

which most people would consider mandatory spending, along with all the other entitlements, we get 82 percent. Only 18 cents on the dollar really is discretionary.

Mr. Speaker, entitlements are important programs, but they will benefit no one if they go bankrupt. And we are headed for a fiscal tsunami in this country. So as we begin the budget process, let us keep in mind that runaway discretionary spending is wrong, and we would do well to rein it in.

But unsustainable entitlement spending is a greater problem that we should address as well for the sake of our children and grandchildren. Whether we like it or not, this is a very real problem. It is not going to go away.

Doing nothing is simply not an option. In fact, doing nothing is the worst thing we can do.

#### IT IS TIME FOR A POLICY THAT REALLY SECURES AMERICA

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, over the last couple of days we have seen the focus of the American conscience look toward whether America is actually secure.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is time now for the administration to craft a policy that answers the enormity of the concerns that Americans have expressed in town hall meetings across America. Frankly, I think when the headlines read 1,300 Iraqi dead, our soldiers standing by, not knowing whether to engage or not in the civil war that is pending, it is actually now time for the President to acknowledge that our troops have done their job, they have won the victory, and they need to come home.

And then we speak of securing America and having conflicts cause the tension that they are causing and then we still want to say that it is all right to sell our ports to foreign entities; and, of course, I think America needs to know that in the 2007 budget there is no funding for securing the Nation's ports around America.

It is time now for the administration to craft a security posture and policy that really secures America. The time is now.

#### STATE TAX COMPETITIVENESS

(Mr. STEARNS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. STEARNS. Mr. Speaker, this week the Tax Foundation, an educational foundation for taxpayers since 1937, released its much anticipated third edition of their State business tax climate index. It ranks the 50 States on how business friendly their tax systems are.

The study finds the most business-friendly tax systems in Wyoming,

South Dakota, Alaska, Florida, Nevada, New Hampshire and Texas. The least business-friendly tax codes were found in New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Vermont and Maine.

Low-tax States are where the job growth is. Governors and businesses and residents want jobs to flow to their States. Low taxes will do that. So low taxes in America will also keep jobs here.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a cautionary tale from this report, reminding us that we are truly competing in a global economy, and we cannot ignore the fact that low taxes indeed create new jobs.

#### RECOGNIZING AMBER CASHWELL'S SERVICE TO SOUTH CAROLINA

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, as I always say, congressional schedulers have some of the hardest jobs in Washington.

While serving as a scheduler, Amber Cashwell has seamlessly planned a calendar, helped manage the office, and assisted the citizens of the Second District of South Carolina. Throughout her service she has handled her responsibilities with patience, professionalism, and good humor. Her colleagues and I truly appreciate her hard work and dedication.

A native of Spartanburg, South Carolina, Amber began her career in Washington as a staff assistant for Congressman BOB INGLIS. In May, 2004, she graduated from Converse College with an impressive double major in French and history.

Tomorrow, Amber will depart the halls of Congress to work at the Moore Van Allen law firm in Charlotte, North Carolina. I am proud of her success and pleased to congratulate Amber on this wonderful opportunity.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11.

#### MALPRACTICE INSURANCE

(Mr. PRICE of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, when I opened up my local paper the other day, I was troubled by a letter to the editor. This gentleman was lamenting the fact that he and his wife were losing a long-time doctor because the physician could not afford to remain in business. What is even more troubling is that none of this is a surprise.

Every day more and more doctors across the country are watching their malpractice rates skyrocket. These premiums are going up as the insurance companies are being forced to pay higher and higher awards for malpractice lawsuits.

Doctors need to be held accountable, yes. However, there is also a need to

recognize the institutional abuse that is far too often perpetrated in our courts by personal injury lawyers and the frivolous lawsuits they introduce. These lawsuits do not just affect doctors. They are affecting patients all across the country who either lose access to their doctor altogether or are cared for by a physician who has been intimidated into practicing defensive medicine.

While everyone is talking about rising health care costs, let us not forget to recognize there are a number of different ways to lower those costs, and starting with lawsuit abuse reform would be a genuine first step.

#### KATRINA EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2006

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to the order of the House of March 1, 2006, I call up the Senate bill (S. 1777) to provide relief for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN). Pursuant to the order of the House of Wednesday, March 1, 2006, the Senate bill is considered read, and the amendment placed at the desk is adopted.

The text of the Senate bill, as amended, is as follows:

S. 1777

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

#### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Katrina Emergency Assistance Act of 2006".

#### SEC. 2. EXTENSION OF UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE.

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, in the case of an individual eligible to receive unemployment assistance under section 410(a) of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5177(a)) as a result of a disaster declaration made for Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita on or after August 29, 2005, the President shall make such assistance available for 39 weeks after the date of the disaster declaration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SHUSTER) and the gentlewoman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

□ 1030

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on S. 1777.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, S. 1777, as amended, extends the disaster unemployment assistance for those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Unfortunately, the economy in the gulf coast area remains devastated and re-employment opportunities are greatly limited.

Currently, disaster unemployment assistance is only available for 26 weeks following a disaster declaration. March 4, 2006, is the current deadline for program assistance as a result of Hurricane Katrina disaster declarations for Louisiana and Mississippi. Unless we act, unemployment benefits will expire this Saturday. This bill would extend that period for an additional 13 weeks, making disaster unemployment assistance available for 39 weeks total. This assistance is only available to those persons who are not eligible for regular unemployment assistance.

By extending these benefits, we are helping those most in need in the gulf coast region as they continue to recover and rebuild. We extended disaster unemployment assistance benefits after September 11 in the same fashion as we are extending these benefits today. I support this legislation and encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking Chairman DON YOUNG, Ranking Member JIM OBERSTAR, and, of course, my subcommittee chairman, BILL SHUSTER, for their leadership in acting together to assure that unemployment benefits are available to the many victims of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita who want to work.

