

even radios to be able to know what to do. But it is important for the public to know, and I think not just in the affected regions, that they need to register with FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, for personal assistance. That is the first step to getting back to their houses, making sure any damages are appropriately assessed, and making sure the affected people get the help they are entitled to under the law.

I would add, in addition to the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Web site and their 1-800 number, if my constituents will call any one of my offices, either here in Washington, DC, which we kept open 24-7 during the storm, and also any of my regional offices in Tyler, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio, Harlingen, Lubbock, or Austin, we will reach them and get them the help they need and to which they are entitled.

I have heard some rumors from the other side of the Capitol that Speaker PELOSI was talking about moving a stimulus package, a huge additional spending package of roughly \$50 billion, and there were going to be some provisions in it for disaster recovery and wild fires and other things.

I would welcome that with this caution: that we not allow politics and the opportunity to use this as a sort of Christmas tree for a bunch of bloated spending that is not necessary to restore people to their homes and to repair the damaged infrastructure; that this not be used as an occasion for politics. To me, the most cynical thing possibly that could happen in Congress is we look past the people in immediate need, and we look for political opportunities to perhaps spend the taxpayers' money on programs that would not otherwise pass because they are somehow bundled up with emergency spending for storm relief.

There is one other thing I learned in this disaster that I think is very important as we look at dealing with our energy crisis generally, with the high price of gasoline, and high price of oil, which, perhaps, is the No. 1 economic concern of the American people today. The gulf coast is indeed a laboratory of energy that supplies the daily needs of our country. When a big hurricane comes in, like this one did, of the 25 refineries—these are the places that actually make gasoline out of oil—representing more than one-quarter of the Nation's refining capacity, 17 of the 25 had to be taken offline because of the storm. In addition, nine different oil pipelines—these are the major oil pipelines that transmit oil from the gulf to various parts of the country—also had to be shut down because of Hurricane Ike. That is going to have an impact on America's oil and gas supply.

Hopefully, the first indications are going to prove to be true, and there were no major environmental spills or problems associated with this hurricane. To me, it was just another reminder of how much Congress needs to

remember that we cannot put all of the Nation's energy—or at least 25 percent of it—in one place. It is literally like putting all of our eggs in one basket. As the saying goes, if you put all your eggs in one basket, you better take care of that basket.

The fact is, as we look forward to hopefully removing the moratorium on Outer Continental Shelf drilling and exploration and production of oil and building of refineries at home so we have to depend less on imported energy from the Middle East, that we will remember the lessons of Hurricane Ike and Hurricane Gustav and Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita.

Frankly, I think putting so much of our Nation's energy capacity in an area that is from time to time going to be affected by these natural disasters is something we ought to take note of and do something about. By producing the ability, or at least allowing the ability, for more exploration and development and building of pipelines, building of refineries in other parts of the country and, producing more at home, we, as we use less by conservation measures, can produce more American energy so we are less reliant on imported oil from the Middle East.

There have been a lot of interesting proposals being made. I want to caution my colleagues against some of the proposals that claim to do more about drilling but which in fact create further obstacles to further American oil exploration and drilling. As a matter of fact, one of the initial proposals we saw—I know this was in good faith. I am not questioning the good faith of the proponents. But the effect of it would actually be to raise taxes and diminish domestic oil production and actually limit energy exploration.

It is true, we would go from 85 to roughly 70 percent of the Outer Continental Shelf that would be available for drilling under this proposal, but what we would in effect be doing is putting a 60-vote barrier on going into that other 70 percent in the future. I do not know why, if we are willing to acknowledge the fact that modern drilling technology will allow for the exploration and production of oil in one place, such as the Outer Continental Shelf, why we would restrict it in other places on the Outer Continental Shelf, or developing the oil shale out West or perhaps even in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—in a 2,000-acre piece of frozen tundra in the middle of a 19 million-acre wildlife refuge—something that can be developed, I believe, in an environmentally responsible way.

Mr. President, how much time do I have remaining?

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator has 6 minutes remaining.

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION

Mr. CORNYN. I thank the Chair.

I want to move to another topic and say I am pleased that an amendment

which I have offered that will protect military voting rights has been apparently accepted as a part of the managers' package on the Defense authorization bill.

This is a provision which I offered last week and we had been unsuccessful getting a vote on that. But I am pleased that through negotiations in a bipartisan effort between the bill managers, Senator LEVIN, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and Senator WARNER, the former chairman, who is the minority bill manager, that has been accepted as part of the managers' package.

The fact is, according to statistics compiled by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, only 992,000 of the 6 million eligible military and overseas voters were able to request an absentee ballot for the 2006 election, and only 330,000 of those ballots were filled out and actually reached election officials.

That means, in other words, that only 5.5 percent of eligible military and overseas voters were able to fill out a ballot and mail it in and have it counted. To me that is a scandalous statistic, one I am glad that this body, in a bipartisan fashion, is going to respond to and say "no more."

We are going to deal with this issue in a way that makes sure that the ballot of those who are fighting, deployed in very dangerous places, is going to count as much as our ballots here in the continental United States.

CONSTITUTION DAY 2008

Mr. CORNYN. I have some remarks, this being Constitution Day, that I want to make in closing. It was 221 years ago today when the delegates of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia completed their work; 39 of them signed it and gave us the very Government we have come to know, we have come to love, and, sometimes, there are those who say they have come to loathe it.

But today, we celebrate the very fact that we live in a country where people have the freedom of speech, that we have our political rights to petition Government, where Government's power is acknowledged to come from the governed, "we the People" as Lincoln said, "Government of the people, by the people and for the people." It is not the decision of a small group of people here in Washington, DC that somehow has to be fed to us like castor oil and we have to take it. This literally is a government of the people representing all 300 million of us who live in this country that was created that day by that Constitution.

Mr. President, it was on this day, September 17, 1787, that the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia completed their work. Thirty-nine of them signed the U.S. Constitution, setting up the government system that we have come to know, love, and sometimes loathe.

As Senators, we have sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution