

had not passed an ordinance that FEMA had approved. Now, I don't know why they had not, haven't gotten into the merits of that, but the bottom line is that FEMA knew this county did not pass this ordinance. They knew it. They had to know it because FEMA keeps it all by ZIP Code. They keep it all by county. They keep it all by flood zone maps. They knew this. Nonetheless, they show up at her house a day or two after the disaster, they take photos, they give her the paperwork, and they assure this couple—they assure them—that they are entitled to this money, and they walk them through the process. The people did it. They got \$27,000 from FEMA in this individual assistance money. Those people took every dime of it and put it back in their home—every dime, put it back in their home. They played by the rules from the very beginning to the very end.

Then, 3 years later—3 years later—FEMA writes them a letter and says: Oh, by the way, we made a mistake. We should have never given you that money in the first place because your county had not passed this ordinance. So you owe us \$27,000. You have 30 days to pay it back or you are going to face penalties and interest.

Well, again, this couple is in their seventies. They are on Social Security. They don't have much else. They have their home. That is about it. This could ruin them financially—probably will ruin them financially. I do not know how in the world they would ever pay this, anywhere close to the \$27,000. But nonetheless FEMA says: Look, our hands are tied. We have to pursue this. We have to squeeze everything we can get out of these folks.

My view is that this was completely FEMA's mistake. That is why I opened with the quote that we are supposed to be a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. This doesn't sound as if FEMA is acting like that type of government right now. FEMA has caused these people harm. Our government should never harm its own people—should never harm its own people—but that is exactly what they have done here. Because of FEMA's incompetence back 3 years ago, they are harming these people.

These people, 3 years ago, had they known they were not eligible, had they known they shouldn't apply for this, had they known FEMA shouldn't have given them this money, would have taken a different course. They would have made decisions based on the circumstances they had at the time. Who knows if they can ever pay this money back. Who knows if they can ever borrow any money. Who knows how this is going to work out.

I feel as if, if we gave FEMA the discretion in this particular case, you would see a different result; you would see FEMA say: OK, we will waive this entirely, and we are just not going to pursue you because it was all our fault.

I think FEMA clearly needs to have discretion in the statute. Again, if you

look at their regs, look at some of their law, look at their practices, they do technically on paper have this discretion, but apparently they are very reluctant to use it, and their inspector general is really pressuring them to collect every dime they can. So FEMA feels as if their hands are tied.

Let me say a couple more words about this. I have asked the Homeland Security Committee to allow us to reconsider this in the committee. There was a little bit of an odd circumstance in the committee yesterday. We had the votes, but some of the Senators who were there and for this either had to leave or were on the way when we voted, and we ended up not having enough to pass it. If everyone was there, we would have passed this. Now we are asking them to reconsider, that we be allowed to bring this back up on the next markup, which I think is going to be next week. We would like to do that. We think it is a matter of fairness.

The reason I am asking this and I am so insistent on this is because this is not limited to my State. I am not just trying to help a few people in the State of Arkansas. I think there are very few in number here in my State. But what is happening around the country is—I saw it today. There were two stories; I believe one was from Tennessee, one was from Mississippi. The same thing is happening in those States. People are starting to get these letters from FEMA. What is going to happen is all of my colleagues are going to start coming to the Homeland Security Committee, and they are going to say: Do something about this. We have these hardship cases in our State that need to be addressed.

Trust me on this, this is going to happen for most people in this Chamber in their home States because FEMA has a backlog of 165,000 of these cases. They have only gone through a little over 5,000 of them to send these back—process these and send these letters out. They have 165,000. They have done about 5,000, and they have 160,000 to go. You can bet your bottom dollar most Senators in this Chamber will have people in their home States who need a little equity, a little grace, and need to have their government stop beating up on them.

