they want a full and independent investigation. They want to know the truth, so that in the future, such tragedies are minimized and responded to with speed, skill, and experience.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important debate for our country. I cannot imagine anything more important to the American people than an independent investigation of why the response to Hurricane Katrina fell so short of expectations. We need a full accounting of what went wrong at all levels of government so such failures don't happen again.

I support the appointment of a non-partisan, independent commission—modeled after the successful 9/11 Commission—to investigate the response to Hurricane Katrina. An independent commission is the only way to get to the bottom of this. The commission would look into every aspect of the preparation and response to Hurricane Katrina, and let the chips fall where they may. The American people have made it clear this is what they want as well. A new Washington Post/ABC poll found that 76 percent of the public supports the creation of an independent commission. The Leadership of the House badly misreads the public mood when it disregards the clear wishes of the American people for a non-partisan investigation. We need to look at our government's weaknesses and correct them.

I oppose the straightjacket procedure under which the House is considering this legislation. The Majority calls this a ''Select Bipartisan Committee,'' but the legislation was drafted behind closed doors with no input from Democrats. This is bipartisanship? The Leadership of the House will not even allow Democrats the opportunity to offer a substitute and have a straight up-or-down vote on it. Is the Majority's position so weak that it cannot withstand a debate?

I don't think the American people are going to have much patience for partisanship on this issue. They want answers and a measure of public accountability, not a partisan whitewash. There are hard questions to be asked about the slow, disorganized, and woefully inadequate response to a natural disaster that left a major U.S. city uninhabitable.

The proposal before the House calls for a House investigation that would be completely controlled by the Republican party. Republicans would outnumber Democrats on the Committee 11 to 9. There would be no bipartisan subpoena power. With all due respect, this would be an investigation in name only. It would have no credibility with the American people. You can't have a comprehensive and fair investigation when the people controlling that investigation have a vested interest in the outcome.

I urge the House to reject this unfair procedure and reject the very partisan investigation it seeks to establish.

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H. Res. 437, which would establish a partisan committee to investigate the Hurricane Katrina preparation and response. I agree with the vast majority of the American people, who favor an independent commission of experts similar to the 9/11 Commission.

Perhaps the American people, like me, are skeptical of the investigative integrity of the Republican Majority. After all, these are the same people who took more than 140 hours of testimony to investigate whether the Clinton White House misused its holiday card database but less than five hours of testimony about prisoner abuse in Iraq. The Downing Street Memo has sent shockwaves through the world and confirmed our worst fears about the Iraq war sham, but mum's the word from Republicans in Congress. You also won't find a single committee hearing about Valerie Plame, no-bid Halliburton contracts, or U.S. citizens being imprisoned without a trial.

However, now they say that we should trust them to do a thorough investigation and not hide any damaging evidence regarding the woefully inadequate response to Katrina. Given their history, I think the American people deserve better than an empty promise. It is an insult to the thousands of dead, the victims of rape at the Convention Center, the people who waited five days for buses that never came and so many others who suffered needlessly, to suggest that one year before an election, this Republican Congress is going to pursue indictments not only of their President, but of themselves.

After all, the senior Members of Congress who would populate this Committee are the same ones who advocated moving FEMA into the Homeland Security Department, zealously pursued the downsizing of disaster prevention and response programs, starved wetlands restoration and Army Corps of Engineers funding, and presided over rising poverty rates that make Americans all the more vulnerable.

These foxes have already systematically dismantled the henhouse, sat idly by while the hens suffered, and now want to appoint a committee of foxes to find out what went wrong. I vote no on this ridiculous proposal.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Pursuant to House Resolution 439, the resolution is considered read and the previous question is ordered.

The question is on the resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) was on his feet.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

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

H.R. 3649. An act to ensure funding for sportfishing and boating safety programs funded out of the Highway Trust Fund through the end of fiscal year 2005, and for other purposes.

COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2005

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). Pursuant to House Resolution 440 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 889.

