

ought to be to work together and march together toward a common goal. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask to be given 10 minutes from the Democratic morning business and that I be notified when I have consumed 9 minutes of the 10.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator will be notified.

HURRICANE KATRINA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last Friday, I joined 13 of my colleagues and went to view the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, LA, and Mississippi. It was a sight which I will never forget. This great bustling city of New Orleans is now a ghost town with hardly any activity other than a few people returning to their homes trying to retrieve lost treasures left behind from the flood—trying to put their lives back together by gathering all of this water-laden debris and tossing it outside in the hopes they might save their structures.

We then went over to Mississippi where it was a stunning scene in village and community and town after town—to see subdivisions that have been wiped away, to look down at what appeared to be 50 concrete slabs and to see no evidence of debris but evidence of destruction, all gone, scoured from the Earth by these horrible hurricane winds and waves which consumed some of these communities.

A man in Pass Christian in Mississippi told us of the panic that set in when the remaining villagers went to the library with hurricane-proof windows, believing they might be safe, and then, as a 28-foot wave hit this library, thinking they all might drown right there in that building at that moment. I can't imagine what that was like. I can't imagine what it was like for so many who went through this devastating experience. Some are trying to come to grips with their future and there lives.

The President came to the American people last week at Jackson Square in New Orleans and made a speech which I think will be important for generations to come. I was asked to react to it, and I said I think the President has given us an agenda that we have to follow—to rebuild the gulf coast, to rebuild the lives and the communities. But I believed then, and I believe now, that the President's call for this unity as a nation and this community of caring also has to be called for fiscal responsibility and accountability. We have to rebuild the gulf coast and help Katrina victims rebuild their lives. It is in our national interest. It is part of our national character. We rally as Americans to help our fellow Americans.

But I have a real concern. Instead of the "Big Easy," people are getting a big uneasy feeling about where Katrina

reconstruction effort is headed and who is in charge. Several published reports say the person heading up the administration's Katrina rebuilding project is none other than Karl Rove, the President's long-time political director. That is an incredible suggestion—that Karl Rove will have responsibility for the Katrina reconstruction effort, the No. 1 politician, the No. 1 political operative in the White House. Have we learned nothing?

Consider what happened when Katrina struck. FEMA was not there. Michael Brown is now gone. But how did he get in a position to be in charge of FEMA? It was because of political connections. He didn't have the experience. He didn't have the resume. He didn't have the skills needed when he faced the greatest natural disaster in our history. What was his claim to this job to head FEMA? His claim was he was a college roommate of Joe Allbaugh, who happened to be the President's Chief of Staff and campaign director in Texas who, when he left the FEMA agency to become a consultant, turned it over to Michael Brown, his college roommate, to take over—this little daisy chain of politicians who played out with disastrous incompetence when Katrina struck.

Now this administration, instead of moving away from the politicians to the professionals when it comes to rebuilding, has decided that Karl Rove is going to be in charge—the same Karl Rove who, just a few weeks ago in a political speech, said the Democrats didn't share the Republicans' zeal for stopping the war on terrorism; the same Karl Rove who won't give us straight answers when it comes to his role in revealing the identity of Valerie Plame, an undercover CIA operative, which disclosure of her identity not only endangered her life but the lives of many other career employees; the same Karl Rove who incidentally will take his mind off of the Katrina reconstruction effort long enough to go to North Dakota on this Saturday night for a big political rally.

Is this the person we want in charge of \$60 billion or \$100 billion in reconstruction funds? I hope not. I hope the President reconsiders.

This is a troubling admission—that this administration doesn't have leadership to turn to in time of crisis, if the best the President can find is his political adviser, Karl Rove, to deal with the disaster of Katrina.

What have we seen so far? The Wall Street Journal said last week:

The Bush administration is importing many of the contract practices blamed for spending abuses in Iraq as it begins the largest and costliest rebuilding effort in United States history.

We know what happened in Iraq—no-bid contracts to Halliburton and the buddies of this administration, contracts that have never been investigated by this Congress. And here they go again with Katrina and with Karl Rove keeping his watchful eye on what is being done.

The Wall Street Journal article went on to say:

The first large-scale contracts awarded to Hurricane Katrina, as in Iraq, were awarded without competitive bidding, using so-called "cost-plus" provisions that guarantee contractors certain profits regardless of how much they spend.

It turns out that not only are there no-bid contracts, but coincidentally they happen to be going to the clients of Joe Allbaugh. Remember that name? I mentioned him earlier. He was the President's political campaign director in Texas who became the head of FEMA and who left to be a consultant, and is now making certain that his clients get \$100 million no-bid contracts.

