

CHANGE OF VOTE

Mr. STEVENS. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the vote on 237 be changed. I voted no and I intended to vote aye. I ask it be changed. It will not change the outcome of the vote.

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

Mr. KOHL. Madam President, I thank Senator BENNETT once again for his hard work and expert managing of this bill. It has been a pleasure to work with him, and I look forward to continuing to work together as we conference this bill with the House. I also publicly and sincerely thank John Ziolkowski, Fitz Elder, Hunter Moorhead, Dianne Preece, and Stacy McBride on his staff for their hard work and dedication.

They exhibited professionalism and a strong work ethic throughout this entire process, and worked seamlessly with my staff—something I am constantly reminded of as a rare occurrence in what can be an incredibly partisan place. I look forward to continuing this strong spirit of cooperation.

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, I call for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second? There is a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on the engrossment of the amendments and third reading of the bill.

The amendments were ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. CORZINE) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 97, nays 2, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 241 Leg.]

YEAS—97

Akaka	Coleman	Hatch
Alexander	Collins	Hutchison
Allard	Conrad	Inhofe
Allen	Cornyn	Inouye
Baucus	Craig	Isakson
Bayh	Crapo	Jeffords
Bennett	Dayton	Johnson
Biden	DeMint	Kennedy
Bingaman	DeWine	Kerry
Bond	Dodd	Kohl
Boxer	Dole	Kyl
Brownback	Domenici	Landrieu
Bunning	Dorgan	Lautenberg
Burns	Durbin	Leahy
Burr	Enzi	Levin
Byrd	Feingold	Lieberman
Cantwell	Feinstein	Lincoln
Carper	Frist	Lott
Chafee	Graham	Lugar
Chambliss	Grassley	Martinez
Clinton	Gregg	McCain
Coburn	Hagel	McConnell
Cochran	Harkin	Mikulski

Murkowski	Salazar	Stevens
Murray	Santorum	Talent
Nelson (FL)	Sarbanes	Thomas
Nelson (NE)	Schumer	Thune
Obama	Sessions	Vitter
Pryor	Shelby	Voinovich
Reed	Smith	Warner
Reid	Snowe	Wyden
Roberts	Specter	
Rockefeller	Stabenow	

NAYS—2

Ensign Sununu

NOT VOTING—1

Corzine

The bill (H.R. 2744), as amended, was passed.

(The bill will be printed in a future edition of the RECORD.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, at this time I would like to thank those who worked so hard to help us with the bill, particularly Dave Schiappa and Laura Dove here on the floor, along with Bill Hoagland of the leader's staff and Chairman CHAMBLISS and his staff, all of whom have been tremendously helpful. We also thank David Tinsley, Kathie Alvarez, Lula Davis, the Parliamentarians, and the cloakroom staff. These marathon activities are not the best kind of situations for some of these folks whom we take for granted around here. I want to acknowledge their help and their support.

I, of course, want to acknowledge the staff of the subcommittee, and I will list their names as a single staff, even though technically they are divided between majority and minority, but in this subcommittee we work together as if we are one staff: John Ziolkowski, Fitz Elder, Hunter Moorhead, Dianne Preece, Stacy McBride, Galen Fountain, Jessica Frederick, Bill Simpson, and Tom Gonzales.

All of these people have my very deep and sincere thanks for the work in getting this done.

Now, Madam President, I understand we have to appoint conferees.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate insists on its amendment, requests a conference with the House on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses, and the Chair appoints Mr. BENNETT, Mr. COCHRAN, Mr. SPECTER, Mr. BOND, Mr. MCCONNELL, Mr. BURNS, Mr. CRAIG, Mr. BROWNBACK, Mr. STEVENS, Mr. KOHL, Mr. HARKIN, Mr. DORGAN, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. JOHNSON, Ms. LANDRIEU, and Mr. BYRD conferees on the part of the Senate.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—H.R. 2528

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that at 11:30 a.m. today, the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 169, H.R. 2528. I further ask consent that the committee-reported substitute be agreed to as original text for the purposes of further amendment, with no points of order waived by virtue of this agreement.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BENNETT. Madam President, I now ask unanimous consent that there be a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

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

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

AMERICAN RED CROSS AND HURRICANE RELIEF

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, yesterday morning I made a trip to meet with the head of the American Red Cross. ADM Marty Evans is an extraordinary person. She was born in Springfield, IL, and served in the U.S. Navy for 29 years. She rose to the rank of rear admiral and, after her retirement from the Navy, spent several years as head of the Girl Scouts of America. Then a few years ago, she was chosen to be CEO of the American Red Cross.

