

Compromise may be the mother's milk of the lawmaking process, but today's opposition leaders believe it curdles fundraising appeals and sours the party base's energy. Today's Democratic leaders take their opposition role quite literally. They do what they think opposition leaders should do—"oppose," always. And evidently the media thinks this continuing saga whets public interest.

But focusing exclusively on the rhetoric and voting patterns of Democratic leaders—as the media often does in writing the conflict story dujour—misses another significant development. For those not charged with daily maintenance of fanning the conflict flames, there are tremendous opportunities to shape public policy. Democratic rank-in-file lawmakers are not politically tone-deaf to their constituents' aversion to constant bickering; their leadership's one-note sonata is beginning to grate. That's why the list of bipartisan accomplishments in the House is expanding.

The major pieces of legislation passed in the House so far this year on legal reform, energy, taxes and congressional continuity are not—as some in the Democratic leadership argue—part of an "extreme right wing agenda." An average of 62 Democrats joined with the Republicans to pass the six bills referenced above.

Rank-in-file Democrats with reasonable ideas aimed at improving the legislative product, as opposed to bogging down the process or embarrassing Republicans, will have numerous opportunities to play a constructive role. Reasonable Democrats should not miss this chance to put their mark on public policy.

The next big test is the Central American Free Trade Agreement. The question is: Will the "little engine that could" continue to hum along and will a significant number of Democrats support this legislation promoting economic growth and open markets? Or will they succumb to the fear tactics and threats of leaders more interested in party discipline and consolidating power?

Clearly, Republicans will be open to accommodate reasonable Democrat amendments and ideas. After all, passing legislation with 40-60 Democrats is in Republicans' long-term political interest as well. The question is how many Democrats will reject mere nay saying and seize the opportunity to lubricate the engine of bipartisan success.

THE PLIGHT OF THE TEXAS RICE FARMER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, on Friday night, April 15, I had a meeting with local rice farmers in my southeast Texas district. We met out in the country in the lowland plains of east Texas on Aggie Drive in Beaumont, Texas. Really, it was closer to China, Texas. Many of these men had finished a 16-hour day and came to the meeting after working all that time in the fields. They drove up in their standard work vehicles: Texas pickup trucks. Their appearances would fool you, however. They are highly intelligent, some very well educated. They know more about farming, farming machinery, nature, conservation, irrigation, water resources, meteorology, pesticides, in-

secticides, fertilizer, trade, global competition, foreign governments, and efficiency than many who have a string of degrees behind their names, especially those near this House.

As we sat around and ate fried catfish made out of rice flour, I talked to them for several hours about their plight. One rice farmer said this was his last year in farming. He was finally just going to sell off his equipment and sell the land. They painted for me, Madam Speaker, the extremely bleak picture of the present and future in rice farming. And while one could argue that economic decline plagues all rural America across the board on account of the death tax and high tax levels, too many government regulations, the rice farming industry has been hit particularly hard.

Consider the following: in 1997, 8 years ago, there were about 10,000 rice farms in the United States. By 2002, that number had dropped to about 8,000. The State of Texas in 1972 had more than 600,000 acres of rice farming. That is about the size of Rhode Island. Last year, it was less than 200,000 acres, a two-thirds loss of the land to something else. Unfortunately, rice farmers, those in southeast Texas, for example, cannot change to alternative crops because other crops do not thrive in this environment, the marshy, unique wetlands and humid climate of southeast Texas.

In addition, the farmers have to contend with the whims of the Lone Star weather, ranging from sun to hail, too much rain to not enough rain, or none at all. Natural disasters like hurricanes, they come and go and ravage the land where we live. According to the United States Department of Agriculture's Economic Research Service, in 2002, the average American rice farmer made about \$1,700 from farming, or about 82 cents an hour for a 40-hour work week. I will repeat that. That is 82 cents an hour for a 40-hour work week, and that was with government support. This harsh reality forces most farmers to rely on nonfarming income to support their households.

□ 2130

Rice farmers work their own land, Madam Speaker. They do not hire day laborers or seasonal workers. They cannot afford it. The farmer and his kids, they work the land. Rice farmers can barely support themselves financially, let alone make needed contributions to the industry to keep it afloat.

