

disasters over the years, and FEMA personnel performed admirably as our State struggled to recover from Hurricane Fran in 1996 and Hurricane Floyd in 1999, as well as other floods, tornadoes, and ice storms. Fran featured devastating winds and Floyd produced a 500-year flood in northeastern North Carolina. Fortunately, then-FEMA director James Lee Witt was a professional with marching orders from the White House to do whatever was needed to save life and property. FEMA in the 1990s delivered vital services the American people have a right to expect. Unfortunately, that model of success was replaced by the current administration with the failed approach of cronyism and incompetence. Congress must now step in and provide leadership to fix a broken system.

However, unlike some of my colleagues in this body, my solution to fixing FEMA is not to strip it out of the Department of Homeland Security. This action will not only result in an ill-conceived division of duties, resources and responsibilities, but also increase bureaucracy, interagency turf wars and red tape.

I don't need to tell you, but the American people will not stand for more red tape and bureaucracy. The last thing they want to see after a disaster are Federal government officials trading business cards instead of assisting the victims of the storm. My Democratic colleagues and I have worked for months on the Homeland Security Committee to reform FEMA and to restore its standing as a quality government organization.

I am pleased that our Republican colleagues have joined together and the Homeland Security Committee passed a bill on a unanimous bipartisan vote.

H.R. 5351 addresses many of the problems and deficiencies that prevented FEMA from providing efficient and effective support of State and local officials after a disaster, whether they be natural or man-made. This legislation creates a stronger autonomous mission-oriented FEMA within the framework of the Department of Homeland Security. It restores control of the accepted emergency management cycle of preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation to the agency.

It requires that the director of FEMA be a recognized emergency management professional who would serve as the day-to-day principal adviser to the President of the United States for emergency management matters. The legislation would elevate the director to the President's cabinet during times of crisis so no one could obstruct the speedy delivery of relief, personnel and resources to devastated areas in this country and around the world.

H.R. 5351 reinvigorates FEMA's regional offices and staffs them with emergency management professionals with both experience and a familiarity with the people, geography, and threats to our States and municipalities.

Importantly, this bill gives FEMA budgetary independence and prevents the Secretary of Homeland Security from siphoning money away from disaster and terrorism prevention and preparedness for other agency initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me as a cosponsor of this bipartisan, commonsense legislation; and I urge the leadership to schedule for a vote this legislation as soon as possible. Our Nation and its people will not stand for another botched response from this Federal Government, nor should they. This administration should be held accountable for its many mistakes, and this bill would allow FEMA to fulfill its mission as a primary Federal responder and support agency in times of disaster.

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

(Mr. BILIRAKIS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

BECOMING AMERICA THE DEPENDENT

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentlewoman from Ohio is recognized for 5 minutes.

There was no objection.

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, America, which should value our birthright of independence, is all too quickly becoming America the dependent.

We are dangerously dependent, for example, on foreign oil for our energy needs. Indeed, we import nearly 75 percent of it; a third of our trade deficit is due to this oil dependency. We could become energy independent here at home with energy sources here that we would invent and create and refine, and what a job-rich America that would create.

America is becoming more and more dependent upon imports from foreign manufacturers than we are exports from our country in all fields: in appliances, in clothing, even food. This year America may become for the first time in its history a net food importer.

The balance of payments which had been the pride of our country, more exports than imports, has been reduced to red ink. The monthly trade deficit for March was just in 1 month over \$62 billion, and we are still on another record annual trade deficit pace.

In fact, our monthly trade deficit figure is so huge it equals the entire annual budget of our Department of Vet-

erans Affairs. Veterans fought to make us free from foreign tyranny, but the new tyranny is taking a different form.

At the end of March, our overall publicly held debt was a staggering \$4.6 trillion, not counting promises that the government has made to pay for retirement programs and health benefits that are due to the American people in the amount of over \$8.4 trillion. Now, would you believe that nearly half, 43 percent of this debt, overall debt, of that amount, \$2 trillion is now held by foreigners.

We have already heard that it took 200 years for our Nation to accumulate \$1 trillion of debt. But would you believe we are now at the point where \$1 trillion of our public debt is held by Japan, China and Hong Kong? As this chart illustrates, Japan is the largest holder of our debt, followed by Europe, followed by China and Hong Kong, which are rising very quickly.

In fact, would you believe that between October of 2003 and March of this year, China alone more than doubled its holdings of our public debt from \$151 billion to \$321 billion. The United States government, our taxpayers this year will pay more than \$200 billion in interest on publicly-held debt with nearly \$100 billion going to foreign holders of our debt. That's right. We are going to pay interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt, almost five times as much as we appropriate on an annual basis for the entire U.S. Department of Energy. Imagine if we invested those dollars in ourselves. We will pay interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt nearly three times as much as we spend in a year on the Department of Housing and Urban Development to build this country from coast-to-coast.

We will pay interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt nearly twice as much as we appropriate for the entire Department of Labor. We have just had more miners killed in Kentucky, God rest their souls, because they didn't have oxygen equipment that would last them long enough that would outlast the monoxide until the rescue workers could get there.

Yet we can pay this kind of money to foreign holders of our debt. We will pay about as much interest to foreign holders of U.S. debt as we will appropriate for fighting the war in Iraq. Wow. Think about it. What do we do about it?

Without a doubt, first thing we should do is clean up our fiscal house, and that starts with balancing our budgets and digging out of this red ink. We cannot expect to continue in this fashion and remain the leader of the free world. Our currency is being devalued. We see the skittishness in the stock market, and interest rates are going up at the same time as gas prices are going up. This is very clear.

There are certain rules of economics that never fail you. We are either going to have a currency devaluation, or we are going to have inflation go out of control. But the point is, more and