

FEDERAL EMERGENCY
MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise today, as I have in months gone by, to talk about some of the good things that are happening in Government. We tend to dwell—because of the negative perception that the press throws on almost everything that is done here in Washington—on things that the Government is involved in that are not good. There are things we do that are good, however, and I want to talk about some of those things. I want to do this, Mr. President, in an effort to stem the tide of negativity that has engulfed the perception many Americans have about their Government. Strident skepticism about our Government seems to rule the day. I worry about the harm it will do to our country in the long term.

A recent survey of 1,000 registered voters found that about 63 percent of them did not want their children to be President. This is in stark contrast to what it was 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago. If this is the case, where will we find the leaders for future generations?

There are, in fact, as I have already indicated, many Government efforts and agencies that serve this country well. Last summer I spoke on this floor about the National Park Service, which began in the early part of this century as an idea of President Theodore Roosevelt. The National Park Service has worked to preserve and protect the remarkable lands that we call our national parks.

Since Congress established the National Park Service, this agency has cared for these natural wonders. Today, about 80 years after the National Park Service was formed, 270 million people will visit our National Park System.

I am very proud that the most heavily visited entity in our entire National Park System is in Nevada. The Lake Mead recreational area has over 10 million visitors every year. Because of the hard work of the Park Service, these national treasures will be available for all Americans to enjoy for generations to come.

Another worthwhile Federal agency about which I have spoken is the Consumer Product Safety Commission. This is a very small agency, but very effective agency, and it has jurisdiction over more than 15,000 different products. It maintains a constant vigil to seek out and eliminate harm to the American consumer. For example, after a baby's death resulting from a faulty playpen right here in the District of Columbia, the Consumer Product Safety Commission responded quickly by removing these playpens from stores and issued a nationwide alert to all consumers.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission most recently made news by recalling popular fleece clothing because it was found to be dangerously flammable. At one time, we had a simi-

lar problem with children's pajamas catching on fire. Because of the Consumer Product Safety Commission, we now have flame-retardant pajamas for our children.

From investigating reports about unsafe products to protecting our children from lead poisoning on playgrounds, the Consumer Product Safety Commission has proven, in my opinion, to be an indispensable and beneficial Government agency.

Every summer wildfires sweep the Western part of the United States. About 25,000 brave men and women fight those fires. These self-sacrificing and hard-working firefighters are coordinated through the National Inter-agency Fire Center, which is a joint project of the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. These people put their lives on the line. Hundreds of these men and women parachute out of the back of airplanes with backpacks weighing almost 100 pounds. We have hundreds more who propel off helicopters into harm's way in order to save life, property, and our great natural resources.

We should be proud of this work done by the Federal Government. When wild fires race across our forests and fields, and the flames threaten our communities, these brave firefighters risk their lives to keep us safe.

Today, I want to take the time to recognize the good work of another Government Agency that takes care of us when we suffer calamities. That is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA. Mr. President, when I was in the other body, one of the committees I served on had jurisdiction over authorizing what FEMA did. In those days, more than a decade ago, FEMA got a lot of bad publicity. They have made remarkable improvements. This organization is one of the best examples of how Government truly works for Americans.

In late December and early January, northern Nevada experienced the worst floods in the history of our State. We do not have many rivers in Nevada, but three tiny rivers in northern Nevada—the Truckee, Carson, and Walker Rivers—became raging torrents, washing away people, animals, and property. While most of America was enjoying the New Year's holiday, we in Nevada were besieged by the "Flood of 1997," as were a number of other Western States. When northern Nevadans were confronted with this devastating damage, the Federal Emergency Management Agency quickly responded to the short-term and long-term needs of residents and businesses. With FEMA's help, Nevada is not only rebuilding, but we are well on the road to recovery.

FEMA has been tremendous. They called on their reserves and utilized their experts to assist with our devastating farm losses. They were even able to bring in people that could deal with the losses we had to tourism.

FEMA is an agency that is used to handling water damage. About 80 per-

cent of the emergencies they deal with in the United States deal with water damage and floods. They are truly experts at this.