At one time the American Rice Growers Cooperative Association in Dayton, Texas, that is in my district, they owned an irrigation system using the Trinity River to irrigate between 5,000 and 6,000 acres of rice land. It has not run in 3 years because not enough farmers could financially commit to pay \$25,000 to run the pumps to irrigate the land.

Now, get this, Madam Speaker. The water rights have been sold to the city of Houston, and the land is being used

for trailer parks which, as one farmer put it, once the land is gone, it is over for the rice farmers. You see, rice land takes years to develop. If it remains unused for extended periods of time, like 3 years, the land becomes useless for rice farming.

Moreover, industry representatives are dwindling. Farm machines, the John Deere stores, they are disappearing. Each year, older farmers quit or retire. Each year, less acreage is being used for crops. Each year, fewer young men go into farming because the cost versus the return on this investment is not sufficient for any type of lifestyle. What is the incentive for the young to enter the farming industry?

This meeting we had on April 15, most of the farmers there were at least 50 or older. Farming, rice farming is a very labor- and energy-intensive business. It requires electricity to run the pumps to irrigate the crops, diesel fuel to run the combines, and fuel for the crop dusters, pesticides to control insect problems. And we have a lot of insects in southeast Texas.

In addition to the labor from early morning to dark, from February to November, it is about 8:30 now, Madam Speaker, in southeast Texas, most of the rice farmers are coming in from working all day.

All the costs have increased, yet the price that the farmer receives for selling his crop remains the same or has dropped. It also takes an enormous amount of time to fill out Federal forms, which has tripled, according to the farmers.

These farmers are required just to sell the rice they grow. Due to government regulations, sanctions have prohibited farmers from making sales of their crops in an open market. They are even told by this government, our government, how much they can plant.

Back in the 1970s, in what was called the rural renaissance, an average of 300 farmers or so would attend the American Rice Growers annual dinner. Last year at the dinner, 14 rice farmers showed up.

Once the experienced rice farmers leave the industry, we cannot restore this lost knowledge. No government program can do that. Not to mention that the present farm program constitutes only four-tenths of 1 percent of the national budget.

Madam Speaker, I would like to take some time to recount the personal stories of two of the countless Texas rice farmers, to give this body an idea just who these folks are.

Ray Stoesser, he is a friend of mine. He is also a third-generation rice farmer in southeast Texas. He has a true appreciation for the value of research, education, and he loves the land. One of the most successful and consistent producers, he brings an exceptional crop each year to the rice market.

Ray is quick to point out there is no secret to rice farming. He says, "I believe that God could give me the talent

and the strength to become a good farmer."

Ray's grandfather, Emil Joseph Stoesser, immigrated from Germany around the turn of the century and settled in Illinois. He learned about rice farming through a friend, decided to move his family to Texas, southeast Texas.

He had a different type of farming apparatus. He brought with him two Clydesdale horses, probably the first two Clydesdale horses ever in the State of Texas. They came with the farming community and he hoped to use them to plow his rice fields. Soon after moving to Texas, however, the Clydesdales succumbed to the heat and the humidity and mosquitoes common in our area. After that, they used mules to pull the plow.

Ray remembers how, as a boy, he worked long hours to clear the new property and get ready for rice production. He said, "Dad had 3,000 acres that was completely unimproved. We had to clear the trees, pull up the roots, build the canals, dig the wells just to get it ready."

Ray's dad was a dedicated and talented farmer. And Ray attributes his strong work ethic and teachings to his dad. Every day after school Ray would meet his dad on the farm and work until well after dark.

Ray also had a son that followed him into the rice farming industry. Neal Stoesser is 26 and has been farming since his senior year in high school. Although he works in partnership with Ray, Neal also farms 1,000 acres of rice and soybeans independently of his dad.

In 2002, Ray and Neal had 2,000 acres of rice, all in Cocodrie, 5,000 acres of milo, 650 acres of soybeans. This was a father and son team that farmed from one end of Liberty County to the other, about 60 miles from one end of their farming community to the other end.

In good years the Stoessers average about 7,300 pounds an acre on this main crop of rice. They sell to the Beaumont Rice Mill and the Gulf Rice Mill. Ray has considered joining the Riceland Co-op out of Arkansas, but he prefers to have his rice sold and milled in Texas. He says, "declining infrastructure is a real problem for our Texas rice industry, and we want to do what we can to support our local mills."