□ 1424

IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 889) to authorize appropriations for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2006, to make technical corrections to various laws administered by the Coast Guard, and for other purposes, with Mr. SIMPSON in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

H.R. 889, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2005, authorizes funding levels for the Coast Guard in fiscal year 2006 and makes several changes to current law related to the Coast Guard and to the maritime transportation system.

This bill is the result of a bipartisan effort; and I greatly appreciate the efforts of the bill's original co-sponsors, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), the subcommittee chairman; the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the full committee ranking member; and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), the subcommittee ranking member.

This bill provides the Coast Guard with the necessary resources and authorities to protect the safety and security of lives and property on U.S. waters.

H.R. 889 authorizes a funding level of nearly $8.7 billion for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2006. This authorization level includes an amount of $1.6 billion to accelerate the delivery of new vessels and aircraft as part of the deepwater program. The Coast Guard's legacy fleet is deteriorating at an unacceptable rate, endangering the safety of the Coast Guardsmen on board and the general public.

We must provide the Coast Guard with these new assets, and I urge my colleagues to support full funding for this program this year and in future years.

As this body's only licensed mariner and the representative of the State that includes more than half of this Nation's coastline, I recognize the importance of making certain that the Coast Guard has the tools necessary to carry out its many and varied missions.

Earlier this year, the Coast Guard responded to a major oil spill in my

State and in the district of subcommittee chairman, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO). While the Coast Guard has recently received a great deal of attention for its important homeland security missions, we must be mindful of the requirements of the Coast Guard's equally important traditional missions.

Mr. Chairman, all of us recognize the exceptional work done by the Coast Guard, often under dangerous conditions in Alaska and all around this Nation.

Mr. Chairman, as I am reminded with the Katrina hurricane, the outstanding agency that worked the best and did their job with honor and dignity was the United States Coast Guard. I am very proud to be affiliated with them, and I urge the strong support of this legislation.

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

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

As the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) indicated, this legislation is in the great spirit of our committee, a bipartisan product. We worked together long and hard to bring to the House a reauthorization of the Coast Guard.

I commend the gentleman from New Jersey (Chairman LOBIONDO), the chairman of the subcommittee, for his dedication, his commitment to the Coast Guard, and for not only legislative reasons but for personal reasons. The gentleman has a long history with the Coast Guard.

I concur with the gentleman from Alaska (Chairman YOUNG). Flashing across television screens, across the country since the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina has been the extraordinary accomplishment of the U.S. Coast Guard in responding to the needs of citizens stranded, devastated by the storm.

Some 32 years ago, I took the opportunity to spend a day with the 8th Coast Guard district commandant and his staff and reviewed the entire range of operations of district 8 in their 26-State area of responsibility, not just New Orleans or the gulf. It is 26 States up to Mississippi, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, the river system for which that district has jurisdiction.

The men and women of the Coast Guard are extraordinarily dedicated, skilled, professional, committed to their work. I walked through every stage of their preparation for the homeland security responsibilities that the Coast Guard carries out, as well as the aids to navigation, search and rescue, drug interdiction, immigration responsibilities that the 8th Coast Guard district shoulders and carries out so effectively.

On Saturday, August 28, aircraft from air stations in New Orleans, Houston and Mobile flew over the destroyed gulf coast and over New Orleans. They immediately began lifting survivors, transporting them to safety and calling for reinforcements. But as the devastating scope of the disaster became known, every Coast Guard air station around the U.S. began sending aircraft and extra air crews to support the rescue operations.

The Coast Guard had equipment 24 hours a day on scene. Cutters and crews were brought in.

□ 1430

The buoy tenders were necessary. All aids to navigation were just blown to smithereens: either sunk, devastated, smashed, or some of them blown way inland. The Coast Guard had to go back and redeploy all those aids to navigation.

