

supplies close to 40 percent of the natural gas for our country, and was off line for a considerable amount of time following Hurricane Rita. It highlights the strategic interest that southwest Louisiana plays to our energy industry and why we must ensure that this infrastructure will be protected from storms.

This is another photo of the same area, more close up, showing the tanks. We had about 7 or 8 feet of water in this area. One way we can protect our energy infrastructure is to expand drilling in the Outer Continental Shelf. This can provide a long-term oil and gas supply that would serve the bridge to renewable energy sources.

Most importantly, it would also provide States with critical revenue sharing from any oil or gas leasing off their coast, allowing States like Louisiana to fund our own protection from future disasters.

Mr. Speaker, despite our many challenges, the people of southwest Louisiana remain determined to rebuild their communities and businesses. Parents look forward to the day when their children can once again attend schools and churches in a safe and comfortable environment.

Travelers look forward to a day when they can escape the summer heat with a trip to Holly Beach in Cameron Parish. Farmers look forward to the day when they can once again tend to their fields.

Mr. Speaker, southwest Louisiana has already begun to plan for our future. It is up to us as Members of Congress to help them realize it.

EQUITABLE FUNDING FOR HURRICANE RITA

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

Mr. BRADY of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague, Congressman MEEK from Florida, for allowing me to reclaim my time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my good friend, Congressman BOUSTANY from Louisiana, in urging our colleagues not to forget the victims of Hurricane Rita as they determine priority funding in the Hurricane supplemental bill that is before the House and the Senate today.

You may know, but, of course, last August Hurricane Katrina, the sixth largest Hurricane in gulf coast history hit the gulf coast. It sent a human tide of over half a million evacuees to Texas. And while our State was struggling with the unprecedented effects of that storm, its own coast took a direct hit from Hurricane Rita, the fourth largest storm in gulf coast history, just 3 weeks later.

As Hurricane Rita grew into one of the most intense storms in recorded history, steering a path through Texas and along the Louisiana border, our State, and especially southeast and

east Texas were in the midst of its unprecedented response to Hurricane Katrina.

So our region not only took in evacuees, tens of thousands from Louisiana, and are thrilled that we did, we also took in 2.7 million evacuees from Hurricane Rita, the largest in history.

Then the hurricane shifted; Hurricane Rita went right up those same communities that had already done so much. Rita delivered a devastating blow to the region. As this photo illustrates, the resulting physical damage was massive.

The town of Sabine Pass was leveled. Further inland, entire communities, including houses, businesses, bridges, roads and utilities, were severely damaged or destroyed by Hurricane-force winds and torrential rains.

Over 75,000 Texas homes were damaged or destroyed in Rita, \$1 billion of our timber crop, the largest economic driver in east Texas; and today, 10 percent of our Rita evacuees have yet to return. Without homes or without places to work, we are again in a real fight for our lives.

Today we have a number of our Texas leaders, southeast Texas Recovery Team in Washington meeting with the White House, meeting with House leaders, meeting with FEMA and HUD to talk about how Texas can recover.

We had, as I said, 75,000 homes damaged or destroyed. Many of those have temporary blue tarps on today that are starting to deteriorate or blow off. When the hurricane season hits, we will put more and more people out of their homes.

We are asking for about \$1 billion in community development block grant funds in housing to help repair those homes, to help get people back in their homes, to help southeast Texas recover.

We are also asking for equal treatment. These are all photos from the Beaumont Enterprise and their special edition on Rita, showing the damage from this region. But as we rebuild, we find that, unfortunately, the Federal Government split Hurricane Rita along State lines, literally provided one assistance to our Louisiana neighbors, and a different level to our Texas neighbors, which is terribly unfair and creates a terrible burden on our Texas communities, many of whom are poor, many with very high minority and poverty rates, all of them eager to help our Louisiana neighbors, but also eager to try to recover ourselves.

So we are up here asking for the same 90/10 reimbursement rate of FEMA that our Louisiana folks have received for the exact same hurricane, same storm, same damage. Different treatment, same storm. It ought to be the same storm, same damage, same treatment.

