Europe has now entered its post-Christian era. That is a very interesting statement, to think that Europe went through a pre-Christian era, then a Christian era, and now it is in a post-Christian period.

When you go throughout the great cities of Europe and look at the many churches, you find that most of them have been turned into concert halls, or tourist attractions, and they are not used for religious purposes anymore.

So why is Europe turning away from religion where America remains a strongly religious nation? I am sure there are many reasons, but the one that strikes me as cogent is the fact that we have never had a State church here in America. That means religions in America have had to compete for adherence in the public square on the basis of their doctrine, on the basis of their humanity and compassion, on the basis of their attractiveness to those who might want to affiliate with them, whereas in Europe you are required by law to join a particular church in a particular country.

When the government and the church become intertwined, in that fashion, you are at the point where the government provides funds for the church, that makes it unnecessary for the church to appeal to its adherents sufficiently that they will support it out of their own pocketbook, you get a corrupting influence.

It was very interesting to me to travel to Russia after the Soviet Union collapsed and spend some time talking with Russian officials about this very issue. The Russian Parliament had passed an act which I believed was violative of the notion of freedom of religion and I went over with them to talk to them about it.

After having visits with members of the Duma as well as members of the Yeltsin administration and their justice department, I was assured they would lean on the concept of freedom of religion and that the law would not be used in any way to persecute certain religions that had come in from outside, once the Iron Curtain was over and religions were made welcome there.

But the interesting conversation out of all of that in the context of what I am saying here came from some individuals who were talking about the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in Russian life. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russians were making an effort to identify themselves once again as something other than Communists, trying to figure out who they were, asking the fundamental question: What does it mean to be a Russian? Of course, the members of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy said being a member of the Russian Orthodox Church is important to being a Russian, and so we do not want to be a State church again. We have been there, and we know how debilitating it is for the church to have government involvement in our affairs and to have government financing our affairs.

As we have this debate over the words that go into the pledge—a debate that I think will ultimately be settled by the courts, and if the precedent is as it has been, the words “under God” will be retained in the pledge—let us take the occasion to remember why we have such religious strength in this country. It is the fact that we have had freedom of religion, and we have been nominals competing in the public square for their various adherents and not depending upon the Government for funding or direction, unlike many of the countries in Europe.

America is not in its post-Christian era the way Europe is, and, ironically, I think one of the reasons is because America has never had a government dictate of what that would mean, what religion ought to be. But again, even as we celebrate freedom of religion, I hope we don’t go so far as to have Government dictate freedom from religion and tell us that we must in some way or other, however subtle, persecute people of faith.

I had the privilege of receiving an honorary degree at one of our universities, and the commencement speaker was the Catholic bishop of the area served by that university. He made the point that he respects, and it is required by our Constitution to respect, all of those who disagree with him and have made the choice not to worship anyone. But he said, I only ask in return that they extend to me the same respect for the fact that I have chosen to worship and that they do not use Government affairs to persecute me for having chosen to believe, just as I say we must not use Government agencies to persecute those who have chosen not to believe.

I yield the floor.

Mr. TALENT. Mr. President, I am here today to discuss a resolution, strongly disapproving of the recent decision by the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of California that the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional. I am hopeful that the Senate will pass this resolution later today.

The Pledge of Allegiance is a record of American values and history and the words of the Pledge still resonate in the convictions of Americans today.

For more than 75 years, the Pledge of Allegiance has included references to the flag, to our country having been established as a union “under God,” and to this country being dedicated to the “liberty and justice for all.” The Senate believes, a recognized in a resolution passed unanimously in 2003, that the Pledge is a fully constitutional expression of patriotism.

However, some of our courts have either no respect for or understanding of these words. Several years ago—June 26, 2002—in what has become an infamous case, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled the Pledge of Allegiance to be unconstitutional when recited voluntarily because it uses the phrase “one nation under God.”

On June 14, the Supreme Court at least temporarily preserved the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance, ruling that the plaintiff could not challenge the patriotic oath because he did not have standing in the case. This procedural ruling did not directly address whether the pledge recited by generations of American schoolchildren is constitutional. It left the Pledge vulnerable to another challenge.

Not unsurprisingly, on January 3, 2005, the same plaintiff and four others filed a second suit in the Eastern District of California challenging again the words “under God” in the Pledge.

