

basis during a period of military conflict is a dereliction of our duties.

I worry that the Congress is becoming an impediment to the efficiency and the capability of our Government, and to our Department of Defense in particular. We are not acting to protect the security of our troops who are putting themselves in harm's way and embarking on dangerous missions or providing for others whom we are trying to train to prepare to take over the responsibilities for national security. We need to get together now.

The time for dragging our feet is long past. We need to find a common ground so that we can provide our men and women in the field with the necessary resources and the support that is necessary to conduct successfully the mission assigned to them by our United States Government. We need to do this without any further delay. I urge my colleagues to do it now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. CANTWELL). The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I rise to speak in support of the supplemental bill that was put together by many Members, actually, on both sides of the aisle, who believe that, yes, we should expedite funding for our troops in the field, but also there are emergencies right here at home, as eloquently described earlier this morning in the remarks of the Senator from Maryland and the Senator from Washington State.

I would like to add some words to their arguments. First of all, I realize there is an emergency and a war and conflict going on in Iraq and international incidents around the world that deserve the attention and support of this body. But there are also emergencies right here at home and imminent and ongoing threats.

This chart basically says it all. It is a frightening chart to me, a depressing chart, but it is reality. The reality is, since 1955 through 2005, this is the track of hurricanes that have hit the United States. Some of these are category 1, some are category 2, but dozens of them are categories 4 and 5. This track is Hurricane Katrina in yellow and Hurricane Rita in blue, which devastated large parts of Louisiana and Mississippi, even going into Alabama and Texas—flooding thousands of homes and killing 2,000 people plus along the gulf coast. The predictions are that these kinds of storms are going to get more frequent and worse.

There is nothing we can do to prevent hurricanes. This is Mother Nature. We have just seen it explode in China and in Burma. It is frightening to a civilized society. We get in strong buildings like this and think that nothing can hurt us; surely no water could reach us or wind destroy us. Then Mother Nature appears in a very vio-

lent way sometimes and reminds us how vulnerable we all are.

In the United States, we just don't cry about these things and wring our hands. We do something. We, the States, local and Federal Governments appropriate funding to build the right kind of levees and dams, and we provide the right paradigm or framework for insurance because that is the way we protect ourselves. Hopefully, we have infrastructure that will not fail when the pressure comes; and then insurance, if it does come, to help people who have lost so much get back on their feet. That is all we can do. It would be good if we would do that.

But if we vote against this bill today, we are not taking the necessary steps to get that done. Again, this is a depressing chart to me. I don't like to see it, but I put this up in my office to remind myself that this is not just about Katrina and Rita, which we will be marking the anniversary of on August 29—3 years—and then September 24, 3 years for Rita, two of the most destructive storms to hit the United States. I remind myself that New York is in danger, New Jersey is in danger, and South Carolina and North Carolina are in danger. And Florida, in 2005, had the worst storm season of the century, according to the Senator from Florida.

Briefly, referring to this chart, this is the area that went underwater in New Orleans, this region—New Orleans and Jefferson and St. Bernard. Some say: Why don't you all just relocate? That would be a very expensive proposition, and impossible, for any number of reasons. One, about 1 million people live in the metropolitan area; two, the mouth of the Mississippi River is something that the people of Mississippi and Louisiana most certainly think is an important asset to the country—so important that Thomas Jefferson, when he was President, leveraged the entire Federal Treasury to purchase it. We put all of our defenses along the river to defend it. You cannot close this river. The people who work on the river and contribute to the assets of the country cannot go live in Arkansas or north Texas or north Mississippi. They need to live close to the coast for all of the important energy that comes.

The city is no longer underwater. The water is long gone, but the tears are still there and the pain is still there and the frightening part is still there because the start of the hurricane season is just right around the corner, June 1. We have reports in the paper today that there is some leakage in the same canal that breached and destroyed over 10,000 homes—or more, actually—in the Lakeview area, which is a solid middle-class area.

This is a picture from the Times-Picayune today. In this bill, there is about \$7 billion for levees, to finish the construction of levees that broke—Federal levees that should have held and didn't. We are in a mad dash to get these levees and this infrastructure rebuilt strongly, correctly, and safely so peo-

ple can begin to rebuild this city higher, yes, and stronger, yes. But no one living in the middle of a city or urban area should have to go to bed at night and wonder when they wake up if they will be in 8 feet of water or 12 feet.