Mr. Speaker, let me close with this. This Congress, our government, are charged with a duty to wisely allocate precious taxpayer dollars. This hurricane supplement has become a magnet for some less-than-justified projects.

Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this: that the Hurricane Rita assistance in schools of 90/10 and in housing are not only fair and justified, but will go a long way toward helping these communities who did so much for our Louisiana neighbors and are doing so much today to help them recover at a time of terrible need.

LADIES OF THE GULF

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 thank Mr. MEEK for allowing me to make some additional comments with my friends, Mr. BRADY from southeast Texas, and Dr. CHARLES BOUSTANY from Louisiana.

The area of the State of Texas that I represent, Mr. Speaker, borders Louisiana, and also borders the Gulf of Mexico. And today we had another storm hit not Texas, but Washington, DC. Individuals from southeast Texas and east Texas, government leaders, community activists, chambers of commerce presidents, came to Washington to make the case for what occurred in the last 6½ months in southeast Texas.

By way of review, the ladies of the gulf came into the Gulf of Mexico last fall. The first of those, Katrina, came through, became the sixth largest hurricane, most powerful hurricane to ever hit the gulf coast. And when that occurred, 450,000 people from Louisiana went west. They crossed the Sabine River into Texas. Many of them came into my district.

Many of those people are still there. Several thousand kids are still in school in Texas from Louisiana. So many people are in Texas from Louisiana that we have a mayor's race in New Orleans this Saturday, and the two candidates campaigning for mayor in Louisiana have billboards all over the Houston area soliciting votes from people in Louisiana that happen to be in Texas.

Katrina was mainly a water-damage hurricane. The waters rose, caused damage, the waters stayed a long time. One of the towns of course hit was New Orleans. The national media focused on Katrina day after day after day. But 3 weeks later, another lady of the gulf came. Her name was Rita. She became the fourth most powerful hurricane to ever hit the gulf coast. She hit western Louisiana and east Texas, part of the area that I represent.

The largest evacuation in American history took place in Texas because of Hurricane Rita. Over 2 million people evacuated their homes. In Beaumont alone, 8,320 people were airlifted out of hospitals, in the middle of the night with C-130 transport planes, to 14 different States.

The first responders before Hurricane Rita hit loaded their police cars, their emergency equipment, their fire trucks, their front-end loaders, and

even helicopters on two enormous cargo ships that were in the Port of Beaumont. Those ships deploy cargo to the war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The community, because of Hurricane Rita, was left without electricity for over 3 weeks; 75,000 homes were destroyed. Several thousand homes to this day have not been repaired, and people are still living under blue roofs.

That part of the gulf coast, Mr. Speaker, is a petrochemical area, refinery area. Eleven percent of the Nation's gasoline is refined out of that small area in southeast Texas. Thirty percent of the Nation's aviation fuel is manufactured there. And the Port of Beaumont, as I mentioned, that deploys one-third of the military cargo going to Iraq and Afghanistan.

But this hurricane was not a water-damage hurricane, although there was a storm surge. It was a wind-damage hurricane, and people lost their homes not to rising water, to losing their roofs and water coming in because of rain.

And that whole issue is being dealt with, or not being dealt with, with the insurance companies because of their refusal in many cases to even pay for the damage because it was not water damage, it was wind damage.

But be that as it may, the devastation affected the rice industry. This part of southeast Texas is a rice-growing area. As with Dr. BOUSTANY and his area, this part of the Nation supplies a lot of rice for not only the United States but other nations.

This year the rice farmers lost their second crop, that is the crop that they make money on. And now, rice season is back upon us. But to show you the devastation from Hurricane Rita, I talked to the owner of two John Deere stores there in southeast Texas that supply the farm machinery for the rice farmers.

He says he has not sold one piece of farm machinery this year because the rice farmers cannot afford to buy them. Those rice farmers now, many of them will go out of business and that land will be turned into something else. But be that as it may, Hurricane Rita was not one of those issues that caught the National attention, because local officials, many of them that were here today, took care of business as soon as Hurricane Rita showed up. There was very little loss of life.

And because apparently for no loss of life, that was not a story that the national media sought to portray. Mr. Speaker, we just hope in the supplemental that two things occur: that the people of Louisiana are treated not unfairly, but the people in Texas are treated equal to the people in Louisiana.