Again, I feel very strongly that, in this particular case, FEMA has done these people harm. They have put them in a very dangerous position financially. They gave them some money, and now they are trying to jerk the rug out from under them and take it back. I think that is unfair. I think that once these cases—and there will not be many of them; there may be a couple hundred around the country—but once people get into these cases, they are going to want FEMA to clearly have this discretion. The first numbers we ran—it was only about three-tenths of 1 percent, but now probably it may be a little higher, but we don't know because FEMA doesn't keep accurate statistics.

One last thing on FEMA. I feel like FEMA has fixed this for the present time and going forward. When Director Fugate came in, this is one of the many cleanups he had to do from the previous FEMA administration. I think they have done that, and they have better systems in place. I think their competence level has gone up in the last couple years. I don't agree with him on everything, but I think he has done a pretty good job. We have asked questions of him before the committee. He took over an agency that was in distress, and he is trying. Generally, he has done a great job, and he thinks he has fixed this. As far as I know, he has. I think they have their act together much more than they did back then.

My point is, hopefully, we will not see these kinds of cases come from the flooding we are seeing right now. These are legacy cases from the previous FEMA administration.

I thank my colleagues for being aware of this. I ask my colleagues on the Homeland Security Committee to allow us to bring this back up, put this back on the markup, and let's get it out of the committee.

One of the great things about Homeland Security is that very seldom do we have party-line votes in that committee. That committee is very non-partisan. The chairman and the ranking member insist on that. When we sit in that committee, we actually sit around the table, Democrat, Republican, Democrat, Republican. It is a great committee to serve on. I love being on that committee. I hope my colleagues on the committee and also in the Chamber will encourage us to move this through the committee next week and try to get this done to help a lot of people around the country.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized as in morning business.

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

NAVY OPERATIONS OFF THE COAST OF SOMALIA

Mr. KIRK. Madam President, I rise to commend the work of our Navy operating off the coast of Somalia.

Over the weekend, the USS *Stephen W. Groves* encountered a pirate mothership, a captured Taiwanese fishing vessel, the *Jih Chun Tsai*. The pirates aboard exchanged fire with the *Stephen W. Groves*. Once the firefight ended, a boarding party found that the Taiwanese captain had been murdered along with three pirates. The crew of

the *Groves* captured 19 surviving pirates, but, unfortunately, by much higher command, was instructed to return them directly to Somalia.

I recently visited the *Groves*, shortly after a previous engagement with the *Jih Chun Tsai* in April. I, personally, commend CDR Matthew Rick and his crew aboard the *Stephen W. Groves* for the work they have done fighting piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Their actions over the weekend eliminated the pirate threat of one mothership, but, unfortunately, there are many more to take out.

Also, on Monday, a helicopter from the USS *Bulkeley* responded to a distress call from the M/V *Artemis Glory*, a German-owned crude carrier. The helicopter crew from the *Bulkeley* saw the pirates firing on the merchant ship and returned fire, sinking the skiff and killing the four pirates aboard.

Also, on Monday, the USS *Bainbridge* responded to a distress call from a cargo carrier, the MSC *Ayala*. After the crew of the *Ayala* repelled a pirate attack, the *Bainbridge* arrived and located the mothership responsible for the attack. The crew made contact with the pirates, who ultimately agreed to abandon the mothership they had hijacked just 4 days before. Ironically, the skiff the pirates tried to flee in sank, and the pirates were rescued by the *Bainbridge*.

I commend the men and women serving on the USS *Stephen W. Groves*, the USS *Bulkeley*, and the USS *Bainbridge* for jobs very well done. My hope in the future is that we can have far more robust rules of engagement, empowering Commander Rick and his fellow commanders to eliminate the threat of piracy.

Of course, this mission would be in the highest traditions of the U.S. Navy and in the tradition of the Jefferson administration, which so ably handled this threat when it emerged in the early part of the 19th century. My only hope is that, in the coming administration review by Secretary of State Clinton, she adopts a more Jeffersonian policy with regard to this threat, so the sealanes, which control 70 percent of the world's supply of oil, and so the ransoms, one-third of which are now being paid to terrorists who operate the largest terror training camps on Earth, can be eliminated.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

STUDENT VOTING

Mr. MANCHIN. Madam President, I rise today to speak about the importance of getting our young people in-

involved in our electoral process and to highlight a West Virginia school with a standout record for going the extra mile to encourage students to register and participate in voting.