The air station for the Coast Guard in New Orleans was flooded. Its roof, or a great deal of the roof at any rate, was peeled back. The Coast Guard Air Facility Mobile had damage to their roof, lost their operation space, their maintenance space, power, and telephone communications. Station Gulfport of the Coast Guard was destroyed. The Integrated Support Command in New Orleans was flooded and destroyed. Buoys and aids to navigation throughout the region of the gulf just smashed, and pushed way off station in most cases.

The vessel traffic service radar in Burwick Bay was destroyed. The Coast Guard even had to evacuate their eighth district headquarters in New Orleans and move to Saint Louis. Nonetheless, the Coast Guard rescued 6,500 people. 6,500 people. Rescue swimmers, and we saw this on our screens, were dropped from helicopters to collect people from houses, to maneuver around power lines, hack through attic roofs with axes, and endure foul and contaminated water. One helicopter crew saved 150 people in one shift; another 100 people in a single shift.

The Coast Guard saw that the storm was coming. They have prepared for it year after year after year, for this or any kind of storm. Training for the Coast Guard is not just an exercise on paper nor on computers, as I saw as I walked through each of the stations at District 8. It is real life, day to day. And because of that professionalism, the chairman and I both argued on this floor 3 years ago that the Coast Guard should not be put in the Department of Homeland Security. It ought to be kept in its status within the Department of Transportation with a considerable degree of latitude to carry out their responsibilities. Unfortunately, our commonsense counsel was not heeded in the shaping of the Department of Homeland Security.

The Coast Guard, nonetheless, overcame bureaucracy to respond to the needs of people in sharp contrast to the disarray of FEMA, which left Americans startled, stunned, disgusted and, ultimately, the President in a position to recall his director of FEMA and to redirect operations and bring a new leader in. We did not see any of that with the Coast Guard. In fact, the Coast Guard was asked to dispatch an admiral to take over and run the rescue operations in the gulf.

We keep adding responsibilities to the Coast Guard, but we do not provide them with sufficient personnel, equipment, and funding; and that is what this legislation will do. It will authorize $8.7 billion for the upcoming fiscal year for the Coast Guard. Of that amount, $5.6 billion is for operating expenses; $1.9 billion for the acquisition, construction and improvement program, part of which is the Integrated Deepwater System to replace their cutters and their aircraft, to keep older ships and aircraft operating; $24 million for research and development; $35.9 million to remove and alter bridges that are obstructions to safe navigation; and $12 million to clean up environmental and pollution problems at Coast Guard facilities.

When I was elected to Congress and took office in 1975 and served on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee and on the Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation, along with the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), who preceded me by a term, that is where we developed our friendship and relationship over these many years. There were 35,000 officers and enlisted personnel in the Coast Guard in that year. Today, and in the intervening years, we have added 27 new functions for the Coast Guard, but there are only now 40,000 Coast Guard personnel. They have increased only 5,000 in the last 31 years. Yet we expect the Coast Guard to carry out all these 27 new functions, plus their historic functions, with this rather limited personnel and limited budget.

We make a big step forward today by increasing the funding, providing substantially for the acquisition of equipment that the Coast Guard needs and, hopefully, to support the personnel that they require to carry out their functions.

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

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the gentleman from Minnesota for his comments.

This budget, although it appears large, is not large enough. The reality is, and I was just sitting here and thinking about it, that the Forest Service budget is $7 billion, and they do not produce anything. They do not save any lives, and they spend $7 billion for what, I do not know. But just to give some comparisons, this really should be more. This is the biggest increase we have ever had, but it should be more for the duties we have given the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard has 27 new challenges and duties we require of them through this Congress, and only 5,000, I believe, more personnel in the deal; and they have never been funded correctly.

Mr. Chairman, I yield the balance of my debate time to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), and pending that I ask unanimous consent that

the gentleman be permitted to control this time.

The CHAIRMAN. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Alaska?

There was no objection.