Yesterday, the Eastern District of California refused to dismiss the case, holding instead that the Ninth Circuit’s ruling in 2002—that the words “under God” were constitutional—was still good law. The effect of the court’s ruling is that the Pledge has been deemed unconstitutional in three Sacramento-area school districts. This issue will likely be appealed to the Ninth Circuit again.

We are a nation of many faiths and beliefs. Tolerance for dissent is one of our great American values. But so is our common conviction that America is a nation that seeks the will and endeavors of God. If we give up the phrase “under God,” we give up the very essence of our American values. But so is Tolerance for dissent is one of our great American values. But so is our common conviction that America is a nation that seeks the will and endeavors of God. If we give up the phrase “under God,” we give up the very essence of our American values.

HURRICANE KATRINA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in a few hours President Bush will speak to our Nation about Hurricane Katrina, a catastrophe that has devastated the gulf coast and left all Americans deeply shaken.

For nearly a week, the entire world was horrified by the image of the levees failing, the floodwaters pouring into New Orleans and other low lying areas of the Gulf Coast. By the time the floods crest, the water had risen to a height of 24 feet in some areas—half the height of the New Orleans levees.

The levee breaches have left some communities completely isolated, with no power, no means of communication, no access to food or medicine. The United Nations has declared the situation a humanitarian crisis.

The death toll continues to climb and with it, the number of people who are homeless. And while we won’t know the exact number of those who are homeless, we do know that the number will be in the millions.

On September 15, 2005...
to be rescued. People died trapped in the attics of their homes. Sick and elderly American citizens died, abandoned, in nursing homes. Babies died in their mothers’ arms. Bodies floated in rivers and decomposed in plain view. The images we saw didn’t even look like America. They looked like some foreign land. Yet we knew it was our America.

We don’t have any idea how many lives were lost. The numbers may reach hundreds, maybe thousands. We do know that Katrina was the greatest natural disaster America has ever experienced. One million of our fellow Americans have been displaced from their homes by this terrorist. Many lost their homes, their jobs, their communities, everything they owned. They are scattered today across America, living in emergency shelters, living with families and friends, and living as if we are in some kind of foreign land. Many still don’t know what has become of their family members, or whether they even survived.

A short time ago, our leader, Senator HARRY REID of Nevada, and Congress—whether they even survived. We don’t have any idea how many lives were lost. The numbers may reach hundreds, maybe thousands. We do know that Katrina was the greatest natural disaster America has ever experienced. One million of our fellow Americans have been displaced from their homes by this terrorist. Many lost their homes, their jobs, their communities, everything they owned. They are scattered today across America, living in emergency shelters, living with families and friends, and living as if we are in some kind of foreign land. Many still don’t know what has become of their family members, or whether they even survived.

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That is a very disappointing headline. To think we would go down the same path of waste and abuse we have seen in Iraq now in our own country with Hurricane Katrina is unacceptable.

The lead in the story says:

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

This was printed in the Wall Street Journal in their news. It is not some political document. It is their analysis.

The article quotes a contracting expert at Georgetown University Law School who says:

You can easily compare FEMA’s internal resources to what you saw in the early days of the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq. A small, well-funded organization was able to coordinate the entire reconstruction in Iraq, including the billion-dollar-per-week levee project. The money was spent well.

The article notes that many of the contractors and practices blamed for spending abuses in Iraq as it begins the largest and costliest rebuilding effort in United States history.

The article says:

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

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The first large-scale contracts awarded to Hurricane Katrina, as in Iraq, were awarded without competitive building, using so-called ‘cost-plus’ provisions that guarantee contractors certain profits regardless of how much they spend.
I asked a question the other day of the Secretary of Defense. I am not sure he was happy with it. But I asked him: How far can we stretch the National Guard? In my State, 70 percent of the National Guard men and women have already served in Iraq or are currently serving there.

Now, of those who have come home, 1 out of every 10 are headed to the gulf coast. Many of them returned from Iraq a few months ago. They were getting reacquainted with their families and rebuilding their lives, taking care of their homes and undertaking new responsibilities in their communities, new jobs.

Now, with that spirit of voluntarism, they have stepped forward. But the obvious question is: How many times can we ask the National Guard to rise to this national challenge? How are we going to meet the recruiting goals when we are asking so much of these men and women?