When is this going to end? When are we going to have true accountability? Once again, we see the same names coming out of Hurricane Katrina—Halliburton, Kellogg, Brown & Root—the names of Joe Allbaugh's clients who are, once again, coming up with these contracts.

If it wasn't bad enough, this morning's Washington Post, on the front page, tells the story of a Bush official arrested in a corruption probe. It says:

The Bush administration's top Federal procurement official resigned Friday and was arrested yesterday, accused of lying and obstructing a criminal investigation into Republican lobbyist Jack Abramoff's dealings with the Federal Government. It was the first criminal complaint filed against a government official in the ongoing corruption probe related to Abramoff's activities in Washington.

The complaint, filed by the FBI, alleges that David H. Safavian, 38, a White House procurement official involved until last week in Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, made repeated false statements to government officials and investigators about a golf trip with Abramoff to Scotland in 2002.

The top official in the White House that was in charge of procurement involved in the Katrina effort not only resigned but was arrested for misleading the Federal Government in terms of his involvement with the Republican lobbyists.

Now the administration comes out and says they found just the person to look into the mistakes of Hurricane Katrina. It is a woman by the name of Frances Townsend. I do not know her. She may be a very competent individual. But how in the world can we get to the truth of the question as to what went wrong with Hurricane Katrina? How can we really hope to discover the incompetence that led to all of this human suffering and devastation if the administration is going to investigate itself?

We know from 9/11 that the only way we got to the heart of the matter, the critical questions about what went wrong on 9/11, was with an independent, nonpartisan commission. Yet this administration resisted the efforts of that 9/11 commission being created and today resists the efforts of an independent, nonpartisan commission to look into what went wrong with Hurricane Katrina.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER.) The Senator has 1 minute remaining.

Mr. DURBIN. Thank you, Mr. President.

I will conclude by saying this: We owe it to the victims and their families and to the American people and the American taxpayers to get honest answers about what went wrong with Katrina, and to put people in charge to make certain that we don't waste the billions of dollars that are going to be spent in this reconstruction effort. Putting Karl Rove in charge makes no sense whatsoever. He has no resume and no skills other than running political campaigns. If he is being put in place to protect the President politically, that decision does not serve the best interests of the American people nor the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

It is time to get to the bottom of this. If Congress will not have an honest investigation of what happened with Hurricane Katrina, we need to have this nonpartisan, independent commission like the 9/11 Commission to answer the questions about what went wrong and to make certain that we don't replicate those mistakes in the expenditure of these funds in the future.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware is recognized.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, before Senator DURBIN leaves the floor, he has mentioned the 9/11 Commission. When he and I were first elected in the Congress in 1982—to the House—we arrived at a time when Social Security was not just rumored to be in dire straits but was in very dire straits. And an earlier commission was created similar to the 9/11 Commission but different as well. The Republican Members were appointed by President Reagan. As I recall, the Democratic Members were appointed by Democratic Speaker, Tip O'Neill, and I think by Senator ROBERT BYRD. The Blue Ribbon Commission was chaired by Alan Greenspan, with Members Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Robert Dole, and Claude Pepper, with whom we served in the House. They worked for a whole year trying to couple a combination of benefit cuts and revenue increases to enable us to put Social Security on a sound footing for another quarter of a century. I think that serves as a good role model as well as the 9/11 Commission, which Senator DURBIN mentioned.

While he was on the floor, I wanted to remind him and us of that. But I think our first response to the catastrophe is to make sure that people who need help get help.

First of all, get help in getting out of dangerous places to safe places, get help in reuniting families, get help in making certain their medical needs are met, having something to eat and drink, making sure the kids from K-12th grade are getting to the schools they need to get into, making sure students who have been displaced in col-

lege have a chance to get back in a college or a university to continue their studies without losing a quarter or a semester or a year, helping to create jobs and getting the economy moving in places that have been destroyed or badly damaged. Those are the kinds of things that need to be done and are being done.

While our startup was slow and disappointing, I believe, as time goes by, we are doing better. I commend all—not just in government, not just the first responders, not just the Guard, not just FEMA, which is doing a better job today, but also a lot of folks who are giving of themselves—volunteers from my State, and all other States, who have gone to the region, giving blood, and raising money in our home States, receiving folks who have been displaced, to give them a home, a place to live, and a job for a while. Those efforts are to be commended. Those are the first responders. Maybe I should say second responders because the first responders were not even responding.

Second, last week, Senator COBURN, Senator OBAMA, and I spoke about the introduction of legislation which is supported by Senator FRIST, by Senator REID, our respective leaders, to create a CFO—chief financial officer—to serve as a watchdog so we don't find ourselves 6 months or 12 months from now looking back to see that we spent X billions so foolishly in response to Katrina, to make sure we get out ahead of this expenditure as best we can rather than looking at it after the money has already been spent, in some cases inappropriately.

The amount of money that is going to be spent in Katrina relief over the next couple of months will dwarf the annual appropriations that go to most of our Federal departments. Every one of our Federal departments has a chief financial officer. We need to make sure, when we are spending this much money this quickly to try to help a lot of people in a hurry, that we spend it wisely.

It is a bipartisan issue. We believe one of the ways to make sure we do that is to have a chief financial officer who is well qualified and can get on the job and do the work quickly.

The third thing I mention is oversight. I serve on the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. We have obvious oversight of a good deal of what is going on, including the Homeland Security Department, FEMA, the Coast Guard, and any number of responder agencies. We have a responsibility to do our oversight. We have begun that oversight with hearings last week and informal hearings the week before that. We will continue this week and next week and on and on.

Our interest is in finding out what we did well, what we did collectively—State, local, Federal, volunteer organizations, military, National Guard, Armed Forces—and what we did not do well. Then, if this happens again—and

we have another hurricane that is trying to round the corner in Key West today—to make sure if this comes north and revisits again, whether New Orleans, God forbid, or Mississippi—that we are better prepared to do more of the right things.

The last thing is the point Senator DURBIN raised, the notion of an independent commission. I was skeptical as to whether or not the 9/11 Commission would enable Congress to do much good with respect to restructuring of our intelligence operations in this country. The intelligence operation in place had not been changed much for 50 years. I don't know if there was any reason to believe five Republicans and five Democrats could somehow find common ground and entice the rest of Congress to do the same thing, to work with the President to change in substantial, far-reaching ways the way our intelligence community works in this country. They did, and the 9/11 Commission provides an excellent template, role model, if you will, for how we should, once the first surge of oversight activity and the successive waves of help and aid are out the door, proceed to make sure a couple months from now we are in a position, whether it is five Republicans and five Democrats—it could be a chairman appointed by the committee, a vice chairman appointed by our leadership, but to put in place a commission that might have the kind of success not for us, and not just for them, but for our country.

Success would be measured by better ensuring that a lot of the good things that happened this time in response to Katrina happen the next time—and we know there will be a next time—and we reduce the likelihood that some of the same mistakes and foolish choices will be made.

The American people would approve of that. It is great the President has asked the Cabinet Secretaries to look at what they did within their departments to make sure what they did was right, it made sense, and was appropriate. It is all well and good to have oversight here, but it would be helpful to have an independent commission that could stand back, not distracted by other issues we are distracted with each day, and impartially—led by people such as Governor Tom Kean and former Congressman Lee Hamilton—with good staff and only with this issue to focus on, and figure out what went well, what went badly, and how we can do better next time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 12 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Please indicate when 2 minutes are remaining.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair is happy to do so.

KATRINA'S DISPLACED SCHOOLCHILDREN

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I will talk this morning about helping all of Katrina's displaced schoolchildren. Each weekend when I go home to Tennessee, the people who elected me teach me about how we should be doing our jobs in Washington, DC. This is not a lesson they shout from the rooftops. It is a lesson they live by their own example, and we would be wise to follow.

Two weeks ago in Maryville, my hometown, it was Al Gore flying a planeload of evacuees from New Orleans into one of Tennessee's most Republican counties. Nobody asked about anybody's politics. Everybody just pitched in to help.

Last weekend, members of the church where I am an elder, Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville, sent \$80,000 and a truckload of clothes and Clorox to southern Mississippi. "The Presbyterians are here," one grateful Mississippi man relayed to his friends on his cell phone to say, "and they have Clorox." When the Clorox was passed out, nobody asked if anybody was a Presbyterian.

And now this Sunday, the headline in the Tennessean, the Nashville newspaper, was:

Private schools Welcome Those Displaced by Katrina.

According to the newspaper:

A growing number of private schools in Middle Tennessee [in the Nashville area] . . . have volunteered to help students displaced by Katrina. Many of them are also waiving or drastically discounting tuition and fees for these students and some also accept evacuees from public schools.

Continuing the quote, "These children are in crisis. They have been displaced, but they have found a home," said the principal of Father Ryan High School who has accepted 20 students and is trying to accommodate every student who shows up.

