

the "Dead Sea". However, leading edge technologies breathed new life into the Gulf—technologies that have enabled more efficient exploration in deeper waters and production from the deepest recesses of the earth's crust. Now the Gulf is widely recognized to be among the most promising areas in the world and oil production levels have increased sharply every year since 1996.

Leading edge offshore technology helps the country to find and produce the energy to heat our homes, fuel our cars, run our computers and drive the economy in faster, safer, cleaner and more efficient ways than ever thought possible. These innovations began with the natural gas and oil industry but they enrich the lives of all Americans. As the leading technological laboratory in the oil industry, the Gulf's transformation provides an interesting snapshot of the advances that have reverberated around the world and helped to keep energy abundant, affordable and clean.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMERT). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

HONORING PPL ELECTRIC UTILITIES AND THE INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD OF ELECTRICAL WORKERS LOCAL 1600

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

Mr. DENT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in praise of the actions of PPL Electric Utilities and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1600 for the inspiring sacrifices they made in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita on behalf of citizens of the Gulf Coast.

Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita were two of the most destructive natural disasters to ever strike the United States. In the wake of these catastrophic storms, utilities serving the Gulf States reached out across the country for technical resources and skilled labor necessary to rebuild an electric infrastructure destroyed by the forces of nature.

PPL Electric Utilities is a great corporate citizen in my district that provides electricity needs for 1.3 million customers in eastern Pennsylvania. When the people of the Gulf Coast needed assistance, PPL true to form answered the call for help after both hurricanes. More than 180 of the company's employees willingly agreed to leave their homes and their families to help restore an essential basic service, to assist victims of the hurricanes in getting their lives back to normal.

Many of these employees were members of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1600, skilled, dedicated union members whose efforts were desperately needed in the fight to restore a functioning

electrical grid in the devastated areas. These workers endured long hours of work, oppressive heat, uprooted trees, biting insects, and many other hazards to their personal safety.

In accomplishing their important task they earned respect and admiration of the people from Mississippi and Louisiana, as well as from those back home in Pennsylvania. Through their hard work, caring and professionalism they became true good will ambassadors of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the 15th Congressional District. It is my intention today to make sure this distinguished body is fully cognizant of the dynamic deference of both PPL Electric Utilities and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1600 and of their exceptional work in the Nation's time of need following Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. By working hand-in-hand, these two organizations toiled long hours to ease the suffering of the many affected by these natural disasters.

□ 1900

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMERT). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honor to be here before the House, and I would like to thank the Democratic leader, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), and our elected leadership team, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER), and also the gentleman from the great State of New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) and the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. CLYBURN).

We come to the floor, as you know, Mr. Speaker, almost every day to talk about issues that are facing Americans; some that we are working collectively on, others we are not working collectively on but should be working collectively on. Tonight, we are going to talk about some of the issues that we did not talk about last night, but I can tell you that the themes continue to run together.

I am here tonight with the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), Youngstown, Ohio, and as the gentlewoman from Florida was not here, I can tell her that what we are hearing and what we were talking about last night was the fact that now we are looking at how are we going to move forward in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, how are we going to respond to those Americans that have paid taxes all of their lives, and how are we going to correct past wrongs.

From the beginning, the majority side has come off the block saying, well, the story is kind of changing now,

which is interesting, but I have a copy of yesterday's Washington Post where there is a lot of bold talk about, well, first we are going to start with Medicaid, which is a program that provides health care for financially challenged Americans throughout this country, and we are going to find this \$500 million to offset some of the Katrina cost there; and then we are going to go to some folks who really cannot fend for themselves, we are going to pick on someone that is not our size and we are going to go and cut free and reduced lunches for financially challenged children, and then we are going to hit these small farming programs that we have out here so we can make sure they cannot compete with foreign agricultural interests, which are already cleaning our clock in many ways with the help of this majority that we have here now.

Now, this has kind of changed, but it has the same theme. Now we are going to go after young people, 30-somethings that are trying to educate themselves to compete against those kids coming from other countries here to the United States and that are taking their jobs, and I will let my colleague, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYUN), talk about China and other countries. As a matter of fact, these days, they do not have to come to the United States. They can stay where they are and they will have good American jobs because the workforce is there. And they will definitely be educated. Yet we are willing to cut Pell grant opportunities and some other things.

So there are a number of issues still on the table, but I hope we can talk tonight about the lack of an independent commission. I understand that there are going to be some additional partisan hearings this week here, if that is what you want to call them, here in the Congress on the House side. I hope that we will have an opportunity to talk about the lack of a Hurricane Katrina independent commission that 81-plus percent of Americans have called for.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am glad to be here once again with my colleagues, and I look forward to some fruitful conversation with them. With that, I yield to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN).

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the gentleman, and I want to welcome back the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), who we missed desperately last night.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I was pining for you as well.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And I announced last night that my brother had a baby last week.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Oh, congratulations. That is fantastic.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Yes, that was my big announcement. His name is Nicholas John. So I will probably be saying that to every 30-Something for the next 6 months.