Guardsmen, Coast Guard members, and so many others have been the heroes of Hurricane Katrina. They have saved thousands and thousands of lives, at great risk. But the Guard’s efforts were hampered by the fact that 3,000 Guardsmen from Louisiana and 4,000 from Mississippi were in Iraq, with their equipment, their humvees, their trucks, their helicopters.

The Army National Guard was woefully underequipped before the Iraq war started. It had only 75 percent of the equipment it needed. Today, more than half of the National Guard’s equipment is either overseas or in need of major repair.

Now, we are watching Hurricane Ophelia off the coast of North Carolina. We pray it will not cause anywhere near the damage that it might. But we are positioning emergency personnel and the National Guard to respond.

Time and time again, we turn to our Guardsmen and women. The obvious question is: How often can we ask them to perform this heroism? I think that is a legitimate question to ask this administration. When disaster strikes, the Guard is forced to move its people and equipment from farther away. As it does, it takes precious time and delays response.

The Guard estimates its equipment needs at $14 billion today to upgrade the equipment of the National Guard to where it needs to be. The President’s budget recommendation is it $14 billion for National Guard equipment? It is $1 billion. So we are not preparing homeland security by equipping the National Guard with what they need today.

National Guard members do not lack for courage or commitment. They lack for equipment. The President should tell the American people tonight that he plans to ensure that the National Guard has what it needs to protect us at home.

Let me move to another issue that is affecting families and businesses across America. The average price of gasoline today is $1.40 higher than it was 4 years ago; for a gallon of gas, $1.40 more. Oil companies are announcing record profits. According to the Boston Herald, ExxonMobil is set to announce $30 billion in profits this quarter, after almost $38 billion for the last quarter. They are making $110 million a day, and you know it because when you fill up your gas tank, you take a look at what you are paying. This money, frankly, is far in excess of what you companies have made in profits and more in net income than any companies in recent history in our country.

In Illinois, and across America, families have opened up their wallets for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. They should not have their pockets picked by a group of greedy oil companies.

Tonight, America wants to hear from President Bush the steps he is going to take to protect America’s families and reduce our dependence on foreign oil. I certainly hope the President is willing to take them on. What steps will the President support to develop alternative fuels so we can reduce our dependence on foreign oil? What can we do to make certain we do not have to walk hand in hand with Saudi sheiks begging them for their oil for our economy? I hope the President will address that this evening.

Americans also want to hear President Bush explain how we are going to pay for the reconstruction of the gulf coast without shortchanging important national priorities and without burying our children and grandchildren in debt.

In the 1990s, under President Clinton, we eliminated the Federal deficit. The Government was running a surplus. And we were actually paying down the national debt so our kids’ mortgage, our national mortgage would be lower. In the 1990s, under President Bush’s watch, our national debt has increased by $3 trillion. That is a 50-percent increase in the cumulative debt of America’s entire history—50 percent under President Bush.

The Federal Government has to borrow $2 billion every morning just to keep operating. Some are predicting the cost of Hurricane Katrina could push the deficit up to $400 billion this year. We are looking at a flood of red ink this year and for years to come.

Yet, incredible as it may seem, there are those who think our top priority now should be cutting taxes for wealthy Americans. Imagine, no President in our history ever, of any administration, has cut taxes in the midst of a war.

This President continues to cut taxes as our deficits reach historic levels. And now, with Hurricane Katrina, we still hear Republicans on the other side of the aisle saying: Well, we have to give a tax break to the wealthiest Americans by eliminating the estate tax.

Accountability means responsibility. It means leadership. Tonight, when the President speaks to the Nation, he should announce he will refuse to sign any bill eliminating the estate tax or any other tax cut that provides a windfall for the very wealthiest among us, until we provide it for the neediest among us, the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Let me conclude by reminding my colleagues of a statement of Bill Cohen. Bill is a former Republican Senator from Maine and former Secretary of Defense under President Clinton. And here is what he said. This is “the Cohen Rule”:

Government is the enemy—until you need a friend.

The other day I read a variation of this rule. It was said by Senator Trent Lott, who is viewed as a very conservative Republican in this Chamber. Here is what Senator Trent Lott said:

You’re a fiscal conservative—until you get hit with a natural disaster.

