This bill authorizes a federal program that would award grants based on how well states improve access to the ballot in at least nine ways: flexible registration opportunities, including same-day registration; early voting, at a minimum of 9 of the 10 calendar days preceding an election; no-excuse absentee voting; assistance to voters who do not speak English as a primary language or who have disabilities, including visual impairment; effective access to voting for members of the armed services; formal training of election officials, including State and county administrators and volunteers; audited and reduced waiting times at the poorest performing polling stations; contingency plans for voting in the event of a natural or other disaster, such as Superstorm Sandy, which impacted voting in New York and New Jersey, and would have only needed to take a slight turn to dramatically impact my home State of Delaware.

The stakes are high, and the importance of achieving these electoral reforms is paramount. When tens of thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of Americans have their right to vote denied or compromised, we have to take action.

The implications of these voting irregularities are felt far beyond our shores. I am the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, and I worked and studied in South Africa during its apartheid regime. One of the most inspiring sights I have ever seen was during the first ever free and fair election in that nation, when South Africans stood in line for up to two days to cast their votes. Members of our subcommittee meet regularly with African heads of State, and all of us, Democrats and Republicans alike, stress with these leaders the vital importance of free and fair elections. So when we still have substantial voting issues in our own elections, that is a cause for deep concern.

We have the opportunity to send a message to first time voters here at home, as well as those fighting for democracy overseas, that every vote counts and every voter will be counted.

When States prevent their citizens from exercising their fundamental right of ballot access, whether deliberately through the law or regulations, or accidentally because of incompetence or lack of preparedness, it is a violation of voters' civil rights.

The FAST Voting Act is one way to try to fix our elections and make sure what happened across our country last week does not happen again. I look forward to working with my colleagues of both parties to move this important solution forward.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleague and friend, the Senator from Delaware, CHRIS COONS, in introducing legislation that would make voting faster and more accessible to all voters. Here we are, barely a week after a historic election in 2012. I can't speak about North Carolina, but in Virginia it is remarkable that in 2012 people had to wait for hours in line to vote. In Prince William County, folks waited for up to 3 hours. In Chesapeake, VA, folks waited for up to 4 hours. It was remarkable that it was 5 days after the fact before we even knew the results in Florida. In the 21st century, in the greatest democracy in the world, voting should not be this much of a burden.

In many ways, when you have those kinds of extraordinary lines, particularly when you are working, what we have in effect created is a 21st-century poll tax. Those of us in the South have a history where poll taxes were used to restrict voters. What you in effect have by having these extensive lines is when, if you work on an hourly basis or can only get off a bit of time, you cannot afford to wait 3, 4, or 5 hours in line to vote.

This legislation, the Fair, Accurate, Secure and Timely Voting Act of 2012—the so-called FAST Act—creates a competitive grant program to encourage States to aggressively pursue election reforms. It would provide incentives for States such as Virginia to invest in practices and technology designed to expedite voting at the polls and simplify voter registration.

The FAST Voting Act addresses this issue in a responsible way. It doesn't add new mandates; it authorizes simply additional resources for those States which step up with commonsense reforms to make voting faster and more accessible to voters. This is a relatively very small program, but a few dollars spent to both improve the access and increase the number of voting machines at those polling places which are so restricted would, I believe, remove some of the embarrassment Virginia and so many other States saw last week when people had to wait so long.

I encourage Virginia's elected leaders to embrace this opportunity to improve access for Virginia voters, who should not have to wait in line for hours to exercise their most basic constitutional right—the right to vote.

As I mentioned, this bill authorizes a Federal program that would award grants based on how well applicant States—again, States will be the decisionmakers on whether they would want to apply for this program—are able to improve access to the polls in at least nine specific ways. Let me mention three of those.

No. 1, provide absentee voting, including no-excuse absentee voting. We in Virginia still have restrictions on absentee voting.

No. 2, provide assistance to voters who do not speak English as a primary language. Virginia and North Carolina and other States are becoming more diverse, and we need to accommodate those voters.

No. 3, audit and reduce waiting time in polling stations. No one in the 21st century should have to wait 4 or 5 or, as in some reported cases in Florida, up to 7 or 8 hours to vote.

This voluntary grant program also requires the establishment of performance measures and reporting requirements to ensure a State's progress in eliminating statutory, regulatory, procedural, and other barriers to expedited voting and accessible voter registration.

This is a relatively small bill. I commend my colleague from Delaware, Senator COONS, for taking the lead. I join him as a cosponsor. Regardless of which side of the aisle you stand on in 2012—and surely before 2016—we ought not to have a repeat of this 21st-century poll tax that is imposed on folks all across America by not being able to exercise their vote, having to pay too high a price, or having the kind of embarrassment where it takes us literally days and days for the public to get the results.

I hope my colleagues will join me in supporting this legislation.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 597—TO PERMIT THE COLLECTION OF CLOTHING, TOYS, FOOD, AND HOUSEWARES DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON FOR CHARITABLE PURPOSES IN SENATE BUILDINGS

Mrs. MURRAY (for herself and Mr. BURR) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

Resolved,

SECTION 1. COLLECTION OF CLOTHING, TOYS, FOOD, AND HOUSEWARES DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON FOR CHARITABLE PURPOSES IN SENATE BUILDINGS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provision of the rules or regulations of the Senate—

(1) a Senator, officer of the Senate, or employee of the Senate may collect from another Senator, officer of the Senate, or employee of the Senate within Senate buildings nonmonetary donations of clothing, toys, food, and housewares for charitable purposes related to serving persons in need or members of the Armed Forces and the families of those members during the holiday season, if the charitable purposes do not otherwise violate any rule or regulation of the Senate or of Federal law; and

(2) a Senator, officer of the Senate, or employee of the Senate may work with a nonprofit organization with respect to the delivery of donations described under paragraph (1).

(b) EXPIRATION.—The authority provided by this resolution shall expire at the end of the second session of the 112th Congress.

SENATE RESOLUTION 598—COMMENDING AND CONGRATULATING THE SAN FRANCISCO GIANTS FOR WINNING THE 2012 WORLD SERIES

Mrs. FEINSTEIN (for herself and Mrs. BOXER) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 598

Whereas the San Francisco Giants defeated the American League champions, the Detroit