

many Americans might still be alive if someone other than Mr. Brown was in charge of FEMA. Mr. Brown should get out of the way so someone with experience can come in and fix this whole thing; and if Mr. Brown does not come to his senses and step aside, the President should remove him immediately.

Some say that we cannot switch leaders in the midst of this relief effort because it would disrupt the efforts already under way. Mr. Speaker, I do not see how our worst enemies could disrupt our efforts much further. It seems the effort will be far more organized if someone other than Mr. Brown were in charge.

One more disturbing trend I have noticed is the effort of administration officials to shift the blame to State and local officials for this scale of disaster. This is unconscionable, and I do not think the American people will really swallow it. The President declared Katrina to be a Federal emergency 2 days before it hit. He claimed responsibility for the emergency response for the Federal Government. Now it is time for him to take responsibility for the Federal Government's colossal failure.

HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I am joined this evening by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), my colleague from New Orleans, on a Special Order held by the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss the events of the last few days relative to Hurricane Katrina.

As you know, we have had serious troubles in our part of the country. The gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) and myself, who are members of the Congressional Black Caucus, have had our districts pretty much decimated because of Hurricane Katrina, and we have some serious concerns about our government and its response. On behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus, we want to share those concerns tonight.

Mr. Speaker, I yield at this point to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON).

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, it is important the Congressional Black Caucus address these issues tonight because many of the people who are affected by this tragedy are African American and otherwise impoverished or disadvantaged, and they are folks who need to have their concerns given voice tonight.

Many of our Members will talk on different issues. I want to talk about the recovery of that area, of our area, and about an economic recovery pack-

age for New Orleans and the other areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Hundreds of thousands of my constituents have been uprooted from their homes. More than 100,000 businesses have been shuttered, and possibly thousands of lives have been lost to the wrath of Hurricane Katrina.

The extent of the damage, the human toll, property damage and economic loss is unprecedented in our Nation's history.

Of particular significance, a disproportionate share of the damage in my hometown of New Orleans was meted out to parts of our great city that were already extraordinarily economically disadvantaged.

The poverty and economic depression in these areas in no small way were factors in the extraordinary loss of life and property experienced by my constituents.

For that reason, it is critically important at this time to come together to ensure that all areas affected by Hurricane Katrina receive the necessary resources to rebound from what could be an economically devastating blow all across the gulf coast.

Now, we are talking about an economic package of \$40 billion coming up. We just approved \$10 billion a few days ago, but I think it is important to put the right number before the Congress. At this time, we do not know what that number is, but we know it is a lot larger than \$50 billion.

The Wall Street Journal reports today that through their own analysis they have come up with a figure of \$150 to \$200 billion. Today, at a press conference, I called on our Congress and our Nation to set aside some \$225 billion for this tragedy, \$100-plus billion for New Orleans alone.

I believe it is important to talk about a number that is closer to the right number now so that we will not have the rest of the Congress figuring that we have already fixed the problem with 40 or 50 or \$60 billion when we know it is going to be four times that number.

So as the Congress moves on various relief packages, I would like to articulate a few principles and policy proposals I believe should guide our efforts and be included in any relief package.

□ 2000

First, the urban poor in New Orleans were dramatically and disproportionately affected, as I have said, by the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, our efforts must include provisions to improve conditions to the point that the magnitude of the damage is never again experienced in our great Nation.

Second, businesses large and small have been shuttered throughout the region, leading to an economic double whammy. Not only is the region cut off from the goods and services provided by these businesses, but the tens of thousands of employees working for these businesses are cut off from their jobs and their paychecks.

Third, the public health effects of Hurricane Katrina are also extraordinary. In response to the health impacts of the hurricane, we must restore health care access, health care quality, health outcomes and the health care worker force because all Americans deserve equal treatment in health care. A proper investment in health care will improve both the health and economic well-being of our region and our country. The legislation we propose ought to address rebuilding the public health infrastructure and ensuring health care coverage. We must, therefore, move to immediately counter these difficult challenges.

On the economic front, I think it is important to propose measures to jump-start the economic recovery throughout the gulf coast, and in the long term to improve the lives of hard-working Americans throughout the region. Because there are a number of Federal tax benefits conditioned on the household living situation of the taxpayer, and in light of the extraordinary displacement of citizens throughout the region, I think we should recommend changes to the Tax Code that ensure that displaced Americans are not disqualified from the tax benefits to which they are otherwise entitled as a result of the hurricane.

Under current law, there are limits on a taxpayer's ability to deduct casualty or disaster losses in ways that would severely affect large numbers of our constituents. Accordingly, I believe we should propose to eliminate any barriers in the Tax Code that would prevent the devastated families from the tax relief to which they are now entitled.

