

Mr. WEXLER. Mr. Speaker, like all Americans, my heart goes out to the millions of people displaced and suffering from one of our largest national catastrophes in our history. I hope the victims of Hurricane Katrina know that our prayers are with them in this most difficult hour, and I strongly support today's initial package to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

However, the administration's response to this catastrophe is nothing short of a national disgrace itself. How is it possible, how is it possible that the administration did not realize earlier what a catastrophe this is? There is a 90,000 square-mile footprint of disaster, and yet last night FEMA's director, Michael Brown, admitted that the administration had no idea exactly how bad the situation was. Even worse, he had previously characterized the security situation in New Orleans as "pretty darn good," and stopped just short of blaming the residents of New Orleans themselves for not evacuating.

The Bush administration failed the American people in advance of this hurricane by cutting critical funding in spite of the pleas by the Army Corps of Engineers, money that would have been used to reinforce the very levees that broke and flooded New Orleans.

We had plenty of money to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, but none apparently to save the poorest Americans with an ounce of prevention.

In terms of the response to the disaster itself, what we have seen is unquestionably too little too late. While the President today said relief efforts so far were "not acceptable," how can he possibly be surprised by this deplorable response? How can he say that flooding was not anticipated? Quite to the contrary, it was expected. It was predicted. What is not acceptable is the President's response.

Mr. Speaker, 1 year ago we had an opportunity to learn from the disasters in my home State of Florida. Floridians experienced the consequences of FEMA's failure to deliver aid to communities who needed it the most. We saw the most vulnerable in our society, the elderly and the poor, being left out and overlooked. Last year we had the opportunity to prevent this from happening again. At the time I called for the resignation of the head of FEMA, Michael Brown, because of his grievous mismanagement in Florida. The President did not heed that call, nor did he see fit to make any substantial changes in FEMA.

Last year when the President's election was in question, his response to the hurricanes in the swing State of Florida was tremendously fast, even passing out ice in the immediate aftermath. Where was he in the immediate aftermath in New Orleans? Where were the trucks of food, where were the water buffalo? Where were the tents of aid that are just now being established and delivered?

When the issue was the medical condition of Terry Schiavo, the President

and the Congress flew back to Washington on Palm Sunday to intervene.

Why did the President delay so long for an entire American city in crisis? These have desperate people who need food, water, shelter and safety, not a photo opportunity, which even itself comes 5 days too late.

Every asset of the great American military in this hemisphere should have been devoted to America's humanitarian crisis starting on Monday at 5 in the afternoon.

I was in Aceh in Indonesia last month. I saw firsthand the greatness of the American aid efforts. Our response in the aftermath of the tsunami was one of America's finest hours. I was extremely proud as an American to see all the work that Americans and our country have done to stave off famine and disease for tens of thousands of desperate people.

Our aircraft carrier was off the Aceh coast within 2 days. If we can do that 12,000 miles away in Indonesia, why not in New Orleans? If we had even met that same standard, help would have been in New Orleans on Wednesday. We would not be seeing the horrific scenes we saw yesterday and today. It should have been self-evident on Monday that now is the time to use our enormous strength for the benefit of our own people.

Mr. Speaker, now is a wake-up call for America. This should never happen again. It should not have happened this time.

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HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Mr. SHAYS. Mr. Speaker, a disaster of this magnitude can be hard to comprehend. Convinced of our mastery of the physical world, we too often underestimate Nature's horrible, irresistible power.

A storm like Hurricane Katrina should puncture that hubris and occasion in its wake a humble assessment of our plans and preparations to meet the catastrophes Mother Nature sends our way.

As our fellow citizens in affected States struggle to cope, now is not the time to compound their fears with criticisms and second guessing about rescue and recovery efforts. But gaps and flaws in the joint local, State and Federal response are clearly showing. Today the President concluded those efforts so far were "not acceptable." They are not acceptable.

