

Mr. Speaker, it may be a voluntary checkoff, but the money is not voluntary. It is part of the income tax you are required to pay. While we all do support government, I would wonder, if you made the income tax entirely voluntary, whether we could get anything close to what we do now. It is, in fact, the tax that you must pay. So that part is not voluntary.

Secondly, I'm surprised that one would not want to attribute this to reducing the deficit even though it's only \$36 million, as suggested by the other side. If we can't even do this here, what confidence can the American people have that we would deal with the tougher issues and larger amounts? If \$36 million is too difficult for us to use to somehow reduce the deficit, what hope is there that we can do anything seriously in this Congress or Congresses in the future?

I must respond to the repeated suggestion that we have done nothing in this Congress.

The Obama administration would be surprised, since they said that the FISA amendments, which we passed on this floor with 301 positive votes, were the number one priority for the administration in the area of intelligence. In the aftermath of what happened just a couple of weeks ago, one would think that we would understand the seriousness of intelligence. And that which is the greatest tool, according to the DNI currently and previous DNIs, that tool, which got strong bipartisan support, was indeed an important thing for us to do here.

We had three free trade agreements that we finally approved. They have been waiting around for a number of years. The consensus is they create jobs in this economy and give us a fair playing field in which our workers can compete.

We had a transportation bill that we passed. We dealt with the interest paid on student loans. And I would just say, for 2 years in a row, we have, in fact, spent less on discretionary spending than we did the preceding year. I think that's the first time we've done that in a generation.

There are other things that I could talk about. It is a shame that the other body has not acted on the nearly 30 bills we've sent over there that deal with jobs.

Oh, yes, we also had my bill, H.R. 4, which repealed that section of the President's health care bill that placed an inordinate paperwork burden on small business, and that was the number one priority of the small business community in the country.

I wish we would do more. I wish we would have the cooperation of the other body. It's very difficult to negotiate when the other party won't come to the table or even articulate what their position is; but, nonetheless, I would suggest that those things I have spoken about are not unimportant.

But, of course, that's a digression because that's not talking about the bill before us.

The bill before us is a simple bill. All it does is say that the party's over. The taxpayer will no longer pay with taxpayer dollars for the conventions of the two national parties. Doesn't stop them from having their conventions, doesn't denigrate their conventions, doesn't take them off television; it just says the American taxpayer will not pay for it. We're going to save \$36 million. Fairly straight forward, fairly simple.

I would hope that we would have a strong bipartisan vote for this, because it is truly a bipartisan problem and timely, because many of our constituents, at least when I was home in the district, said, Why are you in the Congress voting to put taxpayer dollars for these conventions?

That was a tough question to answer. We can answer that question here in a very bipartisan way by passing this bill.

With that, I would ask my colleagues to support H.R. 5912, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. PRICE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in opposition to H.R. 5912. This bill is flawed in substance and comes to the floor without serious deliberation or debate.

I want to make clear, however, that my colleague from Oklahoma and I agree that paying for presidential nominating conventions is not a wise use of taxpayer dollars. In fact, the main provisions of Mr. COLE's bill are included nearly verbatim in my Presidential Funding Act H.R. 414. However, H.R. 5912 excludes a critical prohibition on the use of "soft money" to fund conventions, keeping the door open for unlimited soft money donations from corporations and high-dollar special interests. Allowing conventions to accept millions of dollars in these unregulated contributions could threaten the credibility of the nominating process and further erode the principle of one voice, one vote.

I also take issue with the closed process under which this bill has been brought to the floor. H.R. 5912 is being considered under suspension of the rules, without amendments, committee markup, or serious deliberation. The Committee on House Administration has not even held hearings on this bill. But that should come as no surprise—the Majority has not held a single hearing on the issue of campaign finance in the 112th Congress, a period that has seen the House pass bills dismantling many of the common-sense campaign reforms of the post-Watergate era. I have opposed repeated floor votes that would repeal the presidential public financing system as a whole. This bill is merely the latest cynical attempt to attack the system with no effort to replace it.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's thoroughly misguided Citizens United decision, we should be working to strengthen—not to weaken—the rules that ensure our elections are free and fair. That is why Mr. VAN HOLLEN, other colleagues, and I will introduce a bill later this week which will be an important first step toward the comprehensive reform that our democratic elections need.

Our bill, the Empowering Citizens Act, will incorporate and improve H.R. 414, reforming and strengthening the presidential public financing system. In addition, it will establish a voluntary small-donor public financing program

for congressional campaigns. Finally, it will establish strong rules forbidding coordination among candidate-specific SuperPACs and political parties or campaigns, thereby lessening the outside influence of special interests and outside spending groups in our elections.

I believe that we are at a tipping point in the short history of campaign finance reform—we can either choose to stand by the common-sense reforms that have restored America's faith in elections after the Watergate scandal, or we can choose to cede control of political campaigns entirely to wealthy corporations and interest groups. The responsible choice is clear. I strongly urge my colleagues to oppose this measure.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 5912, as amended.

The question was taken.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. In the opinion of the Chair, two-thirds being in the affirmative, the ayes have it.

Ms. FUDGE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

DISASTER LOAN FAIRNESS ACT OF 2012

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6296) to amend the Small Business Act to provide the interest rate for certain disaster related loans, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6296

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 "Disaster Loan Fairness Act of 2012".

SEC. 2. INTEREST RATE FOR CERTAIN DISASTER RELATED LOANS.

Section 7(d) of the Small Business Act is amended by adding at the end the following:

"(8)(A) Upon application, the Administration shall grant an interest rate determined under this paragraph with respect to any qualifying disaster loan.

"(B) For the purposes of this paragraph a qualifying disaster loan is the Administration's share of a loan—

"(i) for which the interest rate would be set pursuant to paragraph (5) but for the operation of this paragraph;

"(ii) which is or was made with respect to activity in an area when the President has declared a major disaster in that area under section 401 of the Stafford Act; and

"(iii) which is or was made during the period beginning January 1, 2011, and ending on the date that is 4 years after the date of the enactment of the Disaster Loan Fairness Act of 2012.

"(C) The Administrator shall determine the interest rate for each calendar year to be the lesser of—

"(i) 4 percent; and

"(ii) a rate equivalent to ½ the rate prevailing in the private market for similar

loans for those unable to attain credit elsewhere and ¾ of that prevailing rate for those able to attain credit elsewhere.

“(D) The Administrator shall refund excess interest payments to borrowers whose interest rate on already made loans is lowered by reason of the operation of the paragraph.

“(E) Not later than one year after the date of the enactment of the Disaster Loan Fairness Act of 2012, the Administrator shall report to Congress as part of the annual report under Section 10(a) on whether the interest rate provided by this paragraph has resulted in any or all of the following:

“(i) A greater number of applications for disaster related loans.

“(ii) A greater number of approvals of disaster related loans.

“(iii) A decreased default rate on disaster related loans.”

SEC. 3. TERMINATION OF USE OF PUBLIC FUNDS FOR POLITICAL PARTY NOMINATING CONVENTIONS.

Section 9008 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

“(i) TERMINATION OF USE OF FUNDS FOR CONVENTIONS.—Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, in the case of any presidential election held after 2012—

“(1) the Secretary shall not make any payments under subsection (b)(3) to any national committee of a major party or minor party;

“(2) on November 1 of the year prior to the year in which the election is held, the Secretary shall determine—

“(A) in the case of the first such election, the amount which is equal to the aggregate amount of the payments which were made under subsection (b)(3) to the national committees of a major party or minor party for the presidential election held in 2012, adjusted in the manner described in subsection (b)(5), or

“(B) in the case of any subsequent election, the amount which is equal to the amount determined under subparagraph (A), adjusted in the manner described in subsection (b)(5); and

“(3) at the time the Secretary makes the determination under paragraph (2), an amount equal to the amount determined under paragraph (2) shall be permanently rescinded from the fund and returned to the general fund.”