The American Red Cross is an extraordinary agency. There are some 4,500 employees in Washington, 30,000 nationwide, millions of volunteers. Those of us who have had the good fortune of working with the Red Cross know that the people working in Washington are important, but the volunteers in the field are absolutely essential—men and women from communities across America who, at the first warning signal, are prepared to give up their personal lives and move to where they are needed. The help they bring and have brought has made a difference so many times in the lives of victims.

As Ms. Evans told me yesterday, this is not just a matter of hurricanes and floods. They respond to house fires to try to make certain that families and individual communities have a helping hand. I asked her what she did in preparation for Hurricane Katrina, how the American Red Cross positioned itself. I asked what they were doing in anticipation of Hurricane Rita, which we are all watching so closely. She said they didn't wait for a Government signal. They knew what they had to do. They positioned their people, their resources in safe locations where they could move in as quickly as possible after the disaster. They gave a helping hand in the evacuation. But they were ready and prepared, if something terrible occurred. It was heart warming and reassuring to know that the American Red Cross and other extremely important charitable organizations such as America's Second Harvest based in Chicago,

the Salvation Army, and so many faith-based groups are prepared and ready to move.

We are now watching, because of satellite imagery, the course of Hurricane Rita, praying that it will not strike with the force of a category 5 hurricane on the coast of Texas and Louisiana, and that somehow, some way, at the last moment we will be spared. But whether we are spared or not, we must be prepared.

This administration has been haunted by Hurricane Katrina for the last 3 weeks. President Bush has made at least five different visits to New Orleans to be visibly present during the rescue and recovery. He made a historic speech from Jackson Square about the challenge which Hurricane Katrina places on Americans. I thought what the President said was the right thing. I am a loyal Democrat, but I listened carefully to what the President said, and I thought the President showed the kind of leadership America needs at this moment.

I will refer later in my remarks to the question of what went wrong with Hurricane Katrina. But looking forward, as we must as a nation, we need to stand behind those victims, their families, the communities, and the States that were hit by Hurricane Katrina. It was a call to arms by the President for this Congress to join with him and the American people in standing up for the most vulnerable people in our country. That is as truly American as it gets.

Listen to the debate that has followed President Bush's announcement in New Orleans. We have had Members of Congress saying we can't afford to do it. We can't afford to provide the disaster assistance for these people to rebuild their lives and for these communities to rebuild their infrastructure and their homes. There have even been arguments from some that we can't consider spending this money because we have to keep our word to the wealthiest people in America that we promised we would cut their taxes.

The budget resolution we passed in the Senate and in the House this year promised that before we went home at the end of the year, we would give \$70 billion more in tax cuts to the wealthiest people in America. We also promised in the budget resolution, which I opposed, that we would cut Medicaid, which is health insurance for poor and elderly people, and that we would cut student loan assistance. That was part of what I considered a poorly thought out budget resolution which passed with Republican majorities in the House and Senate.

Now with the intervention of Hurricanes Katrina and Ophelia, and the possibility of Hurricane Rita and damage, many Republicans are arguing: We have a solemn responsibility to cut the taxes for the wealthy first, to cut Medicaid expenditures for the poor and elderly, and to cut student loans, and we don't have the resources to help the victims.

That is unfortunate. It reflects a difference in values. It reflects a difference in priorities. This Senator from Illinois believes that our first obligation is to the most vulnerable in America. Our first obligation is to those helpless victims and those communities who, through no fault of their own, are suffering today. It is time for us to be straightforward. It is time for the President to be straightforward to Republican leaders in the House and Senate, to say clear and unequivocally: We cannot afford to go forward with more tax cuts for wealthy people as we fight a war in Iraq and Afghanistan and as we come to the assistance of our neighbors who suffered because of these terrible natural disasters.

If the President will do that, I can guarantee him this: There is plenty of room on this side of the aisle for Democrats to join him in a bipartisan response to a national disaster which paid no attention to party affiliation.

I can say that with confidence because after 9/11/2001, that is exactly what happened. Democrats and Republicans alike joined hands in the face of that terrorist disaster and said we will stand behind the victims and their families and the State of New York and that city that endured that great loss, as well as, of course, our friends in the Pentagon who were victims as well of 9/11.

We stood together on a bipartisan basis. We did some exceptional things, things to make our country stronger, things to respond to the attack that had taken place. The list is long, starting with resolutions condemning terrorism, appropriations bills, and special bills to put money after 9/11 where it was needed the most, the Airline Stabilization Act, Uniting and Strengthening America Act, the USA PATRIOT Act, the intelligence bills, the defense bills—the list goes on and on.

