

And we know what happens if we don't do our job right with these young men and women. We already had the canaries in the mine with our Vietnam vets. When our veterans returned from Vietnam, many of us who were opposed to that war made a mistake. We did not differentiate between the war and the warrior, and so the warriors did not get all the care, the love, the attention, the honor, and dignity that I talked about earlier. And this society has paid a heavy price for that. Individuals, families, neighborhoods have paid a heavy price. Half of the homeless on the street tonight, Madam Speaker, are Vietnam vets, about 200,000.

There have been more deaths by suicide of Vietnam vets than died in the original war by combat. And we have had the head of our mental health agency in this Nation say that the same will be probably true of Iraq; we will have more suicides than battlefield deaths.

That is not only a tragedy, but it is a preventable tragedy. We have to say that we are going to put the resources in to deal with these issues. It is part of the cost of war. As I said earlier, Madam Speaker, we are spending \$1 billion every 2 days on the war in Iraq. Surely we can spend the hundreds of millions or billions that are required to treat the mental health needs of our older veterans and our newer veterans. This is absolutely required. We must do this job and do it right.

As George Washington said, the biggest factor in the morale of our fighting troops is the sense of how they are going to be treated when they come home. We have to do a better job of treating them when they come home.

Our committee, Madam Speaker, and this Congress provided in this fiscal year and the coming fiscal year almost \$20 billion of new money for health care. That represents over a 40 percent increase in the budgets that we started off with 2 fiscal years ago. Our job is to make sure that the money is spent right, our oversight job. Now that they have the resources, are they hiring the mental health professionals? Are they doing the diagnoses and treatments?

It is absolutely apparent, Madam Speaker, that tens of thousands of our young people are getting out of the military or the Reserve or the National Guard without being adequately diagnosed for brain injury or PTSD. Let me say that again. We have tens of thousands of our young people being discharged from the military or from the Reserve or National Guard without diagnosis for PTSD or brain injury. That means tens of thousands of ticking time bombs are out on the street. We need to do a better job.

There is a stigma against adequate evaluation and early treatment. The military, or at least many members of the military, seem to give their younger troops the sense that it is not

macho, it is not marine-like, it is not soldier-like to have mental illness. That it is a weakness. You have got to buck up, sergeant, and not have any mental illness. So we have folks who get a questionnaire about some of the risk factors, and they just say no. They know they are supposed to say no, because they want to be home, they don't want any influence on their future career or any possible promotion. So there is a dynamic within our military not to adequately diagnose.

The VA says they have mandatory screening for these illnesses, for these injuries when people come to the VA for treatment. Well, they may not come to the VA for treatment. We don't have an outreach that goes after every single one of them. And when they come in, they get a questionnaire by an intake clerk of two questions. Anybody who wants not to have any of the stigma of mental illness knows to say no on those two questions. Besides, we are told there are 15 risk factors for PTSD and suicide. Why don't we ask about all of them? Why don't we have a mandatory evaluation by competent mental health personnel before anybody gets discharged or leaves the National Guard or leaves the Reserves? This has to be done, Madam Speaker. We have to get rid of the stigma and do it in a way where we allow the soldiers to do it as part of their company, for example, so they have that comradeship and with their family to help both diagnosis and treatment.

So we have a big job to do as we celebrate this Memorial Day. We have a job to do with the 1.6 million troops who have been deployed already, 800,000 of them have returned home. We have a great deal to do with the other 23 million of our veterans from previous wars.

□ 1515

We have to do this job right, Madam Speaker. And on this Memorial Day, let us recommit ourselves to doing the job right.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I would ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and add extraneous material to H.R. 6048.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. I would yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 6048.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF SMALL BUSINESS PROGRAMS

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill (S. 3029) to provide for an additional temporary extension of programs under the Small Business Act and the Small Business Investment Act of 1958, and for other purposes.

The Clerk read the title of the Senate bill.

