

"They've taken emergency management away from the emergency managers," complained Morrie Goodman, who was FEMA's chief spokesman during the Clinton administration.

Michael Chertoff, secretary of homeland security, acknowledged in interviews on Sunday that Washington was insufficiently prepared for the hurricane that laid waste to New Orleans and surrounding areas. But he defended its performance by arguing that the size of the storm was beyond anything his department could have anticipated and that primary responsibility for handling emergencies rested with state and local, not federal, officials.

His remarks, which echoed earlier statements by President George W. Bush, prompted withering rebukes both from former senior FEMA staffers and outside experts. "They can't do that," former agency chief of staff Jane Bullock said of administration efforts to shift responsibility away from Washington. "The moment the president declared a federal disaster, it became a federal responsibility."

THE TRAGEDY OF HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Indiana (Ms. CARSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. CARSON. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you all Americans for your prayers, your volunteerism, your most generous financial support, and all of the ways that you attempted to relieve some of the pain of those evacuees who were affected. My prayers continue.

The United States Congress, Members of the United States Congress, should board the plane transportation and go to the gulf, go to Mississippi, go to Louisiana, and all the other affected places. Congress should go, not just watch it on television, because it is very heart-wrenching, and I think we ought to be there in person.

I think we need to understand what happened to the young man whose mother cried out for help. On a Monday they promised her help was coming. On Tuesday they promised her it would be there shortly. On Wednesday it would be there in just a few. On Thursday, help is on the way. On Friday she drowned. Most heart-wrenching story that I have seen.

In my district, Calvary Temple sent nine buses after they got authorized by the American Red Cross to go down. But once they got there, FEMA would not allow them to board people on the buses. And they only allowed 12 people to get on nine buses, and the rest of the buses returned to Indianapolis empty, which is tragic.

We have some of the most sophisticated hospital ships in the whole world that sit right out here at Virginia. It took them 5 days to even get started to go down to the gulf, when it was clear that the help of the ships and the midshipmen and all the medical supplies on board were needed immediately.

We need to immediately reinstitute WPA days, Work Progress Administration days, that worked so well during

the Roosevelt administration and that allowed all of these unemployed people that we have now in the South to begin to rebuild their own cities. And I know that numerous of them would be more than happy to allow the government to pay them while they rebuild their own cities. It is like Charles Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities," the worst of times. But we could augment legislation to make it better times for the people that were so tragically affected. And I encourage Congress to do that.

Mr. Speaker, there have been so many comments made that I was going to make, and I will not replicate them. But in closing, I would like to remind us that every Member of this Congress should get together, not all at the same time, it is too many of them. But day after day after day we need to take a trip to the gulf, meet the people there, help serve the homeless, help serve the hungry, take clothes, our own money used, take clothes, take water, take diapers, take hygiene equipment. We need to personally be involved ourselves. And we need to get on the road right away.

Mr. Speaker, I regretfully rise today to join a growing chorus of American outrage in the wake of the Hurricane Katrina disaster on the Gulf Coast.

My purpose tonight is not to assign blame for this tragedy onto any single official or agency, but to express my shame and the shame of my constituents at the failure of our government to serve its citizens when they needed it most. Mr. Speaker, the American people know that this great Nation can do better. They deserve answers. They deserve results.

When I talk to my constituents I hear their indignation that a city like New Orleans, which lies below sea level and is so obviously vulnerable to hurricanes, was turned down repeatedly in recent years by its Federal Government for assistance in shoring up levees and reinforcing the ailing water pumps which kept the city above ground.

I hear anger that, in a city where with several days' notice of an imminent landfall of the hurricane, in a city where one third of all residents live below the poverty line, the only real option for evacuation was the ownership and deployment of privately owned automobiles.

Mr. Speaker, families living on less than \$9,000 a year don't own cars. And because the hurricane came at the end of the month, low-wage earners living from paycheck to paycheck could not afford passage even if they had them. It was these poor, overwhelmingly African-American residents who were left to die in the thousands. The American public knows this tragedy could have been avoided. They deserve answers. They deserve results.

And now, with as much as 10,000 feared dead and thousands more waiting for housing, food, and other supplies, Americans from across this country who have offered their assistance and opened their cities to displaced citizens from Louisiana and Mississippi are being turned down by FEMA.

Last weekend a caravan of relief supplies and buses organized by local charities in my hometown of Indianapolis arrived in New Orleans to help evacuate the homeless to Indianapolis but was sent home by FEMA officials

who insist that such generosity first pass through exorbitant layers of red tape before reaching citizens in need.

Never before has the great disconnect between the American public and its government been so clear.

The management of this disaster calls into question our readiness to deal with similar emergencies, including future terrorist attacks that may displace citizens and require massive relief efforts. But it also exposes the colossal failures of this Congress. And for that the American public deserves answers. They deserve results.

The business of this body has for too long been dominated by legislation that explicitly benefits the wealthy at the expense of our Nation's poor, such as the bankruptcy bill, the repeal of the estate tax, the President's devastating income tax proposals, and multiple bills shielding corporations from lawsuits, which are often the only means to reverse the injustices inflicted on our forgotten poorest citizens by our richest and most powerful.

Indeed, this Congress and this administration have not dared acknowledge the plight of the poor and less fortunate in this country. Now, finally, we have no choice.

In the wake of this profound tragedy, let us find the strength to face the failures of our past and turn toward policies that aim to protect all our citizens from harm.

HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, what we are witnessing in Louisiana and in Mississippi right now is the complete meltdown of the Federal Government, and in particular, the Department of Homeland Security. Given that the Federal Government can't even dole out adequate assistance to this one area of the country during this tragedy, how can U.S. citizens feel safe at a time when we are faced with the threat of a terrorist attack on a national level?

What I find truly amazing is that the disaster planners have said that a direct hurricane strike on New Orleans is one of the top 3 catastrophic scenarios facing our Nation. So how is it that the agencies have been so slow to respond to this crisis, claiming to have been caught off guard? The President himself said that the levee breach was not anticipated . . . how can that possibly be true? In addition, while the Superdome has long been considered as the city's main hurricane refuge spot, no supplies were stocked there before the storm hit on Monday. It is simply incomprehensible to me how Federal officials had not deployed equipment and relief supplies before Katrina struck land, or even bothered to mobilize in the region beforehand? This lack of response is outright shameful, an outrage, and an embarrassment!

This is one more example of the complete failure of the Federal Government under the Republican led administration. Since 9/11, the Republican led Congress has given natural disaster preparedness secondary status in the Federal budget, undermining the effectiveness of FEMA, and has cut funding for the Army Corps floor control projects in and around New Orleans, and throughout the Nation.