The assault on mutual respect has pervaded Congress. Republicans, desperate after 40 years in the minority, are turning ever more negative. Some nervous Democrats follow suit. The dissonant memory of their president attacks the personal integrity of our president, but they seem out to weaken and destroy Congress itself. Absurdly, they think this is what we need.

Mr. SARBANES. Mr. President, I rise today to draw to the attention of the Senate my concern about declines in recent decades in voter participation in local and national elections. In the 1988 election, only about half of those citizens eligible to vote went to the polls. While turnout improved during the last Presidential election, voter participation remains low in this country compared to other advanced democratic countries. According to the Congressional Research Service, only 61 percent of U.S. citizens eligible to vote are registered. Not only are these numbers weak, but they are out of line with other advanced democracies. The United Nations has estimated that the vote participation in the United States is the lowest in the world. Many of our fellow democracies have systems of registration that are significantly more efficient and effective than ours. In other countries, the voter registration rates are significantly higher than ours.

Recognizing the need to establish uniform national voter registration procedures to allow greater opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate in the electoral process, the U.S. Congress adopted the National Voter Registration Act early in the 103rd Congress, legislation I was proud to support. The National Voter Registration Act, also known as the motor-voter bill, provides greater opportunities for all eligible citizens to participate in the electoral process.

The methods for voter registration established by the legislation—by mail, as part of drivers license renewal, and when visiting Government agencies—are well tested and successful methods for registering in almost all States which have implemented the motor-voter provisions. They have experienced significant increases in voter registration. About 3,700 voters were registered in Washington State within the first 7 days of motor-voter operation. Florida has been averaging more than 3,000 new voter registrations per day from people obtaining drivers licenses.

While some critics of this legislation have charged that by making voter registration easier, there may be an increased opportunity for fraud, the bill includes important safeguards to prevent such fraud. The mail registration form requires a statement of eligibility to vote, an attestation that the applicant meets each requirement of eligibility to vote, and the signature of the applicant under penalty of perjury.

Mr. President, there are further misconceptions surrounding this bill that should be clarified. First, though agencies are required to provide registrants with assistance when requested, the legislation makes it clear that they need not require agency personnel to fill out the registration forms—it is the applicant who fills out the form. Second, the legislation requires that an applicant be informed that the quality and quantity of Government assistance they receive will not be affected by their willingness or refusal to register. Third, the legislation protects the privacy of the applicant by restricting the use of voter registration information. An applicant has the option of completing the form at home and returning it by mail, and agency employees may not force an individual to register or attempt to persuade an applicant to join a particular political party.

I understand that concerns have also been raised about potential additional costs for State and local governments to implement this legislation. I would simply note that any increased costs for a State to comply with the uniform voter registration standards provided by the National Voter Registration Act will be offset by the reduced workload or the purchasing of new voting machines. The National Voter Registration Act is already making it easier for citizens to exercise one of the most fundamental rights of democracy—the right to vote. A healthy democracy thrives on the active participation of the governed.

This important new law is clearly working and should not be repealed nor should its implementation be delayed as some have proposed.

CUBAN LIBERTY AND DEMOCRATIC SOLIDARITY ACT—S. 381

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I am pleased to join my colleagues as a cosponsor of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act, although I have reservations concerning the trade sanctions included in the legislation. Fidel Castro’s 36-year authoritarian rule remains intact. Castro’s bankrupt philosophy of Communist authoritarianism. The Cuban people cannot move forward to the prosperity which their survival and natural resources entitle them as long as Castro’s authoritarian rule remains intact. The United States must continue to do what it can to help the Cuban people in their struggle for economic and political freedom and to reestablish the rule of law.

We also have an obligation to American citizens, many of whom have unresolved property claims against the Castro government, to work for justice on their behalf. For these reasons, I believe the United States must balance its goals in Cuba with other important foreign policy objectives, such as free trade and support for market and political reforms in other countries. Accordingly, I associate myself with the objections to important elements of the Democratic Solidarity Act and look forward to working with my colleagues to improve the bill particularly in the

NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT

By mail
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