But we had a great discussion last night on so many different issues, and

the Katrina issue was one. I want to go back and sort of fill in the blanks here a little bit and let people know that the Democrats are proposing that we create an independent Katrina commission like we had an independent commission to oversee 9/11. And here is the bill, H.R. 3764.

We are asking for an independent commission, meaning Republicans or Democrats do not rule the commission. It is independent of this body. It is independent of the White House. It is like we had for 9/11. Because we feel, as Democrats, that what we all had to watch happen on TV was one of the great national tragedies, not only the natural disaster that happened but the response from a government that we have been promised over the last number of years would be adequately equipped to respond, would respond in a timely manner, and that they would have a coordinated response in order to save American lives if there was an emergency.

Because after 9/11, and since then, we have been told by this administration and by this Congress that we are protecting you. You are safe. It is okay. We are going to do it. We are the party that is strong with these kind of issues. Then we found out during Katrina that that just was not the case.

You throw that on top of what we are watching happen in Iraq, and we are losing our confidence. If you ask the American people, they are losing their confidence too. That is why over 80 percent of the American people in every poll that we have seen want this independent commission. But what the Republicans have set up is a real farce. They might as well put the Chair of the Republican National Committee in charge of the oversight committee of Katrina.

There are eleven Republicans and nine Democrats, which means the minority party is not allowed to subpoena witnesses. The Republican Chair of that committee and the other 10 Republicans on the committee will be the only ones who can subpoena people to come and testify before the committee and really give this thing a thorough overview and a good look-see and overturn every rock possible to figure out what the real problems were and what the real problems are.

This is not about politics. This is about making sure the United States post-September 11 has an adequate emergency response system in place regardless of where you live. Because that could very easily been New York, it could have been L.A., or it could have been Youngstown, it could have been Miami. It just so happened to be New Orleans and it happened to be a natural disaster instead of a terrorist attack.

But if it was a terrorist attack, we cannot explain how we would have responded any differently. It was about communication and coordination and all these other things that we need to ensure for the American people. And

we believe that an independent commission that is free of politics is the only thing that is going to give us those answers. That is what the Democratic Party is asking for, that is what the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) is asking for, and that is what 80 percent of the American people are asking for.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, I want to thank the gentleman from Ohio for his comments, and he is absolutely right.

Number one, I am sorry I was not able to participate with my colleagues last night. I was in my district. And when you are in the district, you really get a true sense of how people are feeling. The gentleman is absolutely right, there is a crisis of confidence out there in America. People really have had their confidence in their government's ability to deal with their everyday problems badly, badly shaken by one scandal after another, by one more bit of evidence of corruption and cronyism.

What all of this points to is and is emblematic of is a system that cries out for reform. We absolutely have to have some reform here in Washington, and one of the first reforms that needs to occur is to change this partisan committee that is stacked with Republicans and is currently not being participated in by Democrats and shift it to an independent bipartisan commission that is going to be able to be objective and review what really happened.

Every day that has gone by since Katrina's aftermath, a little bit more trickles out, a little bit more dribbles out, and if we are going to be able to restore the American people's confidence in their government's ability to respond to disasters like this, be they natural disasters or man-made disasters in the form of terrorism, we have to start by restoring their confidence and utilize a process that is going to be objective and that they know they can have confidence in in terms of the outcome, like the 9/11 Commission.

There is a never-ending possibility of more disaster looming over us. Even now, we have Wilma, the 21st storm looming out there in the ocean, potentially about to bear down on Florida and then the gulf coast again, nearing this weekend. If we do not get the American people answers as to how the aftermath of Katrina occurred and make sure it does not happen again, it is not like we have the luxury of time being on our side. We have storm after storm. We have the fact that you never know when a man-made disaster is going to occur. By their very nature, they are surprise attacks. It means it is ever more important we reform the system and make sure that our government is ready to respond, that we have a comprehensive ability to do that.

When we have people engaging in CYA, which is exactly what is occurring here, and when you look at the former Director of FEMA, who in to-

day's paper it was revealed was more worried about his title in the aftermath of Katrina than getting the job done, that is deeply disturbing.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That is a joke.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It speaks to the structure of their ability to respond to that disaster.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Does that not say a lot about what we are dealing with in the leadership today?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It does.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is all about what is my title. After the greatest natural disaster in the country and everything that is going on, you are talking about your title.

That just proves what we talk about a lot here with the 30-Somethings. It is more politics than it is policy. It is more politics than it is actually fixing the problems.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Absolutely.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Evident by, my God, this guy is worried about his title after Katrina. Give me a break.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Let us explain what we are talking about. In the press today there was an e-mail exchange revealed between the spokesperson of FEMA and then Under Secretary Brown where he was appalled that Secretary Chertoff had made him, I think it was the point person, I forgot the title he was given, in the aftermath of Katrina. But he looked at it as a slight, an insult, and somehow a demotion from his position as Under Secretary.