The text of the Senate bill is as follows:

S. 3029

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY EXTENSION OF AUTHORIZATION OF PROGRAMS UNDER THE SMALL BUSINESS ACT AND THE SMALL BUSINESS INVESTMENT ACT OF 1958.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Section 1 of the Act entitled “An Act to extend temporarily certain authorities of the Small Business Administration”, approved October 10, 2006 (Public Law 109-316; 120 Stat. 1742), as most recently amended by section 1 of Public Law 110-136 (121 Stat. 1453), is amended by striking “May 23, 2008” each place it appears and inserting “March 20, 2009”.

(b) EFFECTIVE DATE.—The amendment made by subsection (a) shall take effect on May 22, 2008.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New York?

There was no objection.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I yield myself as much time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, today we will consider a short-term extension for programs in the Small Business Act and Small Business Investment Act. The measure extends the authorization of the Small Business Administration and these programs through March 20, 2009. This measure will ensure continued operations at the agency.

The legislation comes before us at a time when the American economy is facing many challenges. Fallout from the subprime crisis is driving a tightening of the credit market, the average price of a gallon of gas is almost \$4, and unemployment is rising.

Entrepreneurs can help reverse these trends, if they have the proper tools. Throughout the 110th Congress, the Committee on Small Business has been

working to improve and revitalize the economic environment for business activity. With nearly 20 bills passed out of the House, these reforms have been a collaborative and bipartisan effort. With the input of Ranking Member CHABOT and other Members of this body, this has included major changes to SBA programs which affect millions of small businesses.

We have already passed measures into law that will help small businesses cope with rising energy costs, as well as become part of the solution. The President also signed a bill earlier this year that provides needed assistance to veteran business owners. And just last week, the House and Senate cleared a package to strengthen the SBA's disaster relief initiatives, which failed so many Americans during Hurricane Katrina.

The House has also reported legislation that is awaiting Senate action. These include reforms to streamline the SBA access to capital initiatives, improve contracting opportunities, and increase the outreach of entrepreneurial programs. We will continue working with the Senate to get these reforms signed into law.

This extension would allow the chamber to move its own versions, setting the groundwork so we may work out any differences. In the interim, and in the midst of a weakened economy, it is essential that these programs continue to serve small firms. The SBA is the sole Federal agency charged with assisting these entrepreneurs, and this bill allows the agency to continue to meet their needs.

I urge support of the bill.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. CHABOT. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of this particular legislation, and I yield myself such time as I may consume.

The bill is very simple, Madam Speaker. It extends the authorization of all programs authorized by the Small Business Act, the Small Business Investment Act, and any program operated by the Small Business Administration for which Congress has already appropriated funds. This extension will last until March 20, 2009.

The extension is necessary because authorization for various programs operated by the Small Business Administration ceases on May 23, 2008, so in just a couple of days.

Working in a bipartisan effort with Chairwoman VELÁZQUEZ, as she always does, she's reached out many occasions to work in a bipartisan fashion in the committee. The committee has ordered 15 bills to be reported out of the committee, all of which have passed this body, the House of Representatives.

The most recent action taken by the House was the recent passage of legislation to extend the Small Business Innovation Research Program. With the passage of this bill, the House has fin-

ished all the necessary work to reauthorize all of the programs overseen by the Small Business Administration.

Even though the House finished its deliberations, we operate in a bicameral legislative system, of course, and time is needed for the legislative process to run its course and enable the two bodies to resolve any disagreements on the best way to move the Small Business Administration forward and helping America's entrepreneurs. That work simply cannot be completed by this Friday, and given the upcoming legislative work on appropriations matters, it remains unclear when the two bodies will be able to commence deliberations to iron out their differences.

As a result of the need for following regular order and ensuring due deliberation of important issues to the American economy, I would urge my colleagues to suspend the rules and pass S. 3029.

However, there are additional items that I believe this House should address when it comes to small business. We're looking at access to capital in the Small Business Administration, and that is one of the areas that small businesses all around the country struggle it, with, access to capital.

Taxes is another big issue, and that's why I believe that the tax cuts that we pass should be made permanent because many of the people who would benefit from those, that tax relief are small business owners, and they hire about 70 percent of the new workers in this country. So I believe we should make those tax cuts permanent.