In the weeks and months ahead, those of us charged with oversight of homeland security issues will be asking hard questions about the effectiveness of the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, commonly referred to as FEMA, for their response, planning and execution.

Streams of refugees and reports of lawless gangs terrorizing the streets of New Orleans convey images more commonly associated with the Third World than with a major commercial port in the New World.

When a catastrophe, natural or man-made, rips through the social fabric, the first obligation of governments at all levels is to maintain order and deal with the short-term needs of the populace. The capability to reestablish public safety and protect the lives and property of law-abiding citizens must be brought to bear visibly and promptly.

Katrina's destruction took just hours, but reconstruction will take months and years. Together, we must work overtime until homes are built and people are back to work. We must continue to provide all the government support, money and manpower they need. We must continue to encourage private donations of food, blood, funding and services.

Although the burden of this storm has been borne by those who live in the region, this is truly a national challenge. I have heard from so many of my constituents, and all want to express their love and concern and convey their desire to be of help by lending their skills, opening their homes, providing financial assistance, and doing whatever else they can.

Two wonderful organizations in our district, Save the Children and AmeriCares, are working around the clock to provide relief. On our Web site, we have provided information on ways to donate money, food and water to the efforts.

Since Katrina washed away homes, businesses, families and lives, America has grieved deeply. We all mourn those who lost their lives, and we grieve with those who have lost their loved ones and friends.

While we cannot reverse Katrina's damage, we can begin to repair the region, which sustains millions of Americans and is vital to our Nation. Today's legislation will help us begin that process of rebuilding the area, providing support to law enforcement and getting Gulf Coast residents back to the business of their lives. In the days and weeks to come, there will be much more that follows.

HURRICANE KATRINA SUPPLEMENTAL RELIEF

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

Ms. ZOE LOFGREN of California. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the people of San Jose, California, I extend our deepest condolences to the thousands who have lost family and friends, and to those who are still searching for loved ones. As the chairperson of the California Democratic Congressional Delegation, I want to let the people suffering today know that we care and that we Californians stand with them.

The people of California have also faced natural disasters in the form of earthquakes, floods, and fires. I recall the Loma Prieta Earthquake on October 17, 1989, that measured 7.1 on the Richter scale. Sixteen years have passed, but everyone who lives in the bay area remembers where they were when the earthquake struck. Americans everywhere stood with Californians, and this gave us the strength we needed to recover, rebound and rebuild.

As difficult as that earthquake was for us in California, the situation in the Gulf Coast is infinitely more challenging. Homes across the Gulf Coast are gone. People are left with nothing but the clothes on their back. Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, Bay St. Louis, Waveland, Kiln, Slidell, and other towns barely exist.

Our Nation has never had a city in the desperate shape that New Orleans finds itself in right now. The rule of law has broken down. People at the Superdome and the Convention Center are suffering in ways that are just not seen in our country in the 21st century. Mayor Nagin has said that thousands may be dead in New Orleans. This is an unprecedented human tragedy.

As a Nation, we must be steadfast and commit ourselves to save these people. We must stand with all of the people of the Gulf Coast and let them know that we are here today to help them get back on their feet. We are here to lend them a shoulder to lean on. We will be with you as long as it takes to get your lives in order, as long as it takes to get our cities back.

The people of the Gulf Coast have experienced hell on earth over the past week. They will face challenges in the coming days, weeks and months that are almost unimaginable. People are hungry, sick, homeless, and desperate. The storm has hit everyone hard and it has hit the poor hardest of all. The Federal response to this disaster has been too little and too slow. The situation must change and it must change right now.

Last night I flew across our great country to be here today to participate in this emergency session of Congress. It is important that the necessary resources be provided for this disaster, but actual leadership by the administration is desperately needed right now. There are dead bodies floating in New Orleans as we speak. There are tens of thousands of our fellow Americans who have been without the help that they need for this entire week.