Father Ryan High School is waiving the \$6,880 tuition, the \$350 activity fee, and the \$500 in books for displaced students it simply calls "transfers." "It's not all about money," said the principal. "There is no amount of money that equals being family," he said.

Public schools, by law, have to accept all children. And Tennessee's public schools have made room for more than 3,000 of Katrina's displaced school children.

Our public schools have been greatly helped by these private schools, who do not have to accept anybody. In Tennessee, private schools have accepted at least 400 students, and probably many more.

"We couldn't sit quietly and do nothing. We felt a need to reach out," said the headmaster of Webb school in Bell Buckle, which is waiving the \$29,500 room and board for up to 30 students. "No one flinched. Everybody just responded with, what can we do to help?" said the headmaster at Webb school in Bell Buckle.

Especially in Memphis and Shelby County, where so many displaced students have gone up the Mississippi River from New Orleans, the willingness of private schools to accept these students is a huge help to overcrowded public schools.

In Baton Rouge, according to a report this morning on National Public Radio, there are 5,000 to 10,000 of these displaced private school students who have no school to attend. To accommodate them, the Catholic Diocese in Baton Rouge is struggling to establish satellite schools, some located great distances away, which these students will have to attend at night.

These private schools that reach out are filling a huge need because the four Louisiana parishes hit the hardest had nearly one-third, or 61,000, of their 187,000 students in private schools, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

That is the story and the lesson from Tennessee.

The story in Washington last weekend, unfortunately, was different. According to Saturday's Washington Post, when the President proposed temporary emergency disaster legislation that would help all of Katrina's 372,000 displaced school children during the rest of this school year, the Senator from Massachusetts and some teachers' unions objected. Senator KENNEDY said:

I am extremely disappointed that [the President] has proposed this relief using such a politically charged approach. This is not [the] time for a partisan political debate on vouchers.

I absolutely agree with that last sentence. This is not the time for a partisan political debate on vouchers.

This is the time for those of us in the Senate to do what Tennesseans and Americans all across our country are doing: opening our arms and asking what we can do to help all displaced children not just some school children.

As the Presiding Officer knows so well, Katrina displaced 20 times more families than any natural disaster in the history of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Mr. President, 372,000 of those displaced persons are children who were just beginning the K-12 school year, and 73,000 more are college students.

The President has proposed \$2.6 billion in funding for students in elementary and secondary schools and colleges. Under the President's proposal, colleges and universities would receive \$1,000 for each displaced student enrolled; no person in an affected area in Louisiana, Mississippi, or Alabama would have to pay interest on their

student loans for the next 6 months; public school districts would receive up to 90 percent of the State's per-pupil expenditure, up to \$7,500 per student; and \$488 million would go to help displaced students who attend private schools.

The President is not throwing out a lifeline to just some displaced students. He is trying to help them all. The private schools in Tennessee are not turning their backs. They are opening their arms. Katrina did not discriminate among children and neither should we. The only politically charged approaches around here are coming from those who oppose helping every child.

For Heaven's sake, this is not the beginning of some big, new voucher program. It is the beginning, hopefully, of a big, new 1-year effort to help children who are in desperate trouble. The best way to do it, in most cases, is simply to let the money follow the child or the person who needs help.

We have already approved vouchers that follow displaced persons for housing in this exceptional case. Food stamps are vouchers, and they are helping in this exceptional case. No one is suggesting a displaced mother cannot take her Federal daycare voucher to a Catholic daycare center in these exceptional cases. No one is suggesting we cannot pay Boston College or Harvard University \$1,000 for enrolling a displaced student who was set to attend Loyola or Xavier in New Orleans.

Scholars agree there is no constitutional issue here. So are we going to stand here and argue about old ideologies and leave these displaced children standing on the levee because the only doors that are open to them for this 1 year happen to be to a private school?

At the end of World War II, a grateful Nation enacted the GI bill, giving veterans scholarships for college. A lot of veterans had these vouchers for college but no high school degree. So thousands of veterans took their GI vouchers to Catholic high schools to earn their high school diploma. That did not create a big, new voucher program for high schools, this will not either. This is a one year exceptional disaster relief program for kids from the gulf coast who desperately need help.

The public schools are brimming over. They need help from private schools. I hope those who are objecting to helping all displaced school children will think again. We can have our debates about vouchers next year when the floodwaters subside and the schools are open again. Right now we need to be throwing out every lifeline we can for all of Katrina's displaced schoolchildren, not just some.

Mr. President, in Time magazine this week, there is a story on this subject. It quotes Andrew Rotherman, a co-director of a think tank here and a former Clinton education adviser. Mr. Rotherman, who is not a fan of public school vouchers, says: