

In the post 9/11 reorganization, FEMA joined 21 other agencies to form the new Homeland Security Department, and was stripped of the Cabinet rank that had allowed it to report directly to the President. Later, in a further department shuffle back in July, FEMA lost its mission of working with State and local governments on preparedness plans even before a disaster hits. FEMA used to be a very powerful organization, with veteran staffers, that is, up until the Bush administration threw everything together into one huge department, ironically labeling it "Homeland Security." What the new department should have been called is the "Department of Insecurity!"

And now, as many here in Washington and around the country have been urging for the agency to have its independence restored, the Republican Congress has just taken away people and money, as well as power and authority from FEMA, doing away with our national security while doling out tax cuts for the rich. This agency, which in the past has given out hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to State and local responders, has now lost the ability to do so, leaving grant giving in the hands of the overextended Homeland Security Department. Moreover, the Bush administration has canceled other FEMA programs, including a Clinton administration-era disaster mitigation effort known as Project Impact. And what's more, at a time in our history when homeland security experts are calling for a greater emphasis on preparing for calamity, Michael Brown, FEMA's current director, has faced years of funding cuts, personnel departures and the downgrading of the department. And of course, worse yet, Michael Brown himself is a mere political appointee, who obtained his current position because of his close friendship with Joe M. Allbaugh, who managed President Bush's 2000 presidential campaign. I think many would agree with me that for a position as important as this one, past experience in emergency management is crucial.

One other terrible decision made previously in the administration was the transferring of the Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security. Let us remember that the Coast Guard was the first agency to respond to the terrorist attacks on September 11th. Within minutes after the attacks, their ships were guarding our bridges and waterways.

In closing, it is clear that we really need to evaluate our country's ability to handle national disasters. It is simply unacceptable for the Federal Government to wait until there are bodies floating down rivers to begin activating the National Guard! Again, I would have hoped that FEMA would have had a contingency plan in the case of a major hurricane hitting the Gulf Coast. Yet obviously, they did not.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take my Special Order at this time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

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

HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, hurricanes may be natural disasters, but Hurricane Katrina has made it clear to anyone in the world with a television that who lives and who dies, who is left to suffer, who is left without the most basic necessities of life, who is left without medical care as a result of that disaster is very much related to who you are.

We have watched with horror and rapidly growing anger as Katrina came and went and left behind many, overwhelmingly poor, black, old, sick, to drown, to be stranded, to be herded into shelters under filthy, inhuman conditions, to be left in sweltering heat without water and food and to be cut off from health care. Why did it take aid and security so long to arrive?

□ 1930

We have received no answer. Why were we so unprepared? We have received no answer.

What kind of shelters are planned without stockpiles of water and food as well as basic sanitation, medical personnel, and emergency power? We have received no answer.

Why did we not immediately press into service every able-bodied National Guard member? Why did we not immediately bring into service emergency teams from cities across the country? We have received no answer.

Why have we not moved to use unoccupied military barracks to house families left homeless by the storm? We have received no answer.

Where are the plans and the resources to stabilize the lives of hundreds of thousands with no homes, no jobs, no schools? We have received no answers.

Where are the plans and the resources to rebuild all that has been destroyed and to heal the families and communities left so devastated? We have received no answers.

When will we act to rein in the profiteering by big oil? We have received no answer.

How much can we do to lessen the impact of big storms by restoring natural buffers like wetlands, ending our disinvestment in infrastructure such as levees and acting to halt global warming? We have received no answer.

Ordinary Americans have responded without reservation. They have opened their hearts and their wallets. They have already given hundreds of millions of dollars. They have given of their time and their material possessions. Many have opened their homes.

We thank all of those who have contributed and we urge every household to find some way to join this great patriotic effort. Despite the sometimes heroic efforts of many frontline first responders, America's response to Katrina has been every bit as big a disaster as the storm itself.

It is government, especially the Federal Government, that has failed. "Un-

acceptable" is much too weak a term to describe that response to this disaster. It is time, it is past time, to put America's priorities straight and get them straight today.

I call upon the President to immediately mobilize adequate resources, medical supplies, personnel, security, transportation, and move those who are still in harm's way to safety. We call on the administration to present to Congress an emergency plan and a budget to address the needs of all those left homeless and jobless while their homes and communities are being rebuilt.

I call on the President to initiate an emergency public works program to rebuild America, to restore infrastructure, roads, bridges, water and sewers; and to mesh with private-sector insurance to rebuild every home, every small business.

We have a clear choice. We can use this as an opportunity to offer thousands, especially our young people, a chance to work to learn new skills from construction to nursing, or we can abandon tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands who have been uprooted and displaced, who have lost their material possessions, but each of whom is still a unique and irreplaceable person with untapped resources.

The President indicated that there is no limit to what we will spend in Iraq. I ask, how much will we spend in America?

I thank all of those in my immediate community, from the governor to the mayor to the president of our county board, all elected officials, churches, members of organizations and groups. I am proud to live in Chicago and in Illinois where we have opened our hearts and our wallets, and I simply ask that our Federal Government do the same.

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

(Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. REICHERT). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Ohio?

There was no objection.

SWEEP AROUND OUR OWN FRONT DOOR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Ohio (Mrs. JONES) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I stand today concerned about what happened on the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Katrina. I hope that apart from

this devastation we can say that Hurricane Katrina has brought to light the atrocities that have been going on for years across our country.

