world and helped to keep energy abundant, provides an interesting snapshot of the advances that have reverberated around the world and helped to keep energy abundant, affordacable and clean.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GOHMIERT). 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 needed assistance. The company sends 1,300 customers in eastern Pennsylvania. When the people of the Gulf Coast need assistance, PPL true to form lived up to its reputation as a great corporate citizen.

We come to the floor, as you know, Mr. Speaker, almost every day to talk about issues that are facing Americans; some is 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 gentleman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) of 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 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 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 that oversaw 9/11. And here is the bill, H.R. 3767.

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 independent of FEMA, which 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 in control of these kinds of crises. 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 the one that is going to be the majority on 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 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 gentleman 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 solution after another by one mandate 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 I think that the only way that is going 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. If you want people 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, they need to have their confidence in their government’s ability to deal with their everyday problems badly, badly shaken by one mandate after another by one more bit of evidence of corruption and cronyism.

When we have people engaging in cronyism, and we know that it takes a culture. It is not like an overnight fix. It is not like an overnight change revealed by another e-mail. It is a culture. It is a culture.

We are asking for an independent commission. Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I think it was the point person, I forgot the title, but he looked at it as a slight, an insult, and somehow a demotion from his position as Under Secretary Brown where he was appointed 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 I think it is just 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 is he perceived in terms of title?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Terrible. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is what we want the FEMA Director to be worried about, what he is called?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Right. Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And how is he perceived in terms of title?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. President, I think it was the point person, I forgot the title, but he looked at it as a slight, an insult, and somehow a demotion from his position as Under Secretary.

Mr. MECK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I think it was the point person, I forgot the title, but he looked at it as a slight, an insult, and somehow a demotion from his position as Under Secretary.

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 exchanged between a White House spokesperson of FEMA and then Under Secretary Brown where he was appointed 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?
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.

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 explosion, there is an independent 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 today. 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 that I vote 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 into them without a technical issue 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, 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 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. There 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 it, 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 anyone anywhere who looked at this 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 they made a decision to stop when we are 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 picture 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 concrete about to go into the water, 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 3 days for all of this 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 the creation of an 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 I liken 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 flasho 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 if the executives of a corporation went through, it would be

I do want to read one report. Correct me if I am wrong. I read a report from a book of Ted Weisberg on the behavior of Tyco.

Let me 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 at the night of August 30 and declared Hurricane Katrina a “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 Cheryl Chertoff.

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

Brown’s reply was, “Exactly.”

Reps. 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.

Mr. Speaker, these are the people that were responsible for making sure that the very people who 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, 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 to change the leadership. We need to reform this 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 highlight all of the good 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 resisted 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.

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.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman has the website at the bottom. 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.house democrats.gov/Katrina or they can e-mail us. We will put them on either way. But I think it is important to hold 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 for a 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. RYAN 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 we clearly 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 politics. The White House appointed someone inside the White House, a high-ranking Homeland Security adviser to the President. That 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. We need to take control of 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 this from that?

Somepeople 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. 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 anywhere. Americans are going to keep control of this situation. 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. Third party validators. Then they can go over to the Homeland Security responding to Katrina and Rita and the same picture that 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 drapes 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 of saying. Lisenced 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 to make corrections 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, 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 some of the comments about business 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 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 gentlewoman 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. I know that these 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 shout out 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. Instead, the 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 are Washington speak for budget cuts, not individuals. $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, one thing after another, the natural disaster in the gulf coast, hurricanes last year, all this stuff that has been going on, not one time has the President 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, tell them we need 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 costs.

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 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 loans and the Pell grant, which is broken under $9 billion, 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 people. Meanwhile, we are cutting 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 children 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 more family 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.

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 coinci-
dence, 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 that is on that area.

Then during the greatest natural dis-
aster, 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 re-
building 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? It feels like they are down here. You are just slowly watch-
ing 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 re-
forming the way government works. Reform is not consistent necessarily with tax cuts for wealthy people. It is about fixing the way government exec-
utes its responsibilities, and this is what we set out to do, and 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, a government agency, like 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 the banks, the insurance companies, they are 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 get 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 government; but we do not want them to make too much money, we are going to make the minimum wage on these jobs, or whatever wage you want to pay them, but not a prevailing wage that is this Fed-
eral law.

Because this happens to be an emer-
gency and this is the President’s think-
ing, 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 high-
est was 10. The low was four and an-
other 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.

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 Con-
gress 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 re-
ality?

This would not be a discussion about an independent commission to look at Katrina or what did happen or what did happen in Katrina. If we look, so when another U.S. city goes through a situation where they have to evac-
uate the entire city, families being dis-
placed, living with others, some people living in arenas, some folks living in church fellowships and synagogue fellowships 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 way we can get them back home and to get them help-

ing them, being able to get the pay-
check or even open their business, then let us do that to make them self-suffi-
cient. 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 good-

ness, if something comes out about Iraq, get out of the way; we have got to fund it. Matter of fact, can we add an-
other billion to it, can we, because we, in the case we want to make sure we give our commit-
mment to the Iraqi people. Let us get another billion.

But when it comes down to the Americans, our people, once again, I will I will salute the 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 if they get a free and balanced 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? 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 who can knock us to the floor, because they will be able to give campaign contributions to the management. 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 and they show you a person that 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 scenario, the one where the money ran out. So we do have time for our Iraqi friends, the ones that we have an investigation going on, see if you can do better this time.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN). I am just not going to happen, and that is the reason why we have to have the LIBRARY, see if you can do better this time. 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 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 gentlemwoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) is right to let us focus on things we are doing.