

Speaker, this is unacceptable. We must do more to correct this disparity.

HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, the whole country continues to be focused on the millions of Americans who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina. As we begin to understand the enormity of the situation in the gulf region, it is becoming clear that this is one of the worst natural disasters to ever strike our country. My thoughts and prayers go out to the families grieving the loss of their loved ones and to the survivors who are struggling to cope and to find shelter, food, and medical care in the wake of this terrible disaster.

These are the moments that we realize that we are our brothers' keepers. It is clear that we must all come together to help our fellow citizens. And Americans are donating record amounts of money, time, and supplies to help those who are displaced by the hurricane. The most important thing right now is to make sure that we are saving lives and we are providing the food, shelter, and medical care for the people affected by this tragedy.

As has happened in many other States, four jetliners arrived yesterday in my home State of Illinois with the first group of 540 hurricane evacuees; and Illinois expects to provide housing, food, and medical care for up to 10,000 evacuees.

I am pleased that Congress was called back to Washington last week for a special session to pass the \$10.5 billion in relief funding for the victims of this horrific natural disaster. This funding is only the first step on a long and challenging path to recovery for the entire gulf coast region.

Unfortunately, many of the victims have had to endure not only the natural disaster of Katrina but also the unnatural disaster of the delayed and deeply flawed relief effort. In this time immediately following the disaster, we have an obligation to correct the mistakes in crisis response. We must find answers to basic questions that the American people are asking right now as they watch the aftermath unfolding on their television screens minute by minute and hour by hour. They are saying over and over again to themselves, How could this have happened in the United States of America, the most powerful country on the Earth? How could our country allow people to die without getting them water, food, and medical care?

One thing that is clear is that the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, must assume a large share of the blame for the woefully inadequate response to the hurricane. Somehow FEMA has lost its way. During the Clinton administration, FEMA

was transformed into an exemplary and effective cabinet-level agency under the leadership of James Lee Witt, a veteran emergency director. Unfortunately, as part of the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the President and Congress moved FEMA from an independent, cabinet-level rank to a sub-agency of the Department of Homeland Security under the authority of the Secretary of Homeland Security.

It is time for us to return FEMA to its status as a cabinet-level agency that reports directly to the President and establish it once again as an independent agency.

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I have signed on to legislation to do this, and I urge my colleagues to quickly and carefully review this bill.

We have important questions to answer about how the Federal Government could have better handled the events that unfolded as a result of this catastrophe. These are serious questions on which we all need to work together. We need to make sure that we are responding quickly not only to those in need today, but also prepare for anything that may happen in the future.

Today, we live under the specter of terrorist attacks, and we may face a situation much worse than we have faced with Katrina. We have to be ready. We have to learn from this catastrophe, from the mistakes and the lack of adequate response, and we have to quickly fix the problems. As we have all too painfully seen, the lives of millions of Americans depend on how we handle this, depend on how FEMA handles these emergencies. So it depends on what we here in Congress do to correct this situation so it never happens again.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S SHAMEFUL RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina has torn down the curtain and exposed the dirty secret that divides our Nation like an open wound, and the entire world is watching. If anyone ever doubted that there were two Americas, Hurricane Katrina and our government's shameful response have made the division very clear for all to see.

New Orleans is a city where 67 to 70 percent of its population was black. Nearly 30 percent, one in three, were living below the poverty line. Twenty-one percent of the households earned less than \$10,000 a year. Eighty-four percent of the people living in poverty in New Orleans were black.

So when a disaster came such as this one, the people who had cash in the bank and a car in the garage, they es-

caped, and those who did not were shamefully left to fend for themselves, and the majority were poor and black.

The Bush administration's response to Katrina has been nothing short of shameful, and they must account for their actions. Why did Federal officials ignore predictions of a disastrous flood and hurricane in New Orleans? Why did FEMA turn away assistance, telling Amtrak it did not need to help evacuating survivors, denying the Red Cross access to New Orleans, turning away three trailer trucks from Wal-Mart that were loaded with water, and preventing the Coast Guard from delivering 1,000 gallons of diesel fuel?