Regulatory reform needs to happen. Small businesses continue to be over-regulated, as many parts of our economy are. Health care is important. That's why we believe that Association Health Plans should pass. We ought to make sure that businesses are able to provide health care for their employees.

But there's one area that this Congress, I believe, has been woefully remiss in not addressing, and that's the area of energy, the fact that whether it's natural gas to heat our homes in the wintertime, or whether it's filling up one's gas tank at all-time record highs of almost \$4 a gallon, it's absolutely unconscionable that Congress has not acted in a responsible manner and a bipartisan manner to actually do something to bring those gas prices down. Why are we seeing these gas prices at all time highs?

Well, we are far too reliant upon foreign sources of energy. Is there anything we can do about this? Absolutely.

I've been in Congress for 14 years, and I've voted 11 times to allow us to explore and drill and go after energy up in Alaska, in ANWR, where we believe we have up to 16 billion barrels of oil which is being kept off-limits.

So we're essentially handcuffing ourselves and saying, you can't go up

there at all, even though most Alaskans are all for it. They believe that we should be able to go up there, as do most of their representatives, as do an awful lot of Members of this House. And we had the votes in previous Congresses to pass that here in the House. As I say, I voted for it 11 times. But we didn't have the votes over in the Senate.

But I just think it's absolutely outrageous that we've kept 16 billion barrels of oil off-limits. And that's only the start. We've also kept the entire Outer Continental Shelf off-limits. We think we have 86 billion barrels of oil there, and trillions of cubic feet of natural gas to heat our homes in the wintertime, which we've kept off-limits.

Now, we're not going to go after it, but Cuba has entered into an agreement with China to go after this oil out there that we ought to be getting. And so they're going to take advantage of it and we're not. And that's one of the main reasons that we see these high gas prices out there, because we have to buy the oil from somewhere, so we continue to buy it from some of the most unstable parts of the world, like the OPEC countries especially in the Middle East.

We're also buying oil from Venezuela. Hugo Chavez is down there, really a bitter enemy of the United States, yet we're forced to buy his oil. We buy oil from Mexico and Canada, Nigeria and other countries around the world as well. But we ought not to allow ourselves to be so dependent on foreign sources of energy.

We ought to go after those areas that we have control over, that we don't have to ask anybody's permission. But this Congress has kept that oil off-limits, and that's one of the main reasons we see prices as high as they are right now.

In addition, if we had the crude oil here, which we don't, but if we had it, we can't refine it quickly enough to be able to put it into our cars. Why? Because we don't have enough oil refineries in this country.

Back 30 years ago, which is the last time, more than 30 years, 32 years ago is the last time we built an oil refinery in this country. The regulations now make it virtually impossible to build an oil refinery. So we ought to change those regulations. We ought to make sure that we do it, you still build these refineries in an environmentally safe manner, just as we go after the oil in ANWR and the Outer Continental Shelf in an environmentally safe and friendly manner. But those are the types of things that we need to do. But because we take no action in those areas, we haven't built an oil refinery in this country in over 30 years.

We've put nuclear off-limits, no more nuclear power plants about 20 years ago. France can produce 75 percent of their electricity, completely, safely.

But we can't do that in the United States? I don't think so. I think that's just a very bad policy that we enacted about 20 years ago, making it impossible to build nuclear power plants. We need to change that.

Finally, we need as well to make sure that we have sufficient dollars going into research so that we can go after the cutting edge types of energies that are going to power us in the future, solar, wind, biomass, hydrogen fuel cells that we may be able to power our cars by in the future.

But most of these things, for the most part, are in the future. Yes, we do have wind now. But we're talking about less than 1 percent of the power in this country. So we have to have energy going in; we have to have sufficient dollars going into those technologies of the future.

But the bottom line is that at this time oil is one of the principal ways that we power our automobiles and other important things in this country. And when we put that stuff off-limits and we continue to buy it from foreign sources, we're going to continue to see these high prices. And that's just wrong.

The American people are suffering right now. We should have taken this action a long time ago. But since we didn't, we need to do it immediately. And that's what really bugs me when I hear people talk about, well, even if we opened up ANWR now, we're not going to have that oil for years. Well, that's why we should have opened up ANWR a long time ago. But we can't go back and undo what was, we can't go back and do what we didn't do back then, but if we passed it now, a lot of the price at the gas pump is reflected in speculators, what they think oil is going to be like in the future. If we opened up ANWR, I think you'd see an immediate effect on the prices at the pump that we would pay.

People are sick and tired of the high prices we're paying. It's time that Congress act, and we ought to act sooner rather than later.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, I have no further speakers, if the ranking member is prepared to close.

Mr. CHABOT. I would like to yield such time as he may consume to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. SHIMKUS).

Mr. SHIMKUS. Madam Speaker, may I inquire how much time is remaining. The SPEAKER pro tempore. Eleven minutes.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Madam Speaker, this short-term extension is important. It's just too bad that we couldn't extend the low cost of energy that we had 18 months ago. Eighteen months ago the price of a barrel of crude oil was \$58.31. Today it's \$128 a barrel, a \$70 increase.

What's important to small businesses is the cost of doing business. And the increase in energy cost, the increase in

liquid fuel cost, the increase in electricity cost, bears a disproportionate share of the cost today, more so than 18 months ago.

□ 1530

Mr. WU. Would the gentleman yield? Mr. SHIMKUS. I would be honored to yield to my friend from Oregon.

Mr. WU. Would my friend care to cite to us the price of a barrel of oil when this administration took power in 2001?

Mr. SHIMKUS. It was \$27 a barrel when this administration came in.

Mr. WU. Would the gentleman care to cite the price of a barrel of oil when the war in Iraq began?

Mr. SHIMKUS. Do you know what it was?

Mr. WU. I was hoping—

Mr. SHIMKUS. I will debate this issue. This issue is about supply. I don't care who's responsible. This issue is about bringing more supply into the market. When a barrel costs \$128 versus \$58, this is what you get: You get gas prices that were at \$2.33 when this Congress got sworn in to prices today that are \$3.80 because we will not expand our supply.

Now, if you add climate change, my friend from Oregon is a good friend of mine, and I know he's concerned about climate change and global warming and a cap-and-trade system, conservatively, that's going to add 50 cents to a gallon of gas to comply with climate change. So today the average price \$3.80, plus 50 cents, \$4.30.

Now, I think yesterday in Chicago without the climate change gas tax increase, it was \$4.50 a gallon.

So the debate is when are we going to say that it's okay to do these things? When is it okay that we can take coal and turn it into liquid fuel? When is it okay to go off the Outer Continental Shelf and harvest those billions of barrels of oil, those trillions of cubic feet of natural gas? When is it going to be okay to say let's continue to move aggressively in cellululosic and biofuels, coal-to-liquid, OCS, wind, and solar?

In 20 years, we're going to increase our electricity demand by 50 percent. We have to bring on more supply. We have to bring on more baseload supply because in rural America, which I represent, in over 30 counties it takes 2½ hours to drive from one part of my district to another. We don't have mass transit. We don't have light rail. In fact, it's an agricultural economy. It runs on big diesel trucks to haul the cattle, to haul the horses, to haul the hay. Diesel prices have doubled.

And so because of that, what we're trying to say is it is time that we start addressing and bring this to the floor. The chairwoman herself said in her opening statement, We have brought policies here, this Congress, to lower the cost for small business. That's kind of like the Speaker's promise in 2006, We've got a plan to lower gas prices. It didn't happen. It went up.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. SHIMKUS. I would be honored to yield.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. H.R. 6—

Mr. SHIMKUS. It's a failure.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. You know why? Because your President, our President refuses to implement the provisions, at least the one that would lower the cost of loans for small businesses.

Mr. SHIMKUS. When your party will come to the floor and debate bringing more supply to the market, we can negotiate. But when you say, We're going to solve our 50-percent increase in demand on energy with solar and wind, it just doesn't pass the laugh test. We just can't get there.

We've got to expand nuclear power. We've got to expand coal-fired power. We've got to turn coal into liquid fuels. We've got to bring on more supply. Yes, we can do it. I've got it here. In fact, Illinois is going to be a great wind power State.

Mr. WU. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. SHIMKUS. I would be happy to yield.

Mr. WU. I look forward to debating the gentleman from Indiana on this issue. As you know, this Congress has acted on every item that you have cited except for drilling on the Arctic Wildlife Reserve. We've acted on every other single one.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Do you know how big the Arctic Wildlife Refuge is?

Mr. WU. I believe it is a very, very short-term supply.

Mr. SHIMKUS. No. Do you know how big it is?

Mr. WU. It is a very large expanse of land.

Mr. SHIMKUS. It is the size of the State of South Carolina.

Do you know what the drilling platform is?

Mr. WU. Would the gentleman care to—I mean, we're asking—

Mr. SHIMKUS. We're debating back and forth.

Do you know how big the drilling platform would be?

Mr. WU. It would be a substantial size.

Mr. SHIMKUS. No, it would not be a substantial size. It would be the size of Dulles Airport. It would be like putting on a football field a postage stamp. That's the perspective. That's what gets lost in this debate. We can do it.

You know what? If you look at the OCS here, we do drill in the western gulf. Remember when Katrina went rolling up the gulf and we saw that big picture, tell me the environmental disaster that occurred with those derricks in the western gulf with Katrina rolling over the top of them. Can you name one? There wasn't one.

Mr. WU. Would the gentleman yield?

Mr. SHIMKUS. I would be happy to yield.

Mr. WU. I do believe that the oil derricks, as Katrina came through, were

evacuated and covered, and the people who were responsible for those rigs did do a good job in Katrina, and I would be happy to concede that to the gentleman.

But I also want to mention to the gentleman that experts ranging from the CEO of Exxon to academicians on the topic all estimate that the current price of a barrel of oil should be about \$60 a barrel. Instead, it's twice that price.

Let me just finish my statement.

Mr. SHIMKUS. I'm not going to argue. It's my time. I will debate, but I won't argue. It's my time.

Mr. WU. And most individuals agree that there are three reasons why the price is \$128 a barrel rather than \$60 a barrel. The three reasons are our presence in Iraq, instead of lowering the price of oil, it increased the price of oil; the permission from Wall Street to speculate on a purely financial basis in commodity futures; and the third reason is the lowering of the value of the U.S. dollar. Two of those policies are intentional policies, and the third policy was passed by the Republican Congress.

Mr. SHIMKUS. And because I'm enjoying this type of debate, I will concede the dollar price.

But let me tell you why, if we had our own resources, if we were drilling our own oil, isn't it criminal that we're relying on imported crude oil to fund our energy needs? Wouldn't it be better to use American dollars to drill on American soil in American land on American OCS? Then we wouldn't have to worry about the dollar, because an American dollar is an American dollar. And we wouldn't have to worry about our trade imbalances because we import all of this crude oil.

Now, to point two, the speculators. Do you know why they're bidding the price up? Because we won't open supply. They're taking a position that I am going to bid this up, and you know what? Those dummies in Congress, they're not going to open up more supply. So what I hold is going to cost more in the future. It's a futures market. It's risk management. They're betting about our inability to go here. Billions of barrels of oil, trillions of cubic feet of natural gas. We won't go there. They're betting against us going there. Feet of natural gas. We won't go there. They're betting against us going there.

Mr. WU. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. SHIMKUS. I'm from Southern Illinois. It's the Saudi Arabia of coal, 250 years worth. Fifty percent of our electricity that we generate today is by coal. We could also use that coal as the South Africans have done for 40 years. The Germans did it in World War II. Take that coal and turn it into liquid fuel.

