

asked to come in and allocate billions and billions of dollars that we do not have to pay people primarily in property areas where they could have bought insurance, either flood insurance, earthquake insurance or fire insurance.

This legislation that we are going to advocate and highlight this Friday in fact focuses on a national system to not just take the burden off the taxpayers but to establish a reinsurance fund through the private insurance companies to pay for disasters, but also to provide an incentive for local towns and counties to adequately preplan their emergencies, to make sure those building codes are up to date and enforced, to make sure there are adequate emergency plans in place in each community and to make sure the emergency responders are properly trained and equipped.

So, Mr. Speaker, all week long we will have a series of activities in Washington focusing on the ultimate objective of reducing the loss of life in this country and the damage to property from the perils of fire and other disasters. But I think it is more important than that in terms of the issue not just of educating the citizens of this country but in recognizing those heroes that we take for granted too much in this country.

I have had the pleasure, over the last 9 years, of traveling 49 of the 50 States and to work and speak to individual and State fire service groups in each one of those States. Those brave individuals in each of those 49 States are the same. They are selfless people, unselfish people who care about their neighborhoods, care about their communities. They are Republicans and Democrats, and they are there doing a service in many cases with no compensation as volunteers.

This is a time and this is a week for us to acknowledge them, to pay tribute to their work, to thank them for being the real heroes of this country, that we can look up to and pay our respects to, to pat them on the back for a job well done, to stop by the local emergency response station and let them know we appreciate their work, to take our kids over and help sensitize them to the kinds of things they should understand in case an emergency occurs in their home. This is a week where we can pay tribute to these people.

As I traveled around the country and interacted with these folks, one of the things I heard in my early time in Congress was they just were not getting the response from the Congress that they felt was necessary. We took that notion and 8 years ago, 7 years ago formed the Congressional Fire and Emergency Services Caucus. That caucus, Mr. Speaker, quickly became the largest caucus in the Congress and remains the largest caucus in the Congress with over 400 Members, Republicans and Democrats who laid down their partisan differences and who come together to say, we together can

support these brave men and women and give them the kinds of resources they need.

Following the formation of that caucus, which has had successes in a number of legislative areas, ranging from increasing funds for training to passing legislation dealing with safe cigarettes to dealing with issues involving hazardous materials, putting an emphasis on FEMA, on urban search and rescue and all of the other issues that confront us every day, we also formed a congressional institute, and that institute works as the educational arm of the Congress in sensitizing us to the real priorities that emergency responders have every day.

In talking to these emergency responders nationwide, the one message that I keep repeating to them that is so important is that they have to let public officials at all levels know who they really are. They are not just the people who respond to our disasters. They are not just the firefighters. In every one of the towns where we have emergency response organizations, and Mr. Speaker, there are 32,000 organized emergency response departments in this country, in every one of them, the local fire and EMS department is the location where they hold the town meetings. It is the hall where the young couple holds its wedding reception. It is the organization that gets called when there is a child that is lost and they have got to organize a search party. It is the group of people that you call when the cellar is flooded and you have to pump it out. It is the group of people who organize the July 4th parades and Memorial Day celebrations, Christmases for kids that have special needs and all of other things that make our communities in America so vibrant and strong.

And so during this week, as we recognize and celebrate the need to educate the people of this country on how to protect themselves from the ravages of fire and other disasters, let us especially pay tribute to those brave men and women, 1.5 million of them in 32,000 departments across America who today are responding to every type of disaster that the mind can imagine. Let us thank them for their efforts.

Mr. Speaker, as further effort this week to encourage Members to get involved locally in these issues, we will be distributing this week some of the most important devices that Members can take and sell back home in terms of educating their own citizens on how to prevent loss of life and property damage.

□ 2230

The First Alert Company is providing smoke detectors for every Member of the House and the Senate which they can use as an example of what should be done in every home in this country, and that is placing a low-cost, in some cases, \$5 or \$6 smoke detector in a home that can alert families there is, in fact, a problem.

I would encourage all of our colleagues, Mr. Speaker, to take these detectors, which they are getting for free and to use them as examples of simple things that can be done by families, and if families, in fact, cannot afford to buy smoke detectors, let us know where they are so that we can work with the groups that are providing them nationally. In fact, both the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the First Alert Company have gone time and again to provide free smoke detectors and free batteries to many of our urban areas, especially areas where we have high incidences of poverty, coupled with incidences of arson and fire so we can protect those people who do not have the financial resources to buy this equipment.

These are simple tools, but perhaps one of the most important tools in protecting lives and especially children in terms of incendiary fires and situations that would occur that would threaten the lives of our youngsters throughout this country tonight.

In closing, let me say I took this special order out in hopes I could spend an hour talking about many of the programs in place today and many of the actions that are being done both in this Congress and throughout America, and let me say this issue is about as strong a bipartisan effort as I can think of. The Democrats who are involved in this are leading the way as equals with Republicans on these issues, and they have been supportive along the track all the way down the line even when some of our Republican administrations were not as sensitive to these concerns as they should have been.

I just wish we could take that spirit of bipartisanship that we use in dealing with fire and life safety issues instead of scaring people and use that same spirit to address some of these other concerns that we have in this Nation which cause us to polarize, split apart and just demean each other, call out partisan name-calling back and forth. If we could accomplish that, then perhaps we could really show the American people that we can solve the problems of this country and we can do it in a way that is bipartisan and that can give each party credit, because the ultimate goal is not to achieve a winning edge over the other party. The ultimate goal is to meet the needs of the American people.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. RIGGS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of the special order offered by the gentleman from Pennsylvania [Mr. WELDON] on today.

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

There was no objection.