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) and the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

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

There was no objection.

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

Just over a year ago, the people of the 11th Congressional District of Pennsylvania endured some of the worst flooding that we have ever experienced. In the aftermath of both a hurricane and a tropical storm, the Susquehanna River and streams flowing

into it surged out of their banks, washing out homes and businesses and roads and bridges.

I spent days traveling across my district consoling my constituents. I was with them as they had to throw out photo albums, their children's toys, their clothing, their furniture, their lives' possessions. I stood on muddy porches and cried with my constituents.

Time after time they asked me how the Federal Government was going to help them recover. Time after time, business owners asked me if the Federal Government was able to provide low-interest loans so they could rebuild, reopen, and bring back their workers. Time after time, I would tell them the government of the United States was going to offer them loans at a 6 percent interest rate. That's right, 6 percent.

□ 1800

A 6 percent loan isn't going to help a business owner rebuild and reopen, and the hardworking people of northeastern Pennsylvania knew that. A 6 percent loan isn't going to help a family rebuild a flooded home. I was embarrassed to tell the mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers and business owners of my district that the Federal Government, through the Small Business Administration, was going to give them a 6 percent loan to help them get back on their feet.

I was even more embarrassed—and even shocked—when I started looking at our budget for foreign disaster relief. This government gave \$215 million of flood relief to Pakistan. And what rate do we charge foreign countries when we rebuild their infrastructure? Zero percent. We don't charge foreign countries any interest. The taxpayer money they receive from the United States is a giveaway. But this government was going to charge American homeowners and American business owners 6 percent interest on loans they were going to use to rebuild.

Now, the United States of America is one of the most generous, compassionate countries when it comes to providing global aid. When disaster strikes anywhere in the world, the United States is the first country to help them rebuild. But when disaster strikes right here in our own country, we need to start rebuilding here first. Let's help Americans first. We must restore American lives, save American businesses, and protect American jobs.

Now, I know hundreds of my colleagues have had similar conversations with their constituents after they experienced natural disasters in their districts. Since the start of the 112th Congress, communities in over 200 congressional districts in 46 States have been flooded by a tropical storm or a hurricane, burned by wildfire, crippled by a snowstorm, or destroyed by a tornado, resulting in a disaster declaration by the President. Constituents across the

country have heard the same news—the Federal Government can provide help in the form of a high-interest loan.

Fortunately, this is something that we can fix. I introduced the Disaster Loan Fairness Act of 2012, which would dramatically change the way the SBA provides disaster recovery loans. This bill would lower the interest rate for borrowers with no credit available elsewhere to one-half of the prevailing rate, and it would cap the interest rate at 4 percent. For those who can get credit elsewhere, this bill would lower the interest rate to three-quarters of the prevailing rate, again, capping the maximum interest rate at 4 percent.

The Disaster Loan Fairness Act is retroactive to January 1, 2011. This means the SBA is required to refund excess interest payments for disaster loans made since this date. Homeowners and business owners who took out these loans will receive refunds for their excess interest payments.

To offset the direct spending, this bill terminates the use of public taxpayer funds for political party conventions in the elections occurring after 2012. Simply put, this bill prioritizes disaster victims over the subsidizing of political party conventions. We are literally putting the American people ahead of politics.

This bill will provide serious, substantial, necessary help to the hundreds of thousands of Americans who have endured horrible loss during natural disasters. It will provide relief to the millions of Americans who will suffer loss in future disasters.

I ask my colleagues to support the Disaster Loan Fairness Act of 2012, H.R. 6296, and provide relief for so many Americans that need that help.

I reserve the balance of my time.

