

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.