In the devastation and aftermath of Katrina, is that what we want the FEMA Director to be worried about, what he is called?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Right.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And how he is perceived in terms of title?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Terrible.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is how out of touch this administration is. They are that badly out of touch, and that is why the system cries out for reform. We have to make sure we reform the system so that we can restore people's confidence and that they understand that the three C's are incredibly important: No more corruption, no more cronyism, and we have to restore people's confidence.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I think what the gentlewoman is saying is so very, very important. We talked last night and spent quite a bit of time on the culture of corruption and cronyism, and we know that it takes a while to get a culture. It is not like an incident here and an incident there. It is a culture.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. It is not random.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It is not random. It is a way of doing business here in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, it is affecting the entire country and in some cases it affects some parts of the world that we are also concerned about, and there are also parts of the world we are concerned about outside

of Iraq. I think that is important to point out.

I just want to mention something that the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) talked about, this H.R. 3764, which is the House bill that will create this independent commission just like the 9/11 Commission. The only difference between the bill we see by the gentleman from Ohio, House Resolution 3764, and the 9/11 Commission is the fact that it says the independent Katrina commission versus the 9/11 Commission.

□ 1915

So it is language that we all understand and eventually, like the 9/11 Commission, the majority side came around and voted for it. Some did.

I think it is also important for us to understand that independent commissions are not a new phenomenon to the way to deal with issues in correcting wrongs that took place or possible mistakes that could have happened.

For instance, I mention the 9/11 Commission, which is the most respected commission that came after 9/11. Also, if we look at the commission after the *Challenger* space accident in 1996, the Presidential commission that looked into the NASA program and things that we needed to look at.

And also in the aftermath of the accident at Three Mile Island in 1979 there was an independent commission; and numerous independent commissions established by the White House after plane accident tragedies to make sure that we do not make the same mistakes and correct issues that might have contributed to loss of life. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, there was another independent commission.

These independent commissions are given authority to go out and make sure that we do not continue to repeat some of the same issues that we are seeing right now. We are seeing a repeat on issues that are facing Americans time and time again.

Now, I want to say to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) on H.R. 3764, how many Republicans are on that bill?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, as far as I can see, there are not any.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I want to make sure that my Republican colleagues know, either in the leadership or the rank and file, that they know it is okay for you to call for an independent commission even though there is a Republican in the White House, even though there is an agency appointed by that Republican administration, because we are all Americans. We should have this independent commission to make sure that we are able to deal with the Federal response to natural disasters or terrorist attacks, whenever it may happen, or making sure that we can deal with some of the issues in the present.

There are still 100,000 individuals that were affected by Hurricane Katrina that are still in shelters or displaced in some Red Cross emergency

housing. The deadline for shelters to be empty was a couple of days ago, but we have trailer parks that are sitting empty. The trailer park has been established, the asphalt has been laid, the trailers have been delivered; but the people cannot move in because of technical issues of getting them in, need it be someone did not hook the power up to the trailer or the sewage is not where it is supposed to be. So there is still a lot of work to be done and lessons to be learned.

Any American city, here in Maryland today, there was an alert about a possible tunnel attack. The week before last it was the New York subway station. So we see cities and counties and local communities finding themselves in harm's way, and Americans may have to leave with what they have in their pockets or on their backs.

If we do not learn from lessons learned, having an independent commission of people who do not have a vested interest, a political vested interest in the outcome of the report, then we are not going to get better as a country, and we are not going to be better prepared.

Two things that we learned under the scenario of Hurricane Katrina: one, we are not ready. How about that. All of these top-off programs that have been created, and when I say top-off, I want to make sure Members understand what I am saying. These are the programs where the Department of Homeland Security would go into a local community and go through an exercise in case a chemical weapon was actually detonated or a terrorist event was to take place here and how would you deal with it, how would hospitals deal with, how would first responders deal with it. Where would the people go. We did that with Hurricane Pat in New Orleans. We knew. When I say "we," the Federal Government knew that anything over a category 3 would bring about catastrophic damage to the area.

I have a little picture that too many Americans are all too familiar with. This is a neighborhood east of downtown New Orleans. Billions of gallons of water flooded 80 percent of the city of New Orleans. Now, that is not Hurricane Katrina by herself; this is a lack of governance. I want to know why the Corps of Engineers stopped their work. After 37 years of working on the levee, why did they stop working to make sure it is safe. Hurricane Katrina came through and the event was over, and it did not look like this. When the levee broke in several areas, all of the loss of life took place at that time. Pretty much all of the property damage for sure took place at that time. When you say it was an act of God, well, I am not going to put all of that on God. I am going to put some of it on this government that should have been there.

Let me just put this poster down because I want to make sure that this aerial picture that was taken, and I am going to put it down for a minute because the real issue, and this is the pic-

ture before or right after people were on those roofs waiting, living it out for 3 days, waiting on the cavalry, waiting on someone to come and say is it possible to get off the roof.

Here is another picture. There is concern about somebody looting a Walgreen's for food, and people had to improvise. People are jumping in a boat not with a paddle, but with a board. Here is a kid in a refrigerator trying to find safe haven. It took awhile for all of this ingenuity to come about because definitely they could not count on the government, whether it be State, Federal, local. We need to get to the bottom of this. We need to make sure that this is not coming to a city near all of us, and we are not standing and waiting and hoping and praying that the helicopter is going to come soon or the boat is going to come soon. I think it is important. We need to learn from our past mistakes.