I do not believe that our Federal Government is incapable of mobilizing to meet this disaster. The problem is that we have not yet done so as comprehensively as is necessary. Even the President stated today that the response of his administration has been inadequate.

There will be plenty of opportunity in the months to come to analyze what we could have done better, but today our task is simply to do better, to engage in a massive mobilization to save

the lives of our fellow citizens and to end the chaos that has descended upon New Orleans and other areas devastated by this hurricane.

Our Nation stands united with the victims of this ruthless storm. Our fellow citizens from Mobile, Alabama, to New Orleans, Louisiana, need to know that they have our commitment to do all that we can. The bill we passed today is just a start. We will recover. We will rebuild. We will prevail.

In the days and weeks to come, the Congress will have many tasks before it, from fully funding the Army Corps' efforts, to revising the bankruptcy laws so the victims who have lost their homes can have a fresh start. But today, we call on you, Mr. President. Article 2, section 1, the executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States. We expect that the resources, the food, the water, the health care, the evacuation, the shelter will be brought to bear so our fellow citizens can end their suffering.

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

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

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. ENGLISH. Mr. Speaker, I seek unanimous consent to claim the time of the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. HARRIS).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

HURRICANE KATRINA SUPPLEMENTAL

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

Mr. ENGLISH of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, we are in the midst of a crisis, a crisis of crushing proportions in terms of lives lost and property destroyed. Time is clearly of the essence, and I commend Speaker HASTERT for calling Congress back into session over this holiday weekend.

While we are still assessing the full extent of the damage caused by Hurricane Katrina, we know that the damage is severe and that the response must be strong and steady. The legislation that we have just passed in the House will provide financial assistance to the victims who have borne the brunt of this devastating storm.

It will allow the Federal Emergency Management Agency adequate resources to continue operating and to restore order in the affected areas. Rescuing and evacuating those who are trapped, getting food, drinking water

and medical care to those who are stranded, should be our top priority, and this funding is essential to accommodate some of those basic initiatives.

The image we have all seen on television and in the newspapers only begins to convey the desperation of those in and around the areas that have been hit. My heart goes out to those families, and I am pleased that Congress has answered the call here today and sent and guaranteed the much-needed resources.

On behalf of western Pennsylvania, an area where we are familiar with Mother Nature and how tough she can be, I am here to express our solidarity with the people in those communities that have been hardest hit. The economic impact of Katrina also looms over us as we move forward, and as gas and other oil prices spiral out of control this natural disaster certainly has the potential to become a serious economic challenge as well.

We need to take action in Congress to alleviate the short-term crisis that has been caused by Katrina. It will likely take the next several weeks and perhaps longer before we know the full extent and the true extent of the damage and begin to repair our critical energy infrastructure.

We recognize already that electricity remains sparse in some communities, limiting the capacity of refineries to operate. In addition, distribution pipelines also lack capacity, so refined products are unable to reach local gas stations. The production and delivery problem will, without a doubt, have significant impact on consumers and a ripple effect on the economy. We in Congress I think need to anticipate that and respond. I think it is essential that we act to address any fuel shortage and act decisively to blunt its nationwide consequences.

While our supply chain is coming back online, Congress needs to carefully consider options for managing the energy supply and the price of gasoline, such as giving the President the authority to fight price gouging for oil and oil by-products, and manage strategy fuel supplies.

Further, we ought to consider a temporary suspension of the Federal gas tax to give consumers at least a small break from the unanticipated increases. Any temporary measures we can engage will ameliorate the enormous impact of the present situation, and these need to be carefully thought through.

For now, however, we have to quickly move forward, as we have done with this emergency appropriations bill today, which will help the victims who have suffered most from the devastation of this storm. This storm is a challenge to the Nation, and I urge the American people to pull together and to help each other get through this.

I encourage people to donate what they can to the charity of their choice and do what they independently can do to conserve energy. I believe this will