We are acting in virtual unison, though under the wire, to pass S. 1777, the Katrina Emergency Assistance Act of 2006, which extends unemployment assistance under the Stafford Act, providing essential unemployment benefits before they lapse on Saturday. This bill extends the period that victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita would be eligible for unemployment benefits to an additional 13 weeks, for a total of 39 weeks.

Currently, the disaster unemployment assistance benefit period begins the week following the disaster or the date thereafter that the individual becomes unemployed and can extend up to 26 weeks after the declaration or until the individual becomes reemployed. This bill means 39 more desperately needed weeks, in addition to the first 26 weeks. The Department of Labor has the usual authority to administer the program.

The extension of these benefits would help untold thousands of workers who lost their jobs as a direct result of the unprecedented storms that hit the gulf region late last summer but do not qualify for regular unemployment assistance. The Labor Department reports that more than 500,000 individ-

uals have already filed new unemployment claims.

Unemployment at 12.5 percent for those who had returned in November was more than twice the national rate; and for those still displaced the rate was an amazing 27.5 percent, more than twice the rate for those who had returned.

Unemployment benefits are available, of course, only for workers in search of actual employment. These benefits may, nevertheless, of course, be used wherever these workers are living today. However, the benefits also may encourage needed workers to take the many risks associated with returning to gulf cities and towns at a time when all the basic ingredients of working communities, from housing to health care, are at unprecedented low levels.

For example, relatively few workers have returned, despite a high rate of job openings in New Orleans. With at least the guarantee of unemployment benefits during the job hunt and much more rapid and sensible job training and reconstruction policies, these benefits could leverage new work opportunities for gulf residents that were unavailable even before the storm, leave alone what the benefits could do in helping the reconstruction of the region itself.

At the same time, I regret that a provision similar to the one approved by the committee of jurisdiction in the other body to increase unemployment benefits to 50 percent of the national average of unemployment benefits had to be removed from the final bill to achieve the rapid agreement needed. Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana have the lowest unemployment benefits in the country. As a result, disaster unemployment benefits for these States are as low as \$87, \$90 and \$97 per week, respectively.

Fifty percent of the national average for unemployment benefit amounts to \$135 a week. In an area of the country that even before Hurricane Katrina suffered long-term unemployment at record levels, this increase could have made a major difference to families who need much more assistance than the typical unemployed worker, because many have lost everything, including their homes.

For the gulf victims, the job search that S. 1777 will afford is much more than finding a job. This bill will help some victims return to the gulf region to begin building their lives from scratch. Many who qualify for these benefits were in the lowest wage categories and are among the neediest for assistance. This extension will help them move forward after experiencing the worst natural disaster in the Nation's history. The American people would want us to take at least the step of passing this urgently needed legislation today.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER).

(Mr. NEUGEBAUER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. NEUGEBAUER. Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition today to S. 1777. One of the things that I am concerned about is we are spending billions of dollars every day on this Katrina emergency disaster, with very small results. We have people filing lawsuits against the government to keep them from being kicked out of apartments, while thousands of trailers are idle just a few hundred miles away.

Certainly, our hearts and thoughts go with the people who experienced this tremendous tragedy, but I think one of the things that I hear from the people in the 19th District of Texas is that they see we are spending billions and billions and billions of dollars, yet we are getting reports of mismanagement almost at every level of government.

One of the things that I think we have to do, and it is the reason I am going to encourage my colleagues today not to support this, is I think we have to step back and look at where we are spending our money today, the American taxpayers' money, by the way, and by the way, money that we don't have. Every dollar we are spending right now for Katrina relief is money that we are borrowing, and we are going to saddle our future generations with that debt.

So I believe that what we have to do is begin to assess what are the job creation opportunities going to be in that region. We are at a time in our country today, quite honestly, where we have record low unemployment, yet we are here today to extend unemployment benefits for another 13 weeks.

The question I have is not whether these people need a job, but the question is are we providing opportunities for them to get a job and moving them away from an environment of entitlement to an environment of empowerment, where we are investing dollars in those communities in such a way that those communities will be able to create jobs for those people that maybe lost their jobs because of this disaster that happened.

So, Mr. Speaker, I would encourage my colleagues today, let's vote this down. Let's sit back and assess where we are spending our resources. I know that we have a \$20 billion additional supplemental coming to the floor of this House for debate, and I think as we keep throwing money at this problem, what we hear on the national news every day is the people living in these areas are saying they are not getting any of the help. The way to make sure you have accountability is not to give someone more money, but to bring in more accountability.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleagues not to support this.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I must say, Mr. Speaker, we thought of going forward with this bill under unanimous consent because we did not think there was a single Member of the House of Representatives who would want to deny to people searching for a job after the worst disaster in American history the funds that would enable them to live while they search for a job. So I am amazed. I will be amazed that there is a single vote against the bill.

But I think the chutzpah to stand on the floor and say we are throwing money at a problem, when I have just recounted what these benefits will mean in that part of the country, less than \$100 a week for families looking for work, is an amazing statement to make. We are throwing money at a problem? We are giving unemployment benefits to people looking for work who have no other means because Mother Nature has taken their means from them. Moreover, may I remind this House that twice after 9/11 we extended unemployment benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the distinguished gentlelady for her leadership, as well as Mr. SHUSTER. I also thank Mr. YOUNG, and certainly Mr. OBERSTAR.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the bulk of Texans, those of us who are now hosting more than 200,000 Katrina survivors and Rita survivors. Might I say to my good friend who lives a little further from the gulf that he should recognize that this legislation also includes Hurricane Rita survivors, who are all throughout the southern part of Texas.

But this is not an isolated whose-State-are-we-in type of legislation. It is a legislative initiative. As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, I see my ranking member has come who has worked very hard on these issues, this is an answer to the cry of Americans. For anyone to suggest this is frivolous or throwing good money after bad is wrongly focused and misdirected.

Let me suggest to you the parameters, or at least the scene, that we are now talking about. We already know that we have suggested that the government in all of its power absolutely abysmally failed in its ability to save the lives of those on the gulf coast, and they knew that there was going to be a catastrophic event.

