

# House Dems suffer election anxiety, complain leaders doing too little on gas prices

By [Ramsey Touchberry](#)



Digital displays are illuminated to mark the prices for the various grades of gasoline available from a pump at a Circle K station Friday, April 22, 2022, in south Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Democrats on Capitol Hill are increasingly anxious about how to show voters they are taking aggressive action to deflate swelled gasoline prices, even if that means voting on legislation that would likely not bear results.

A new push by Democratic leaders to investigate alleged price gouging by the oil industry was met with tepid enthusiasm from rank-and-file members. They told *The Washington Times* that the party should be

pursuing legislative action regardless of its effectiveness — all in hopes of avoiding a Republican landslide in November.

“It’s a very good start, but we need to do everything we can to get prices down for gas and groceries. It’s a problem for working families like the one I grew up in,” said Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney of [New York](#), who heads the House Democrats’ campaign arm. “You’re going to see us with real solutions.”

After months of political blowback with no legislative achievements to present to frustrated voters back home — who on average pay \$4.15 per gallon for regular gasoline — Democratic leaders have thrown their caucus a bone.

They want to force the Federal Trade Commission to investigate whether oil companies are taking consumers to the cleaners, an idea that top Democrats admit may do more to woo voters than provide near-term relief. President Biden already called in November for a probe by the FTC, which since its establishment in 1914 has never uncovered a nationally coordinated gasoline price-gouging scheme.

“Public sentiment is everything. With it, you can do almost anything. Without it, practically nothing,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat, told reporters when announcing the plan on Thursday.

Democrats were not swayed and are holding out for more, despite disagreements and pessimism about what can be accomplished.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal, leader of the Progressive Caucus, described an FTC investigation as “just a beginning.”

“Hopefully, we’ll have a number of building blocks that we’ll put

together," the Washington Democrat said.

President Biden also has been laboring to bring down the price at the pump, which hit an all-time high in March with an average of \$4.33 per gallon for regular gasoline. Prices remain near that high mark and far above roughly \$2.89 per gallon a year ago.

The Biden administration on Friday issued an emergency waiver to allow higher-ethanol gasoline blends to be sold in the summer. Lower-ethanol blends are normally required in the summer to limit smog on warm days.

The administration said the waiver could reduce gasoline prices by as much as 10 cents per gallon.

Rep. John Yarmuth, Kentucky Democrat chairman of the House Budget Committee, questioned what Congress could do to lower prices set by a global market where private energy companies are strapped for supply.

"That's not exactly legislating, just urging the FTC to [investigate]. I'm not sure what you could possibly do legislatively," said Mr. Yarmuth, who is not running for reelection. "I don't think there's much Congress can do. The oil companies pump the oil."

Climate advocates are also unsatisfied. They, too, have peppered oil companies with accusations of keeping prices artificially high while raking in record profits and focusing on investor returns rather than increased production.

"It's a decent start, but it's nowhere near enough," Lukas Ross, Program Manager for the non-governmental environmental organization Friends

of the Earth, said Friday during a phone call with reporters. "These companies need to be taxed, not investigated."

Other proposals pushed by Democrats vary widely.

They include a windfall tax, which would take a percentage of profits from oil companies and give it to consumers; a federal gas tax holiday; and direct rebates.

Vulnerable members have homed in on a federal gas tax holiday to offer an immediate 18.4-cent-per-gallon break.

Mrs. Pelosi, flanked by Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer of [New York](#) and other Democratic leaders, laid out the FTC proposal while once again putting the kibosh on suspending the gas tax. She likened it to a public relations stunt that would defund infrastructure projects and potentially place the savings in the pockets of middlemen and oil companies.

"The pros are that it is good PR: You're asking about it," Mrs. Pelosi said. "The cons are that there's no guarantee the reduction in federal tax would be passed on to the consumer."

Democrats are under no illusion about the gas-price quagmire the party is in with just six months until the election. But with few solutions and a lack of agreement, time is running out to offer voters relief.

"We're looking at four or five options, and as soon as we have a consensus — which we do not now have — we will move on those," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Maryland Democrat, told reporters.