

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.

□ 1645

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