So many of our people who lost their property back home were not home owners; unfortunately, they lived in apartments. They did not have renters insurance or flood insurance. They have lost everything. This has to be taken into account as we go about this.

One of the most extraordinary effects of Hurricane Katrina ever is the unprecedented destruction of housing in New Orleans. One hundred sixty thousand homes in New Orleans alone, and across the area more than 200,000 homes have been affected by this or destroyed by this hurricane. This is going to take some extraordinary action by FEMA and HUD, and some flexibility in the Community Development Block Grant program and the HOME program to get our region back on its feet.

I think we should look at the New Markets Tax Credits program and add \$1 billion in 2006 and another \$1 billion in 2007 to help with the restructuring there.

With our businesses, of course, there are no jobs, and we ought to ensure that we provide businesses throughout the region the tools necessary to reopen and thrive, as well as incentives to provide jobs to the thousands of displaced Americans throughout the region.

On health care, we ought to have a declaration of emergency to trigger

emergency Medicaid provisions, and we ought to allow our States to therefore simplify the application process and eliminate other barriers to enrollment and participation. We should think about a 100 percent Federal Medicaid match to States directly affected by Hurricane Katrina or States receiving evacuees, and elimination of residency requirements as people are being scattered throughout the country.

On Medicare, we ought to waive the late enrollment penalties for affected residents to sign up for the new prescription drug benefit from October of this year to some other time, if they become newly eligible. We ought to delay transition of the affected dual-eligible to the Medicare program. And we ought to create a health safety net for all people affected by Katrina.

With regard to the health care workforce, we have to redirect our resources there to make sure we have people available to do the work. We ought to establish health empowerment zones, for instance, and freeze budget cuts for safety net and public health programs for two. And, finally, we ought to be concerned about the mental health of our people, because displacement is a terrible mental health issue, and we ought to make sure services are delivered there in the proper way.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield to my colleague, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT).

Mr. WATT. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), and the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) for providing an opportunity for us to speak this evening. I am speaking as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, and we are here to show our support for our three Members whose districts have been severely and adversely affected by Hurricane Katrina, the gentleman from New Orleans, Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), who represents part of that district, and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS), who represents part of that State. We are here to support their efforts on behalf of their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, it is coincidental that those constituents are disproportionately African American. I say it is coincidental because I believe this catastrophe, this hurricane, was certainly not directed at African American people. But the reality is that poor people, disproportionately African American people who were poor, were not able to get away from the disaster. When they were told to leave New Orleans, in particular, they did not have the financial means to escape the disaster.

This is an issue that the Congressional Black Caucus has been talking about not only in the context of a hurricane, but in the context of an agenda which describes disparities in every area of our lives. It is an agenda that we have been talking about the entire

year. We did not just start talking about it in the context of a hurricane.

Disproportionately, African Americans are poor. And if this same catastrophe had happened in any American community in which black people and white people were living, disproportionately African Americans would have been left behind, subject to the whims of nature and the catastrophe.

So we are here to express our support for our Members and their constituents, and we heartily endorse the proposals that have been outlined in general terms by our friend, the gentleman from New Orleans (Mr. JEFFERSON). We endorse them and we encourage our colleagues to embrace them.

Our Nation is at a crossroads, and we must respond. We must respond to these constituents in the same way that we would respond to other Americans, rich, middle class and otherwise, who were subjected to this kind of disaster. I encourage my colleagues to pay attention to what is going on in this area and to devote our resources and our energy, both private-sector and governmental, to addressing this problem.

Mr. Speaker, I will yield back to my colleague, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), and again applaud him for providing this opportunity for Members of the Congressional Black Caucus to address this issue.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. KILPATRICK).

Ms. KILPATRICK of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Mississippi for yielding to me and for his leadership during this difficult time. We are here to stand with you and to offer assistance to you.

And to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), whose district has been so devastated, we are here to say that we support you wholeheartedly.

I want to thank the millions of Americans, individual Americans and families, who have brought into their own homes, into their churches and into their schools many people who find themselves homeless. I want to applaud the American citizenry for stepping up at a time when our Federal Government did not.

In our own State of Michigan, we have received evacuees. The governor advised today that no more evacuees would be coming to Michigan, but I am here to say, Madam Governor, that they are still coming to Detroit. We have 300 families in Detroit right now and we are housing them, we are clothing them, we are feeding them, and the medical community in Detroit has come together under the leadership of Mayor Kilpatrick.

I want to pledge to my colleagues, the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) that we will continue to do that. We are

here to serve, to represent, and to take care of the least among us. And so we will do that, my congressional brothers. And I want the governor of the State of Michigan to know that we appreciate her, but we will take care of these people as they come to our doors from this grief-stricken region.

