

the floor to debate an important nomination for Secretary of State or Attorney General I don't think is being impudent. I think it is what we were elected to do.

The Constitution not only empowers us and authorizes us; it commands us to advise and consent—not just consent. If we want to spend a day or two debating something as serious as Judge Gonzales's involvement in rewriting the torture policy in America, I don't think that is inappropriate. In fact, I think our silence would be inappropriate.

Those on the other side—and even some on this side—may disagree with the conclusions reached earlier. I think you will find when the rollcall comes that there will be Senators on both sides of the aisle voting for Judge Gonzales. So be it. But to say we are somehow stepping out of line by even debating a nominee for the Cabinet is just plain wrong.

Second, this is exactly the same argument that was used on the issue of judges. If you listened to the commentaries, particularly from some sources on radio and television, you would think that the Democrats had found a way to stop most of the judges nominated by President Bush over the last 4 years. But look at the cold facts. Two-hundred and four of President Bush's judicial nominees were approved. They went through this Congress, under both Democratic and Republican committee leadership. Only 10 nominees were held up. The final score in that game was 204 to 10. It is clear the President won the overwhelming percentage of judicial nominees he sent to the floor of the Senate. If you listen to our critics, you would think it was the opposite—that we only approved 10 judges and turned down 204.

That wasn't the case at all. When people come to the floor critical of the Democrats for even wanting to debate a Cabinet nominee, I think they are overstating the case.

Let me address the last point made by the Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for 1 minute?

Mr. DURBIN. I would be happy to yield for a question.

Mr. DOMENICI. I don't want to take the Senator's right to the floor under any circumstances.

First, I ask to speak to ask the Senator a question right now, because I can't stay. I want the Senator to know that I always appreciate his remarks. They always stimulate me, whatever the Senator thinks that means. Maybe it stimulates me to answer; maybe it makes me get red in the face. I don't know.

Anyway, I don't think my remarks were principally devoted to—in fact, only mildly devoted to—the delay that may be taking place with regard to some nominees. I stand on that premise—that there have been delays that were uncalled for. But that was the principal point.

I hope that nobody would let the distinguished Senator kind of avoid the issue. That is not the issue Senator DOMENICI raises.

The issue is that this man is totally qualified; that those who know him best say he is qualified. It appears that those on the other side of the aisle want to see him defeated, or put upon by their arguments such that he doesn't go into that office strong and full of support but, rather, nicked by attacks that are meaningless and without any merit. That is the argument.

I tried to tell everybody who is for him. Frankly, they knew him a lot better than any Senators knew him. Many of them like Cisneros knew him for 15 years—and what he said about him on January 5, not 10 years ago, what he was, what he wasn't, how good he was.

That was my argument. My argument and question was, Why? Maybe that is my question. I thank the Senator for yielding.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New Mexico. I will make it a practice to always yield the floor whenever I possibly can because I think dialog between two Senators runs perilously close to debate which we have very little of on the floor of the Senate.

I welcome the comments of the Senator from New Mexico. I may disagree on this issue, but I hope we have respect for one another and what we bring to this Chamber.

The point I would like to make is this: I do not know him personally. I met him in my office for a brief meeting, the first time we ever sat down together.

I read his life story. I couldn't help but be impressed. Here is a man who came from a very modest circumstance, who served his Nation in the Air Force, who went to law school, who became general counsel to the Governor of Texas, a member of the Texas Supreme Court, and then legal counsel to the President of the United States. It is an amazing, extraordinary life story.

Some of my colleagues, including the Senator from Colorado, Mr. SALAZAR, have talked about their origins and their upbringing and how difficult it is to overcome with discrimination in many quarters. Thank goodness that is changing in America but not fast enough.

The point I would like to make is, I don't know a single Member of the Senate who has taken exception to Judge Gonzales because he is Hispanic or because he comes from humble origins. That is not the issue. The issue we believe, simply stated, is what did he do as general counsel to the President? Did it qualify him or disqualify him to have the highest law enforcement position in the United States of America? I think that is the issue.

