CONGRESSIONAL RECORD—SENATE

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period for morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for a period not to extend beyond 30 minutes each.

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

THE CRIME VICTIMS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2001

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, on March 26, 2001, my friend Senator KENNEDY and I introduced S. 783, the Crime Victims Assistance Act of 2001. This legislation represents the next step in our continuing efforts to afford dignity and recognition to victims of crime. Among other things, it would enhance the rights and protections afforded to victims of Federal crime, establish innovative new programs to help promote compliance with State victim's rights laws, and vastly improve the manner in which the Crime Victims Fund is managed and preserved.

Senator KENNEDY and I first introduced the Crime Victims Assistance Act in the 105th Congress, and we re-introduced it in the 106th Congress. Like many other deserving initiatives, however, this much-needed legislation took a back seat to the debate over a proposed victims' rights constitutional amendment. I have on several occasions noted my concern that we not dissipate the progress we could be making by focusing exclusively on efforts to amend the Constitution. Regrettably, I must note again that the pace of victims legislation has slowed noticeably and many opportunities for progress have been squandered.

This year, we have a golden opportunity to make significant progress toward providing the greater voice and rights that crime victims deserve. The Crime Victims Assistance Act of 2001 enjoys broad support from victims groups across the country, including the National Center for Victims of Crime, the National Organization for Victim Assistance, and the National Association of Crime Victim Compensation Boards. Regardless of their views on the proposed constitutional amendment, these organizations recognize that our legislation can make a difference in the lives of crime victims right now.

When I spoke about the Crime Victims Assistance Act earlier in the year, I expressed the hope that Democrats and Republican supporters and opponents of a constitutional amendment, would join me in advancing this bill through Congress. This should be a bipartisan effort, and in this closely divided Senate, it must be a bipartisan approach. And I want once again to urge my friends on the other side of the aisle to step up to the plate and support this important victims' legislation.

When it comes to recognizing the rights of victims of crime, there is no majority, no minority, and no middle ground. As Americans, we share the common desire to help victims and provide them the greater voice and rights that they deserve. The Crime Victims Assistance Act proposes some basic, common-sense reforms to our federal crime victims laws, and would help provide the resources necessary to assist the states in giving force to their own locally-tailored statutes and constitutional provisions. What a shame if this legislation stalls again this year, because we could not work together on an issue on which we share so much common ground.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ACT OF 2001

Mr. SMITH of Oregon. Mr. President, I rise today to congratulate the people of East Timor on the success of their recent Constituent Assembly elections.

On August 30, 2001, the people of East Timor voted to elect a new Constituent Assembly. That Assembly will begin meeting almost immediately to adopt a new constitution and to establish the framework for future elections and a transition to full independence next year. The vote was conducted on the second anniversary of the violent 1999 independence referendum. In that earlier referendum, nearly 90 percent of eligible voters risked their lives to vote for independence from Indonesia. Last week, the people of East Timor demonstrated their continuing commitment to democracy by turning out again in force to elect the women and men who will lead them now to full democracy and independence. Final voter turnout in this recent election was reported at more than 91 percent, in a territory-wide poll that was both peaceful and orderly.

After 25 years of occupation by Indonesia, and a much longer period of colonization by Portugal, many ordinary men and women walked for hours and lined up before dawn to vote for the first time for their own political leaders. Clearly, many difficult decisions and frictions debates now lie ahead for the 24 women and 64 men who have been entrusted by their election to the