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

(Ms. VELÁZQUEZ asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, natural disasters profoundly impacted our Nation this year. From wildfires out west to drought in the Plains to violent storms in the Northeast, millions of households were affected. These unanticipated events leave families and small businesses facing significant costs when rebuilding.

Typically, insurance covers monetary losses, but that is not always the case. To complement insurance coverage, Congress authorized the SBA to provide disaster loans to affected families and small businesses. Since its inception in 1953, the SBA has approved roughly 1.9 million disaster loans, amounting to approximately \$47 billion.

Over the years, the program has evolved to better assist victims. As chairwoman of the Small Business Committee, I worked to incorporate bipartisan reforms in the 2008 farm bill to help disaster victims get back on their feet. These included new disaster

bridge loans, greater loan amounts, extending deferment periods, and enabling more private sector involvement.

The current program makes the government the lender of last resort by subsidizing reduced interest rates only for those who cannot get credit elsewhere. The goal is to assist as many victims as possible and ensure risk-sharing remains a public-private partnership. This bill, however, would eliminate the "credit elsewhere" test, offering taxpayer-subsidized, low-interest loans to all applicants. At a time when government resources are scarce, we should not be shifting more borrowers and additional risk into this initiative.

This is not my only concern. The bill also arbitrarily limits interest rates—with no empirical data to show why these levels are appropriate. Capping interest rates could greatly increase the taxpayers' burden in the future as costs rise and revenue remains flat. The SBA is also directed to issue refunds on previously approved loans. The bill is silent on how to carry that out, creating an administrative nightmare for the SBA.

Continuing to improve the program is important, but in doing so, we should not create unintended consequences. If the regular committee hearing and markup process had been followed, Members could have addressed this bill's shortcomings. Placing it on suspension has further limited Members' participation.

I would like to direct the attention of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to the fact that this bill creates \$50 million in direct spending. To offset the cost, it will eliminate public funding of political conventions, undoing years of campaign finance reform in the process.

Today, Federal election rules seek to keep soft money and undue influence out of the Presidential race. Since the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision, it's become clear that powerful stakeholders will spend millions to help a candidate win. If public funding were terminated, special interests will once again compete to curry favor with Presidential candidates by bankrolling nominating conventions.

Mr. Speaker, it is certainly appropriate to provide relief to homeowners and businesses affected by a disaster; however, it is inconsistent with the intent of the program to ask taxpayers to subsidize loans for those who can get credit elsewhere. Is this the best use of government resources? I don't know. But I'm confident we could have investigated this and other concerns if the committee process were not bypassed in favor of today's suspension vote.

With that, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MARINO).

Mr. MARINO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 6296, the Disaster Loan Fairness Act of 2012,

introduced by my colleague from Pennsylvania, Representative BARLETTA.

Our districts cross each other in several counties, so we both have experienced the disaster that took place in the 10th and 11th District.

□ 1810

At the end of August 2011, Hurricane Irene caused severe flooding and widespread power outages in eastern Pennsylvania. With the ground saturated and waterways at a very high level, Tropical Storm Lee arrived about one week later, causing historic widespread flooding in most of central and eastern Pennsylvania. The 10th Congressional District that I represent was particularly hit hard.

Ten of the 14 counties in the district were impacted by the flood. The storm knew no boundaries. It hit homes and businesses, government offices and schools, farms, cemeteries, and churches. I visited with families and individuals who had lost everything.

I traveled to many businesses, both large and small, that were affected, like the Knoebels Amusement Park in Northumberland County, where I watched workers and owner clean up four inches of mud that covered the ground across the entire park.

While the people of my district have made heroic efforts to rebuild, they have faced many obstacles. One of these is finding loan opportunities which they need to finance the rebuilding of their homes and businesses.

Unless you have lived through a disaster and visited with families that have been through the experience, it is hard to imagine the hopelessness and desperation that people experience when the rebuilding process begins.

H.R. 6296 will provide critical relief to disaster victims in my district and across the country by lowering the interest rate on SBA disaster loans. This legislation, which will, on average, lower rates on SBA disaster loans by 1½ to 2 percent, will give Americans impacted by disaster the ability to begin the process of rebuilding their lives and livelihoods.

I had the occasion to hear a little of the argument prior to this concerning the conventions getting money, and there was an issue raised about it's only \$36 million. Well, there's nobody in this room that doesn't think \$1 million is a lot of money, and I certainly think \$36 million is a whole heck of a lot of money.

Now, we can send money to conventions. That should be the responsibility of each party, regardless of what side of the aisle you're on.

But we also send taxpayer money to countries that hate us, so I think it's about time we start helping the American people with their own tax dollars.

I urge all of my colleagues to join with me and Representative BARLETTA in support of this important legislation.

I had one experience that just stuck in my mind. During the flood, I visited a family who wasn't in their house.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BARLETTA. I yield the gentleman 1 additional minute.

Mr. MARINO. I want to share an experience I had touring the same areas that Lou did. And it was a family of six; they weren't able to be in their house. It was a blue collar family. It was half a double.

They wouldn't even be able to sit on their porch or stand in their front yard. That's how bad the flood was. Most of their furniture and belongings were out on the front yard, just totally lost.

They sat on the back of a pickup truck. A 6-year-old little girl, 6 or 8 years old, said to me, Are you here to help, because we don't have a bed to sleep in and we don't have a room to sleep in. What are we going to do tonight?

That is what we're faced with. We're supposed to be helping our people in our district, and I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

Ms. VELAZQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from New York (Mr. OWENS).

Mr. OWENS. Mr. Speaker, I was a cosponsor of the original version of this bipartisan bill and rise to support the modified legislation we are considering today. I want to thank Mr. BARLETTA for his work on this important legislation in the aftermath of Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee.

These two disasters caused millions in damage in northern New York. One year later, small businesses and homeowners are still recovering.

As I walked around my district immediately after, I saw people shoveling out mud, throwing out heirlooms, and struggling to understand what had happened to them. Many of the businesses were ruined, along with homes.

But I also saw something else. I saw people helping people. What we're doing here today is having the government help people. We're following the example of our constituents.

Currently, the Small Business Administration offers disaster recovery loans to small businesses and homeowners for as low as 4 percent and up to 8 percent if credit is available elsewhere. To date, nearly 100 small businesses and homeowners in my congressional district have been approved for more than \$5.8 million in disaster loans. But I have heard from many constituents that the interest rates are simply too high to take advantage of these loans.

This bipartisan bill would lower the interest rate on disaster loans.

Mr. BARLETTA. Mr. Speaker, I have no more speakers and I am prepared to close.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. VELAZQUEZ. I yield back the balance of my time.

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

When disaster strikes around the world, America is always the first to help, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud

of our country. I'm proud that when countries need help, we're there.

But when disasters strike right here at home, I do believe that we should help Americans first, and we don't know when or where the next disaster will occur. It could be tonight, could be tomorrow, could be next week. But let's make sure, before we leave here today, that we tell our neighbors and friends back home and around this great Nation that, in their greatest time of need, their country will be there for them.

With all the devastation and destruction that happened from last year's flood, I saw the greatness of America. I saw neighbors helping neighbors. I saw strangers helping people. I saw students helping the elderly. I saw what makes this country great, and I saw the American people come together.

It's time that this Congress comes together. I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. BARLETTA) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6296, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

BORDER SECURITY INFORMATION IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2012

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 6368) to require the Department of Justice, in consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, to provide a report to Congress on the Departments' ability to track, investigate and quantify cross-border violence along the Southwest Border and provide recommendations to Congress on how to accurately track, investigate, and quantify cross-border violence, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 6368

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 "Border Security Information Improvement Act of 2012".

SEC. 2. STUDY.

(a) REPORT ON CROSS-BORDER VIOLENCE ON THE SOUTHWEST BORDER.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Attorney General and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall jointly submit to the congressional committees set forth in subsection (b) a report on cross-border violence on the Southwest Border of the United States. Such study shall include—

(1) the definition of cross-border violence used by law enforcement components within the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security;

(2) the ability of the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security and their law

enforcement components to track, investigate, quantify, and report on the level of cross-border violence occurring along the Southwest Border of the United States;

(3) the extent to which the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security define and track cross-border violence and steps being taken to address the effects of cross-border violence along the Southwest Border of the United States;

(4) the information and data on cross-border violence collected and made available through inter-agency taskforces on the Southwest Border of the United States, including the Southwest Border High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area, Arizona's Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats, the El Paso Intelligence Center, the Border Enforcement and Security Task Force, and State and Local Fusion Centers; and

(5) the additional resources needed to track, investigate, quantify and report on the level of cross-border violence occurring along the United States-Mexico border.

(b) CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES.—The congressional committees set forth in this subsection are—

(1) the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs of the Senate;

(2) the Committee on the Judiciary of the Senate;

(3) the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives; and

(4) the Committee on the Judiciary of the House of Representatives.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. SMITH) and the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. SCOTT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMITH of Texas. 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 materials on H.R. 6368, as amended, currently under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. SMITH of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank my colleague and good friend, Congressman FRANCISCO CANSECO, for his work on the issue of cross-border violence and its impact on the United States.

Mr. Speaker, In recent years, drug trafficking-related violence has increased in Mexico. According to Mexican officials, over 40,000 people have been killed as the result of drug-related violence since 2006.

As the gentleman from Texas has pointed out, we should be very concerned that there are insufficient methods to track this violence and that it spills over into the United States.

When evaluating increased violence in Mexico and its effect on the United States, a central concern is the potential for what has been termed "spillover violence"—an increase in drug trafficking-related violence in the United States.

The violence being committed by Mexican drug cartels within Mexico's own borders presents a national security challenge for Mexico. When that violence spills over into the United

States, it presents a national security concern for America as well.

Cross-border violence is a challenge for both countries while criminals kill not only each other but government officials, law enforcement and military officers, innocent civilians and children.

Administration officials maintain that there has not yet been a significant spillover of violence from Mexico into the United States. But we should not wait for it to happen.

This bill requires the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security to provide a joint report to Congress on the Departments' ability to track, investigate and measure cross-border violence along the Southwest border.

In addition, it directs the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security to make recommendations to Congress on how best to accurately track, investigate and measure cross-border violence.

Cross-border violence is a complex problem which cannot be resolved overnight. This legislation is an important first step in developing an overall strategy to combat spillover violence.

I again thank Mr. CANSECO for his work on this issue, and I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

I will now yield as much time as he might consume to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CANSECO).

□ 1820

Mr. CANSECO. I want to thank my friend and colleague and fellow San Antonian—the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. SMITH—as well as his diligent and hardworking staff, for their help on this very important matter.

I come to the floor today, Madam Speaker, in support of my legislation, H.R. 6368, the Border Security Information Improvement Act.

As the Representative of a district with nearly 800 miles of U.S.-Mexico border, I know firsthand how important the security of our citizens along our shared border with Mexico is. As I visit with the people of the 23rd District of Texas, I hear time and time again from Americans living along the border that they do not feel safe or secure. They talk of living in fear. They tell me that Washington is not paying attention as drugs, weapons, and humans are smuggled through their communities. Washington is not listening as they ask for help as violence from Mexican drug cartels spills into their communities and cities and towns.

Many of the statistics and information used to make claims about the security of our southwest border are based on information from sources, such as the Uniform Crime Report, that are not intended to measure security along our border.

Administration officials have claimed that the border is safe and secure. Yet, while attending a Homeland Security Committee hearing last May, I learned that the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice do not have a working, uniform definition of "spillover violence." Yet witnesses at the hearing—