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

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

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Ms. MCKINNEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time of the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DeFAZIO) for 5 minutes.

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

KATRINA DISASTER

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

Ms. MCKINNEY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to join in the remarks of my colleague about the intensity of feeling that we have for the people of Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama and, of course, Florida on the first stop of Hurricane Katrina and the situation that has unfolded literally before our very eyes.

I should also take a moment to commend the journalists who have facilitated us being able to see what has unfolded. Part of what has unfolded is sheer incompetence on the part of this administration, and the feelings that the people are experiencing result from the fact that we have an administration who let the American people down, who let the people in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida down, and just will not say We let you down. We made a mistake. They, instead, try to defend the indefensible.

Part of the late response comes from the fact that 40 percent of the Mississippi National Guard are in Iraq; 35 percent for those of Louisiana are in Iraq; 26 percent of the Florida National Guard are in Iraq; and 25 percent of the Alabama National Guard are in Iraq.

I have seen the interviews that have been done by Aaron Broussard of Jefferson Parish and Malik Rahim in New Orleans proper. Aaron Broussard said, “We have been abandoned by our own country.” Investigative journalists sent information to me that Customs’ Blackhawk helicopter pilots were livid because they were not allowed to rescue people.

And then in the matter of attitude, and of course, I will be speaking more at length on this on Thursday in a 1-hour special order, but in attitude, FEMA Chief Michael Brown had the nerve to say, No one was clairvoyant enough to foresee this happening. But there have been studies, there have been articles, and this is his job to foresee this happening. I have got articles from National Geographic and Scientific American all saying exactly what happened and what we witnessed unfolding. And then he had the unmitigated gall to say that people must take some responsibility.

Well, Mr. Brown, you need to take responsibility.

And, Mr. Bush, you need to take responsibility.

The Times-Picayune has called for Mr. Brown’s firing, and I have to say that they are absolutely correct. And I would just like to ask this administration to just admit that they messed up instead of appearing before the American people with all kinds of excuses about what they did and what they did not do, and we are not going to revisit the past, we are going to make sure we move forward or we look forward. There are a million people who have been affected by this, dispersed all over our country. The State of Georgia has received and is receiving thousands of them. The Fourth Congressional District is receiving as many of them as we can. The City of Atlanta has opened its arms to the victims of this administration.

With interest, I note, on the State Department Web site, that they provide us a clue as to when we are seeing misinformation, and what they tell us is that we are being misinformed when we are being told something that is clearly not true. What the administration has said to us tonight, in many instances, is clearly untrue.

And let me just say that it is unconscionable that the Secretary of Energy could stand before us tonight and say that he does not know how to bring down gas prices, which was the original reason that I asked for this 5 minutes tonight.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair would remind all Members to address their remarks to the Chair.

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

(Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGEN of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to take the time of the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WOOLSEY) for 5 minutes.

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Florida?
There was no objection.

HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, first let me say that my thoughts and prayers go out to those who have lost loved ones and those who have suffered as a result of the destruction of this devastating natural disaster. I represent South Florida, an area that is far too often in the cone of error of just about every hurricane that approaches the United States and also home to the last time a Category 5 storm hit a United States territory.

As I speak here tonight, it is unclear how many people have been killed or will ultimately die as a result of this storm. What is clear is that America has yet to send a wake-up call and it came in the form of Hurricane Katrina. Hurricane Katrina calls into question our preparedness as a Nation to deal with any kind of major disaster, whether it is a natural disaster or a disaster resulting from a terrorist attack.

This month marks the fourth anniversary of the September 11 attack on our Nation. Our country saw the devastation that could be caused by a terrorist attack, recognized our vulnerabilities and supposedly set about the task of protecting Americans as best we could from disaster. The administration knew about the vulnerabilities of the levees in New Orleans. They knew about the level of poverty that exists in the Gulf States that would hamper evacuation plans, and they should have known at a minimum the day before the hurricane hit that they would need more law enforcement, rescue, medical and evacuation personnel.