So 81 percent of Americans support this independent commission. For people to talk about they do not quite understand, independent commission, why? We do it when we have a horrific event in our country, whether a plane crash or a natural disaster.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I have mentioned this before and likened the lack of desire on the part of the Republican leadership here to establish an independent commission. For example, if the executives and CEO of Enron after the fiasco that corporation went through, it would be as if we said, Okay, Mr. CEO of Enron, you go ahead and investigate what happened at Enron and do a report and a full examination of the doings of your corporation and you get back to us and let us know what steps need to be taken to prevent it from happening again. We can do the same thing with Tyco.

I think the gentleman is smiling, and people who might hear this description would be sort of laughing to themselves saying of course we would not do that. This leadership is saying of course we would not have an internal partisan committee that would investigate. For some reason that is not ludicrous to the people who run this institution. It would be ludicrous to anybody who was a rational person who would actually want to get to the bottom of what happened. One would think given the information that has come out slowly over the last weeks now that there would be some more deep, abiding concern.

Let me go back to what I was saying earlier that came out today. Secretary Chertoff, according to The Washington Post, apparently belatedly named Brown the on-site disaster coordinator on the night of August 30 and declared Hurricane Katrina "an incident of national significance," which is the highest order catastrophe under their new national response plan.

This was the reaction of then-Under Secretary Brown and his assistants, "Demote the Under Secretary to PFO, principal Federal officer?" an outraged FEMA press secretary Sharon Worthy wrote Brown at 10:54 p.m., soon after Chertoff's decision.

"What about the precedent being set? What does this say about executive management and leadership in the agency?"

Brown's reply was, "Exactly."

Reading a little further, there are e-mails "that show that the government's response plan, 2 years in the making, began breaking down even before Katrina hit the gulf coast.

"Before the storm hit, Brown's deputy chief of staff, Brooks Altshuler, said White House pressure to form an interagency crisis management group was irrelevant even though a task force and principal Federal officer are key parts of the plan." He says this: "Let them play their 'Reindeer Games' as long as they are not turning around and tasking us with their stupid questions. None of them have a clue about emergency management."

Mr. Speaker, these are the people that were responsible for making sure that the people in that picture survived and actually got out and did not have to float in a refrigerator to save their own lives. This is what they were worried about, their own little title and the petty garbage that you would think is reserved for the smallest of issues.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, during this time, they spent more time having press conferences thanking everyone and saying you are doing a wonderful job.

No, you are doing a better job.

No, I want to make sure you know that you were doing a good job.

Meanwhile, folks are still clinging onto life, people are running out of insulin. They need medical supplies and people are drowning in nursing homes. These are Americans. These are Americans. These are individuals that live in our communities. There were veterans caught up in this stuff. There were teachers caught up in this. There were individuals counting on their government for them to be there for them, be it State, local, or Federal. I am not here to protect anyone. I want to make sure that we have what we need from an independent commission to make things better.

I remember this time very vividly when these e-mails were going on. This was at the height of the rescue, and they were running around here talking about titles and respect.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, we can blame the FEMA people complaining about their title and all of that stuff, but who appoints these people? These people are appointed by the President of the United States. This goes to his judgment to hire a horse attorney, not a horse's attorney; but he is an attorney for equestrian activity, that is what this gets to.

This President appointed this person, and he appointed the other people. The top seven or eight people who were involved in the top FEMA flow chart were appointees from President Bush, and they were not qualified. They had no emergency management experience. We need change in the government today. We need to change the way the situation is. We need to change the leadership. We need to reform the way we do business. We need to change the way we do business, and you do that through an independent commission, not through politics.

Do Members think that the majority party here, the Republican Party, is going to somehow oversee this whole process and dig up and say, What were we thinking? This guy was asking about his title during the greatest natural disaster in the history of the country. They are not going to highlight that and say maybe that was a little bit of the problem. They are going to do their best to keep that out of the press. Fortunately, that stuff makes its way in. But why not have an independent commission, bipartisan, to figure out exactly what happened. If we do not implement this change, we are going to be in real trouble the next time this happens.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, one of the things that I wanted to highlight was one of the things we have been asking people to do. H.R. 3764 is the Democrats' bill that would establish an independent commission on the response to Hurricane Katrina. The way that the administration re- lented on the independent 9/11 Commission, as the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) referred to earlier, they initially opposed, was the groundswell of support, particularly from the families of the 9/11 victims.