I want to applaud Secretary Alphonso Jackson and HUD, who has been working with our mayor to make sure that we have the facilities available. Our private community has stepped forward, our hotel industry, our manufacturers of food, and our health care industry. That is how we are able to do what we are doing in the city of Detroit, and we will continue to do so.

We need the Federal Government to cut the red tape. There is too much red tape here. We have an emergency. We have put out \$10.5 billion, which has been passed by both Houses of Congress. I am told today that Halliburton got \$500 million of that already in a no-bid contract to help in New Orleans, to relieve the streets of its water. I wonder why we could not find others. At the same time, I have families who have been stopped from getting the food and nutrition that they need.

FEMA must develop a plan. I, too, call for the firing of Mr. Brown, the FEMA director with no emergency management experience, as well as his deputy, a friend of the President's, with no emergency management experience. We need real professionals in this time of need. The CBC stands ready, our Congressional Black Caucus, to do what we must do, and we will be visiting the stricken area soon now.

I was in an appropriation hearing today where we discussed the tens of billions of dollars, over \$250 billion, that is being spent in the reconstruction of Iraq. Must we be there? Maybe. But should we take care of America's people? We must. So I call upon this Congress and the President to work together to make sure that American people are taken care of.

I witnessed this morning on a morning show a family with the last name of Allen, a wife whose husband works for the housing department in Louisiana, who stayed in Louisiana to help the people who were left there. The wife and one of the sons were evacuated. This family has a son fighting for this country in Iraq.

So, you see, they are American citizens, many who have been evacuated because of a national disaster. We owe them. They pay taxes. The seniors, the frail, they built this country. We owe them.

Let us rise up, America. This Congress can do better and we will do better, because we cannot let them down.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Chicago, Illinois (Mr. RUSH).

Mr. RUSH. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Mississippi for yielding to me, and I want him to know that he and the gentleman from Louisiana

(Mr. JEFFERSON), and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) are an inspiration to many of us. Your courage, your commitment, and the leadership that you have displayed over these trying times, not only to those who reside in your districts but also to the American people in general have not gone unnoticed.

The Bible says, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan." Mr. Speaker, when I think of the devastating effects of the failed rapid response of the Federal Government to Hurricane Katrina, I cannot help but wonder about the value of some life, some human life in this country, particularly the lives of the poor, the powerless, and the black.

Along with the rest of the world, I have been outraged by the less-than-rapid response, of the inaction, of the lack of attention and the lack of providing aid to the thousands of individuals who were left to die and fend for themselves in the aftermath of the worst natural disaster in American history. Those who did not die were subject to the most dehumanizing conditions, the demoralizing squalor in the Superdome and other relief centers in New Orleans has been compared to the conditions in the hulls of slave cargo ships.

□ 1815

I might add, this is not a far-fetched and extreme exaggeration.

Hurricane Katrina is an example of how the Federal Government failed. It is an example of a complete breakdown when responding to those in need of critical help. In times of national crisis, the cries of mothers, fathers and families from Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama went unheard.

I serve on the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and today our committee held a hearing on price gouging at America's pumps. But my immediate concerns are on the price of human suffering being paid by the most vulnerable in our society.

New Orleans is going through a full-blown public health crisis, Mississippi is going through a full-blown public health crisis, and so is Alabama; and they are all suffering from the debilitating environmental conditions caused by Hurricane Katrina and by human malfeasance.

In addition to examining the incompetence and indifference of FEMA, the National Guard, and, I might add, the American Red Cross in their responding to this catastrophe, this Congress needs to address immediate and emergency concerns, including the purification of the drinking water and the abatement of dreaded diseases such as e-coli, hepatitis A, cholera, West Nile and other mosquito and waterborne diseases. Clearly, the public health concerns of this Nation and particularly the Gulf Coast region are of paramount importance.

I might also quickly note that we should sharply increase funding for the

LIHEAP program, so that we can address the rising cost of heating oil during the upcoming winter months.

Lastly, we must examine and address the psychological scars that people have suffered from this terrible tragedy. We cannot underestimate the wounds that lie deeply in the psychology of the victims of Hurricane Katrina. The week-long conditions under which many of them toiled are unimaginable.

In this regard, we must especially be sensitive to the psychological needs of the children. Children may have suffered trauma that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. It is important that this Congress provide comprehensive mental health services to the children and to all of the evacuees.

It is now time for this Congress to acknowledge that there is widespread poverty in this Nation. It is now time for this Congress to also acknowledge the role that poverty played in the paucity of the Federal response during this national crisis.