Mr. LOBIONDO. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I want to thank Chairman YOUNG for his attention and leadership on this issue. I want to thank the ranking member, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER). I think this is one committee and one area where we are probably a role model for the rest of the Congress to look at in terms of the way we have come together in a bipartisan way to recognize the needs and form a consensus and conclusion.

Chairman YOUNG outlined some of the basics of the bill, the $8.7 billion that we are authorizing. He talked a little bit about Operation Deepwater, and I want to sort of reemphasize a little of that. We are asking for $1.6 billion for the Deepwater System, which will result in the complete recapitalization of the Coast Guard. If there were ever a time and a need for it, it is now.

While we have not talked about homeland security that much in the wake of Katrina, the Coast Guard's primary mission has been that of maritime anti-terrorism and homeland security. They are not able to conduct that mission with assets that are failing on a more regular basis, and every day Coast Guardsmen must deal with the reality and the possibility of asset failures that put the safety of the personnel and the success of their missions in jeopardy.

This is an opportunity for us, in an authorization bill, to clearly state how important we think it is for the Coast Guard to have the right assets to go along with the extraordinary training and dedication they are bringing to the mission. This is a very good step forward, and I would urge all my colleagues to support this legislation.

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

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), the ranking member on the Subcommittee on the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation.

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman for yielding me this time and for all his expertise, his help, and his mentoring on these and other transportation issues for so long. I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) for his leadership on the subcommittee, and of course, the chairman, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), on the full committee.

Mr. Chairman, I agree with the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) when he said this is a committee that is working well together. The collegiality, the input that is provided from our side is greatly appreciated, and the mutual respect is evident. So we thank the Chair of both the subcommittee and the full committee for that.

Mr. Chairman, I have never been more proud of the men and women that serve in the United States Coast Guard than in recent weeks. What we have seen are valiant men and women stepping up to the plate and saving thousands of Americans from the destructive flood waters brought by Hurricane Katrina. The Coast Guard, whose motto is ''Semper Paratus,'' always ready, was prepared and ready to respond to this storm. Before levees ever broke, the Coast Guard was flying additional helicopters and extra air crews to the gulf region. Once the storm hit, their air crews and boat crews were operating 24 hours a day to save their fellow citizens.

The best decision that the President has made in the past 2 weeks was to place Vice Admiral Thad Allen in charge of the emergency response to the Katrina disaster. To the Coast Guard, being prepared to respond to a disaster is not just a paper exercise to sit on a shelf when the big one hits. Being prepared is something they do every day. They develop relationships with State and local government officials. They know who in the private sector can help provide resources quickly to respond, and they make decisions quickly so they can implement an effective response.

What we know to date of Katrina is that the Coast Guard has saved over 12,000 lives with their air resources and over 11,000 lives were saved by boats and other surface resources. They evacuated over 9,000 people to hospitals. When the storm passed, they remained on the scene helping to clean up the mess and protect the environment. In New Orleans, they are coordinating the cleanup of 15 significant oil spills. The Coast Guard is helping to coordinate the removal of sunken ships and barges.

Mr. Chairman, the Coast Guard has responded with all of the resources at their command to this disaster. It is time for the House of Representatives to respond to the Coast Guard by ensuring they have the resources they need to carry out their missions in the coming year and to continue to help American citizens, whether it is a disaster on the scale of Katrina or in a boating accident, to which they respond thousands of times.

H.R. 889 authorizes a total of $8.7 billion for the Coast Guard in the coming fiscal year. It includes $5.6 billion for operating expenses and almost $2 billion for acquisition, construction, and improvement. Funding for the Integrated Deepwater System is increased above the President's request to make sure this vital system stays on schedule.

I want to thank Chairman YOUNG and Subcommittee Chairman LOBIONDO for including my request for $39 million to establish an additional helicopter interdiction tactical squadron, or HITRON, on the west coast. Currently, the Coast Guard operates only one HITRON squadron out of Jacksonville, Florida. We need another on the west coast to protect the eastern Pacific Ocean and interdict vessels attempting to smuggle drugs into the United States. The east coast squadron has interdicted over $6 billion in drugs to date, and I think we can do even more on the west coast.