But Ray feels that the government policies regarding food exports have really hurt American farmers. He recalls the years when Iran and Iraq were two of our best export markets. They would buy the lion's share of U.S. rice. Not surprisingly, Ray feels the Cuban market should be open to U.S. farmers, as export embargoes only serve to hurt American farmers. They hurt farmers here at home. And they are not effective in dealing with political problem governments.

Ray's younger son, Grant, is also very involved in the family farming operation as well as promoting the rice industry.

And of course, there is Mom, Eileen Stoesser, very proud of all of her boys.

She includes Ray as one of her boys, and has had many happy stories to tell about their life on the farm as the wife of a rice farmer. She remembers making a trip with her family and driving past endless fields of green. Eileen thought this was the most beautiful sight she had ever seen, and asked her parents what is growing on these flooded fields? Little did she know how important that beautiful crop would be, how it would come to shape her life. It was rice growing in southeast Texas.

Ray and Eileen, they are humble folks. They believe that all their success comes from the good Lord. Ray said, "I can plant the crop, but I cannot make it grow, only the good Lord can do that. I have been blessed with a wonderful upbringing, a beautiful family, and the talent to serve God by producing food for the American people."

That is Ray's story. He is still farming in southeast Texas.

Jack Wendt is also a third-generation rice farmer. He just planted his 62nd rice crop. Jack, he is not a young guy. Some would call him a senior. He is in his eighties. But you would be hard-pressed to keep up with the pace that he sets each day. Jack and his wife Billie, they live in Richmond, Texas, and the house outside of Kendleton is used for social gatherings, receptions, weddings, church functions and rice meetings. That is what they do in the country, Madam Speaker.

Much of the furniture in the house is from their parents. There are several door frames dating back to 1868 from the original homestead of Billie's grandparents in Fulshear. That farm had been continuously operated by her family for over 100 years and was designated as a Texas Century Farm by the Texas Department of Agriculture. There are old photographs of Billie's and Jack's ancestors around the house, kitchenware and tools that date back to the 1800s.

Jack takes pride in their family heritage. The man Jack called Grandpa Wendt came to America, like many other rice farmers, from Germany. He came in 1856, and he settled in this town called Sweet Home, Texas. That is right, Madam Speaker. It is Sweet Home, Texas.

His father, William George, born in August of 1886, served in World War I, fighting for the United States. In 1936 his family moved to Stowell, Texas and started farming rice.

Jack Wendt is an activist, and he has written our President, President Bush, and a number of Members of Congress, letters about the issue of rice. This is one of the letters he has written President Bush recently. I will read part of it because it is lengthy.

He starts, "Dear President Bush, I am a third-generation rice producer. I have spent my entire life, except for 3 years in service to the United States during World War II, being involved in agriculture; rice, cattle, cotton, and grain. I will be 83 years old this year, so I have seen a lot of changes, changes

from horses and mules to 400 horsepower tractors, threshing machines to combines. This statement is coming from a farmer who is still actively engaged in the production of agricultural products.

"All of us who are engaged in production of agriculture commodities that are subsidized by the USDA are very concerned about the proposed cuts the administration is considering in the 2006 budget. Some commodities will not survive if these cuts are a reality.

The subsidies that we now get for our crops are just enough to keep us in business. Other developed countries are supporting their rice production 3 to 10 times more than we are in the United States. The reason: These countries do not ever want to be without an adequate food supply.

Three of our most lucrative markets we have ever had were Iran, Iraq and Cuba. The seed money to develop these markets came from our check-off funds. Now our government has curtailed sales to these countries by putting sanctions on the countries. Other rice-producing countries are supplying most of their needs. That should not surprise us. If we do not sell food to some country, they will buy it somewhere else. When and if these sanctions are ever lifted, it would be hard to reestablish these markets.

American agriculture is known by some to be the envy of the world because of its quality and high production per acre. Since we are losing prime farmland to urban development, it is very important we maintain and support American agriculture and research so we can continue to produce our needs on less acreage. You know and I know we do not want to depend on our food supply coming from foreign countries. Although we in the United States, in the American agriculture, represent less than 2 percent of the American population, we play a vital role in the balance of trade with other countries. Agriculture is America's number one export. It totals \$53 billion a year."