□ 1930

And we need a groundswell of support from the 81 percent of Americans that, when polled, say they think the only way to approach the response and the investigation of the response to the aftermath of Katrina is through an independent commission. We need people to contact us and become citizen cosponsors of H.R. 3764.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield, they can e-mail us at 30SomethingDems@mail.house.gov. They can e-mail and be a citizen cosponsor, but call their Members of Congress, call their Senators. I mean that is what really needs to happen.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman has the website at the bottom.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, they can go to the website at www.housedemocrats.gov/Katrina or they can e-mail us. We will put them on either way. But I think it is important we also need to get ahold of the people who represent folks at home, who come down to Washington, D.C. for 3 and 4 days during the course of a

week, and let those folks know that this is something they are interested in because it speaks to more than just this legislation. It speaks to the independence that we think needs to oversee this process. It also speaks to the kind of change that we need in government. We need this kind of independence. We cannot have people holding us back to make the proper decisions in government, and that is happening way too much down here.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, I think it is important to note that everyone has some sort of inquiry going on. I mean we have this partisan commission here in the House that obviously we tried to push an independent commission. That is out of order. We cannot do that. We do not need to do it because we have control, and since we have control, we are going to keep control of this situation to make sure it does not get out of hand because there may be some political reasons that we do not want certain things to come out. Well, this happened in America. It did not happen somewhere across in some foreign third world land to a group of individuals who are not a part of our democracy. These are people that live within the borders of the United States of America, born here, and I think it is important that we do not leave any American behind because the whole country can learn. So why deny the whole country from that?

Someone may say, Congressman, Congresswoman, we got it covered. We are dealing with it here in the House. What are you talking about? We are all Republicans, but we got it. We will take care of it. As a matter of fact, the White House appointed someone inside the White House, a high-ranking Homeland Security adviser to the President. Well, that is interesting. We are going to keep the adviser who advises the President on the part of Homeland Security to do a report to let him know what went wrong. If something went wrong, then maybe the adviser did not do what she should have done in this case, maybe some of the conversations that we know that the President's Chief of Staff had with the folks on the ground and the Deputy Chief of Staff that happens to be the boss of the person who is doing the inquiry.

I always tell people, I come to the floor and say, listen, this 30-Something Working Group in looking at what is happening and what is not happening, this is not a game. This is serious, and we went on the White House website 2 weeks ago. This thorough review that they are doing, not a mumbling word about this review. Not anything where Americans can be reassured that our country is doing all that it can to make sure that we do not make the same mistakes, have the same kind of loss of life that took place.

Now, here is the front page, and our President is there and honors Buckley, the anniversary and all. It is good stuff. I mean this is stuff that the

President does. And then we have the little thing that people can click on. I want to make sure that folks know that this is not the Wasserman Schultz-Ryan-Kendrick Meek report.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Third-party validators.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Third party validators. Then they can go over to the Homeland Security responding to Katrina and Rita and the same picture that was there a couple of weeks ago, the President hugging an emergency worker, rightfully so. I think that is important. But it says nothing, not even a press release, about what we are doing and if what we find we are going to make corrections and these are the subject areas that we are concerned about. Nothing. Absolutely nothing. So we know under the drape of not only corruption, cronyism, but this culture that we have here that the majority does not have the ability to even have an inquiry on themselves.

I said this as a joke several weeks ago, and I am going to say it again because it is very real. It is like my coming to the floor saying, Listen, my name is KENDRICK MEEK, and I have made some possible mistakes, and to make sure that I do not make these mistakes ever again I am going to investigate myself and I will be back in a couple of weeks to let you know what the findings are. That is how off balance, I am just trying to find the right words, that this whole theory is of the fact that the White House can look into itself and that we are going to have some findings that are going to save American lives in the future and that the House is going to have a partisan commission that is going to look at the agency that we did not give proper oversight to and still do not. The Committee on Homeland Security right now, I am here and I am giving the report, I am on the committee, has not even had one, hear me, not even one hearing since Katrina, not one public hearing to talk about what has worked and what has not worked and why do we have this problem and why do we still have people in shelters. Not a mumbling word. Not one. I am telling my colleagues if I am lying, I am flying, and I am still well footed right here. Not one hearing. That is horrible for the Department of Homeland Security, for the committee that deals with it. And I told my colleagues we are here to take care of the Federal business.

I like some of my colleagues. We go and we talk about baseball games and all of these things, and they are nice people. I consider myself a pretty nice person. But let me tell the Members something. This is about business. It is not personal. It is about business. It is about the business of protecting the American people, and if we are going to sit here and act like nothing is really going on, something is really wrong, and that is the reason why we need this independent commission.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentleman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, we have been talking about what they are not doing, that they are not establishing an independent commission. Let us mention what they are getting ready to do because we all can describe what we think the response to the aftermath of Katrina should be. Obviously, a pretty significant fiscal hit on our economy. No question about it. Between Katrina and Rita, we have refineries down. We have gas prices that have skyrocketed out of control. We have people having to dig deeper into their pockets. A dollar is not going as far as we would like it to or as it was previously before the storm hit. So one would think that the Republican leadership's response would be to ease up on the tax cuts. Let us pull back on making them permanent. Let us push back the reconciliation process, which is Washington speak for budget cuts. Let us make sure that we can ease some of the pain and dull the sharp point that has been the aftermath of Katrina.