Only yesterday in Cleveland, Ohio, we were notified that 400 evacuees would be coming to Cleveland tomorrow that we were supposed to support. Only 2 hours ago, we learned that they were not coming.

This is a part of that same situation we are talking about, that FEMA does not know what they are doing. What we are concerned about is people being put on a bus, being told, "We are going to take you somewhere," and the people do not even know where they are going. It is part of denying these evacuees dignity, denying them an opportunity to say that we are Americans and we are entitled to the very same democracy that everyone else is entitled to.

Far too long we have neglected the underprivileged of this country, and we are quick to criticize others for not taking care of their own. However, we have all forgotten the poor in our country and we are hoping this will be an opportunity again for this country to address the issue of poverty, the lack of housing, the lack of education, the lack of the ability to create wealth, the lack of opportunity to grow African American and small businesses.

A recent study by the Population Reference Bureau noted that the Orleans Parish, Louisiana, and Harrison County, Mississippi, are counties that are homes to New Orleans and Biloxi and have median incomes that are just above \$32,000, 44 percent below that of the national average. I will not read through all the statistics that I have, but I will say these statistics point out the dilemma that we face as a result of poverty being rampant in our country. It is unacceptable. It is unacceptable.

Now, the President said it was unacceptable what FEMA did, but since saying that he is backing off on his statement about its being unacceptable.

The other thing I need to point out is, people keep saying to those of us who are speaking out that we should not place any blame, that we should be quiet and move forward. But the reality is, you have got to own up to your mistakes before you can correct those mistakes. And the United States Government needs to own up to the mistakes that they made over the past few days with regard to this.

There is a gospel song that says, "Sweep around your own front door," and that is what we need to do in America is sweep around our front doors across this country, the doors that used to exist, the doors that no longer exist.

It is our job, and we are calling upon people across America to say that it is unacceptable, that what we have seen over the past few days from our government is unacceptable, that it is not permissible and that the people of America, the people who have been

devastated by the storm, deserve to have the same kind of support, the same kind of encouragement that all other Americans want.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

GOVERNMENT FAILS MOST VULNERABLE

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

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, this is a very special time in American history. We have experienced one of the greatest catastrophes in the history of this country. We have lost lives, and we have seen this catastrophe mismanaged in ways that most of us could never have imagined.

Mr. Speaker, I was sitting at home watching television, and for 3 days or more, I saw almost 30,000 people in front of the Convention Center in New Orleans waiting for food, waiting for water, waiting for some assistance. They waited and they waited and nothing happened.

I decided to leave Los Angeles and join with some of my friends in New Orleans to see what was going on. After all, I am the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity of the Committee on Financial Services; and when people are homeless in America, particularly 30,000 as a result of a catastrophe, I need to understand what I can do to make sure that those people are housed, that they get some kind of shelter.

So I went to New Orleans and was met by State Senator Cleo Fields, and he and his staff and others, we joined together and we went to the State Police compound, motor vehicle compound where people were gathered. All of our agencies were gathered there. The governor of the State was there. Mr. Chertoff was there, representing Homeland Security. Mr. Michael Brown was there, representing FEMA. The National Guard was represented and on and on and on.

I had an opportunity to speak with the governor. I had an opportunity to speak with Mr. James Lee Witt, who is now advisor to the governor, who was once head of FEMA, to try and find out what was going on and where the breakdown was.

What became very, very clear in my interactions there early on in one of my visits was that there certainly had been a breakdown, that responsibility had not been accepted, assumed, implemented in ways that we expected. And what surprised me more than anything

else was the fact that we have spent a lot of time organizing Homeland Security. We have spent millions of dollars making sure that there are plans in cities and States. We have spent millions of dollars identifying the first responders and their responsibility. But all of the sudden we have a catastrophe that could have been a terrorist attack.

The levee that broke, that was vulnerable and could have been attacked by a terrorist, and this is the operation that was supposed to respond, it had fallen apart. It did not happen. And poor people, the most vulnerable of people, were left without any protection.

By the time that I got there, they had started to move the people to the Louis Armstrong Airport. This had become a staging ground, and the buses were supposed to go there to take them to shelters that had been identified all over the State. And they were supposed to have airlifts that were taking them even farther out of State.

Cleo Fields, a State senator was trying to get them to open England Air Force Base. It is an Air Force base that is right there in the area, Alexandria, Louisiana, that is all boarded up, has 450 dormitories unused. He brought with him three huge buses, and he told the governor and everybody else, Mr. Chertoff and everybody else, that he was going to fill these buses up with people from the Convention Center and people along the highway and people at the airport, and he was going to take them to England Air Force Base and he was going to force them to open it up and let them in and give them some safe and secure place to live until they could get permanent housing.

We put them on the buses and we drove into the Louis Armstrong Airport and it was a sight that I shall never forget in my life. There were thousands of people on the sidewalks, in wheelchairs, people who did not know what their future held. We finally got inside the airport. Thousands of people, people who needed medication, people who needed insulin, there were people who had not been attended to.

Well, we stayed there a few days and we went to a number of shelters up and down the State. We were not only in shelters in Louisiana, the top part of the State, but the bottom line is this, Mr. Speaker, our government failed us, and they failed the most vulnerable people.

We cannot let this get swept under the rug. We have to keep this before the American people. It does not appear that the attitude exists here that we will pay attention in the way we paid attention to 9/11. But we have to make sure that we do not fail the people again and again. We have got to get them out of these temporary shelters. We have got to get them into permanent housing and that is some responsibility that we are going to accept.