In addition to houses and lives, one of the things swept away by Hurricane Katrina for many millions of Americans was the myth of this “ownership society,” which we have heard from the most conservative think tanks in Washington and from this administration. That is the point of view that says that America need is not necessarily less Government, but smarter Government. We need a Government that is strong enough to protect us overseas and protect us at home, a Government rooted in the most basic American moral values, a tradition that goes back to the earliest days of our Nation: banding together in times of need, to do for each other what none of us can do alone—using our common wealth for the common good.

Americans want a Government that says: We are all in this together, not: We are all in this alone.

We have seen so much heroism from so many people during Hurricane Katrina. We have seen the overwhelming kindness of Americans toward the survivors, the overwhelming, spontaneous outpouring of contributions from people across America—from the major corporations with their millions of dollars to the kids on the corner selling lemonade—all of them trying to do their part to help their neighbors, the most vulnerable in America, the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

America is yearning for a leadership and a leader that will speak to that spirit of unity and community. We will listen closely tonight for it.

The “ownership society” is not the right answer—it never was. Nor is this national tragedy to try to divide Americans a good idea, when we yearn to be drawn together, not pulled apart.
We understand there are some challenges so enormous that none of us acting alone can meet them. We believe in sharing our blessings and our burdens. We believe in shared sacrifice.

There was a story in the Washington Post last week, and the headline was “The Nation's Capital Becomes a South Bronx Story about some of the people who were left behind to fend for themselves in New Orleans when the floods came. The reporter described a man who felt as if for a moment he was living in the South Bronx.

I feel like an American again,” the man said on TV after help finally began to arrive. “I thought my country had abandoned me.”

Government at all levels failed during Hurricane Katrina, and tens of thousands of Americans were left with that same terrible fear—that their country had abandoned them. But we know from experience that when Americans pull together, we can overcome any obstacle. We have done it so many times in our history.

The urgent task facing the President tonight, and facing every leader in Government at every level, including this Senator, is to show the American people, not just in words but with actions, that we will not allow this tragedy to be repeated.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Thomasee Chaffeee (R-Conn.). The Senator from Minnesota.

Mr. DAYTON. Mr. President, I have come to the floor to join with the distinguished assistant Democratic leader in his conscientious and continuing concern for the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

I have seen the Senator from Illinois on the floor day after day, raising these questions, addressing these concerns. I understand tomorrow the Senator from New Orleans will tour the area personally, with Senate leadership, to see what needs to be done there to address the human suffering. I hear in his voice, and know from his longstanding commitment to the people of Illinois, the depth of his own heartfelt concern for their problems and his passion for their suffering and to do what we can, what we must, to address those problems.

I look forward to hearing from the Senator from New Orleans after his return from New Orleans and that area, as to what we can do more effectively—all of us as leaders in the Senate, all of us working together, all of us as Americans, as Democrats or Republicans, as partisans but as patriots—on behalf of all the people in need.

I share his concern. What prompted me to come to the floor is I heard the Senator speaking about some of the difficulties in getting some of the necessary information in order to perform our responsibilities as Senators. I share that frustration, or at least let me express my own frustration because as a member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs which has, under the Senate's organizing resolution, the responsibility and the authority to oversee the Department of Homeland Security as well as FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which is under the Secretary that is surrounded and enormously dismayed by the unwillingness of the Senate Republican leadership to permit that committee to do what it is responsible to do, which is to hold oversight hearings and to understand what is and what is not happening down in that flood-ravaged part of the country, and also to find out what must be done not to look at just failures—also, you hear about successes—not to point fingers of blame, but to exercise our oversight responsibility, particularly given that we have now, this body, at the President's request, appropriated almost $63 billion of taxpayers' money to address these critical emergency needs.

I do not know how we need to act quickly. And we have done so. But to deliver that much money—Federal taxpayers' dollars—to the responsible agencies without any oversight, without any questions asked or answers provided about what is being done with that money, and particularly to hear the Senator from Illinois describe published reports of sole-source contracting with organizations that have political connections with the President's former campaign manager, I find it to be shocking and appalling we have not exercised that responsibility.

I would ask the leader, and others responsible for these decisions, about when we will be holding public hearings in that committee to authorize our proceeding to do so with those who are directly responsible for the recovery efforts.