So I thank the Chair for working on this bill so cooperatively. I thank the Coast Guard for not only responding to Katrina but for the work they do every day in all of our districts, whether it is search and rescue, cleaning up oil spills, interdicting drugs, or enforcing our fishery laws.

Mr. Chairman, I hope every one of my colleagues votes for this bill.

Mr. LOBIONDO. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. CARNAHAN).

□ 1445

Mr. CARNAHAN. Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the leaders and Members on both sides of the aisle who have worked together to bring this bill to the floor today.

I rise in support of our Nation's Coast Guard and the heroic men and women who serve our country with distinction.

The Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act is an important authorization for our country and for our citizens, as we have seen so vividly in the last few weeks. From protecting our natural resources to providing maritime security and national defense, the Coast Guard's duties are broad in scope, and the performance of those duties has never been more important. The authorizations in this bill for operations, acquisitions, and maintenance of the fleet seek to serve our constituents by allowing the Coast Guard to protect citizens along America's waterways, including the Mississippi River district I represent in Missouri, and especially now in the gulf coast.

I would particularly like to take this moment to thank the Coast Guard unit at the Port of St. Louis and all the units in the Coast Guard District 8, covering 26 States, that were headquartered in New Orleans that have temporarily been moved to St. Louis. In St. Louis, the unit led by Commander Susan Engelbert, Coast Guard personnel, and auxiliary volunteers up and down the Mississippi mobilized with unprecedented speed and purpose to assist those communities devastated by Katrina. These men and women conducted search and rescue missions under extreme and dangerous conditions and often risked their lives, just as they have done in countless hurricanes and floods across our country.

In the gulf, in the last 2 weeks of constant work and sweat, those Guard personnel helped make things safer and more secure. With little sleep or rest, they performed their duties helping their fellow Americans in their time of need. Commander Engelbert said it best when she stated how proud she was of the men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard's Port of St. Louis: They saved lives. They made a difference.

For their dedication and their actions, they deserve our thanks. The U.S. Coast Guard is a shining example of how well a Federal agency can perform with its flexibility, speed, and expertise. I urge my colleagues to support this vital authorization bill.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I yield 4 minutes to the distinguished gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. SCHWARTZ).

Ms. SCHWARTZ of Pennsylvania. Mr. Chairman, I rise in strong support of the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2005, a bill that will provide the men and women of the Coast Guard with equipment and tools that they need to monitor and protect our coastal waters.

In keeping with our efforts to improve the Federal Government's ability to prevent and respond to potential mass incidents, whether caused by terrorists, an act of nature, or human error, H.R. 889 will maintain the Coast Guard's traditional mission of water safety while also improving its ability to contribute to our Homeland Security. To that end, H.R. 889 includes provisions from the Delaware River Protection Act, a bill Representatives LOBIONDO, CASTLE, ANDREWS, SAXTON, and I co-authored in the aftermath of the November 2004 oil spill in the Port of Philadelphia.

The Athos I oil spill caused an estimated $200 million in damages, injured wildlife, and temporarily impeded trade and traffic. It served as a costly reminder that the Port of Philadelphia contributes significantly to our region's economy and that we cannot afford, for economic and environmental reasons, to put it in harm's way.

Under this legislation, strong but necessary steps will be taken to prevent a similar incident in the future. However, we cannot stop there. We must consider other activities in our ports and waterways that might impact the region. That is why I am grateful to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) for including at my request a provision requiring the Coast Guard to conduct a vulnerability assessment of a proposal to turn an LNG, liquefied natural gas, peak shaving plant into an LNG import terminal in my district in Port Richmond, Philadelphia.