FEMA was established as an independent agency in 1979 when its original purpose was to deal with nuclear attack. That is no longer the case. While the Agency once operated within a narrow mandate, it has since been expanded to handle disasters generally.

Mr. President, this is an agency that recognizes that people who are hit by floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other national disasters are Republicans, Democrats, and independents. This is an agency that must act on a bipartisan basis. And I think they have done a good job of doing that.

Due to the present Director, James Lee Witt, who visited Nevada during the flood disaster, FEMA has become an example of good government. For example, in an effort to streamline and reduce costs, FEMA has closed a number of field offices and has drafted a plan to reduce its internal regulations, which we all dislike, by more than 50 percent. It has become a cost-effective agency which has developed an innovative, customer-oriented approach to government. Most notably, from the very first sign of disaster, FEMA works in partnership with State and local governments, as well as businesses and private agencies. I can testify to this, as it is precisely what happened in Nevada. FEMA does not act like some type of monolithic big brother trying to supersede all local efforts. Everything they do is in partnership with local government. They also deal with business concerns. When the New Year's flood struck, FEMA was on the ground within hours to begin the coordination of relief efforts in Nevada. In conjunction with local officials, FEMA conducted preliminary damage assessments. They did not do it on their own. They did it with local officials. Based on FEMA's initial findings, the President declared 6 of our 17 counties disaster areas, and one major city in Nevada as a disaster area. After the declaration, FEMA began some more good work coordinating numerous assistance efforts in the State.

In a disaster, FEMA becomes the central point of contact for a wide range of emergency responses, including planning, mitigation, and recovery. Aid offered by the Agency ranges from low-interest loans, even cash grants, to advice on how to mitigate damage from future disasters.

FEMA's basic disaster recovery assistance falls into three main categories. No. 1 is human services, or individual assistance, which provides aid to individuals, family, and business owners. No. 2 is infrastructure and public assistance, which helps State and local governments pay for emergency services and repair damages to facilities such as roads, bridges, buildings, and utilities.

During the flood, when it was still raging, I went into an area outside of

our capital, Carson City, to meet with county commissioners. One of the big problems we had with the Carson River, which is a wild river with no dams, was with a levy that had been washed away. This levy had been there for as long as anyone could remember, but no one claimed ownership of it. It did not belong to the county. It did not belong to the State. The farmers did not claim it, and neither did the Indians. It was essential, however, that levy be reconstructed. So the county said, "We will take responsibility." As soon as they did that, FEMA was there to begin work on how to reconstruct the levy, which is so essential to prevent damage from Nevada's spring thaws.

The third disaster assistance category is hazard mitigation assistance, which provides funding for reducing future losses in disaster areas. We have an area along the Truckee River where FEMA is considering buying all of the land. It is likely that this area will suffer another flood, so why should we continue to put those residents in harms way? The homes should not have been built there, and FEMA's efforts to buy this land is a fundamental part of hazard mitigation assistance.

Additionally, one of the first things FEMA does in an afflicted community is activate what they call the National Teleregistration Center. This sounds like a fancy name, but it is basically a telephone bank which begins taking applications for assistance within hours of the President's declaration. In Nevada, we have had over 3,000 people register for assistance by using this telephone number. Moreover, as of just a few days ago, FEMA had issued millions of dollars in housing checks to Nevadans; approved nearly a half a million dollars in individual and family grants in Nevada; obligated almost \$5 million in public assistance grants to repair and restore Nevada public facilities; and issued \$15,000 in disaster unemployment assistance to Nevada residents left jobless.

One reason FEMA works so well in a partnership with local governments is because, when there is a disaster, they do not come in and say we are going to take care of everything. The reason cooperation is coming from State and local governments is because they are required to come up with 25 percent of the costs of these repairs.

Amidst all the chaos of this devastating flood, FEMA was a source of hope, assistance, and relief. In time of disaster, when communities are reeling from devastation caused by nature or humans, it is vital that an emergency management infrastructure is ready to respond immediately. FEMA works in cooperation with States and nonprofits to pick up where their efforts left off. This efficient Federal Agency also works to cover what residents' insurance does not.