This is the 17th Street Canal, and you have seen this many times in pictures. That is what is in this bill. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on the supplemental.

I ask unanimous consent for 2 more minutes.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I can only yield 30 more seconds. Other Senators wish to speak.

Ms. LANDRIEU. We have hurricane levees in this bill. We also have housing vouchers. The risks have increased substantially in the region. After the storm, we lost 250,000 dwellings in Louisiana and thousands in Mississippi. We have a homeless population that has doubled. There are housing vouchers in the bill for the homeless, for the very low income, and for the disabled. After storms like these, that population is gravely threatened.

I will come back later and finish my remarks. This is important to the people of the gulf coast. I thank the Senator for the time allowed this morning. I urge my colleagues, in supporting the war funding in Iraq, please let's remember the emergency still going on at home.

Mr. COCHRAN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the remaining Republican time be allocated as follows: Senator GRAHAM for up to 20 minutes to engage in a colloquy with Senators BURR, KYL, and CORNYN; Senator VITTER for 5 minutes; Senator BROWNBACK for 5 minutes; and that the remainder of the time, if anything, be allocated by Senator McCONNELL, or his designee.

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

FOOD, CONSERVATION, AND ENERGY ACT OF 2008—VETO

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair lays before the Senate the President's veto message on H.R. 2419, which the clerk will read, and which will be spread in full upon the Journal.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Veto message on H.R. 2419, a bill to provide for the continuation of Agricultural programs through fiscal year 2012, and for other purposes.

Mr. REID. Madam President, so that there is no misunderstanding, I ask unanimous consent that the veto message on H.R. 2419, the Food Security Act, be considered as having been read, that it be printed in the RECORD, and spread in full upon the Journal, and held at the desk.

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

The President's message is as follows:

To the House of Representatives:

I am returning herewith without my approval H.R. 2419, the "Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008."

For a year and a half, I have consistently asked that the Congress pass a good farm bill that I can sign. Regrettably, the Congress has failed to do so. At a time of high food prices and record farm income, this bill lacks program reform and fiscal discipline. It continues subsidies for the wealthy and increases farm bill spending by more than \$20 billion, while using budget gimmicks to hide much of the increase. It is inconsistent with our objectives in international trade negotiations, which include securing greater market access for American farmers and ranchers. It would needlessly expand the size and scope of government. Americans sent us to Washington to achieve results and be good stewards of their hard-earned taxpayer dollars. This bill violates that fundamental commitment.

In January 2007, my Administration put forward a fiscally responsible farm bill proposal that would improve the safety net for farmers and move current programs toward more market-oriented policies. The bill before me today fails to achieve these important goals.

At a time when net farm income is projected to increase by more than \$28 billion in 1 year, the American taxpayer should not be forced to subsidize that group of farmers who have adjusted gross incomes of up to \$1.5 million. When commodity prices are at record highs, it is irresponsible to increase government subsidy rates for 15 crops, subsidize additional crops, and provide payments that further distort markets. Instead of better targeting farm programs, this bill eliminates the existing payment limit on marketing loan subsidies.

Now is also not the time to create a new uncapped revenue guarantee that could cost billions of dollars more than advertised. This is on top of a farm bill that is anticipated to cost more than \$600 billion over 10 years. In addition, this bill would force many businesses to prepay their taxes in order to finance the additional spending.

This legislation is also filled with earmarks and other ill-considered provisions. Most notably, H.R. 2419 provides: \$175 million to address water issues for desert lakes; \$250 million for a 400,000-acre land purchase from a private owner; funding and authority for the noncompetitive sale of National Forest land to a ski resort; and \$382 million earmarked for a specific watershed. These earmarks, and the expansion of Davis-Bacon Act prevailing wage requirements, have no place in the farm bill. Rural and urban Americans alike are frustrated with excessive government spending and the funneling of taxpayer funds for pet projects. This bill will only add to that frustration.

