

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MORNING BUSINESS

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that there be a period of morning business for debate up to 90 minutes, with the first 45 minutes under the control of the Democratic leader and the remaining time under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HURRICANES

Ms. LANDRIEU. Madam President, I rise to speak this morning about a very important issue for the country, particularly for the gulf coast region and the State of Louisiana.

Madam President, as you know, although your State of Alaska is not located in the southern part of the Nation, you and other members of society are well aware of the devastation that occurred to our coastal communities, whether on the eastern coast or southeastern coast or the central gulf.

As is the case this morning, Hurricane Ivan, a category 4 hurricane bearing down on the gulf coast region, according to the latest weather reports and indications based on good research that is being done here by many of our Federal agencies, we can somewhat predict the path of the hurricane. With our most sophisticated systems, radar and weather tracking, pinpointing with some accuracy, there is a projection of where this killer storm, this major storm, may hit. It seems as though it has turned north and is headed right now to the Mississippi-Alabama line, but it could move within the next 12 hours to the east or to the west.

As we wrap up our business here in Washington, the entire gulf coast, and the State I represent, Louisiana being one of those Gulf Coast States, Mississippi and Alabama and the panhandle of Florida, is under a mandatory evacuation. Why? It is because this is a huge storm. It is a category 4. We hope and pray, and there are some indications, that it will change to a category 3. But it is a major storm with high winds of 165 miles per hour.

It is not the first time a storm of this size or intensity has hit the gulf coast. We know by reading history. Several decades ago, some of us actually lived through extremely powerful and killer storms like Camille or Betsy in Louisiana and other States throughout the gulf coast that proved to be very dangerous, with loss of life and billions of dollars in property loss.

We don't have to be reminded that Florida has just been hit in the last 3 weeks twice already. This one will be of historic devastation in Florida, having had three hurricanes hit in such a short period of time.

I want to speak this morning about what we can do here in Washington a

little better, with a little more energy, with a little more focus to help the people in Louisiana and throughout the gulf coast area. Not only do they deserve our help, but because of the energy industry and the economic benefits they bring to the whole country, they not only need our help, they deserve our help. They deserve our attention.

As I have stated, the hurricane is to make landfall sometime in early Thursday morning, sometime between 1 a.m. and 6 or 7 a.m.

The people of Louisiana know the devastation this kind of storm can bring. Let me show a picture because I think a picture is worth a thousand words. While this looks terrible and horrible—and it is very frightening, as you can see a woman, standing water rising over her waist, trying to get to safety—this is not a hurricane. This is only a tropical storm. This was Tropical Storm Isidore that hit the gulf coast in 2002. This wasn't a category 1 hurricane. We are talking about severe devastation when a category 3 or category 4 or category 5 hurricane pushes that water out of the gulf, out of Lake Ponchartrain into the tremendously populated areas around the gulf coast.

This is what people have been fleeing from for the last 36 hours. When I say fleeing, I mean all of the interstates going north out of Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana, and interstates going west, as people try to leave the east and head for safety toward Houston. They have been, at times, in bumper-to-bumper traffic for hours. People can walk faster than the rate the cars are moving. Luckily, the Governors of these States are very skilled and able, the local elected officials have been through this many times and were quick to see the danger, even though the path could not be predicted, and were quick to call for evacuations days ago. This morning, we received reports that the highways are clearing in some parts along the Gulf of Mexico. Some families spent yesterday 12, 13, 14 hours in automobiles, going less than 5 miles per hour as they tried to find safety and shelter all along the gulf coast to flee a storm of this magnitude.

Again, this is not a picture of a hurricane. This is a tropical storm. That is why people are fleeing in the gulf area.

I will speak for a moment about energy and about what the gulf coast contributes to the energy independence and energy security of this Nation. As millions of people have been leaving their homes to flee to higher ground, 442 rigs or platforms have been deserted by companies in the Gulf of Mexico. When I say deserted, not just, of course, left to wreak havoc, but they have been tied down, secured, supported. All nonessential emergency personnel have had to move out of the Gulf of Mexico. This evacuation represents 50 percent of the manned rigs and platforms in the gulf.

Right now, oil and gas from the Gulf of Mexico and coastal Louisiana rep-

resents 60 percent of the entire Gulf of Mexico production. For the time being, that has been shut down because of Ivan. I have discussed with Members of this Senate the importance of our LOOP facility. The Louisiana Offshore Oil Port sits right out on the Continental Shelf, near Port Fourchon Louisiana, and is a superport responsible for the entrance of 1 million barrels of oil a day.

We are in Iraq, in an important battle, but part of our objective there is to secure an oil supply for the region and for the Nation and to use that for the betterment of the people of Iraq, for their growth and development and the security and stability of the world, as well as to fight for other issues. We are fighting to get 1 to 3 million barrels out of Iraq, and right here in the Gulf of Mexico, today, we have a facility that has virtually been shut down because of a hurricane. Nearly a million barrels is being imported in this country, and exported, a year.

Port Fourchon is a small port that sits at the very edge of Highway 1. It is unbelievable to view the picture. This is Highway 1 in Tropical Storm Isidore. That was another storm, not a hurricane. This damage occurs in a tropical storm. We cannot see the highway because it is covered with water. The highway leads down to the gulf. Port Fourchon, the LOOP facility, is right off of this shore where 18 percent of the offshore oil and gas revenues flow into this country through this little road called LA 1 that we have been fighting now for several years. With the leadership of Senator MURRAY and Senator REID and others, Senator JEFFORDS and Members on the Republican side, as well, we have been able to get a designation as a special highway, but we are still waiting for the big bucks to help with lifting this highway and expanding it so we can have a functioning port.

The hurricane is scheduled to hit Mobile or west of Mobile right now. I just spoke to the Port Fourchon Port Director and they expect this highway to be underwater by 1 p.m. today—again. This is the major route of oil and gas into the United States of America. This is Highway 1, Port Fourchon, and the LOOP facility, which is the only facility in the Nation that imports and exports oil and gas at that rate and at that level.

My point is, I hope we will again use this opportunity to focus on the critical infrastructure needs necessary for Louisiana and the gulf coast of Mississippi and Alabama primarily to protect itself not just from homeland security threats from terrorists but real threats of weather.

People might say: Senator, why did they build the port here in the first place? I understand that. If we could do it again, knowing what we know now, perhaps that would not have been done. I will speak for a minute about that because I want people to understand the argument. Men and women are here because the oil and gas is here. If we