Since the potential for flooding in some areas is still extreme, FEMA's efforts in hazard mitigation planning are

invaluable. I have already talked about an example of that. The Carson and Walker Rivers are threatening to flood again, and the problem will not be gone until the snow has melted. The flood of 1997 washed away levees, choked river channels, and saturated soils. These conditions make the area ripe for more flooding. FEMA will be there to help if this untoward situation takes place. Because of strong leadership and a willingness to make necessary reforms, FEMA has become an indispensable Government agency for millions of Americans who have suffered these terrible losses. In a 1994 survey, over 80 percent of natural disaster victims approved of the way FEMA did its work. This is clearly, Mr. President, government working for us. The Director, James Lee Witt, should be very proud of this Agency. I know I am.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ENZI). The Chair recognizes the Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. TORRICELLI. I ask unanimous consent to address the Senate for 10 minutes.

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

THE WAR AGAINST ILLEGAL DRUGS

Mr. TORRICELLI. Mr. President, before this day is ended, the administration must decide whether or not to certify Mexico as an ally in the war against illegal drugs.

Having served in the House of Representatives as chairman of the Western Hemisphere Committee for some years, and representing the State of New Jersey, which, among other centers of urban and suburban life in our country, has been plagued by narcotics, I feel a need and a responsibility to address the administration on this issue before it makes its final judgment because I believe, based on the actions of the Government of Mexico in the last year, the choice, though difficult, is very clear. The simple fact is that no country anywhere on the globe now poses a more immediate threat to our actions in curtailing the spread of narcotics than Mexico. Indeed, the administrator of the DEA has said, and I quote, "Mexicans are now the single most powerful drug trafficking operation in the world."

The State Department's 1996 World Narcotics Control Strategy Report outlines the threat that Mexico now represents. It cites Mexico as the principal transit route for cocaine entering the United States and a major source for heroin and marijuana. Indeed, Mr. President, it has been suggested that with the success of American operations in the Caribbean and the Bahamas, fully two-thirds of cocaine now entering the United States is being routed through Mexico. As we have succeeded in the Caribbean and the Bahamas pound for pound, dollar for dollar, Mexico has been available to com-

pensate the drug cartels. The State Department's 1996 report further concludes, "Mexico is the most important money laundering center in the Western Hemisphere."

There is no escaping the fact that Mexican cartels now are bribing whom-ever can be bribed and killing those who resist. In recent months, eight Mexican prosecutors and law enforcement personnel have been murdered in Tijuana, all this since certifying last year that Mexico was assisting United States Government operations. In the last year, Mexico has failed to capture or extradite a single high-ranking member of any drug cartel. There are now 52 outstanding United States extradition requests for drug dealers, and Mexico has not complied with a single one of those extradition requests. Indeed, Mr. President, there is no record of any Mexican national ever being extradited to the United States on a narcotics charge.

There has been considerable hope since certification last year that the use of the Mexican Armed Forces would represent a change. If, indeed, the narcotics strategy of Mexico included not simply law enforcement personnel who might have been compromised but Mexico represented and recognized that this was a matter of their own national security and involved their armed forces, that there might be a change. But the record is now clear. There has not been a change. The announcement of only last week that General Gutierrez, a 42-year veteran of the armed forces, had accepted bribes from the Carrillo Fuentes cartel makes clear that the entry of the Mexican Armed Forces is not only insufficient but inadequate and, indeed, potentially counterproductive.

Changes in Mexican law lead us to the same conclusion. Last year the Mexican Parliament passed criminal money laundering laws, but they are both incomplete and completely not implemented. These laws at a minimum do not require banks to report large and suspicious currency transactions. Unfortunately, the Mexican Government, having not implemented its antinarcotics strategy, having now recognized that the entry of the armed forces is inadequate or counterproductive and taking no actions against laundering with the banks, it therefore, in my judgment, can be concluded that Mexico has not taken the certification process seriously. Previous certifications have brought no new cooperation, and now we must reach a different judgment.

Indeed, Mr. President, in light of the evidence of the corruption of law enforcement personnel, new evidence of corruption of the armed forces, the failure to comply with American requests for extradition, the failure to enforce their own laws on money laundering, the United States Government should be answering the following question: What else would Mexico have to do to be denied certification? Having