

This week, we have the opportunity to take a giant leap for common sense: reinvest in the American people, reinvest in American jobs, reinvest in our defense, reinvest in our competitive edge, reinvest in our human capital, reduce our dependence on foreign oil. And that's precisely what we will do by passing this bill.

#### VICTIMS OF CRIME ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. POE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about one of the novel concepts that Congress has come up with over the years. It goes back to the Reagan administration and a bipartisan bill signed by President Reagan, the VOCA Act was established. It is called the Victims of Crime Act. It's a novel idea in that convicted felons in Federal court who are assessed fees and fines must pay those fees and fines into a fund. That fund then is saved and reserved for victims of crime for restitution. It also establishes and takes care of domestic violence shelters where spouses can hide away from those abusers. It establishes rape crisis coalition centers. It promotes and sends money to the victim advocates throughout the United States who go to court with victims of crime, especially in violent crime. It does many good things. And over the years, because our Federal judges have continued to fine and assess greater penalties to criminals, that VOCA fund, as of today, is \$1.7 billion, money contributed by criminals that goes to crime victims. What a wonderful idea. And let me make it clear, this is not taxpayer money. Taxpayers didn't fund this. Criminals did. Criminals paying the rent on the courthouse, paying for the system that they have created.

So what is the problem? The problem is, Mr. Speaker, that that fund, every year, that's administered by the Federal Government continues to be robbed by other bureaucrats and continues to be less money that's available for crime victims. This year we have \$1.7 billion in the fund. Last year \$635 million of that was used for crime victims, but this year the fund is being cut by the bureaucrats to \$590 million. That's not a lot of money, but it means that victims shelters throughout the country will be closed, that these rape crisis coalition centers will be closed because they're barely keeping the lights on.

So why is that happening, Mr. Speaker? I do not know.

I do know that the Justice Department now is going to charge a surcharge on the victims fund of 5.5 percent to administer the fund. They are doing so without the approval of Congress. They have no right to take \$30

million to pay for their own bureaucracy. That's not authorized by Congress.

We also know that the administration wants to take part of that money and apply it to other programs out there.

Once again, this is not taxpayer money. It's money that belongs to victims. And the Federal Government and, specifically, the Justice Department and the Federal bureaucrats need to keep their hands off that money, because it's not their money. It belongs to victims of crime.

Mr. Speaker, victims of crime do not have a lobbyist up here in Washington, DC, a high-dollar lobbyist advocating on their behalf. They expect us, Members of Congress, to be their lobbyist, and it's important that we do not let the bureaucrats, the robber barons take money out of that VOCA fund and apply it to other programs.

Find that money somewhere else. This money belongs to crime victims. It should not be robbed by the bureaucrats. It should be left alone. And, if anything, we ought to raise how much money we take out of that fund for victims of crime.

It's \$1.7 billion this year. Next year it's going to be \$1.9 billion criminals contribute to that fund. And yet our government continues to let less and less money be applied to victims. We have more crime victims in this country than we did last year, and we need victims assistance.

The Victims of Crime Act is a good idea. Let's leave it alone and quit robbing it to pay for other Federal programs. And if the Federal Government needs money to pay for these other programs, take money out of foreign aid or something. But leave victims alone.

Victims are a unique breed of people in our country, Mr. Speaker, and it's our responsibility to take care of them and make sure that they get the compensation they need, paid for by criminals who commit crimes against them.

And that's just the way it is.

#### FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ADMINISTRATION HAS FAILED DISPLACED GULF COAST RESIDENTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WATERS) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker and Members, I rise today to share with this body the unbelievable circumstances surrounding the victims of Hurricanes Rita and Katrina.

I thought the American people had been shocked at the lack of response by our Government to the victims of these hurricanes. I thought the American people could hardly ever get over the fact that they witnessed victims of a

natural disaster held up in a convention center in New Orleans for days without food, without water, begging for help.

It was unbelievable when we discovered that the head of FEMA, Mr. Brown at the time, said that he did not know that those victims were out in front of the convention center waving white flags, inside the convention center sick and even dying.

It was unbelievable to witness one of the richest, if not the richest country in the world with the lack of adequate response to its citizens at a time when we were needed most.

And so we're trying to work through this. We have been working to try and get money to the gulf coast, to New Orleans, to Mississippi. We have tried to work to save public housing so that residents could return who had been evacuated and told that the housing would be rehabilitated and they could return.

Many of us have been pushing not only on FEMA and our government, but working with the State and local government trying to correct the injustices that we have now come to know that have taken place in the gulf coast.

And now we're confronted with another unbelievable situation. How much bungling can you do? How much mismanagement can you be responsible for?

Finally, we find there's more. The Federal Emergency Management Administration, that is, FEMA, has admitted what people living in trailers have known for several years: that these trailers contain high levels of formaldehyde that pose serious health risks for residents. Almost after moving in, trailer residents started to complain about respiratory and other formaldehyde-related health problems.

The first private study on the unacceptable levels of formaldehyde in these trailers was in 2006. A few months later, the Occupational Health and Safety Administration conducted its own testing and found formaldehyde concentration as high as 5 parts per million, or 50 times higher than the level the Environmental Protection Agency considers elevated. But FEMA didn't stop the sale or deployment of trailers until July of 2007. And here it is 2008, and it still has no plan to move families out of these environmental health hazards and into safe, permanent, and affordable housing.

Mr. Speaker and Members, we've got to force FEMA to rise to the challenge of getting these 38,000 families out of these toxic trailers as soon as possible and move them into safe, permanent, and affordable housing. Unfortunately, because affordable housing creation has not been a priority of this Bush administration, I know this is going to be a difficult task.

The Bush administration has failed to ensure that the gulf coast region has