So, instead, what is their response? Because it certainly is not any of that. This week on Thursday we expect what will be an extremely close vote on a rash of Republican spending cuts that will cut to the core, to the deepest heart of the people who need the help the most, the people who have truly been impacted by the aftermath of Katrina. They are actually going to ask us, force us, to vote on cuts in the Medicaid program, force us to vote on cuts in the Food Stamp program, force us to vote on cuts to higher education. This is a laundry list of items that they are going to propose now. A 2 percent across-the-board random set of cuts that are going to impact the people who were hurt the most by the aftermath of Katrina. It boggles the mind. How that could be a natural response to the needs of the people who are hurting the most is just so far beyond me. I feel like I am dealing with people who live on another planet sometimes.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, there is no doubt about it, to be so far removed. And if we look back, we have got three wars going on right now and four tax cuts primarily to people who make hundreds and hundreds of thousands, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, 800,000-plus, billionaires who are getting these kind of tax cuts, and then not only to do this. After Katrina we have got a \$500 billion deficit. Now we are going to cut \$10 billion out of the Medicaid program for low-income folks who need health care and their kids. \$9 billion out of college students loans. What? It is so competitive out in the world today, and we are going to cut student loans? And throughout this whole process, through 9/11, the war, Katrina, natural disasters in the gulf coast, hurricanes last year, all this stuff that has been going on, not one time has the Presi-

dent asked those people who make more than \$1 million can they maybe help us out a little bit? A novel idea. Please, somebody who makes more than \$1 million, help us. And he is the President of the United States, for God sakes. He can call these people into his office and ask them for help. Ask them for assistance. We need to balance the budget. We need to make investments in education. We need to make sure that the poor folks and the middle class folks in our country have adequate health care coverage.

And then with the wounds wide open, to throw a little salt in it, he repeals the Davis-Bacon provision, which says that for the Federal money being spent to rebuild the gulf coast after Katrina that the people working would have to get prevailing wage in that area. And the prevailing wage in that area is 9 or 10 bucks an hour, and the President repealed that so the Federal money going to that area does not have to be prevailing wage. How much lower is he going to go? He is trying to help these people, and they want to go back and rebuild their community, and he is saying no. He is going to say we are going to pay them minimum wage. That is salt in the wound.

And those same people are going to be the same folks who will probably need Medicaid, who still want to send their kids to school and need the student loan and the Pell grant, which is being cut by \$9 billion. Meanwhile, and I am going to just reiterate what the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL) said before we got here, all the while we are spending \$20 billion in reconstruction in Iraq, building and renovating 110 primary health care centers, vaccinated 3.2 million children, rehabbed 2,700 schools and trained 36,000 secondary teachers, funded 3,100 community development projects, and provided housing for tens of thousands of Iraqis. Meanwhile, we are repealing the prevailing wage provision for our own people? We are cutting health care and student loans for our own people? This is outrageous. This is absolutely outrageous what is going on.

We need change in the government. We need reform. We need people to come down here who are not going to be so tied to the special interests to be independent and make independent decisions for the best interests of this country, not any other, and in the process hurt our country.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman from Florida will continue to yield, I was just going to say that all of this points to this culture that the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) referred to earlier, this culture of corruption and cronyism. And it has created this groundswell of need for reform. We cannot go on like this anymore. I mean I am raising young children. He is raising young children. The gentleman from Ohio's (Mr. RYAN) brother is raising a young child now. We need to make sure that the next generation that comes up does

not inherit a badly damaged country that results from the policy decisions that are being made here. There is some deep harm that will reverberate for at least a generation as a result of these cuts and more and more tax cuts and an ever-burgeoning deficit and more and more reliance on foreign countries and more debt. There are consequences for these kinds of things.

When I go trick or treating with my kids on Halloween, that is when I most often get to see my neighbors and spend some really good time talking to them, and those are the times that they grab me by the wrist and say, "Debbie, what is going on here?" Every year that goes by with another year of this Republican leadership literally not having any ability to be in touch with the reality of the lives of real people is another year that we have shaken the confidence to the core of the American people.

□ 1945

We have got to move in the direction. We have got to get some reform. We have got to get some leadership in America that understands what the basic needs are of the people.

Instead, we have an administration that appears to be of the wealthy, for the wealthy, and by the wealthy. It has, I think, actually reached historic proportions. We have never had a time where you have had the priorities of the leadership in the government so focused on the most elite set of people in the country.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We are not making this up.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I wish I were making it up.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I really think if I was not here and coaching some football in high school in Ohio and I was flipping through and watching us, if I was not exactly plugged in as much as we are, I would think they have got to be making this up. I mean, they just cannot be serious about all of this stuff. They have got to be fudging the facts or misrepresenting them or putting a certain spin on it like they do in D.C.

We are not making this stuff up. I do not think you can, even if you wanted to.

Picture this, natural disaster in the U.S. In the U.S. years ago, they passed the Davis-Bacon provision, which two Republicans authored just by coincidence, that when Federal money is spent somewhere, including natural disasters, wherever the money's being spent, the workers have the right to be paid the wage in that area.

Then during the greatest natural disaster, the President repeals it for the very people who are going to go back in and rebuild their own community. What? You have got to be kidding me. Who would believe that?