I tell young people all the time: You cannot sit on the sidelines and watch life happen. You have to get in the game and start making the calls. The same can be said about our democracy. If you want results, you have to first become an informed and active voter.

Voting is one of the greatest rights the free people of a free nation possess. Over the course of our Nation's history, many have fought tirelessly to gain voting rights. In fact, it was West Virginia's very own Senator Jennings Randolph who relentlessly pushed for the 26th amendment to our Constitution, ensuring those 18 years of age or older had the right to cast a ballot. It took him almost 30 years to get it passed. He started during World War II. It did not pass until 1971.

Each vote matters and the individuals casting those votes matter even more. I know that firsthand because I was honored to serve as West Virginia's highest elections officer, secretary of state. I served from 2000 to 2004.

During my tenure, we established a program called Saving History and Reaching Every Student Program, which was known as the SHARES Program which promoted democracy in West Virginia schools. We registered 42,000 high school students. In my State, so many of the students, if they are 17 years of age but they turn 18 on election day of November 4 or before, can vote in the primary while they are 17. They did not know that. We started promoting it. We had ambassadors. They were all working and trying to get 100 percent of their class eligible to participate—to register and then vote. Then we rewarded them with a school of excellence. My staff and I traveled the State speaking with high school seniors, encouraging them to complete a voter registration form and to participate in our elections.

A decade after that program began, it gives me great pleasure to stand on the Senate floor today and recognize a school—one school—that truly takes it to a whole other level with their students. They took it very seriously as far as democracy and their right and their responsibility to participate.

Every year for the past decade, the staff and the members of Fayette County's Meadow Bridge High School, with their outstanding principal, have registered 100 percent of each senior class. This is truly a remarkable accomplishment. I am unaware of any other school in our great State or across this Nation that has produced voter registration numbers such as those for 10 years in a row. Think of it: Every student in the senior class of this school for 10 years registered to participate.

The school takes important steps such as explaining the registration form, the election process, and the im-

portance of one's vote—all of which go a long way in opening the minds of young adults and showing them that it is easy to become involved, cast a vote, and make a difference.

I have said this to so many young students and the students who come and work with us every day: The most valuable thing you will ever own in your life is your vote. It belongs to you and nobody else. There is only one—your vote. Nobody can take that away from you.

I applaud Meadow Bridge High School's students, faculty, and staff for their commitment to our democracy. I challenge other high schools to follow Meadow Bridge's example.

Let us work together to encourage our Nation's young adults, even more when it comes to our democracy and national issues. This is not a partisan issue, as so many things might be in this body. This is not. It is all of us working together to continue to lead this great country. It is all of us being Americans and that we should support, for the future of our great Nation, this democracy of ours and the freedom to vote.

I am so proud that West Virginia's own Meadow Bridge High School is such a good example, not only for the State of West Virginia but for young students all over this Nation.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. KLOBUCHAR). Without objection, it is so ordered.

FREEDOM IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I rise today to talk about President Obama's speech today on the support of the Arab spring, at least what we are calling the Arab spring. I believe and hope, as many of my colleagues do, that it is in the best interests of the United States to advance freedom in the Middle East.

Supporting free people and democratic governments has always guided American foreign policy. Lending our support to people who yearn for freedom is really part of our national DNA. Doing so in a practical and pragmatic way within the context of regional stability is imperative to our own national security.

In recent weeks I have been very supportive of the President's actions as they related to Osama bin Laden and the decisions that were made there. In recent months I thought the President has been a little unsteady in advancing the principles I mentioned earlier. He demonstrated uncertainty in dealing with President Mubarak before withdrawing his support and, if I can say so,