

Our efforts to keep the Government open for business will also help give Minnesotans a guarantee that budget squabbles in Washington will not affect the long-term efforts to rebuild our communities.

Now, I know we may have reached a budget agreement in overall numbers and terms, but a lot of the debate will continue. And there is still the possibility of an agreement not being reached on every part of that budget this fall which could lead to a possible Government shutdown. It has happened before; it could happen again.

In light of that, we want to provide assurances to these victims of the flood this spring in Minnesota and the Dakotas that they would not come up short this fall, they would not face a stop in the work that they are trying to do in rebuilding their lives.

Under my compromise proposal, checks would continue to go out and contracts would be honored this year—in spite of what happens in Washington. And that is an assurance we cannot afford to go without.

In announcing the President's veto, the White House spokesman said that "Americans in need should not have to endure further delay." I could not agree more with that statement.

The people of Minnesota and the Dakotas cannot afford for Washington's budget politics to stand in the way of the rebuilding that has already begun. Now that we have a starting point, let us move ahead and pass the emergency disaster relief we promised. And let us do it as quickly as we can.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

I yield back my time.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks time?

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, first of all, I feel I need to respond to the statement about the President's action. The President did not include unrelated items in a disaster bill. It is not his fault that we are in this circumstance. It is the fault of those who decided to put unrelated items into a disaster relief bill.

THE DELAY IN DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I represent the State of North Dakota. And our State has been absolutely devastated. We have people, thousands of people, who are still sleeping on cots 54 days after the disaster occurred. Fifty-four days after the dikes broke, we still have thousands of people on cots, people living in cars, people whose homes and businesses have been devastated. And they cannot understand why Congress fails to act.

Mr. President, last night we had a linkup via computer with people who are the leaders of the Grand Forks community—the mayors of Grand Forks and East Grand Forks, the lead-

ers of the business community, the head of the chamber of commerce, leaders of other parts of the Grand Forks community, people from the medical school. And their message was clear and unencumbered. They have asked Congress to send a clean disaster relief bill to the President without unrelated measures, and to do it now. That is their request.

The message was powerful and compelling. People who have had everything lost, people who evacuated their homes at 1 o'clock in the morning and who have not returned since, a city of 50,000, 95 percent of whom were evacuated, with 80 percent of the homes in that community devastated. That is the reality that we are living with.

Mr. President, this chart says it, and says it clearly: Disaster Victims Held Hostage, Day 20. This is just since this Congress took the Memorial Day break without acting. Twenty days of inaction after a bill to provide disaster relief was completely agreed to.

The disaster provisions were agreed to by Democrats, by Republicans, and by the President. It is these unrelated measures that were stuck into this disaster relief bill that have hung things up. The people that I represent say, "Take them out. Quit playing politics with the lives of people. Quit holding hostage thousands of people to a political agenda. Get the disaster relief where it's needed, and get it there now."

Mr. President, this is a sign that a resident of Grand Forks put out on their lawn after Congress decided to take a break without passing disaster relief. It says, "Hey, Congress! Spend your break here!" And here is some of the refuse from the disaster in their front yard. You can see the garbage bags piled up as people try to rebuild their lives.

I have a series of photos here that try to bring this back to what this is really about. It is not about how we take the census in the year 2000. It is not about some budget dispute. This is about people who have been devastated and need help.

This is a picture from Grand Forks. This is the downtown area that not only had a 500-year flood, but had a fire that devastated three entire city blocks. Here is some of the refuse that remains from that disaster.

Go to another picture that shows what is happening in terms of Grand Forks, ND. Here is a downtown area, one of the buildings that burned up in the fire, all the rubble that is there. It is staggering. You go through the city of Grand Forks, it looks like a giant junkyard.

Here is what you see as you go up and down every street in residential Grand Forks—every street, because 80 percent of the homes were damaged in this town. This is what you see on every boulevard. All of the contents of these homes, the washers, the dryers, the carpeting, the furniture is not in the home, it is out here on the street be-

cause it has all been destroyed. And these people are asking for one thing, a chance to get their lives back in order.

