

the administration and embassy officials around the world raise these values regularly with foreign governments, when we speak on behalf of persecuted dissidents, and when we act consistently in our own country, we will not only be working to ensure every person can worship as they see fit. We will also be ensuring a safer, peaceful, more secure world where the rights of all—the freedoms of all—are respected and celebrated.

RENT RELIEF TO FEDERAL JUDICIARY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I rise to discuss S. 2292, a bill to provide rent relief to the Federal judiciary. Our Federal judges and court administrators have expressed serious concerns about the rental charges assessed by the General Services Administration, GSA, in courthouses and other space occupied by the courts around the country. If enacted, this legislation would require the administrator of general services to charge the judicial branch no more rent than that which represents the actual costs of operating and maintaining its facilities. Specifically, it prohibits the General Services Administration from including amounts for capital costs, real estate taxes, except for those taxes actually paid by the administrator of general services to lessors, or administrative fees in rental charges.

The current budgetary problems caused by the judiciary's rental payments must be addressed. In fiscal terms, since 1986, the Federal Courts' rental payments to GSA have increased from \$133 million to \$912 million. The percentage of the judiciary's operating budget devoted to rent payments has escalated sharply from 15.7 percent in 1986 to about 22 percent in 2004. During this same time, the share of the Federal budget provided to the judiciary has dwindled as Congress has sought to tackle our Nation's increasing budget deficit. Even as overall resources available to the judiciary dwindle, analysts project that rental payments will reach approximately \$1.2 billion by 2009, which will be an estimated 25 percent of the judiciary's annual operating budget.

I believe that the courts are doing everything they possibly can to contain their costs without adversely affecting the administration of justice. The Federal judiciary has imposed a 24-month moratorium on the construction of any new courthouses and has stopped planning for many projects. If rent relief is not granted to the judiciary, more personnel cuts will be required in the near future, including the loss of another 4,000 jobs over the next 4 years.

In my view, this constitutes a near crisis in the Federal judiciary. Space and appropriate personnel play a significant role in our judicial system. The ready availability of appropriate courtrooms, jury deliberation and assembly rooms, and workspace for sup-

port staff all facilitate the administration of justice. Appropriate space for drug testing and monitoring of persons under supervision by Federal probation officers is of the utmost importance. It is critical that the courts have all the tools they need to carry out their mission. Providing this relief to the judiciary will allow them to improve the administration of justice for all Americans.

Additionally, serious building-related security problems in existing courthouses are also a key consideration. Courthouses should have secure passage for detainees to be transported, separating public passageways from these individuals. Unfortunately, this is not the case in many courthouses, including several courthouses in my home state of Texas. As an example, I recently wrote to Attorney General Gonzales to urge him to ensure that funding is granted to fix security concerns identified at the Midland Federal Courthouse as soon as possible. Affording the judiciary rent relief so they can devote more money to courthouse security is a good first step.

Finally, I think it is important to point out that this bill addresses the unequal treatment generally afforded the lower Federal courts. Many of the buildings used by other agencies and branches of the Federal Government are exempt from rent. For example, the Department of Defense pays no rent to GSA on the Pentagon or on military bases. The Treasury Department, which once housed GSA, pays no rent on the main Treasury building or on its Mints. The Supreme Court—unlike the lower Federal courts—pays no rent. Likewise, the Federal Reserve Board, the FDIC, and many other quasi-federal agencies do not pay rent to GSA. There is no rent paid on Federal prisons, embassies, NIH facilities, nuclear facilities, VA hospitals, EPA labs, or national parks and national forest facilities. Congress does not pay rent on the Capitol Building we're deliberating in today. Nor does Congress pay rent on the Senate or House office buildings or surrounding structures. Congress is charged rent by GSA only for a small amount of space for congressional State and district offices. The Federal judiciary—specifically, the lower Federal courts—lack that same advantage. This bill takes a step towards granting the judiciary equal treatment.

It is important that all who enter our Nation's courts are ensured fair and equitable treatment. This bill is a critical component in achieving this goal. I will work with Senator SPECTER and the other co-sponsors to get this bill moving through the judiciary committee as soon as possible.

PROVIDING RELIEF FOR THE FEDERAL JUDICIARY FROM EXCESSIVE RENT CHARGES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, yesterday Chairman SPECTER introduced a bill I cosponsored to provide relief for

the Federal judiciary from excessive rent charges assessed by the General Services Administration, GSA, for the use of courthouses and other spaces occupied by the courts across the Nation. Since 1986, the Federal courts' rental payments to GSA have increased dramatically, with the percentage of the judiciary's operating budget devoted to rent payments escalating from 15.7 percent in 1986 to approximately 22 percent in 2004. If no changes are made, this percentage is expected to continue to rise sharply. This legislation brings these rent charges under control by capping the rent charges at GSA's actual costs of operating and maintaining accommodations provided to the judicial branch, by specifying that certain capital costs, taxes, and administrative fees shall not be included in GSA's rent charges, and by establishing a means for repayment over time for the future costs of repair and alteration projects performed by GSA.

As the ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I have been concerned about the adverse effect of these rent payments on the administration of justice. On May 13, 2005, a bipartisan group of 11 members of the Judiciary Committee, including Chairman SPECTER and myself, sent a letter to GSA asking it to exercise its authority to exempt the judicial branch from all rental payments except those required to operate and maintain Federal court buildings and related costs. GSA's response has not been adequate. As set forth in that letter, the excessive rent paid by the judiciary will exacerbate severe personnel shortages by forcing more cuts and could also have impacts on courthouse security. The rent relief provided in this bill will help ensure that the judiciary continues to have the tools it needs to carry out its unique and vital function.

KATRINA ON THE GROUND

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina tore through the gulf coast States leaving in its wake death and destruction that none of us will soon forget. In the immediate aftermath, graphic images of people struggling to escape the flooding in New Orleans and digging through the rubble of their homes in Mississippi and Alabama filled our television sets and newspapers. People were outraged at the Government's response. They volunteered their time to aid in rescues. They donated their money to help the victims. But many soon moved on.

The problems faced by the residents of the gulf coast, however, have not gone away. Rebuilding is underway, but it will take years. We cannot forget the work that still needs to be done or the people who are still struggling.

That is why I am so impressed with a new volunteer initiative called Katrina on the Ground. Katrina on the Ground, or KOTG, will bring together students from across the country to help rebuild