He goes on to say, Madam Speaker, "Keeping a strong agricultural system in our country is as important as keeping an updated and strong army. The old saying goes; 'you cannot fight or work on an empty stomach.' Once you lose the desire of the American farmer to produce, and he is forced to leave the farm, it will be hard to replace him or get him back on the farmland. American agriculture was built on individual initiative, private investment and incentives to produce. Once destroyed, agriculture will not be restored overnight by some government program or some government bureaucrat.

"If there is one thing Americans do not worry about these days, it is running out of food. We worry a lot about health care, jobs, the environment, crime. But food miraculously shows up on our supermarket shelves every day. There is plenty of it. It is not priced

that bad, and it tastes pretty darn good. The truth of the matter is our food supply is the best and safest in the world. Let us face it, Americans are complacent about food and where it comes from, not realizing that most of our food is homegrown.

"Restrictions and regulations are putting a noose around the farmers' necks and tightening. Most of the farmers are top-notch stewards of the land. They care about the environment and want to do the right thing, but regulations that are being talked about in Washington, DC are punitive and would curtail farming.

"Here are a few of the facts. Today, each American farmer produces food and fiber for 144 people.

"American farmers produce 18 percent of the world's food on 10 percent of the world's land.

"American farmers account for 25 percent of the world's beef and veal production, 40 percent of the world's corn production.

"Food is most affordable in the United States where consumers spend less than 10 percent of their income on it.

"Farm programs that we now have represent only four-tenths of 1 percent of our national budget.

"However, as it is with most Federal legislation, the cost of our farm program is misleading. Our farmers will not receive all the money earmarked in the farm bill. In fact, they will receive only 30 percent of the funds. The remaining 70 percent in this fund, in this bill, provides support for the Food Stamp Program, the Children's Nutritional Programs, the Women, Infant and Children Care Program, and a range of other USDA programs. The bottom line is that funding provided to producers through the farm bill costs \$0.17 a day per family in the United States."

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He goes on, Madam Speaker, to point out, it takes 440,000 people to process, package, market, finance, and ship agricultural exports. Thanks to our farming families, more and more Americans in related businesses are working.

The United States is one of few families in the world that has never known wide-spread hunger. Not relying on other countries for food is key to national security. The vast majority of food America eats is grown by U.S. farmers. The question is not whether food price support is necessary, but one of determining how much price support is needed to protect our food producers and our food supply from unfair competition brought about by unequal agricultural trade restrictions on the American rice farmer.

Like other businesses in our country, U.S. agriculture products have shown they can compete with the very best from any country, sometimes even when the playing field is leveled against them. So we must keep our agricultural system strong so Americans

can never be dependent on foreign food imports to feed our people. If the American consumers want to keep adequate food supplies, the safest and cheapest cost per capita of food in the world, then our government should maintain a support level on agricultural commodities that is necessary to keep us in business until free trade supply and demand will return as it was in the past.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, with two comments in quotations from former Presidents. One is from President Dwight David Eisenhower when he said: "Our farmers are the most efficient in the world. In no country do so few people produce so much food to feed so many at such reasonable prices."

He also quotes President Bush 41, when he said: "Our Nation owes a debt of gratitude to our farmers and to our ranchers to help ensure the stability of our economy, for providing food products that amply meet our citizens' needs and for representing what is best about America and its people."

He concludes in his letter, Madam Speaker: "Therefore, Mr. President, I urge you pose proposals to reopen the farm bill and single out farming families. Please give us new markets for our rice."

Madam Speaker, these figures and personal accounts all point to the two main obstacles faced by rice farmers. The fact that the land that the farmers work in many times is not land that they own, but they are tenants on the land. Yet the owners of the land are the ones who receive the subsidies. Also, the United States Government has shut off several of the key markets to which our rice farmers used to sell.

The rice farmers that I have talked to, Madam Speaker, they do not want to be dependent on the government. Most believe they are forced to sell their land and become tenants to land owners because of the government. The land owners receive the subsidies. Maybe the farmers who work the land should receive the subsidies.

But with all this talk about free trade, the real issue is, Madam Speaker, is we prohibit free rice trade. It is unjust to further cut subsidies unless we expand the scope of the rice trade. During the 80s, Iraq was the number one rice market for American rice producers, producing 80 percent of Iraq's rice imports.