None of us wants to disrupt the recovery efforts in the southern part of the country. But, I find it perplexing that Cabinet secretaries who have enough time to appear before us in a public setting, have, while the country had abandoned them. But we know from experience that when Americans pull together, we can overcome any obstacle. We have done it so many times in our history.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. Bennett). Without objection, it is so ordered.

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Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.
CONSTITUTION DAY

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, on Saturday, the Nation will observe the 218th anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution.

In previous years, September 17 has been designated "Citizenship Day." This special focus on the Constitution came about as a result of an initiative sponsored by our senior colleague from West Virginia. The Consolidated Appropriations Act for Calendar Year 2005 provides that each educational institution receiving Federal funds during a fiscal year will conduct a program of its own devising on the Constitution. Also, each Federal department and agency, in connection with this special day, will make available educational materials on the Constitution for its employees.

Today, we have placed on the desk of each Senator two documents. The first is an annotated copy of the Constitution. The second contains the record of the 1787 constitutional convention as pertains to the powers and responsibilities of the United States Senate. In the spirit of this first Constitution Day, I hope all my colleagues will take the time to examine both of these fundamental documents.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor the work and achievements of Hispanic Americans. Every year since 1968, Americans have formally recognized the importance of Hispanic heritage and the contributions of Latino members of society. Hispanic Heritage Month allows the Nation's 41 million Latinos, along with all Americans, to celebrate Latino community and culture.

As the fastest growing population in America, Hispanics have the potential to significantly impact society through their hard work, commitment to faith and family, and loyalty of their fellow soldiers. Aida Gianchello is one of the Latina Americans who are changing the world. Aida founded the Midwest Latino Health Research, Training and Policy Center at the University of Chicago at Illinois. From this Center, Aida works within the Chicago area and with the public health network to address health problems that disproportionately affect Latinos, including life-threatening diabetes, asthma and hypertension.

This morning, I had the pleasure of meeting three women from Illinois about to graduate from the National Hispana Leadership Institute. Juanita Irizarry is the executive director of Latinos United, a housing policy and advocacy organization in the Chicago area. Eva Serrano is director of community and school partnerships at Aurora University. Elena Tijerina is a partner at Lucent Technologies. These are only a few of the thousands of Latino leaders who are rising to face these challenges. The Constitution. Also, each Federal department and agency, in connection with this special day, will make available educational materials on the Constitution for its employees.

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HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

ARTHUR RAY McGUIII

Mrs. LINCOLN. Mr. President, today I rise with a heavy heart to honor the life of SGT Arthur Ray McGill. It is the story of a carefree and loving young man from northwest Arkansas, who was devoted to his family and always put them above all else. It is also the story of a trustworthy and brave soldier, who honorably served his Nation in uniform, and ultimately gave his life in the name of freedom.

Sergeant McGill spent most of his childhood in the small town of Decatur. Those who best would describe him as a quiet and patient young man who was always considerate of others and treated them with respect. He attended Decatur High School and although he left after his 10th grade year, he went on to earn his general educational development diploma at the age of 17. Soon after, he joined the Arkansas National Guard, where he would serve for 6 years prior to enlisting in the U.S. Army in November 2002.

In his free time, "Ray" or "Big Country," as he was known to friends and family, had a love for archery and could often be found playing video games or reading the comic books of his favorite superhero, Spiderman. But above all, his greatest love was his family, particularly his 7-year old daughter Kaylee. Her welfare was her father's greatest concern, and she knew that he could always be counted on to protect and care for her as best he could.

Sergeant McGill reported for duty in January of 2003 and was deployed for service in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He was one of the soldiers in the initial waves of American troops into Baghdad, and served in the area until that August. Sergeant McGill returned to Iraq in January of 2005. In explaining his decision to reenlist for a second tour of duty to his loved ones, Sergeant McGill spoke of his feeling of being needed in Iraq, and how he knew he simply had to do his part and was proud to do so. He would also speak of his future after the Army, when he hoped to study criminal justice, buy a home, and become a member of the U.S. Border Patrol in New Mexico.

Throughout his military service, Sergeant McGill's hard work and dependability quickly earned him the respect and loyalty of his fellow soldiers. They even began calling him "Tizzley," a combination of a teddy bear and a grizzly bear, which aptly described the G4 soldier who had a heart of gold. Though the comradeship with his fellow soldiers grew, Sergeant McGill was still a...