When I came to the floor to speak earlier—and I will not recount my remarks—it related to the torture policy of which he was a part. I think in 10 or

20 years of history we will look at this war on terrorism and judge us harshly for having sat down to rewrite the policies and principles—the human principles—that guided this country for decades when it came to the treatment of prisoners and detainees. That is why I have reservations about Judge Gonzales. That is why I raised these questions, both in a public hearing and in written questions to him personally. That is why I am opposing his nomination, simply stated.

I have the greatest respect for what he has achieved personally in life, but I have a responsibility to go beyond that personal achievement and ask from a professional and governmental viewpoint, Is he the best person for this job? That is why many of us have risen in opposition to his nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RECOGNIZING NATIONAL APPRECIATION DAY FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I am pleased to recognize that today, February 2, 2005, is National Appreciation Day for Catholic Schools. As a proud graduate of Catholic schools, I am delighted to be able to meet some of these Catholic school student leaders to let them know what an investment in our future they are.

The spirit of Catholic schools has been present in the United States since the first settlers arrived in America. In 1606 the Franciscans opened a school in what is now St. Augustine, FL. During the next century, the Franciscans and Ursulines established Catholic schools throughout the American colonies: in Maryland, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, and even in non-British colonial locales, such as New Orleans. After the American Revolution, Catholic patriots worked to open the first official parochial school in the United States, St. Mary's School, established in 1782 in Philadelphia. In 1789 Georgetown University, the first Catholic college in the United States, was founded right here in the District.

Catholic schools have offered much more to the United States than just longevity, however; America's Catholic schools have offered an academic excellence that has helped to influence the moral, intellectual, physical, and social values of our youth for over 300 years. As Baltimore Archbishop Cardinal James Gibbons said, "Education must make a person not only clever but good." For more than three centuries, Catholic schools in this country

have worked to do just that. They have inspired our youth, enriched our communities, and provided a moral support for millions.

Today, with over 2.6 million students enrolled in Catholic elementary and secondary schools, they are working as hard as ever to enhance the education of our youth.

On a personal level, Catholic schools have greatly influenced who I am today. It was at my alma mater, Ursuline Academy of New Orleans, that I sought my first elected office. As seventh grade class vice-president, I took to heart the Academy's motto of *serviam* and fully embraced the words of the founder of the Ursuline Sisters, St. Angela Merici that it is better "to serve than to be served." The promotion of educational excellence, the development of the whole person, community, and family, and the dedication to service are values that I am grateful Ursuline reinforced.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I offer my utmost congratulations and thanks to the Catholic schools, students, parents, and teachers across the Nation and specifically in Louisiana for the ongoing contributions they have made in the area of education. You have done remarkable work over the years, and I thank you for everything.

#### WORLD WETLANDS DAY

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I come to the floor today on World Wetlands Day to acknowledge the proclamation by the Governor of our State that today, February 2, America's Wetlands Day in Louisiana. World Wetlands Day is a day that we join together with people around the world to bring public awareness to the benefits and values of wetlands as well as the severe challenges that confront them. February 2 of each year marks the date of the signing in 1971 of the Convention on Wetlands which provided a framework for national action and international cooperation toward the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Wetlands can be found in every country and are among the most productive ecosystems in the world.

Those of us from Louisiana bring a rather unique perspective to the subject of wetlands. You see, Louisiana's coast is really America's wetland. It is not a beach, but a vast landscape of wetlands. The landscape that extends along Louisiana's coast is one of the largest and most productive expanses of coastal wetlands in North America. It is the seventh largest delta on Earth, where the Mississippi River drains two-thirds of the United States. It is also one of the most productive environments in America—"working wetlands" as they are known to Louisianians—producing more seafood than any other State in the lower 48. It is the nursery ground for the Gulf of Mexico and habitat for the one of the

greatest flyways in the world for millions of waterfowl and migratory songbirds.

Louisiana's coastal wetlands provide storm protection for ports that carry nearly 500 million tons of waterborne commerce annually—the largest port system in the world by tonnage. That accounts for 21 percent of all waterborne commerce in the United States each year. In fact, four of the top ten largest ports in the United States are located in Louisiana.

These wetlands also offer protection from storm surge for 2 million people and a unique culture. However, what should be of fundamental interest to those of us here is the role these wetlands play in our Nation's energy security by not only protecting the Nation's critical energy infrastructure but also providing the energy supply that runs our daily lives.

Eighty percent of the Nation's offshore oil and gas supply, which is almost 30 percent of all the oil and gas consumed in this country, passes through these wetlands to be distributed to the rest of the Nation. There are more than 20,000 miles of pipelines in Federal offshore lands and thousands more inland that all make landfall on Louisiana's barrier islands and wetland shorelines. The barrier islands are the first line of defense against the combined wind and water forces of a hurricane, and they serve as anchor points for pipelines originating offshore.

Annual returns to the Federal Government of oil and gas receipts from production on the Outer Continental Shelf, OCS, average more than \$5 billion annually. No single area has contributed as much to the Federal treasury as the OCS. In fact, since 1953, the OCS has contributed \$140 billion to the U.S. Treasury.

Between 80 and 90 percent of that amount has come from offshore Louisiana. In 2003, almost \$6 billion in offshore revenues went into the Federal treasury, and more than \$5 billion, or 80 percent of that amount came from offshore Louisiana. Today the OCS supplies more than 25 percent of our Nation's natural gas production and more than 30 percent our domestic oil production, with the promise of more—expected to reach 40 percent by 2008. In fact, the OCS supplies more oil to our Nation than any other country including Saudi Arabia.

In addition to domestic production, Louisiana's coast is the land base for the Louisiana Offshore Oil Port, LOOP, America's only offshore oil port. LOOP handles about 15 percent of this country's foreign oil and is connected to more than 30 percent of the total refining capacity in the U.S. Much of the support infrastructure is located in the most rapidly deteriorating coastal areas. In addition to LOOP, one will find two storage sites for the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, SPR, and Henry Hub, one of the Nation's major natural gas distribution centers.

Port Fourchon, which supports 75 percent of the deepwater production in the Gulf, is the geographic and economic center of offshore drilling efforts along the Louisiana Coast. This port, and much of the Nation's energy supply, is connected to the mainland by a 17-mile stretch of two-lane highway—LA 1—that is inundated by flooding in relatively mild storms and is vulnerable to being washed out completely.

The oil and gas produced offshore Louisiana moves through a maze of pipelines that crisscross our State delivering energy to other regions of the country. In order to preserve this supply, Louisiana must be able to continue to host this production. Unfortunately, the very coastal wetlands that support the critical infrastructure necessary to deliver the energy are washing away at an alarming rate leaving pipelines and other energy infrastructure vulnerable to the whims of Mother Nature.

When Hurricane Ivan struck back in September, it should have been a wake-up call to us all. Although the storm did not directly hit Louisiana, its impact on prices and supply continues to be felt today. Four months later, a percentage of oil and gas production in the Gulf of Mexico remains offline as a result of the storm, directly contributing to higher oil and gas prices in our country. One can only imagine what the impact would have been to supply and prices had Ivan cut a more Western path in the Gulf.

Louisiana is losing its coastal land at the staggering rate of 25 square miles a year. That is square miles, not acres. That is a football field every 30 minutes. We lost more than 1,900 square miles in the past 70 years, and the U.S. Geological Survey predicts we will lose another 1,000 if decisive action is not taken now to save it. The effects of natural processes like subsidence and storms combined with the unintended consequences of Federal actions like the leveeing of the Mississippi River and impacts from offshore oil and gas exploration and development have led to an ecosystem on the verge of collapse.

With the loss of barrier islands and wetlands over the next 50 years, New Orleans will lose its wetland buffer that now protects it from many effects of flooding. Hurricanes will pose the greatest threat, since New Orleans sits on a sloping continental shelf that makes it extremely vulnerable to storm surges.

More than 2 million people in inland south Louisiana will be subject to more severe and frequent flooding than ever before. Coastal communities will become shore-front towns, and the economic and cultural costs of relocation are estimated in the billions of dollars.

Louisiana takes pride in its role as the country's most crucial energy provider. Ours is a State rich in natural resources. However, given the contribution my State makes to the Nation, it is time for all of us to consider what