American rice sales to this country alone peaked at 500,000 metric tons. But from 1991 to 2003, because of Saddam Hussein and the Iraq sanctions, the U.S.A. Federation and the U.S. Rice Producers Association estimate that the United States lost \$1.9 billion in rice export sales to Iraq.

As a result of loss of these sales to Iraq, other countries have stepped in to sell rice to Iraq. Two of them are Thailand and Vietnam. We have perfectly good rice in the United States, perfectly good rice in Texas and the five other States that grow rice. Not every

State grows rice in the United States, Madam Speaker. The States that grow rice are Texas, California, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Mississippi.

Here we are rebuilding Iraq with American money, and yet rice is bought from Vietnam to restore Iraq. I ask the question, why. Charity begins at home if we wish to have charity, and maybe we should think about some of the other foreign giveaway programs that this country is involved in before we cut subsidies to our rice farmers, remembering, of course, that they really do not want the subsidies as much as they want market for their rice.

In January I had the opportunity to go to Iraq. I met with James Smith. He was a counselor for the Office of Agricultural Affairs at the United States Embassy in Baghdad. That is a long title, but he is the person that is responsible for helping American farmers get rice to Iraq.

He is a good individual. He understands rice economics 101. I congratulate him on his efforts to make sure that we get rice, especially Texas rice and rice from the southeast United States to Iraq.

Upon returning to the United States, I was later invited by the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BONILLA), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies of the Committee on Appropriations to join him and other congressional leaders to discuss with the Iraqi grain board the further expansion of United States rice trade to Iraq.

We learned in that meeting that the Iraqis, through the Iraqi grain board, had purchased 60,000 metric tons of U.S. rice and another 360,000 metric tons will be purchased soon. The Iraqis wish to buy all the rice that they can. It is estimated that Iraq will need 1.3 million metric tons of rice every year. We want that rice to come from the United States, and we need to make sure that it is American rice that is on the Iraqi supper table and not rice from Vietnam.

And while, Madam Speaker, this is a great historic first step, we cannot stop there. We need to reopen trade, not only with Iraq but also with Cuba on the issue of agriculture products, specifically rice. These two countries along with Iran were countries that we used to send our rice to before trade embargoes and sanctions were set.

So these are some issues that are before the House and before our country. It is called food and food supply. I am working along with many others to facilitate rice trade with Cuba. I believe that our sanctions against Castro's regime, which have been in place since 1963, should not prevent our Nation from selling our farm products to the people there.

Madam Speaker, the Cuban people will eat rice just like the Iraqi people will; and if we do not sell it to them, they will get it somewhere else. Why are we economically hindering ourselves, our farmers, and our industries?

The Cuban market remained closed until this body passed the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000. With the reopening mandated by this law, rice sales to Cuba have grown to \$64 million a year. But now we hear that some want to slash back this trade for political reasons.

On February 22 through the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, it announced it was redefining what Congress had put into law, that being the definition of payment of cash in advance. To most folks, payment of cash in advance is not a complicated issue. It means what it means. This bureaucracy is getting in the way of congressional intent. So Cubans are beginning to look to other nations, not surprisingly, Vietnam and Thailand and other sources for their rice. So I encourage other Members of this House to co-sign on to H.R. 1339 to further explain in simple terms to government bureaucrats that farmers should be allowed to trade with Cuba on a cash for crop basis.

I continue to hear from rice farmers in my district that if U.S. political leaders would open world markets to American farmers, price supports would not be necessary. The modest price support provided by the U.S. Government and the greater efficiency of the U.S. agriculture production simply are not enough to provide a level international playing field and prevent erosion of U.S. agricultural infrastructure. We just want markets, Madam Speaker.

America's food supply is the safest, it is the best quality, it is the most abundant and the cheapest in the world. As the agricultural society of the United States declines, we will become more and more dependent on other countries for our food. This could lead to a national security problem.

It is one thing for this country to become more and more dependent on other countries for energy, but we should never get in the position, Madam Speaker, that this country becomes dependent on any country for our food. We cannot let that happen. It is a national security issue.

Maybe we should also consider using Texas rice as an alternative fuel like Nebraska is doing with corn and Hawaii is doing with sugar. In devising a long overdue energy plan, we should capitalize on rice's potential. We should be openminded, be innovative, and not depend on foreign nations for not only our food but our energy as well. And this has great possibilities, Madam Speaker.

