

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES—*Tuesday, May 8, 2001*

The House met at 12:30 p.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. ISSA).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
May 8, 2001.

I hereby appoint the Honorable DARRELL E. ISSA to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

J. DENNIS HASTERT,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING HOUR DEBATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2001, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning hour debates. The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with each party limited to not to exceed 30 minutes, and each Member, except the majority leader, the minority leader, or the minority whip, limited to not to exceed 5 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. BLUMENAUER) for 5 minutes.

LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, if Members care about livable communities, they should be encouraged with the recent discussions surrounding the flooding in the Upper Mississippi.

We cannot make families safe, healthy, and economically secure unless we squarely address how we manage these disasters. Despite massive construction efforts to stave off harm over the last 40 years, losses adjusted for inflation are six times greater than before we started. The reasons are quite clear.

First, we have often made the problems worse by our efforts to prevent disasters. We have channelized the rivers, we have narrowed them, we have reduced the capacity to carry water while they increase the velocity. And we leave no place for the water to go when it floods.

Number two, we have a decided lack of careful planning for land around the edges of rivers and other bodies of water. Water is a magnet for development, especially when we implement things that appear to increase safety,

like build more and higher sea walls and dikes. This has encouraged people to develop in flood plains, which by their very nature puts people at risk. There is a reason why they are called flood plains.

Nationally, we have developed over half our Nation's wetlands with houses and parking lots. In some communities 90 percent or more of the original wetlands have disappeared, taking with it the capacity for the ground in low-lying areas to soak up water and to have relatively benign pools, ponds, and temporary lakes. The swamps, which are always targeted to be eliminated, were actually very effective devices to prevent floodwater from inflicting more damage.

Into this volatile mix, we need to factor global climate change. There are some who still argue, well, we should just study it. But the strong consensus from the scientific community is that global warming and climate change is a reality. There is a very high degree of probability that the warming we have seen in the last century will continue and even accelerate. And while many people associate this with severe droughts and much higher temperature in urban areas and nighttime temperatures, there is another significant factor, extreme storm events. There have been many incidents recently where communities have set all-time records for rainfall in a 24-hour period. This combination of mismanaged flood protection, inappropriate development, and the likelihood of things getting worse in terms of increased precipitation makes these questions even more significant.

There is a golden opportunity for environmentalists to join with the administration, for fiscal conservatives to join with people who are concerned about preventing human misery to agree to simple, common sense steps that will provide for true improvement.

First, there ought to be an incentive, an emphasis, on prevention. We should not discourage or eliminate promising programs like Project Impact, which help people prepare to resist disasters before the fact.

Second, there ought to be increased local responsibility. There is no question that local communities must bear the consequences for decisions they make about the location and nature of development. There is no question that more expensive or intrusive measures should require more local or State support. However, the Federal match should be higher for things that are

going to be preventative in nature while subsidy should be reduced or eliminated for things that are more likely to make it worse. Local communities should implement sound land-use planning and building codes to help themselves.

There is no excuse to put hog waste lagoons in flood plains, to not have reasonable building requirements for window covering for areas that are subject to extreme tropical storm damage, or to allow people to maintain a residence in repeatedly flooded areas. All these people should be given clear signals that they are going to have to accept responsibility to mitigate these clearly avoidable damages.

Finally, a simple, common sense step should be to reform the flood insurance program to eliminate Federal subsidy for repetitive flood-loss payments.

It is critical that we not make this into a political tug of war at a time when there is consensus in the scientific community, environmentalists, the professionals who work in disaster mitigation about what will work, what will make things better, what will keep people out of harm's way. We need to work cooperatively to make our communities more livable with a better match between private responsibility and government policy at all levels.

ARSENIC STANDARDS IN DRINKING WATER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2001, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. OSBORNE) is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. OSBORNE. Mr. Speaker, I have been concerned about attacks made on the Bush administration for their decision to not immediately implement the Environmental Protection Agency's decision to reduce the standard on arsenic in drinking water from 50 parts per billion to 10 parts per billion until further research and data is provided. Since nearly everyone has heard of individuals being poisoned with arsenic, it is assumed that any amount of arsenic is detrimental and that not immediately implementing a lower standard of 10 parts per billion is anti-environment and insensitive to human health concerns. The 50 parts per billion standard has been in effect since 1942, and there is no sound evidence that having a standard of 50 parts per billion has led to increased health problems in the United States.

☐ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., ☐ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.