So what we are trying to do here on the floor of the House is, on the back-drop of our failure, not to look back, we wish there was a 9/11-type commission, but to go forward with solutions.

I want to applaud my colleagues for going forward. We are going forward by providing assistance to those Katrina and Rita survivors, who are scattered now through 44 States. I would like to

ask my colleague, when in the history of America did we scatter Americans throughout 44 States? This is to help those States, because many of the individuals who are there are layered on top of the citizens of Utah, the citizens of Kentucky, the citizens of Georgia, who may be themselves unemployed; and therefore it makes it difficult for them to find jobs, even to be able to develop an income to be able to return home to the gulf coast region.

Mr. Speaker, this provides a cushion for those who are scattered in the 44 States. Then it helps additionally those who are in large urban areas like Houston. Houston, of course, a percolating economy, still has its unemployment. So for you to indict people, to suggest that they are doing nothing to find work, you don't know the economy in America.

Let me also acknowledge that this particular provision will pay back communities for buying soap and food for those who have been in our community. It also provides for student scholars who are on visas, whose visas may be expiring and they have no paperwork, so they will not be deported, not because they are here illegally, but because they cannot find the paperwork coming from that region.

This is an emergency. This is a lifesaver. We will be in a devastated condition this Saturday if this bill is not passed.

Let me say that the bulk of Texans, the majority of Texans, 90 percent of Texans, understand the value of this legislation; and they want this bill to pass because we see firsthand those who are trying to struggle to survive.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the proposed legislation, S. 1777, the "Katrina Emergency Assistance Act of 2005."

As the law stands, unemployment assistance to those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita is going to be running out. We urgently need to act to extend unemployment assistance to the survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

S. 1777 extends disaster unemployment assistance, DUA, to individuals affected by Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita. It does so by expanding FEMA's authority to help individuals affected by Hurricane Katrina and Rita by allowing the President to waive the limitations on direct and financial assistance and by providing 13 additional weeks of unemployment benefits.

With merely days remaining before the unemployment benefits begin to expire, the people displaced by Hurricane Katrina and Rita are facing a dire crisis. The survivors of Hurricane Katrina, and from Hurricane Rita, have faced tremendous stress over these past months. Not only have these men and women lost their jobs, but their homes have been razed to the ground, their beloved city swept away, and their livelihoods destroyed. They have suffered through unspeakable devastation, both to their mental and physical states. But, these proud people have not lost hope. Thousands of people, many in my district of Houston, are working hard to find jobs and rebuild their lives. It is very difficult for them to

integrate into their new community, and very difficult for them to find a job.

In these most trying times, however, their government is threatening to remove them from their temporary, emergency unemployment assistance. Many of these people, their last options exhausted, will be left on the streets. It is a moral, public safety and public health imperative that this not be allowed to occur. I am making an urgent appeal to my colleagues in the House to take the necessary steps to avert this disaster and vote to provide disaster unemployment assistance for the displaced persons.

Late last night I received an urgent call from a constituent of mine, Dr. Ikili Graham. Dr. Graham explained that his friends and family were affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Many had lost their homes and their jobs, and were struggling to integrate in their new city of Houston. Jobs were scarce, but progress was being made.

He called to urge me to support S. 1777, a bill that would provide much needed help to those who are still unemployed as a result of Hurricane Katrina and Rita. This bill would extend unemployment assistance for just 13 additional weeks—hopefully enough time for people to find new jobs and sources of income.

I would like to passionately thank the Minority Leader and the Speaker of the House for their wisdom in bringing this necessary piece of legislation to the floor. The survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita need our continued support.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly support the proposed resolution for the foregoing reasons, and I urge my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to follow suit.

□ 1045

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to the comments of my good friend from Texas (Mr. NEUGEBAUER). I certainly understand his concern about some of what has gone on in the gulf coast region, things that have not been efficiently moved forward. There have been cases of money being spent unwisely.

But on this bill, S. 1777, with the disaster unemployment assistance, this is important, to go to people that do not get normal unemployment. This goes out to people that are self-employed, small business owners. It is critical to the recovery that they have income until they are able to get their businesses back up, or if they are a professional, to get their operations running again.

So again I understand the concern of my colleague, but this bill is about disaster unemployment assistance. It is critical to get it back on line. It expires on Saturday. So I would urge all of my colleagues to support this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman's comments. The kind of small business owners, for example, that the gentleman was talking about, if you are a hot dog vendor, those are some of

the most industrious people in society. An example would be people who are willing to work for themselves where they get no benefits of any kind, but work harder than most of us.

I used the hot dog vendor, because that is fairly typical of the kind of person we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Washington (Mr. McDERMOTT).

Mr. McDERMOTT. Thank God that the Speaker is taking a trip down to New Orleans, because we have waited for a long time for this bill. Six months ago I introduced legislation to extend unemployment benefits. But the majority party has ignored the problem until today, a few days before it is going to run out.

Now as a doctor and psychiatrist, I can tell you a couple of things: When people suffer a catastrophic loss, they need comfort and certainty, a helping hand. Instead, you have waited with unemployment benefits until they were beginning to run out before you acted. You have made matters worse for people who already have much damage to their lives.

For 6 months this body functioned like that empty FEMA trailer when it came to meeting the needs of the people devastated by the hurricanes. The White House was in the driver's seat. No more need be said.

But thankfully, at the urging of Ms. PELOSI from California, Republicans are going to do what I said 6 months ago. We are going to extend unemployment benefits to the people in the gulf coast. Later today, we will go and visit the region and tell the people all the good we are doing for them.

Now, the Republicans will take credit for acting. But there is no credit for acting 6 months late. Six months ago I said we should be protecting the children of the gulf coast. I ask today, are we doing all we can to ensure vulnerable children are protected? Have we done anything to ensure that parents receive counseling and children receive the necessary social services to cope with the trauma in their lives? The answer is "no."