This week is Small Business Week. Farms, the American farmer, the American farm family are the best examples of small business in the United States. So tonight and tomorrow morning when we push ourselves away from our tables, we need to thank the American farmer. We need to thank the folks like Ray Stoesser and Jack Wendt. We need to thank their families for what they have done to America

and for America. They are our natural resources, for there is nothing quite like the American farmer.

Madam Speaker, that is just the way it is.

KEEPING COURTS SAFE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Miss MCMORRIS). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOHMERT) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. GOHMERT. Madam Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE). That was very inspirational. I was not sure rice farming could be that inspirational; but after the gentleman from Texas talked about it, I feel better already.

Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be before this body tonight and to address a number of things on a number of different issues. I have got to say, for those who have never been on this floor, it is a humbling experience. And I know that when on January 4, I sat right over there in that chair on the aisle and when the Speaker, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), said, "Raise your right hand," and he repeated the oath that we were going to take, and I raised my right hand, for some reason, though I have been in here a few times before, I had never looked above the Speaker's head. And as I looked above his head, it kind of choked me up. Because above the Speaker's head are the words "In God We Trust." And that goes back to the beginning of this Nation and to the fact that God has truly blessed America.

Now, in that context I have a number of things I want to talk about, a number of things that people within my district there in east Texas, the first district of Texas, the historical district where the great American Sam Rayburn was Congressman, later Speaker. I realize that nowadays that will not happen to this Congressman from the First District of Texas, but it is humbling to follow those great footsteps of a great American.

Wright Patman was my Congressman. He served in the first district. He was followed by a number of folks, like Sam Hall. He became a Federal judge after serving in Congress, just a great American. He made Marshall, Texas and all of us in east Texas proud.

So as I began about filling this time as Congressman, these 2 years that the voters have so graciously allowed me, there are a number of things that we have undertaken and one of the things I want to mention is the bill that we filed last week. It is entitled The Secure Access to Justice and Court Protection Act of 2005.

It does a number of things. We had looked around, and with my background of having been a district judge, having been a chief justice of a court of appeals, I have a great deal of sensitivity. And as we saw that the Federal judge's husband and mother in Illinois

were killed as a result of her efforts and her duties as a judge, we realized something needed to be done, that it was rather tragic. As we saw what happened in Atlanta, Georgia, as we saw what happened in Tyler, Texas around the Smith County Courthouse where I served so many years as a judge. We realized something has to be done to make people realize that they can not be threatening the system that has come to mean so much. It is one of the few things that other countries do not have and that is a fair, equitable justice system.

Madam Speaker, you have heard me, I am sure, get after the Supreme Court. I have been rather upset about some of the things and some of the reasoning that they have used in arriving at some of their decisions.

□ 2200

I will criticize judges with whom I disagree. I will criticize the Supreme Court. It is our American right to do that. Many have fought and died to give us that right, to secure that right, but when it comes to threats or violence, they have no place whatsoever in this country.

Our justice system needs to be, if nothing else, the last bastion of civility, where people can come together. No matter what has occurred outside the courthouse, they can come together and know that we will take turns. We will sit down. We will talk in order. We will not talk over each other. We will give people the opportunity to have a fair trial, to have due process fulfilled. We will give people the right to have a speedy trial.

All of these things are so critical, and that is why I am proud to have filed this bill, and we even had people talking about bipartisan support. I have the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER), a bipartisan cosponsor, staunch Democrat, but I am proud to have him as a cosponsor on this bill because this is serious, and there are a number of things that this bill does, and I wanted to briefly touch on some of those.

For one thing, it creates stiffer penalties for individuals who harm or threaten to physically harm a Federal judge, their families, jurors, witnesses, victims or informants. And to give you an illustration of what we are looking at, currently if you were to assault or threaten someone who was a Federal judge, for example, you would be looking at zero years to 8 years prison time. Now, if it is a simple assault, it would be a maximum of 1 year, a misdemeanor; but assault resulting in any bodily injury at all would get you 5 years in prison or up to 20 years in prison. Assault with a dangerous weapon, this is serious stuff, that could be anywhere, currently, zero to 20 years. However, if it was a dangerous weapon, under the bill that we filed, it would mean a minimum of 15 years in prison, a minimum of 15 years.

I know there are some people that are against mandatory minimums. I