They have had the worst winter in our history followed by the most powerful winter storm in 50 years that destroyed the electrical grid that served 80,000 people. They were without power for nearly 10 days, in the midst of 40-degree below weather, and then they get hit by the 500-year flood, and then by the worst fire in our State's history. Now they are hit by a disaster of a Congress that fails to act.

Never before in the face of a disaster have we diddled for as long as we have diddled on this disaster. People are asking for help. And this is the condition of their lives.

This is a picture of the business district. It is not just the homes, but it is the businesses that have been destroyed.

I ask my colleagues, if you were in this circumstance wouldn't you expect this body to act, wouldn't you expect a response, wouldn't you expect some help?

This is another picture of what people are going through each and every day now in Grand Forks and East Grand Forks—piles of garbage. This water is not just rainwater, this is water that is putrid. You fly over it, and it stinks because it is filled with every imaginable awful thing. And every home and every business is just destroyed. All of the things that are in there have to go.

This is again a picture of what is outside one of the commercial buildings, and a tremendous amount of destruction. We are going to take years to rebuild. We do not have much time.

We have a short construction season in our part of the country. By October 15 outdoor work will have to be completed. So we do not have time for political games to be played here in Washington.

Let me again repeat the message from the people that I represent. "Please, Congress, pass a disaster relief bill without these unrelated measures so the aid can start to flow."

Some have said, "Well, nothing is being held up. There's money in the pipeline." Last night we heard from the people of Grand Forks. And what they said was very clear. There is not money in the pipeline. There is concrete in the pipeline, because the money is not getting through. There is no money for the buyouts and relocation of the homes and businesses that have been destroyed. There is no money in that pipeline. There is no money in the pipeline to help the ranchers who have lost hundreds of thousands of head of livestock. There is no money in that pipeline. There is no money in the pipeline for the school districts that have taken the kids from the disaster areas. There is no money in that pipeline.

The Governor of South Dakota, Republican by the way, said: On a disaster bill you ought to deal with disasters. He said: For those who say nothing is getting hung up, that's just wrong. And not just he said it, a Republican Congressman from Minnesota, JIM RAMSTAD, said: Those who say there's money in the pipeline are being disingenuous at best. There is no money for housing. There is no money for buyouts and relocations of the homes and businesses that have been destroyed. There is no money for sewage systems. There is no money for roads. There is no money for a whole series of things that desperately need resources.

This is the Republican Governor of South Dakota. He said, "If you've got a disaster bill, you ought to deal with a disaster." He was complaining about the congressional leaders here for sticking controversial measures in a disaster relief bill. And he has it exactly right. For those who say nothing is being hung up, " * * * Janklow said the delay in the legislation is blocking reconstruction of sewage facilities, highways and a State-owned rail line in South Dakota."

Mr. President, this is how the flood victims feel.

This is from the largest newspaper in our State. The headline is very clear: "You are playing with our lives." Let me just read what this disaster victim said:

Ranee Steffan has strong words for members of Congress who think flood victims can wait while bickering continues in Washington . . .

"You are playing with our lives" . . . [she was speaking] from the sweltering travel trailer she and her family now call home. "This isn't some game. . . . [She said] You should come here and walk in my shoes for a day."

Homeless for a month, out of work and bounced from one temporary shelter to another, the wife and mother of two is fed up with lawmakers who she believes think[s] Grand Forks residents are "getting along just fine."

They are not getting along just fine. We had one of our colleagues say, "Well, we can send you a bunch of trailers."

People in North Dakota do not see trailers as a long-term answer to their housing needs. Frankly, trailers in a North Dakota winter are not a very acceptable form of housing. We need to rebuild housing, housing that can withstand a North Dakota winter. We do not need a bunch of trailers sent to our part of the country. That is not the answer to what we face.

We have heard a lot of talk about what is happening and what is not happening, what people out there are asking for, what they are not asking for. How about hearing from the people out there. How about listening to them.

This is the mayor of Grand Forks in a letter to Senators LOTT and DASCHLE, this courageous mayor who has become, I think, an inspiration to the country because, in the face of adver-

sity, she has provided extraordinary leadership. Let me just make clear she is not a partisan. To my knowledge she is not a member of either political party. I have no idea what her political identification is. She has always said she is an independent, that her husband is a Republican. That is as much as anybody knows about her legal affiliation.