We may have sent some money to the States, but we have done nothing to ensure that Federal child welfare programs receive additional resources to cope. Kids are not as important as workers. In fact, Republicans refused to even hold a hearing, despite my repeated pleas to the chairman.

We know child abuse spikes after natural disasters. We know that foster families are living in FEMA trailers. They are living with four, six and eight kids in a trailer, and the State is asking them to take more because they do not have enough places for neglected and abused kids. These trailers do not come close to passing the safety standards that we would demand of an ordinary foster home.

We cannot keep pretending that the Federal Government is responding to the gulf coast. FEMA and the White

House knew the storms were coming; we found that out yesterday. We knew they were going to devastate the area, and they failed to prepare and respond. For the last 6 months there has been nothing going on here.

We have got a chance today to follow the Golden Rule: Treat others as we would be treated. I speak as someone representing Seattle. We know that one day we will have another shaker, another earthquake. And anybody who gets out on this floor and says, oh, well, we're throwing money at Louisiana, don't you dare come near this floor asking for money when it happens to you in California or anywhere else.

This is not a local problem, this is a national problem that the Republicans refuse to respond to until it is at the last second. A day late, a dollar short.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, responding to the gentleman, we are not a day late and a dollar short. We are responding in a timely fashion. We certainly would have liked to have done this a couple of weeks earlier, but we are here on the floor today. We are going to respond to this situation in time.

I think it is important. As we move legislation forward in a situation like this, I think the folks in the gulf coast know that those of us in Congress are concerned about their situation; and that is why we are acting in time for this to be extended. I don't believe that responding 6 months prior to the need is something that is wise policy.

Let's move forward, let's study the situation and when it gets to a point where we have to extend, where we have to act, I think it is prudent that we do that.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I just want to say that I mentioned 9/11 because I think there is a standard here, a kind of control group. I mentioned that we had had to extend unemployment benefits twice during 9/11. This was a terrorist attack, 3,000 people killed. Thank God, the entire City of New York was not wiped out.

Compare, however, that disaster, as tragic as it was, with wiping out an entire city, the whole city gone, all means of employment gone, now being slowly revived. And I think we will have some appreciation for the American heart.

We knew what to do on 9/11. We will be there for people as long as you need us. And the wonderful thing about unemployment benefits is, they go straight to the person. And, of course, what unemployment benefits do, because the people who get them spend them for necessities in their communities, so what unemployment does at the same time is, of course, to help the community, the economy of the community where the unemployment benefits are being spent.

This is very good money for very desperate people.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. KUCINICH).

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, as I listen to the debate here, one of the things that I keep hearing in this House is a question of what the role of government is. One of the gentlemen who spoke earlier would insist that all this is about is throwing money, good money, after bad.

I think there are people in this Congress who actually believe that government does not have a benign role in the lives of the people, except as an engine to redistribute the wealth of the Nation upwards. This legislation proves otherwise. It proves that government does have a responsibility to step up when people have a problem. It also confirms the role of the Congress of the United States.

We see in today's news that the administration was warned on Katrina. It didn't respond quickly enough. Well, the Congress of the United States has an obligation to respond here. That is what we are doing with this legislation today. That is why I support it. We know that so much of the Federal response to the economic security of the Katrina victims has been lacking.

According to the Economic Policy Institute, unemployment is a serious problem for hurricane victims. But the evacuees who are still not back in their homes, and they number 500,000 people, to them unemployment is epidemic, one-quarter of Whites, one-half of African American evacuees are still out of work.

The cause, Mr. Speaker, is not a lack of jobs. At the current time there is a labor shortage in New Orleans. The cause is a lack of housing near the job sites. The Economic Policy Institute found that simply returning home from the Katrina Diaspora makes a dramatic difference in those staggering unemployment figures.

Unemployment rates fall among Whites to 10.7 percent, among Blacks to 11.6 percent if people have a home to go to. But the unfortunately indifferent Bush administration, through the now infamous FEMA, is compounding the unemployment problems of the hurricane victims. The Federal emergency housing effort located the largest temporary housing facility for New Orleans evacuees in Baker, Louisiana, 91 miles away from New Orleans. That is not a commute for anyone, especially low-income workers.

On September 8, the President urged a proclamation to lower the wages of all workers on a Federal contract to rebuild the hurricane-affected region. He suspended Davis-Bacon, a 74-year-old law which requires that companies receiving Federal contracts pay the average wage to employees who are hired to perform those Federal contracts.

He also suspended the requirement of having affirmative action plans. Fortunately, some Members of Congress became involved in that and offered a counterbalance.

That is what we are trying to do here today. We are trying to offer a counterbalance to an administration that was not there when the American people needed some guidance.

But today this bill will show that Congress has a role, and we have to keep remembering it. Congress has a role in meeting the needs of the American people and government has a role in the life of the American people, has a positive, a powerful, a constructive role; and we have to confirm that role over and over again with our work on the floor of the House of Representatives.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support this bipartisan initiative to give the people of the Katrina disaster area some additional relief. I think we need to keep focusing on what is the appropriate role of government.

Let's help people in this country with the resources we have.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentleman from Ohio's support on this piece of legislation today. But I want to remind my friends on the other side that Congress does have a role. And we took it very seriously when we set up the Katrina committee. It was the Democratic leader who refused to appoint Members from the minority to the Katrina committee.

But there were courageous Members on your side, I see Mr. JEFFERSON here today, who defied the leadership and who came to the committee hearings for the last 4 or 5 months. We did the hard work. We put forth a document that pointed out some serious problems that we had. It was critical of this administration. But the minority was MIA, missing in action from the Katrina committee.

So Congress does have a role. We took it very seriously.

And once again I just want to applaud Mr. JEFFERSON, Mr. TAYLOR, Mr. MELANCON, Ms. MCKINNEY. I hope I am not forgetting anybody. But as I said, they defied their leadership and came to these important Katrina committee hearings, and they were a big part of, I believe, the hearings and had great input into what we produced.