At the same time, to pay for the rebuilding of the community, we are going to cut health care for the poor; we are going to cut student loans for

middle-class people; and we are not going to ask the rich people to pay for anything, not even the rich people, people who make four or five, six, seven, eight. Even during this, you just wanted to ask millionaires to give a portion of their tax cut back to help us fund this. It is like you cannot believe it.

It is almost like when you play sports, did you ever have those moments where things kind of slow down a little bit? That is what it feels like down here. You are just slowly watching the unraveling happen. We come to the floor every night not for therapy, but we come here because we hope that we can convince the American people that the Democrats are for changing all this and making this better and reforming the way government works. Reform is not consistent necessarily with tax cuts for wealthy people. It is about fixing the way government executes its responsibilities, and this is what we are for, and that is what this independent commission is for.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I did not want you to leave out, he raised the ceiling as it relates to small businesses to a quarter of a million dollars that an agency could spend on a credit card and not necessarily have to do business with the small businesses in the area. That was also suspended. These are small and the minority businesses, too. When we say small businesses, these are small businesses, period. This is not something where you say just women-owned businesses and minority businesses. These are small businesses, period.

So I think it is important we realize that any outrage in this Congress is not from the majority side as it relates to it. If you start talking about, well, first of all, I want to help you out, we are going to respond to the disasters, matter of fact we want businesses to move back, we are going to let the businesses back in before we let the residents back in, you have got to do more for our small businesses than give them a boon and say good luck. They have no employees.

In the meanwhile, we want the people to come back, but as it relates to the construction, to build the bridges and rebuild the schools and do all the things that need to happen to make this a functional community; but we do not want them to make too much money. We want them to make the minimum wage on these jobs, or whatever wage you want to pay them, but not a prevailing wage that is this Federal law.

Because this happens to be an emergency, and this is the President's thinking, since this is an emergency, I can just suspend Davis-Bacon. I could not do it under calm waters; let me do it now. Let me just hit you while you are down on all fours.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. What is coming out of the conservative think tanks at this time, well, what is going to happen is these workers are going to get this

extra money from the prevailing wage, and they are going to give it to the unions. Then it is just going to pad the union coffers.

I do not know if you have the chart there or not, union membership in the three hardest hit gulf States, the highest was 10. The lowest was four, and another one was like five. Five percent of the workers were union workers. It was just nonsense, and then you look how many union members are there, none basically. None.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. When you think about it, some people may say, well, what are they talking about? What are these three Members of Congress talking about that happen to be in the minority, a few votes shy from being in the majority, to be able to make what we are talking about reality?

This would not be a discussion about an independent commission to look at Katrina or what did happen or what did not happen in Katrina, best practices, so when another U.S. city goes through a situation where they have to evacuate the entire city, families being displaced, living with others, some people living in arenas, some folks living in gyms and church fellowship halls and synagogue fellowship halls throughout the country, how do we bring about the kind of organization that is needed to make sure that we can get Americans back into their normal lives so that hopefully it will not be a burden on the U.S. taxpayer for a very long time?

The way things are set up now, A, there is no oversight, especially in this House. There is no oversight about the urgency of making sure that we save as many dollars as possible through a functional government doing what it is supposed to do on the timelines. It is not there. Money is still going out for vouchers to stay in hotels. I mean, folks need to have shelter; but if there is a cheaper, better way that will get them back home and to get them helping them, being able to get the paycheck or even open their business, then let us do that to make them self-sufficient. That is not the conversation.

The conversation here is to say, well, let us make some budget cuts, and we do not want to talk about Iraq. We did want to talk about that. Oh, my goodness, if something comes out about Iraq, get out of the way; we have got to fund it. Matter of fact, can we add another billion to it, can we, because I want to make sure we give our commitment to the Iraqi people. Let us get another billion.

But when it comes down to the Americans, our people, once again, I will say we salute one flag. I do not know, we have to look at these student loans and grants, and we have to also look at Medicaid, additional cuts on top of cuts that we have already made.

Well, my colleague said something that I thought was very interesting, and I know our time is coming to an end shortly, about the fact that we have to ask millionaires. We are not

talking about folks that make a hundred, not even \$400,000 a year. People that make millions a year, the Congress has to ask if we can roll back some of the tax cuts that they are enjoying right now in the hundreds of thousands to help the country after it was hit by the biggest natural disaster that it has ever been hit with. We have got to ask.

But guess what, no one is asking folks on Medicaid, no one is asking kids that receive free and reduced lunch for the reason because they are poor. No one is asking them. No one is asking States as it relates to rolling back their Head Start money to make sure that kids are ready to perform in this working world and that they go to school ready and prepared. The gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) worked on that in the Florida legislature.

No one is walking around here asking about that. Folks just say, well, you know what, this is what we are going to do; tough talk for hard times. We are not going to pick on someone that can pick back. We are not going to hit a person that can knock us to the floor, because they will be able to give campaign contributions to my opponents. No, we are going to get the folks that we say we are trying to help. We are going to hit them. Matter of fact, we are going to floor them, and we are going to do it because we can. That is what makes this such a tragedy.

