

Californians are full of courage and do not weaken in the face of adversity. The will to rebuild took root even in the darkest of hours. But if not for our firefighters and volunteers, keeping such faith would have been much more difficult.

On behalf of the constituents of the 45th Congressional District of California, I want to thank these individuals for their tireless efforts and extreme bravery during our time of need.

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and pay tribute to each and every firefighter and citizen whose dedication to our communities and families of Southern California again demonstrated exceptional spirit and strength in a time of disaster. Our nation is fortunate to have dedicated citizens who willingly and unselfishly give their time and talent and make their communities a better place to live and work. Our firefighters confronted the unprecedented fires which swept through our region with unwavering courage. They exemplify community leadership. I was fortunate enough to accompany President Bush yesterday as he thanked these spirited public servants and talked to the victims and survivors of the Southern California fires.

Without the dedication and tireless passion of our Firefighters and public servants there would have been even more extensive destruction of property and devastation of lives above and beyond the 3,300 homes and 4,000 other structures destroyed and hundreds of thousands of acres burned. Our Firefighters fought and finally brought under control these devastating wildfires and continue in aiding the victims left homeless in the wake of the destruction.

I know I speak for all the people from California's 44th district when I say that our thoughts and prayers have been with the firefighters as they worked vigorously to contain and control the wildfires. Laboring day and night in extreme conditions, the firefighters that responded to the Southern California wildfires will always have our nation's respect for their dedication to their profession. There is no better example for Americans than those who stare down adversity and meet every challenge with true conviction, just as the firefighters have done during this very difficult time.

While the firefighter worked tirelessly on the front lines of the fires, the support personnel that were tasked with an overwhelming job of reconstruction and recovery are equally honored for their efforts. Often it is the aftermath of a crisis that brings the most arduous challenges. The dedicated public servants that have come to the aid of their victims of the Southern California wildfires are to be commended for their ongoing contributions. Law enforcement, medical personnel, emergency responders, and community leaders have all come together to complete a daunting task; recovering from the loss of loved ones and property, and rebuilding in the aftermath.

I am proud to cosponsor H. Res. 425, recognizing and honoring the firefighters and public servants who responded to the October 2003 Southern California wildfires. I am sincerely grateful for the leadership and sacrifice firefighters and their families endure in order to secure property and protect our lives. As a native Southern Californian I know that our communities will persevere through this tragedy and successfully rebuild our beloved homes and families. We all stand ready to help in any way I can.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support House Resolution 425 honoring the heroic efforts of the firefighters and safety personnel who responded so bravely to the devastating outbreak of wildfires in Southern California.

At the peak of the blazes, more than 14,000 firefighters from across California and several other Western states were deployed over hundreds of miles in an arc around Los Angeles and into San Diego County as far south as the Mexican border.

These courageous men and women have gone far beyond the call of duty. Fighting fires that took the lives of 20 people, destroyed more than 3,400 homes and scorched more than 750,000 acres since igniting in different locations around Southern California nearly two weeks ago, they worked around the clock, despite considerable risk to their personal safety, in order to ensure the well-being of the nearly 100,000 evacuated residents.

And as the evacuated sought safety and shelter, the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and a number of similar organizations mobilized hundreds of volunteers to assist in providing clothes, food and other essential items to the many who were forced to abandon all of their possessions. As the rebuilding process begins, these same agencies and organizations will serve as a helping hand to too many Southern California residents whose homes have been either badly damaged or lost.

I would like to pay special recognition to the firefighters in my California District who were called upon to fight these blazes. Coordinated by the Glendale Fire Department, firefighters from my District were called to battle one of the very earliest blazes and for two weeks after the first blaze, devoted almost every resource in the District to assisting in the effort to knock down these fires. I have no doubt that their heroic actions saved thousands of lives.

This is a devastating time for Southern California residents. I send my deepest condolences to the families who have lost loved ones and to the thousands who have lost homes to these fires. It is only then appropriate that through the passage of House Resolution 425 we honor the actions of the firefighters and safety personnel who prevented the additional loss of life and property. I urge all Members to support this resolution and pay respect to some of our Nation's bravest heroes.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of House Resolution 425 honoring those who fought the devastating fires that have struck Southern California. In particular, I want to mention Steven Rucker, 38 years old and the father of two young children, who died fighting the Cedar fire, which began on the Cleveland National Forest and moved over 25 miles in less than 10 hours. He joins the roll of 29 other wildland firefighters who perished this summer across this country. Every wildland firefighter who takes up this occupation knows that on the next fire, they could face a similar fate.

Brave men and women choose the profession of firefighting with a keen awareness of the dangers inherent in the job. What they do requires bravery similar to that required of our armed forces. However, they fight a foe that isn't driven by ideology, or religion, or a lust for power. Wildfire has none of these motiva-

tions, and is something altogether more unpredictable as a result. If not for the efforts of our firefighters, many more homes and businesses, not just in California but across the country, would be lost, and many more civilians would have lost their very lives.

House Resolution 425 focuses on the Southern California fires, which are fresh in our memories. However, I think it's important that we recognize that wildland firefighters face these dangers in many states across the country. Wildland firefighters have died on the fire ground in States as diverse as Florida, Arkansas, Indiana, Montana, New York, Wisconsin, Texas, Louisiana, and Oregon over the last ten years. Moreover, when wildfires strike anywhere in the United States, wildland firefighters from across the country—Federal, state, and local—mobilize to defend our forests, our homes, our families, from the devastation brought about by catastrophic fire.

The firefighters who bravely face these infernos also understand something that many here in Washington are just beginning to grasp; that these wildfires are getting worse because we've tied the hands of our Federal land managers and prevented them from addressing hazardous fuel buildups. We have a bill that begins to address this issue, and I hope we can work with the other body to finish that important work soon.

I am saddened by the loss of life and the destruction of our resources that we witnessed in the last weeks. I am humbled by the bravery of our wildland firefighters and the tenacity of all our first responders without whom the disaster in California would have been far worse. I am honored to join my colleagues whose constituents have suffered so much in recent weeks in passing this resolution.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). All time has expired.

The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS) that the House suspend the rules and agree to the resolution, H. Res. 425.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the resolution was agreed to.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Mr. Monahan, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed with amendments in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 1904. An act to improve the capacity of the Secretary of Agriculture and the Secretary of the Interior to plan and conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects on National Forest System lands and Bureau of Land Management lands aimed at protecting communities, watersheds, and certain other at-risk lands from catastrophic wildfire, to enhance efforts to protect watersheds and address threats to forest and rangeland health, including catastrophic wildfire, across the landscape, and for other purposes.