Mr. Speaker, I continue to reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Orleans (Mr. JEFFERSON), the city which suffered the worst natural disaster of any big city in American history.

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me the time to speak on this legislation.

I want to thank the bipartisan group that has developed this legislation. We, of course, had hoped for more from it. We were hoping that we would get to

\$135 a week, as the Senate had proposed. And we, of course, hoped for other provisions in the bill.

But, nonetheless, this is an important step forward, and an important response to the needs of the people in our area. I regret that there is objection to this legislation today, because I think it can only be objected to because folks just do not understand. I will not say that anyone is so callous as to not care, but I would have to say that you cannot really understand the dimensions of this issue if one objects to what we are doing here today.

In many ways, the district that I represent and the area that I represent and the whole gulf region is frozen in time. Not a whole lot has changed since August 29 in this aftermath, except that in our city the water has been pumped out. But other than that, the city is largely depopulated. Business has still not stood up. Hospitals are not working. The school system is not working. Our city has no tax base. People do not have jobs. Many have no place to come back to, even for temporary housing.

And those few who are there, of those who are there now, some 16,000 of them who are there in temporary housing, other housing conditions that are not ones that any of us would really like to have to put our families into, 16,000 of them do not have jobs now and are seeking this unemployment extension benefit.

□ 1100

Across the Gulf there are 165,000 families who are either there or displaced some other place around our country who do not have jobs, not because they are not seeking them, not because they do not want to work, but because the storm has displaced them and destroyed not only where they live but where they worked as well.

So the things we have talked about on the committee that reviewed the Katrina lawsuit, I do want to give some compliments to those who worked on that issue, who helped to, I think, make some critical decisions about it that I think will in the future portend better outcomes for these disasters as they occur. We hope they do not occur to anybody like they occurred to us; but if they do, I think we are in a far better position to deal with them now.

I do want to say there is a great deal more to be done in our area. And we are hoping that this Congress as a result of the trip that will be taken in just a few hours down there to take some 35 or 40 Members of Congress down to take a look at this, that people can continue to develop an appreciation for the extent of this disaster. Many of us have said it was not just a natural disaster that drowned our city. There are also some man-made issues here about how our levees failed and about how we could have done more to make sure that that did not happen. Frankly, had the levees had not failed, our city would not have drowned and

we would not have had the 80 percent of our city under water, and all of the untoward consequences I just talked to you about would not have happened. We would have had a serious storm, a series of brief clean-up, and people would be back in town, and we would not have to be here talking about extending unemployment.

We are extending it today because this is a long-term set of issues here. This is not the ordinary disaster. We will be living with this for a very, very long time. It will take a lot of hard work on the part of all of us to make this close to right down the road.

So I hope this Congress is prepared to stick with the people of the region. I hope we will get a full understanding of exactly how folks are suffering and how this approach is a Band-Aid approach to helping people who are in the most dire circumstances, as I said, not because of anything they have done or have failed to do, not because they are not looking for work every day, but because they are displaced. They are disconnected. Their jobs are destroyed. They have no place to go. And they have no means of support for their families except this Congress and this country come to their aid. And this is a small measure to do that.

I am grateful to the committee for the work that it has done. I look forward to our committee realizing that there may be more work to do in this area. I hope we can make a rebound in this work as quickly as we can. But the biggest thing now is how we can keep families together, how we can give them a little support while they struggle to get back to normalcy, and how at the end of the day we can give them the choice to return to the place where they lived, where they have their cultural connections, and where they have dedicated a part of their lives and their influence and where they, frankly, want to return to.

All of us have someplace we call home around here; and for them, no matter how dangerous we think it is, how difficult it is for them, these people, all of our people, all of us want to have a way to come back and reconnect to our home, at least to make a decision about whether we want to make a reconnection or not.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this issue. I hope that whatever objections there are they will be withdrawn because this ought to be an issue on which we are all together, on which there is bipartisan agreement.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I just want to say, Mr. Chairman, thank you once again for the kind of bipartisan cooperation that I think truly reflects the spirit in which this bill comes to the floor today.

Our country is so well known for disaster relief, generously and spontaneously given to the rest of the world, that the rest of the world actually came forward and offered relief to the United States after Katrina occurred.

In a real sense the standard we have set for ourselves in the rest of the world sets the standard for what we do in our country. Will we be known when this disaster has cleared for the generosity of the response to Katrina?

Despite the sour note of one Member only at the beginning, I want to say that I have seen anything but that in the workings of our committee. It did make it necessary for us to make the case in a way we thought would have been unnecessary. For example, when you talk about throwing money at a problem, it makes me realize that some people do not even understand what unemployment benefits are about. They do not understand that you can only get unemployment benefits if you have had a job so that we are by definition talking about working people. And because many have not been unemployed, they may not understand what you have to go through to keep getting your benefits, to report to the office, to show evidence of having looked for a job.

In other words, we are talking here about people who worked, who have every desire to work, and who need a meager benefit in order to keep looking for work. That is why this bill is minimally reflective of where most Members would be. I think the bill at its base reflects the bipartisan spirit of this House when it comes to extending benefits that would allow people who want to work to, in fact, do that work.

And, indeed, if we should be so fortunate that these benefits may inspire some to go back home to places few of us would want to go because of all the future comforts that are gone, to go back home with meager benefits, with no housing, with insufficient health care, to go back home to help rebuild their community, that is the America that we all know.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman has 4½ minutes remaining.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS).

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to come to the floor today to speak on behalf of people of the gulf region of New Orleans, of Mississippi, of Alabama who have in many ways been dismissed, marginalized, even violated. I rise in strong support of the passage of S. 1777.

Six months after Hurricane Katrina, life for Louisiana and Mississippi residents remains an uphill battle. Houses have not been rebuilt. Many are still without gas, electricity, and other needed utility service; and those who once resided in the New Orleans ninth ward are still unable to return home, and other areas also. Yes, some help has been given; however, much more needs to be done.