That is why we need this independent commission. That is the reason why we need H.R. 3838, an anti-fraud commission that will oversee all of the contracts that are going on in the present to be able to review it all, to make sure that it is not left up to some bureaucrat so that I am sitting somewhere in the Committee on Homeland Security and they are saying, well, you pick up *The Washington Post* or *New York Times*, whatever the hometown paper may be in someone's area, and say there were millions of dollars that were spent and someone charged \$1,000 for a roll of toilet paper, and we do not know what happened, but we are looking into it.

No, that is after the taxpayers have already been raped of their money and the victims were made victims again because the money ran out. So we do not have time for an Iraq-Halliburton experience that we have an investigation going on, meanwhile thousands of dollars are going out the door.

If folks want to have tough talk about budget and fiscal responsibility, then we have to have management, and we have to have oversight. You just cannot let billions of dollars out the door and expect the people who have already made mistakes again and again and again say here is another \$62 billion, see if you can do better this time. It is just not going to happen, and that is the reason why we have to have it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, in our last few minutes, I want to just point out that the respon-

sibility lies at the feet of the President. He has the bully pulpit to ask people who are among our wealthiest to make sacrifices.

I represent a community that has a lot of wealthy people, and I know they say to me all the time, you know what, I am willing. They understand what the needs are. They get it, and I know we have an hour tomorrow night, that we are going to have an opportunity to come out here again.

One of the things I think we should talk about, and I do not want to do a rush job on it, is there are steps we can take. There are things we can do to make people whole. There is a way that we can restore Americans' confidence in their government, and there are reforms that we can and must make. I hope we will have a chance to talk about that more tomorrow night because we have got to take this country in a new direction. It would be irresponsible for us to continue hurtling down the path of irresponsible public policy and harm that we are bringing on people who are already knocked to the ground, and now we are putting our boot on their neck to keep them that way.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I agree. We want to take the country in a new direction, in another direction.

Since 1994, the Republicans have held this Chamber. The President has been in for 5 years. They have controlled the Senate on and off for a good while over the past decade and a half. We want to take the country in another direction, because if you look at the leadership, I just believe that because of the lack of experience they just are not governing. They just do not know how to govern.

When you look at the increased poverty rates, when you look at wages, when you look at what is going on with companies like Delphi and General Motors, when you look at the health care crisis in this country, when you look at the poverty crisis, the cuts for school funding and local communities, libraries being cut, prisons and jails that cannot handle the load that is coming in, in every single aspect here, reducing our dependence on foreign oil, every single aspect here has been the ball has been dropped.

We want to take the country in a new direction, in a better place, with the changes that I think the Democratic Party wants to provide.

If you want to e-mail us, it is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov, and let us know if you want to be a citizen cosponsor of the independent Katrina commission, which we think would be the best way in a nonpartisan, bipartisan way to try to address the issues, and I thank my good friend from Florida for the opportunity to join both my colleagues here tonight.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN). I am glad you were able to sum it up for us. The gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is right to let us focus on things we are doing.

We mentioned the pieces of legislation the Democrats have offered to this Congress. The Congress and the majority side have not accepted that legislation. We are still willing to fight on behalf of the American people.

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MEDICARE PART D

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. JINDAL). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, we just heard from the other side, the 30-Something Democrats. I have been listening, as I know my colleagues have, to the 30-Something Democrats for about a year and a half now a couple or three times a week. It is the same old same old. Now they have pledged to come back tomorrow night with some positive information voice, and I look forward to that. In fact, I am going to listen very closely, because all I have heard from my three colleagues on the other side, the 30-Something Democrats, the two from Florida, the one from Ohio, very intelligent, very well spoken, very articulate, and very, very negative.

So before we get into our special hour talking about something positive, a Medicare prescription drug benefit for our needy seniors, I just want to suggest to my colleagues who spent the last hour talking negative we look forward to hearing from them tomorrow night maybe on something positive for a welcomed, welcomed change.

Mr. Speaker, it kind of reminds me of the fall of 2003, my first year in the 108th Congress, when we worked so very hard on trying to bring to our seniors finally, after almost 38 years, a prescription drug benefit under Medicare. What we heard from our colleagues on the other side of the aisle was very similar to what we just listened to in this Chamber over the last hour from the 30-Something Democrats. It was all negative. There was no plan, there was no alternative. It was just: Seniors in my Democratic district, you men and women who have supported me and let me represent you in the Congress, this is what I suggest that you do, you take out your AARP card and you cut it to shreds because that is what I, your Congressman or your Congresswoman on the Democratic side of the aisle, plan to do.

Yet, Mr. Speaker, what we did was a historic benefit. In fact, for 2 years now, and it will continue until January 1 of 2006 when the official Medicare Part D prescription benefit plan is available, we had an almost a 2-year transition plan of a Medicare prescription drug discount card which would allow our neediest seniors actually to have \$600, a debit card if you will, not a credit card, but \$600 each of those 2 years if they were at or near Federal