And herein lies the problem: They knew about these problems as we know about many problems and vulnerabilities that exist throughout other cities nationwide, yet we have been slow to act to improve the situation. I represent a city, the City of Miami, which is the third poorest in the Nation. In prior years, local officials in New Orleans recommended a plan that would have cost $14 billion to reinforce the levee and pump system that keeps New Orleans safe. The State of Louisiana sent out a call for help that the project was too big, and they needed Federal assistance to even begin the project. And the pleas for help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress.

Let us put the New Orleans levee construction into perspective. We spend over $1 billion a week on operations in Afghanistan and Mr. Bush just handed out $14 billion to oil companies in President Bush’s energy bill we passed this summer. What is the ultimate lesson of Katrina? The lesson is that the officials that were supposed to provide support, safety and security to the people in the Gulf States failed. The result was a situation where every emergency coordinator knew that disaster was imminent. However, the existing emergency infrastructure was not there to remove people from harm’s way, and by doing so, it could have saved their lives.

We cannot as local, State and Federal officials, have a 1-day mock disaster drill, and then pat ourselves on the back and say our job is done here. The government is here to provide the infrastructure that is necessary to prevent deaths from imminent disaster and step in immediately afterwards to ensure that deaths do not result from the destruction caused by that disaster. I think that the response from the Federal Government fell far short of that standard.

The lesson that Hurricane Katrina needs to have taught our government officials is that the current emergency management infrastructure could not handle a disaster the size of Katrina, and that we must streamline and reform our disaster preparedness and response. And we have to do it today. Our Nation’s first priority should be to provide security, safety and infrastructure here at home. It is a disgrace that it took a disaster of such magnitude to bring light to the weaknesses of our system, and we must take the lessons learned to ensure that such catastrophes do not occur again.

At the very least, we need not have our leaders respond in the fashion that the President and the Speaker of the House and a number of other leaders have in the last 10 days, indicating that perhaps they did not think New Orleans should be rebuilt and perhaps the people who did not get out of New Orleans made a bad decision.

We need to think about the wherewithal that people in these communities had prior to the storm, and we need to give them that wherewithal to move forward and go on so we can rebuild New Orleans and make sure that we never have to stare down a hurricane the magnitude of Katrina and not be prepared as we were in this storm.

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

Mr. POE. Mr. Speaker, last week the House sent a letter to Governor Kathleen Blanco and to Mayor Ray Nagin. We were asking for specific help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress. We wanted to know if the project was too big, and they needed Federal assistance to even begin the project. And the pleas for help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress. We wanted to know how many people had disappeared. We wanted to know where bodies were being moved. We wanted to know how many more people needed to be rescued. We wanted to know how many more people needed medical attention. We wanted to know how to get supplies and how to get people out of the flooded areas.

I am pleased to report that our questions have been answered. We have learned about the scale of the catastrophe and the magnitude of the need.

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

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, we have a letter from the Governor of Louisiana which tells us exactly what has happened in the state of Louisiana. We have learned about the scale of the catastrophe and the magnitude of the need. We have learned that the project was too big, and they needed Federal assistance to even begin the project. And the pleas for help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress.

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

Mr. GENE GREEN. Mr. Speaker, we have a letter from the Governor of Louisiana which tells us exactly what has happened in the state of Louisiana. We have learned about the scale of the catastrophe and the magnitude of the need. We have learned that the project was too big, and they needed Federal assistance to even begin the project. And the pleas for help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE. Mr. Speaker, we have a letter from the Governor of Louisiana which tells us exactly what has happened in the state of Louisiana. We have learned about the scale of the catastrophe and the magnitude of the need. We have learned that the project was too big, and they needed Federal assistance to even begin the project. And the pleas for help from State and local officials fell on deaf ears in the White House and Congress.