There has been a lot of talk in the news about how America is not a country that will cut and run. Yet that is what we are doing to Hurricane

Katrina survivors if we do not extend the services they so desperately need. If passed, S. 1777 will extend the much-needed unemployment assistance to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The unemployment rate of the hurricane survivors has reached epidemic proportions. This effect is compounded by the fact that the affected areas had some of the country's highest unemployment rates prior to the storm. Six months have already passed, although it seems the desperate images of survivors was just yesterday. As a result, providing unemployment assistance for survivors for up to 39 weeks is not only desperately needed but it is the right thing to do.

S. 1777 will waive the \$25,000.00 limitation faced by individuals and household under existing law. As we have seen many individuals and families have to rebuild their entire lives from nothing. A recent media report chronicled the life of one woman whose sole possession after Hurricane Katrina was one dining room chair. The amount of funds these individuals receive needs to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased at the way the press has not closed up shop and gone home after Katrina. Story after story continues to tell us what is happening in the gulf region. We have just seen Mardi Gras stories over and over again. I was pleased to see Mardi Gras celebrated in the region.

The region is doing for itself what it can do. As I think about this bill, I think that there are people who are on unemployment benefits who got a job during Mardi Gras and who came back home who no longer need unemployment benefits.

I want us to also remember that New Orleans, in particular, which is known for its Mardi Gras gaiety, this is the oil producing, the energy producing region of our country. We need it to get back on its feet.

This bill will help the region, the whole region, Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, to do just that. We are helping the people, and that is the way to help the region.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her comments about the press talking about some positive stories coming out of Louisiana, but we should not forget there are also positive stories in Mississippi. The gentlewoman has traveled to the Gulf Coast on a couple of occasions, and the people of Mississippi were devastated as well.

The gentleman from Louisiana talked about the hard work. There is a lot of hard work left to do in rebuilding the Gulf Coast, but it is important that we at the Federal level do it in a fiscally responsible way in conjunction with the State and local governments

in the Gulf Coast. But we also have hard work ahead of us in fixing the emergency management system, and that is something we are already starting to engage in. And we are going to have, I think, a significant debate on how we move forward.

This legislation today is important. The extension of the disaster unemployment assistance, it is money that, as I said earlier, is going to people that traditionally are not eligible for normal unemployment. These are small business owners, many of them. I think the gentlewoman from the District used the example of the hot dog stand owner, people working hard, small businesses. They do not have any income, and this is going to give them that income they need to get them back on their feet.

I want to also remind my colleagues that there is not an additional appropriation required for this. This has already been appropriated. The funds are in the disaster relief funds and CBO has scored this as no net increase in spending.

So as we move forward, I think it is responsible for us to do this. I urge my colleagues to support this legislation. I also want to thank my colleague from the District for the work she has put into it.

This has been a bipartisan effort. I also want to thank Chairman YOUNG and Ranking Member OBERSTAR. I also do not want to forget members of the committee from the Gulf Coast, Mr. BOUSTANY and Mr. BAKER, for their leadership, and Mr. PICKERING for his leadership.

I want finally to thank the majority leader for working with us to get this legislation on the floor today.

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, before Katrina slammed into my city, we had 2,100 hospital beds. Now we have 400 beds between Touro and Children's. When Katrina struck, about 22 percent of Louisiana residents and 23 percent of New Orleans residents were living in poverty, \$16,090 for a family of three. Over 900,000 people or 21 percent of all residents in Louisiana had no health insurance before Katrina and after the storm 1.2 million were uninsured. Tied to these poverty and uninsurance rates, Louisiana also had some of the poorest health statistics in the country with high rates of infant mortality, chronic diseases such as heart disease and diabetes, and AIDS cases, and lower than average childhood immunization rates.

To this end Mr. Speaker, I am proud to join Congresswoman CHRISTENSEN and a number of my congressional colleagues in introducing the first in a series of healthcare bills that I will be introducing in the coming weeks. The Katrina Health Access, Recovery, and Empowerment Act of 2006 or KHARE Act of 2006 has 4 main provision areas, each which addresses a key component in rebuilding the health care infrastructure in the Gulf Region, and meeting the unique health and health care needs of those displaced by the hurricanes. They include the following:

Title I: Rebuilding the Health Care Infrastructure. This title will meet the immediate



and longer-term needs of the health care providers in the hurricane-affected regions by directing the Department of Health and Human Services in consultation to provide forgivable low-interest loans to eligible small business concerns for the restoration of health care and other services connected to health care.

This title will extend tax-credits for medical malpractice insurance to health professionals whose primary place of employment is located in the Hurricane Katrina-affected area and offer grants to eligible non-profit hospitals and clinics to assist hospitals and clinics in defraying qualified medical malpractice insurance expenditures.

In addition, this title will allow healthcare professionals whose healthcare practice is located in the Hurricane Katrina-affected area and is in a high risk specialty, will be allowed to deduct from gross income an amount equal to 125 percent of the aggregate premiums paid for medical liability insurance.

**Title II: Rebuilding Pipelines of Providers in Medically-Needy and Underserved Areas and Communities.** This title offers support to health care facilities in the hurricane-affected areas in order to expand access to needed health and health care services for hurricane affected individuals in medically needy and underserved areas and communities. The title establishes a Healthcare Safety Net Infrastructure Trust Fund. The Trust Fund will provide Federal guarantee of loan repayment, including guarantees of repayment of refinancing loans, to non-Federal lenders making loans to eligible healthcare facilities for healthcare facility replacement (either by construction or acquisition), modernization and renovation projects, and capital equipment acquisition.

**Title III: Providing Relief to Academic Institutions.** This provision provides support to academic institutions, with health and health care related programs, in hurricane-affected areas in order to ensure that they have the capacity to retain health and health care-related staff and personnel, and continue to offer programs that are important to bolstering the health and health care workforce in hurricane-affected areas.

**Title IV: Restoring Key Components of the Health Care Infrastructure in Medically-Needy and Medically-Underserved Areas.** This title provides grants and technical assistance support to low-income communities with noted health disparities in order to implement programs to improve health and healthcare. It also provides disparity grants to organizations and others in hurricane-affected areas to implement programs to healthcare programs. Finally, this provision expands access to care for low-income hurricane-affected residents by offering disaster relief Medicaid.

Mr. Speaker, this bill codifies legislatively the framework needed to implement sound public health and healthcare practices and this bill is a start to a new direction for healthcare in the Gulf Coast region and I urge my colleagues to support this bill, so that we do what is so clearly needed to improve the health and health care for millions of Americans.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of S. 1777, as amended. The bill provides much needed aid for individuals left unemployed after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita by extending the period of disaster unemployment assistance from 26 weeks to 39 weeks from the date of the disaster declarations. Without this extension, disaster unem-

ployment assistance for those left unemployed by Hurricane Katrina would expire this Saturday, March 4, and unemployment assistance for those left unemployed by Hurricane Rita would expire by the end of this month. There is no doubt that the people of the Gulf Coast need this assistance, and I strongly support this bill, and thank the Democratic Leader, Ms. PELOSI, for joining me in urging its consideration in the House today.

Let's be clear about what this bill does. It extends unemployment benefits for those 165,000 workers left unemployed as a result of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita for an additional 13 weeks. People in the Gulf Region are still struggling to reclaim their lives. It is the right thing to do to extend these benefits—just as we did after September 11—so that people can put food on their table. It is simply shocking to me that some Members on the other side of the aisle have stood up to oppose this bill. Where is the compassion for those who have suffered most dearly over the past several months?

Mr. Speaker, I support this bill. Nevertheless, I believe that Congress can do more, and should. Last December, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure reported H.R. 4438, the Gulf Coast Recovery Act, a bill that would have extended the period of eligibility of disaster unemployment assistance for those left unemployed by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to 52 weeks from the date of the disasters. Further, the bill provided a much-needed increase to the minimum amount of assistance available to an individual. Right now, assistance provided to individuals in the Gulf Coast is among the lowest in the Nation. H.R. 4438 would have provided an increase in the amount of assistance to 50 percent of the national average (\$135 per week). Currently, the minimum is set at one-half the state average (approximately \$100 per week in Louisiana).

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 4438 also addresses other pressing needs of the Gulf Region. It allows the President to provide assistance to financially distressed state and local governments to cover base pay and overtime expenses for essential response and recovery personnel for six months—from January 2006 through June 2006. At Committee hearings, and on a tour of the region, I have heard from Gulf Coast representatives, including Mayor Ray Nagin of New Orleans, that without help from the Federal government they would have to continue to layoff workers that are essential to the recovery, thereby adding to the scores of unemployed in the region and substantially hindering the recovery.

In addition, to help communities with limited resources, the bill amends the Community Disaster Loan Act of 2005 to allow local governments to receive loans up to 50 percent (an increase from the current 25 percent limit) of the local government's budget.

Further, there is considerable confusion among local governments regarding the cost of debris removal. H.R. 4438 provides clarity on this issue by establishing a 100 percent Federal cost share of debris removal for disaster declarations resulting from Hurricane Katrina or Rita.

The bill also provides an increase in the Federal cost share of the Hazard Mitigation Grant program (HMGP) to at least 75 percent for one year. Many of the Gulf Coast communities simply do not have the ability to meet the Federal cost share and that will severely

limit their ability to utilize cost-effective mitigation measures during the recovery. Mitigation saves lives, reduces property damage, and saves limited government funds. Congress should ensure that we have strong mitigation programs that will help encourage communities to rebuild safer and smarter.

H.R. 4438 also makes a permanent change to the Stafford Act and restores the percentage used to calculate the availability of HMGP funds following a disaster from 7.5 percent to 15 percent. This House has previously approved this change in H.R. 3181, the Predisaster Mitigation Program Reauthorization Act of 2003, in the 108th Congress. This change will help improve the use of HMGP for any future disasters in every part of the country.

Finally, the bill establishes a national program by which FEMA can provide grants to state and local governments to purchase or improve emergency interoperable communications equipment (including satellite phone and satellite communications equipment); mobile equipment to generate emergency power; and to train first responders and emergency personnel on how to best use such equipment. The bill authorizes \$200 million for each of fiscal years 2006, 2007, and 2008 for this program.

It is a sad fact that this Nation still does not have sufficient interoperable and emergency communications equipment that can be relied on in the event of a disaster. Since the Transportation Committee reported H.R. 4438 in December, many of the recent government investigations into what went wrong with the Federal Government's response to Hurricane Katrina have concluded that having operational, emergency communications equipment is essential to respond to any disaster. The program authorized in H.R. 4438 will go a long way to ensuring that emergency responders have this vital equipment by providing states and localities much needed resources to purchase and improve their equipment and also train emergency personnel on how to use the equipment.

H.R. 4438 is an important component to rebuilding the Gulf region. It should be scheduled for an up or down vote on the House Floor. The people of the Gulf Coast deserve at least that much.

Given that the Republican Leadership has been unwilling to schedule H.R. 4438 since the Committee reported the bill in December of last year, we are faced with passing a simple extension of the unemployment benefits for Hurricane Katrina and Rita survivors or facing the prospect of 165,000 survivors losing their benefits.

Although Congress can and should do more, I urge my colleagues to support this legislation to extend the hurricane survivors' unemployment benefits, and I commit that I will continue to work to ensure that the people of the Gulf Coast are not forgotten.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of S. 1777, the Katrina Emergency Assistance Act. This bill would extend jobless unemployment benefits for 165,000 survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita for 13 weeks.

In August, 2005, Hurricane Katrina laid waste to our Gulf Coast region, including the City of New Orleans, and devastated other villages and towns in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The extent of the devastation was unprecedented in our Nation's history. I have

repeatedly expressed my outrage at the failure of our Federal Government to adequately respond to this disaster.

Without this legislation, victims of the Hurricane Katrina disaster will lose their unemployment assistance this Saturday. Under current law, Federal emergency unemployment assistance expires 26 weeks after the emergency occurs. Congress must act now to ensure that these victims continue to receive our support as they attempt to rebuild their lives and their communities.

While I support the legislation before us, this is only a first step for Congress. Many of the Katrina survivors have also lost their homes and belongings. They are continuing to look for employment in the region.

Congress needs to take a bold step and enact a comprehensive approach to help the people and the region recover from this natural disaster. I have co-sponsored H.R. 4197, the Hurricane Katrina Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Reunion Act of 2005, introduced by the Congressional Black Caucus. I urge the House leadership to bring up this legislation immediately. This legislation would take important steps toward fully restoring the Gulf Coast and reuniting evacuees with their families. The bill addresses the needs of evacuees in the areas of health, education, housing, community rebuilding, voting rights, business, and financial services.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation, and again urge the House leadership to immediately allow the House to vote on H.R. 4197, the comprehensive Hurricane Katrina recovery legislation.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. All time for debate has expired.

Pursuant to the order of the House of Wednesday, March 1, 2006, the previous question is ordered on the Senate bill, as amended.

The question is on the third reading of the Senate bill.

The Senate bill was ordered to be read a third time, was read the third time, and passed, and a motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

#### PRIVILEGED REPORT ON RESOLUTION OF INQUIRY TO THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

Mr. SENSENBRENNER, from the Committee on the Judiciary, submitted an adverse privileged report (Rept. No. 109-382) on the resolution (H. Res. 643) directing the Attorney General to submit to the House of Representatives all documents in the possession of the Attorney General relating to warrantless electronic surveillance of telephone conversations and electronic communications of persons in the United States conducted by the National Security Agency, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

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#### PRIVILEGED REPORT ON RESOLUTION OF INQUIRY TO THE PRESIDENT

Mr. SENSENBRENNER, from the Committee on the Judiciary, submitted an

adverse privileged report (Rept. No. 109-383) on the resolution (H. Res. 644) requesting the President and directing the Attorney General to transmit to the House of Representatives not later than 14 days after the date of the adoption of this resolution documents in the possession of those officials relating to the authorization of electronic surveillance of citizens of the United States without court approved warrants, which was referred to the House Calendar and ordered to be printed.

#### PROVIDING FOR CONSIDERATION OF H.R. 4167, NATIONAL UNIFORMITY FOR FOOD ACT OF 2005

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, by direction of the Committee on Rules, I call up House Resolution 702 and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the resolution, as follows:

##### H. RES. 702

*Resolved*, That at any time after the adoption of this resolution the Speaker may, pursuant to clause 2(b) of rule XVIII, declare the House resolved into the Committee of the Whole House on the state of the Union for consideration of the bill (H.R. 4167) to amend the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act to provide for uniform food safety warning notification requirements, and for other purposes. The first reading of the bill shall be dispensed with. All points of order against consideration of the bill are waived. General debate shall be confined to the bill and shall not exceed one hour equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. After general debate the Committee of the Whole shall rise without motion. No further consideration of the bill shall be in order except pursuant to a subsequent order of the House.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN). The gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 1 hour.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, for the purpose of debate only, I yield the customary 30 minutes to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MATSUI), pending which I yield myself such time as I may consume. During consideration of this resolution, all time yielded is for the purpose of debate only.

(Mr. GINGREY asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, House Resolution 702 is a general debate rule that provides 1 hour of debate equally divided and controlled by the chairman and ranking minority member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce. It waives all points of order against consideration of the bill, and it provides that after general debate, the Committee of the Whole shall rise without motion and no further consideration of the bill shall be in order except by a subsequent order of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of House Resolution 702 and the underlying bill, H.R. 4167, the National Food for Uniformity Act of 2005.

H.R. 4166 was introduced by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. ROGERS)

and reported out of the House Energy and Commerce Committee on 15 December 2005 by a vote of 30-18. This is a good bill, and I would like to thank Chairman BARTON and Representative ROGERS for their work in bringing this bill to the floor.

Mr. Speaker, currently food regulation is composed of a variety of different and sometimes inconsistent State requirements. These different State standards hamper the free flow of interstate commerce. They also result in increased costs to manufacturers and distributors that are then, of course, passed on to consumers. The greatest burden falls on our citizens and resident immigrants who are at the lowest end of the economic scale, who are struggling to pay for even basic staples.

So, Mr. Speaker, these differing standards and their effects are very similar to problems plaguing the health insurance industry, which also drive up the cost to consumers and lock the door to many low-income individuals and families who simply cannot afford basic health care coverage because of all the required, expensive and often unnecessary extra screenings, tests and procedures mandated by 50 different State legislatures.

From State to State, we have a patchwork quilt of health and insurance regulations and mandates that would create bureaucracy upon bureaucracy, driving up the costs and driving away coverage for those who need it most. These regulatory inconsistencies in both the insurance health care industry and in the food industry impose unnecessary costs and jeopardize the well-being of American consumers nationwide.

However, Mr. Speaker, the National Uniformity for Food Act would establish national standards to ensure consistency in food labeling regulation. The bill will amend the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act to establish a nationwide system of food safety standards and warning requirements for food labels instead of just a hodgepodge of different and, yes, even contradictory warnings among the various and sundry States.

Mr. Speaker, establishing nationwide, uniform standards is by no means unprecedented. We already have national standards in the areas of meat and poultry products regulated by the United States Department of Agriculture. We have national standards for nutrition labeling, health claims, standards of identity, pesticide residue tolerance, medical devices and drugs regulated by the United States Food and Drug Administration.

Mr. Speaker, for those who fear an important warning might fall through the cracks, I want to emphasize that this bill does allow States whose requirements differ from the Federal requirements the opportunity to petition the FDA to adopt the requirement as a national requirement or to exempt it from the requirement of uniformity for