These were strong bipartisan measures taken in the wake of 9/11 by Democrats and Republicans. We need that same spirit today. We need that spirit to stand behind the victims of Hurricane Katrina and their families and, God forbid, if Hurricane Rita will wreak the same type of havoc, we need to stand behind those victims as well, making certain first we have the resources in FEMA to respond to national emergencies.

There was a feeling 4 years ago that America had received a wakeup call after 9/11, that we had to be ready and prepared as a nation to respond to whatever was thrown at us. Extraordinary measures were taken, extraordinary speeches were made, but when Hurricane Katrina struck, we were not ready.

There has been a lot of question about how to answer the question. What did we do wrong, what did we fail to do with Hurricane Katrina? We better get those answers and get them quickly, not just to point blame, which some say is what it is all about, but for

accountability, to figure out what went wrong so it does not happen again. That is basic. It is not a blame game. There is no game involved. It is a matter of accountability.

Sadly, our friends on the other side of the aisle believe the only accountability can come about if a majority of those who are asking the questions are members of the President's party. We learned after 9/11 that it was much better to bring in an independent, nonpartisan commission to ask those hard questions.

The 9/11 Commission, cochaired by Gov. Thomas Kean, a former Republican Governor of New Jersey, and Congressman Lee Hamilton, a former Democratic Congressman from Indiana, did an exceptional job. The strong bipartisan commission came up with measures and recommendations which truly changed the way we govern America and changed the way we think about our responsibility in Congress, as well as in the executive branch.

We need exactly the same type of commission when it comes to Hurricane Katrina. But for reasons I cannot explain, the Republicans have steadfastly refused to appoint an independent, nonpartisan commission to find out what went wrong several weeks ago with Hurricane Katrina. That is the only way to come up with a credible analysis of that failing, whether it occurred at the Federal level, the State level, the local level, or right here in Congress. Let's have an honest, independent, nonpartisan commission, as we did after 9/11.

Instead, the Republican leadership says let's press forward with our own internal investigation. That has no credibility—or very little, I might say. I have been a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee where Senator ROBERTS, as the chairman, has promised he would investigate the misuse of intelligence information before the invasion of Iraq. That promise has been made for over a year. Nothing has happened.

We have called time and time again for a congressional investigation of the contracts in Iraq, the no-bid contracts in Iraq to companies such as Halliburton. We know there is evidence of abuse, misuse of taxpayers' funds, and yet this Republican Congress refuses to have a full-scale, honest investigation of Halliburton and the other contractors who are profiteering at the expense of our troops and at the expense of our taxpayers.

So it is time to concede the obvious. We cannot have a thorough, meaningful investigation of Hurricane Katrina without an independent commission. And we cannot come up with the resources to address Katrina and the other natural disasters until the President makes it clear to the Republican leadership in Congress that we can no longer afford the promised tax cuts to the wealthiest people in America.

It is time for us to assess the reality of the challenges we face in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and right here at home. It is

time for us to dedicate the resources to rebuilding and strengthening America, rather than strengthening the coffers of a few corporations that happen to have political connections. That is our responsibility.

I hope my colleagues in the Senate and the House will gather together and understand that rebuilding our Nation is our first responsibility. We must understand that the least fortunate among us need our help today. They are more vulnerable than they have ever been.

We cannot change the past, but now with another hurricane moving across the Gulf of Mexico, we can work together in a bipartisan way to change the future. America can certainly do better.

Madam President, I yield the floor, and 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. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ALEXANDER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate as in morning business.

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

HURRICANES AND THE PRICE OF OIL

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, Hurricane Rita, bearing down on the gulf coast of Texas, perhaps Louisiana again, a category 5, with winds that have gotten up to 175 miles an hour, is very similar to Hurricane Katrina 3 or 4 weeks ago. It sprang up as a category 1, hitting south Florida first. Katrina did quite a bit of damage, as you would expect with winds in the range of 80 and 85 miles an hour. There was a lot of debris. There was the loss of electricity as it went over Miami, Dade County. Then, of course, when it got out to the gulf, fueled by those warm waters, about 87 degrees, providing the fuel for the hurricane, it surged in intensity on up to category 5, coming down to a category 4 before it hit the Louisiana coast.

It is eerily similar; Hurricane Rita springing up and hitting Florida this time actually 50 miles south of Key West, of course, with those counterclockwise winds, and a category 1 hitting Key West—that being the strongest side of the storm—and then out over the warm waters of the gulf. This is what we have as it is approaching landfall Saturday morning.