We have had four budget airlines go broke. Why did they go broke? They

couldn't afford the price of aviation fuel. How did South African airlines fuel their jets? Coal-to-liquid technology. Taking South African coal, turning it into aviation jet fuel. That's what our competitive advantage is. Our advantage is using our natural resources. Not assuming that our natural resources are an environmental hazard.

That's our policy. Don't go after our natural resources. It's an environmental hazard. Most countries say go after your natural resources; it makes you stronger. It makes you more competitive. It lowers the cost of doing business. It creates jobs. Look at the jobs that would be created here in southern Illinois. Build a coal mine, that creates jobs. Operate the coal mines, that creates jobs. Build a coal-to-liquid refinery, jobs. Operate the coal-to-liquid refinery, jobs. Build a pipeline, American jobs. Low-cost fuel, American jobs.

For every dollar a barrel increase on aviation fuel, do you know how much it costs us taxpayers? \$60 million just to fund the Air Force.

So this policy of no supply hurts the taxpayers. And we have to pay for it. We had the authorization bill of the Coast Guard. For every dollar increase in diesel fuel, do you know what it cost the Coast Guard to operate and make sure our shores are protected? \$24 million for every dollar increase.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman from Ohio has expired.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Madam Speaker, let me just say in closing that I, too, am concerned and outraged about the fact that we are dealing with an energy crisis that is impacting small businesses, but more important is the fact that we passed an energy bill that has provisions that will provide low-cost loans for small businesses to be able to cope with energy and the gas prices, and yet the President refuses to implement the program.

So I would ask the gentleman, Mr. SHIMKUS, to join with me in asking the administration and asking the President to implement this provision contained in a bill that was overwhelmingly supported, a bipartisan bill, the energy bill.

And then the gentleman comes here and gives this great speech about energy prices, and yet whenever there is an opportunity for the gentleman to support legislation that would provide relief to small businesses and consumers, he votes against it. Even today on the Gas Price Relief for Consumers Act, Mr. SHIMKUS voted against it.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Would the gentlelady yield?

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Not on this point. I will not yield.

Mr. SHIMKUS. You're referring to me. I would be happy to debate if you're going to bring my votes to the floor.

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. Reclaiming my time.

You had a lot of time. You claimed a lot of time.

The gentleman voted against this bill.

Mr. SHIMKUS. Will the gentlelady yield?

Ms. VELÁZQUEZ. I will not yield at this time.

So, Madam Speaker, I will ask that the Members of this House support the reauthorization of the Small Business Administration, and I will invite everyone who is concerned about energy prices to come and support the bills that we pass that would provide relief to consumers and to small businesses.

You should put your money where your mouth is.

I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. VELÁZQUEZ) that the House suspend the rules and pass the Senate bill, S. 3029.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the Senate bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES AND SYMPATHY TO THE PEOPLE OF SICHUAN PROVINCE, CHINA

Mr. WU. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and agree to the resolution (H. Res. 1195) expressing condolences and sympathy to the people of the People's Republic of China for the grave loss of life and vast destruction caused by the earthquake of May 12, 2008 in Sichuan Province, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 1195

Whereas on Monday, May 12, 2008, at 2:28 p.m. local time, a massive earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale struck a mountainous region of Sichuan Province in southwest China;

Whereas the epicenter of the earthquake was Wenchuan County, 60 miles northwest of the provincial capital of Chengdu;

Whereas the earthquake destroyed 80 percent of structures in some of the towns and small cities near the epicenter;

Whereas the death toll is currently estimated to exceed 22,000 and is expected to rise as the scope of the damage becomes clearer;

Whereas tens of thousands of people across southwest China remain buried beneath rubble, and hundreds of thousands of people are injured or homeless;

Whereas an estimated 900 eighth and ninth grade students and their teachers remain trapped, with as many as hundreds dead, after a school collapsed in Dujiangyan, a county located southeast of the epicenter;

Whereas another school with up to 1,000 students and teachers inside collapsed in the city of Mianyang;

Whereas two chemical plants have collapsed in Shifang, northeast of the epicenter, spilling 80 tons of toxic ammonia;