The bill also contains a wide range of other objectionable provisions, including one that restricts our ability to redirect food aid dollars for emergency use at a time of great need globally. The bill does not include the requested authority to buy food in the developing

world to save lives. Additionally, provisions in the bill raise serious constitutional concerns. For all the reasons outlined above, I must veto H.R. 2419, and I urge the Congress to extend current law for a year or more.

I veto this bill fully aware that it is rare for a stand-alone farm bill not to receive the President's signature, but my action today is not without precedent. In 1956, President Eisenhower stood firmly on principle, citing high crop subsidies and too much government control of farm programs among the reasons for his veto. President Eisenhower wrote in his veto message, "Bad as some provisions of this bill are, I would have signed it if in total it could be interpreted as sound and good for farmers and the nation." For similar reasons, I am vetoing the bill before me today.

GEORGE W. BUSH.
THE WHITE HOUSE, May 21, 2008.

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2008—Continued

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I yield 5 minutes to the Senator from Montana.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana is recognized.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, the Senate has a real opportunity today to do right by our newest veterans who have served us well in Iraq and Afghanistan.

When our troops came home at the end of World War II, our Nation made a choice to make college a reality for millions of them. Nearly 8 million veterans—half of all who served in that war—took advantage of the Montgomery GI bill. They had their college education paid for. Our country made a decision to invest in our warriors' future as they returned from the battlefield. As a result, the "greatest generation" produced broad-based growth and prosperity.

Today, we are great at sending our troops off to war, but we are coming up short in providing the benefits their service has earned. That is shortsighted and wrong.

A very small percentage of Americans actually serve in our Armed Forces, the military, on Active Duty, Reserves, and National Guard. It totals less than 3 million people in a country of 300 million.

So far, 1.6 million troops have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tens of thousands more of our troops will rotate through in the coming months. These men and women and their families are the ones who have borne the sacrifice of 15-month deployments, multiple tours of combat zones, injuries, and the loss of far too many of their battle buddies.

It is right that the Senate give back to them by giving them a GI bill that meets today's needs. It is time to treat doing right by our veterans as a true cost of war. These folks all joined the

service because they love their country, they want to serve, and they want to be a part of all the great work our military does. It is hardly glamorous, but it is critical to our Nation.

A GI bill that provides our troops the full cost of a college education is a vital recruiting tool, and it helps us give back to the people who are serving our country.

Today, nearly one-third of all Active-Duty servicemembers who signed up for the GI bill never use the benefit. There are many good reasons, but one of the main reasons is that the current GI bill doesn't provide enough benefit to meet the needs of today's veterans.

Madam President, today's GI bill is woefully inadequate. It only provides about \$9,000 in costs for an academic year of college. When you factor in tuition, room, board, books, and other living expenses, that is only about 70 percent of the actual cost of attending a university such as the University of Montana. It is only a drop in the bucket for a private school.

The Webb amendment that we have before us today fully covers the cost of any in-state public school's tuition and fees, and it creates a matching program to help create incentive for private schools to do the right thing and pay for a veteran's education. It will stay this way for a generation. This legislation is tied to the cost of public education so the benefit to our veterans will keep pace with the annual rise in tuition and fees, which have averaged about 6 percent over the last decade.

Another thing that makes this amendment so important is that for the first time it brings the National Guard and reservists more access to the GI bill. Right now, few guardsmen and reservists can get the full benefit. Given how much we have relied on the Guard in Iraq, I think that is wrong.

Let me also say we know the vast majority of servicemen sign up for the GI bill, but that has a cost. When you first receive a paycheck from the military, you have to decide whether to spend \$100 a month for the first year on buying into the GI bill benefit. That is a total cost of \$1,200. Now, \$100 may not seem much to some folks in Washington, DC, but I guarantee you that to an airman just out of basic and on his or her first tour at a base such as Malmstrom Air Force Base, that \$100 is a big deal. The Webb GI bill gets rid of that fee, and it is about time we did so.

Finally, I wish to address one of the complaints about the Webb bill. Some have said the Webb bill will hurt retention, especially in the mid-career officer corps. This is simply untrue. A commissioned officer would have to serve 8 or 9 years before being fully eligible for the new enhanced GI benefit. It is not the GI bill that causes mid-career folks to leave the military. It is 15-month deployments, multiple tours, and stop-loss involuntary deployment extensions, the so-called back-door draft.