How many people died as a result of this delayed response? And why has the FEMA budget been cut since 2003? Why have the last two directors of FEMA been political appointees who had no experience with disaster management?

As one commentator recently said, he said, "Actions have consequences. No one could predict that a hurricane the size of Katrina would hit this year, but the slow Federal response when it did happen was no accident. It was the result of 4 years of deliberate Republican policy and budget choices that favor ideology and partisan loyalty at the expense of operational competence. It is the Bush administration in a nutshell."

Quite frankly, the director of FEMA, Michael Brown, should resign immediately, or he should be fired. And we must help put people's lives back together immediately by providing the health care and the housing and the mental health care and the services and the education, all of the basics that people deserve, who live in the wealthiest country in the world.

The incompetence and the indifference demonstrated by the administration in responding to this tragedy was shocking, but it was not really surprising. Does anyone doubt that if this sort of devastation had taken place in the communities where the small percentage of people who are benefiting from the Bush administration tax cuts live, the response would have been swift and efficient? Can you imagine Bush fund-raisers desperately clinging to their roofs, waiting for days to be rescued?

This indifference to the most vulnerable among us is not isolated to this tragedy; it is part and parcel of a systemic problem that seeks to make a large sector of our population invisible.

Many people viewing the human tragedy left in Katrina's wake could not recognize the images that they were seeing. They thought they were witnessing a tragedy in Somalia or Haiti or the Sudan. They think to themselves, they think, this does not look like the America that I know. Some have even come to refer to the survivors of this catastrophe as refugees, as if the image of the survivors they are seeing are too foreign for them to recognize them as Americans.

The people you see on television are not refugees; they are Americans. They

are Americans. And for some of us, though, let me just say, for some of us, this is an America that we know very well, an America that is often swept under the rug by lawmakers and the media.

The truth is, there are almost 36 million Americans living in poverty in the United States. There are more than 15 million living in extreme poverty.

What does that mean? According to the Census Bureau, it means that a family of three is living on less than \$14,680 a year. They define extreme poverty as half of that. In 2003, the number of children living in poverty, this number grew by a half a million. Since President Bush took office, the number of poor people in America has grown by 17 percent. Is this the real state of this ownership society that we keep hearing about?

It is unacceptable. The Bush administration policies of tax cuts for the wealthy and cutting funding from the programs that provide for economic and domestic security in order to pay for this unnecessary war in Iraq are only making matters worse. That is why we must call for the President to develop a plan to eliminate poverty by 2010.

CALLING FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LACK OF TIMELY RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise with indeed a heavy heart, as so many in America do. This is an extraordinary time in our country. My heart goes out to all of those thousands and thousands of people in the gulf area that have lost everything. This is one of our darkest hours, and let us hope some bright light can shine very, very quickly. But in order for that bright light to shine, Mr. Speaker, we must realize the importance of having an investigation quickly.

Let me hurry up and say that this investigation is not a blame game, because we already know where the blame is. It is for those individuals who had the responsibility. It has been a failure of leadership at the national level. Here in Congress, a failure of leadership. At the White House, a failure of leadership. The President, a failure of leadership. Our military, a failure of leadership. And our Homeland Security, a failure of leadership. In FEMA, a failure of leadership. And we must examine that now so that we can prepare quickly for the next disaster, because it is coming, or a terrorist attack. There have been mistakes after mistakes after mistakes. That is why we need a thorough investigation of what went wrong in the Federal response to Katrina, and why there was such a delay. Delay after delay after delay.