Here is what she says:

I urge you to strip all of the controversial amendments from the disaster aid bill and send the humanitarian emergency provisions of the bill to the President for his signature.

That is what she says. She continues:

We are grateful for the emergency aid provisions included in this bill. These provisions, especially funds for the Community Development Block Grant program, will be essential for Grand Forks to be able to recover and rebuild. North Dakota's short construction season dictates that we must take action quickly to rebuild and relocate homes away from the floodplain.

But the political fight over provisions unrelated to disaster relief have stalled this bill and delayed the recovery process for Grand Forks and other cities in the Red River Valley. This disaster aid is needed now. We are simply unable to make decisions about how and if we will be able to rebuild our city without knowing the extent of Federal resources available. We need funds now for housing, for buy-outs and relocation and homes of businesses, for roads and bridges, for school districts and many more urgent needs. With each passing day thousands of residents of Grand Forks and other communities are unable to get on with their lives and are forced to live in shelters, in government-issued trailers, or with relatives.

Again, thank you for the emergency provisions included in the disaster aid bill. I urge you to strip the controversial, non-disaster related measures from the disaster bill and send the humanitarian emergency provisions to the President for his signature.

This was the elected leader of the city of Grand Forks.

Last night, we heard that identical message from the head of the chamber of commerce, from other leaders of the business community, from people from all walks of life, a member of the police department, a member of the city works department, all of them talking to people across the country via satellite as they told their story, what has happened in their community, and what they are asking for now.

It has been 83 days since the President asked for disaster legislation. It has been 53 days since the dikes broke. It has now been 20 days—20 days—since Congress agreed to a disaster package but left town without enacting it before the Memorial Day recess.

Let me just read part of a letter from one of my constituents: "The people here have no homes, no jobs, and no other homes to go to. They have no toys, no bikes, no clothes, or anything else for their children, and you go home for a break. What are you thinking of?"

That is a sample of the literally hundreds of letters that we have gotten from the disaster area.

This is a letter from another constituent:

Perhaps you should visit here and see and feel the pain and devastation. Spend 3 days here, and you will soon understand why people are depressed and the anxiety level is extreme. We are stressed out.

Also, I am sure that if this disaster had hit your district, you would want to pass the legislation with a sense of urgency. That's all we expect.

What this means to me and my family: Relief from the flood of the century. It brought flood waters into our community, our house and six rental properties I own and manage. Indeed, the amount of damage I have sustained is mind boggling. I'm on the brink.

We urge you to pass the disaster relief bill today. Please don't delay another day. We can't wait.

I have hundreds, if not thousands, of letters like this from people out there who are asking their Government to respond. These people are proud people. They are independent people. They are hard-working people. But they have been hit with a series of disasters unprecedented in our State's history.

The worst winter ever, followed by the most powerful winter storm in 50 years, followed by a 500-year flood, followed by a fire in the midst of flood that destroyed much of the town of Grand Forks, a city of 50,000 people that had 95 percent of that town evacuated. That has never happened in America's history, a town of that size completely evacuated. The town right across the river, East Grand Forks, in Minnesota, a city of 9,000, was entirely evacuated. We are not going to be able to rebuild much of these towns. Many of these homes are just absolutely destroyed. Those homes need to be torn down. They represent a health hazard. The businesses, too, need to be torn down. We need to move back from the river to a more defensible location, but that cannot happen until and unless this Congress acts.

I just conclude by saying when the shoe is on the other foot—and I have been in the Senate 10 years—we were ready to help. We never delayed anybody's disaster bill ever. I never even thought of adding controversial provisions to a disaster bill that someone else needed. I just ask our colleagues to give us the same chance and extend the same respect to our constituents. They desperately need help and they need it now.

I thank the Chair and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming is recognized.

EXCESS SPENDING IN DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I claim the time we had to talk about how to get this job done. We have talked for some time about the need. Now the question is, how do we now find a vehicle to get that done? That is what we ought to be spending our time talking about.

Let me yield to my friend, the Senator from Colorado.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado is recognized.