Since coming to Congress, I have been committed and outspoken about implementing innovative solutions to our Nation's energy needs by promoting more efficient use of traditional sources of energy as well as making substantial new investments in discovering and bringing to market new energy resources. I support improved efficiency standards and enforcement of environmental standards so we can reduce consumption of foreign oil; and I led an effort on this floor to accelerate the research, development, and deployment of new energy technologies. These are critical steps we must take to ensure our Nation's access to the energy that we need to power the 21st century.

There is no doubt that LNG can play a role in efforts to diversify sources of energy and supplement our national gas supply and production. However, due to the inherent volatility of LNG, there is concern that LNG tankers and storage locations will be marked as a potential target by terrorists. Their presence on the Delaware also raises the risk of another major spill occurring in the river. There is no doubt that an incident of an LNG tanker would be devastating to the people of Philadelphia, a city home to 1.2 million people, as well as those living in the surrounding suburbs, and in the States of New Jersey and Delaware. Therefore, we must ensure that LNG tankers and facilities are situated safely and appropriately to protect our citizens from a potential catastrophic event.

In the case of Port Richmond, we must thoroughly examine the economic and safety variables before allowing LNG tankers to travel up the Delaware River, under Benjamin Franklin Bridge, and passing alongside Center City Philadelphia while carrying 200,000 meters of LNG.

A vulnerability assessment will ensure that all elements of the proposal are examined and weighed so we can determine what is best to ensure public safety as well as meet the region's energy demands.

I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO) for so willingly working across party lines to do what is best for our region and for his continued leadership on issues concerning the Delaware River. I also thank his staff for working with us throughout the drafting process. I urge a ''yes'' vote on H.R. 889.

The CHAIRMAN. The Committee will rise informally.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY) assumed the Chair.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Sherman Williams, one of his secretaries.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Committee will resume its sitting.

COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2005

The Committee resumed its sitting.

Mr. LOBIONDO. Mr. Chairman, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK), an admirer of the Coast Guard.

Mr. STUPAK. Mr. Chairman, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG), the ranking member, the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), and the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. HOEKSTRA) for their work on this bill. There could not be a more opportune time to bring this important legislation to the House floor than today with the aspects of Hurricane Katrina.

The heroic and steadfast efforts of the Coast Guard in the wake of Katrina, the worst natural disaster this Nation has ever faced, should be commended by all. This recent tragedy demonstrates how important it is to authorize and fund vital programs that are contained in the Coast Guard bill we are discussing today. This bill will help the Coast Guard to continue to effectively carry out their mission.

I represent a district that is almost completely surrounded by water, so I understand the importance of a Coast Guard that has the resources to assist our coastal communities.

There is one provision included in the bill that is particularly important to me and my northern Michigan district. It directs the Commandant of the Coast Guard to convey the Cutter *Mackinaw* to the City and County of Cheboygan, Michigan, for purposes of a museum.

The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter *Mackinaw* is scheduled to be decommissioned in 2006. The Cutter *Mackinaw*, whose home port has been Cheboygan, Michigan, has served the State of Michigan and the entire Great Lakes region for over 60 years.

The conveyance of the Cutter *Mackinaw* to Cheboygan is both a tribute to the ship that protected Michigan's water and shores and cleared the ice paths for the Nation's mariners. This ship will now serve as an educational resource to help people better understand the history of the vessel, the Coast Guard and the maritime history of the Great Lakes. In this role, it is imperative that Michigan keep this historic treasure.

I see no better way to honor the life and name of the cutter than to retire it as a museum to its home port in the Mackinaw Straits area. This Coast Guard treasure will be a valuable cultural and educational benefit for generations to come.

Once again, thanks to the men and women of the United States Coast Guard for their work in saving lives in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Mr. OBERSTAR. Mr. Chairman, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. FARR).

Mr. FARR. Mr. Chairman, I rise to engage in a colloquy with the gentleman from New Jersey (Chairman LOBIONDO).

Mr. Chairman, as the gentleman from New Jersey is aware, Congress in 2002