Rita was a hurricane just as powerful as Hurricane Katrina, and that the funding be the same, and that the line between Louisiana and Texas, the Sabine River, not separate fairness; that fairness go across the river and treat all Americans the same.

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ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER
PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 4 of rule I, the Speaker signed the following enrolled bill today:

H.R. 4297, to provide for reconciliation pursuant to section 201(b) of the concurrent resolution on the budget for fiscal year 2006.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, it is an honor to come before the House once again. I would definitely like to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing me to have this hour, this 30-something hour, Democratic leader NANCY PELOSI and also Mr. STENY HOYER, our whip, and our chairman Mr. JAMES CLYBURN and also Mr. LARSON, JOHN LARSON, our vice chair of our caucus.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we come to the floor every day that we are in session, almost every day, to share not only with the Members how we should work in a bipartisan way leading on behalf of this country, but also to share with the American people how important that its elected representation here in Washington, DC, need it be Democrats, Republicans, Independents, that we come together under one flag and we salute one flag to make sure that we fight on behalf of what they need, not what the special interests may need here in Washington, DC.

I can't help but segue out of that opening into this historic day in American history. This historic day, and it wouldn't be anything that I would say that we should put forth a House Resolution to designate it as some sort of special holiday, but I think the Members need to be made aware of what happened 5 years ago on this day that might have put into motion, I believe had a lot to put into motion of what the American people are feeling now, not only on the east coast or in the Midwest or on the west coast or north or south, but what they are feeling of the sound of the ring at the gas pump when they are pumping gas into their tank, the feeling that they have when they can no longer carry cash because all of the cash is being spent on fueling their tanks to be able to give their children a ride to school or be able to help a sick loved one to a doctor's appointment, or a small business person trying to figure out how he or she is going to go up on the cost of their service or the product that they provide to a given company because of these gas prices.

Mr. Speaker, I don't want to be a Member of Congress with a conspiracy

theory; and so that is the reason why, Mr. Speaker, the 30-something Working Group, we have gone back to looking for the facts of how do we get to where we are now, where did we fall short as a Congress on behalf of the American people. Now, when I say fall short, I want to make sure that the Members don't get confused.

I think here on the Democratic side of the aisle that we have done a very good job, if not an outstanding job, of trying to represent the people that wake up every day and want to provide, want to put forth their best role, their best foot in this great democracy of ours. I think on the majority side that it has been well documented that there has been access into energy policy here in this country in government-funded buildings where special interest was top shelf. That is a heavy charge, but let me just back it up here.

2001 on this day, not yesterday, not tomorrow, but on this day, Vice President DICK CHENEY and his energy task force had a secret meeting bringing together big oil companies, energy lobbyists, CEOs, and other special interests to craft the administration's energy agenda, an agenda to deliver Big Oil big dividends. This is well documented within the media, this is well documented as it relates to testimony in some committees before Congress. Big five oil companies, \$32.8 billion in the first quarter profits this year, free drilling rights on public lands, \$9 billion in subsidies; \$20 billion over 5 years, and waived royalty fees, another gift that was given out of this energy policy.

Big Oil comes through for the GOP. Big Oil gave 84 percent of their campaign contributions to Republicans in the last 24 months. Bush-Cheney got more than \$2.46 million in 2004 as it relates to campaign contributions. More than \$70 million to the Bush and Republican Congress since 2000.

Democrats want to take this country in a new direction, and I think it is important that we point out some of the things that have taken place.

Now, some may say, Well, Congressman, I mean, that is good, you pointed that out. But, Mr. Speaker, I must go down memory lane to remind the Members and also the American people that this meeting was well denied by many: What are you talking about, a secret meeting? What do you mean? We do everything in the sunshine here in Washington, DC. We have transparency. We believe that we are here on behalf of the American people.

Well, let me just say that, and I want to point to an article that I pointed out last week, and I think it is important because we come to Washington every week for the business of the people and I think it is important that we point this out. This is a Washington Post article that is dated November 16, 2005. As a matter of fact, it was on the front page: White House documents show that executives from big oil companies met with Vice President DICK CHENEY's