Before Katrina, this Nation was finally waking up to how vulnerable we are in our dependence on energy sources. Specifically, the Nation was waking up to the fact that 58 percent of our daily consumption of oil comes

from foreign shores. That is not a very good position to be in if you have to depend on foreign lands for that oil. The price of gasoline was spiking up prior to Katrina, in the range of \$2.70 a gallon. This was during August. I was doing townhall meetings all over my State of Florida, and I can tell you at \$2.70 a gallon, people are hurting. Senior citizens on fixed incomes cannot afford to drive to the doctor. People making \$20,000 a year can't afford to drive to work.

Then along comes Katrina, and because of hitting the area of our refinery capacity, the scare goes into the market and the price of gasoline surges. In one station, overnight—one station on Interstate 10 near Tallahassee—it surged 40 cents to well over \$3 a gallon.

I can tell you because I know what my people feel in Florida, they are hurting. They are having difficulty making ends meet, even without now having this additional cost. Here we go again. Here comes the next major hurricane, Hurricane Rita. It is now apparently bearing down on the Galveston-Houston area, one of the major shipping ports of the world. Also, that is where a great deal of the oil activity and the oil refinery capacity of this country is located. If it does knock out some of that refinery capacity, we are going to see these spikes in the price of gasoline to the point that it is starting to hurt our people.

Is it going to take another tragedy like this for us to finally wake up and, as a nation, get our heads out of the sand and address this energy-dependent condition in which we find ourselves? Mind you, this is with the backdrop that over the past 4-plus years I have been privileged to be a Member of the Senate, we have tried almost every year to do a simple little thing, and that is to raise miles per gallon on SUVs and phase it in over a long period of time so it doesn't hurt anybody. But we cannot even get 40 votes out of 100 Senators for an amendment like that, to try to address the energy-dependent condition in which this Nation finds itself.

What are we going to do? Is it going to take another Katrina-like tragedy to shake us out of our lethargy? We might be shaken come next Saturday morning.

There are a number of things we can do. But before I go into that, let me tell you about this thin thread we are hanging onto in our energy dependence. With 58 percent of our daily consumption foreign oil, any disruption in the system automatically will cause prices to spike and could come to the position of paralysis. It could be a major shutdown because of some malfunction in a refinery. Lord forbid, it could be a terrorist sinking a supertanker in the Strait of Hormuz, that 19-mile-wide strait in the Persian Gulf through which all of the world's tankers have to go out into the open sea to supply a world thirsty for oil. It could

be another series of hurricanes. Whatever it is, that thin thread of the supply line could have devastating consequences for this country, if we cannot satiate our parched throats, this thirst for oil.

We best get on with it. I suggest we start rethinking and get more than 39 votes for mandating increased miles per gallon. I suggest we start making ethanol, not just from corn—which is an expensive process—but from less expensive sources from which our technology now allows us to make ethanol. We can surely make it from sugar cane. We can make a lot from normal waste. Do you know something else. We can make it from grass. We have 31 million acres of prairie grass in this country. Let's cut the grass. Let's make cheaper ethanol and let's mix that ethanol with gasoline that will burn in our existing car engines.

The primary consumption of oil is in the transportation sector, and in the transportation sector are our personal vehicles, where we consume most of that oil. If we start mixing ethanol with gasoline in greater proportions, it will burn in our existing car engines and we will use that much less oil.

But let's do something else. Let's make sure that when the car manufacturers are satisfying the demands of the American public for new automobiles, they satisfy the demands and start producing more hybrid vehicles. If you have a hybrid vehicle, which Toyota has had for the last 6 years, that will get the equivalent of 50 miles per gallon in start/stop traffic, then you are burning less oil. The consumption of oil is less.

If that hybrid vehicle is now burning a fuel that is not just gasoline but is a mixture of gasoline and ethanol, then you are consuming all the less oil.

I suggest one more thing, that we build our hybrid vehicles so that when you park in your garage at night, you plug it in and it charges up that battery, so the next day, when you drive out, you have a fully charged battery so the gasoline engine in your hybrid vehicle is being used less to charge up that battery, and you have charged up that battery overnight from a source of energy other than oil.

These are steps we can take right now. How many more monster hurricanes is it going to take, hitting the refinery capacity of this Nation along the gulf coast, for us to get our heads out of the sand? I hope and pray that Rita is going to lessen and that it will not strike a portion of the coast that brings devastation and tumult and hardship. But as of Thursday midday, that is the course it is on for Saturday morning landfall. The National Hurricane Center is pretty accurate in their predictions.

I am talking to an empty Chamber because we are all out there in committee meetings. I have just run here from trying to help protect us in the Commerce Committee on a question of communications after a natural disaster—which we have experienced after