We must not try to skirt around and assume and put blame, unrighteous blame, on the city of New Orleans and their police department and mayor, who were victims. They were suffering from the flood. They were suffering from the hurricane. Here is a Category 5 hurricane coming at a city 6 feet below sea level and 30 percent of its population below the poverty level. Where was that plan? Their police departments immediately disseminated. Several of their policemen were killed in the flood. They were not able to do it. And then to hide behind and go to the Governor and say, where is the Governor in this? We cannot fault the Governor for this, nor the mayor. This was a national disaster, and the national leadership failed.

We must move quickly to get an investigation so we can determine what went wrong. The need for this investigation, like I said, is not simply to find blame, but it is to prepare us for future disasters and attacks. We cannot delay in this investigation, because time is of the essence. Questions must be asked and corrections in the system must be made while the timeline of the responses is still fresh in our minds of actually what happened and why, because we do not know how soon the next event will happen.

This was on television, Mr. Speaker, for everyone to see. We cannot run and hide from this one. And I tell my colleagues, in looking at the television, no matter what it is, this is not a Republican problem, it is not a Democratic problem; it is an American problem, and America is expecting us to stand up for America.

There are two essential questions that must be raised and answered. The first one is, why did it take the military so long? Six days. Bodies floating in New Orleans. Flooding up to the rooftops. People trying to get rescued. And on every television station, Fox News, Shepard Smith, my hat is off to him. Tears in his eyes saying, Where is our military? Where are people, Geraldo, cradling a baby, with tears coming down his face. Where is our President? Where is our Congress? Where is our FEMA? Where is our Homeland Security? A failure. We deserve to investigate this quickly, and get answers.

And then the other question, Mr. Speaker, that is on everybody's mind is this one: What role did race and poverty and class play in this?

We cannot hide behind the sensitivities of this. Some of these questions are very unpleasant. They were not created by you or me, but they are there. Those were black and poor people who feel that if those people were white, that would not be happening if they were white and middle class. I am not the only one asking this. African Americans are not the only ones asking this. White people, too, are asking this. We need an investigation to get to the bottom of this particular question.

And then this other question, Mr. Speaker: Why can an administration

who can, without a declaration of war, without authority from Congress, invade another country, topple its government, and then can do it in 24 or 72 hours, but it took them 6 days to respond to sick children and people on ventilators who had passed away. We have to ask the question, Mr. Speaker, because the great tragedy here is not Katrina, it is the tens of thousands of American citizens' lives that were lost because their Federal Government failed them. We owe it to the American people, Mr. Speaker, to quickly put together a commission, just like we did with 9/11, with subpoena power, and get to the bottom of this and fix it so that we can put back together and protect this country.

RELIEF EFFORTS FOR HURRICANE KATRINA VICTIMS

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

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I am proud of what I have seen of what is happening not only in America, but also in my home State of Texas. I think we are all an America, where the tragedy occurred in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama last week, and the human and economic cost is unprecedented in our history. I know our Congress will respond to that.

We pray daily for those who have been affected by this terrible storm, and as we say in southeast Texas, "There but for the grace of God go us" in southeast Texas, because we have had our storms and our floods, and that is why I think we have been so willing to help, particularly in Texas as a whole, our neighbors to the east, mostly Louisiana, but possibly Mississippi and Alabama.

I rise to focus on the relief efforts for these evacuees, thousands of which are in my hometown of Houston, Texas. Getting folks out of harm's way is the first objective, and we then have to provide for them during the many months it takes to recover from this disaster.

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Today there are over 30,000 in four mega-shelters in Houston where Texans are being the best friends in need that they can be. The Reliant Astrodome, Reliant Center, Reliant Arena, and George R. Brown Convention Center are full or filling up with evacuees.

The American Red Cross has shelters around the area with an estimated 2,600 displaced persons, including Baytown, Texas. And the people of our area, whether in Baytown or across our county, are responding to this tragedy. Countless people are working long hours to serve, particularly, I know, a Baytown City Council member, Sammy Mahan, and Fire Marshal Bernard Olive who literally formed their own shelter and provided so much assistance to our neighbors.