Mr. Speaker, I also join with my colleagues in saying down with Michael Brown. Down with Michael Brown.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS), another Member of this body that was also affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Mr. DAVIS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) for yielding. I certainly thank all of my colleagues in this Chamber who have expressed solicitude to me. But, frankly, that solicitude is better spent on my colleagues from Mississippi and Louisiana. My State of Alabama was gratuitously spared virtually all of this damage. There are certainly people in my State who lost power, there are people in my State who were hurt. But God did not create all suffering on the same scale, and I know the difference between what has happened in my State and what has happened to my colleagues.

I am very proud of the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), I am very proud of the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) for all of the work that they do in this Congress, but particularly for their fortitude in the last week, because, Mr. Speaker, we have been able to sit at these things from a distance. We have been able to talk as compassionate people about these losses.

The gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) have the very hard work of going into their communities and talking to people who are in pain and saying, "I will use my power to try to help you," and seeing the tears in response. So it is they who very much deserve our solicitude tonight, and I am proud to serve with them.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make three points that I think are related. The first one is this:

So many of the people who died, and we understand that the numbers of the

dead will likely exceed 10,000, the largest single disaster in American history, so many of the ones who died had lives that do not put them on the front page of the newspaper. They had lives that were relatively anonymous. They were hard-working people, trying to make it through their lot in life, and all of a sudden they were cut down in blameless circumstances.

The challenge of leadership though is to give an honor and a place to those who die in tragic circumstances. The challenge of real leadership is to lift the anonymity and to put an honor on the table.

One of the things that I wish we would see in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, is for the President of the United States to do what he did the last time our country was seared, to come and gather the House and Senate together in this body, to address the Nation and the Congress, and to paint a vision of how we can do better next time and a vision of how we can rebuild these people.

I would love to see the President go to the National Cathedral, a place he went 4 days after September 11, because when he went to the National Cathedral, he gave an honor to those victims and lifted them up to a certain place of honor. I would love to see that done for the people in your State of Mississippi and the people in the great State of Louisiana.

We cannot let the anonymity that lingered over the lives of these people mask the honor of their death, because the honor of their death is this: They were innocent, hard-working Americans who lost their lives in part because of nature, but in part because of the errors of our government. And it is that second point that I want to turn to tonight.

The country needs this President to admit that his government failed; the country needs this President to come here and say that the standard that was set by FEMA last week is one that was unacceptable for the people of Mississippi and Louisiana; and the country needs this President to name this as the disaster that it was. I cannot say it nearly as eloquently as our friend and colleague the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS), but our country is embarrassed when we have power and do not use it intelligently and effectively. Our country is embarrassed when we have the means, the capacity and the ability to know what was happening last week, and still fail to adequately respond to it.

I have heard some of my friends and colleagues on the other side of the aisle say that they were pleased and satisfied and thankful for the job that happened last week, and I would simply differ with them in this one sense: Can we truly be pleased with the lack of response, the constant underestimation, the constant miscalculation? Because if we are pleased with that and we consider that to be good work, our standard is far too low.

The final point that I want to make, I say to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), is one that perhaps should be more obvious to us. The fissures that already exist in our society become even more painful and more acute when there are stresses in our society. Last week, as so many people in this Chamber have said so well, the people who were left in the Superdome, the people not evacuated in time, so many are the people we often do not see. And we owe this next quote to Mr. Brown, the head of FEMA. Mr. Brown said that we learned that there were people that we did not even know existed.

Mr. BROWN did not mean to be profound when he said that, but he was unintentionally so, because we did learn and his administration did learn last week that there are people that they did not know existed, who live in the cracks and fissures in our society. And that ought to pain us.

The last point that I want to make, and it is the point I would hang over this Chamber as we think over this next several weeks: We owe people in this country a better place than the margins of life. There are people who, because of their own faults and their own demerits, end up in a particular place. We understand that. We know that. The Bible tells us that. But we ought to be strong enough and bold enough as a country to not let people who are trying to live their lives fall into the margins because we do not care enough to build a net around them. The absence of a net in New Orleans, the absence of a net in Mississippi, the absence of a safety net in much of the South, was laid bare last week, and we ought to be moved by that.

I will not cheapen this tragedy by saying there is a silver lining in it. Too many people died for that. But I will say that I hope that we draw some inspiration. I hope that as we go about fashioning a strategy for relief, that we fashion a strategy for relief that can lift up the weakest of these people and the least of them in an economic sense.

But I hope as we move past Hurricane Katrina, and, frankly most of us in this Chamber will find a way to do that, it is the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) who will continue to you live with it, but for a lot of the people in this Chamber, we will be able to move past this. We will be on to the next crisis of the month or the next political cause of the month.

But I hope as we move on, we carry this lesson with us, we carry this notion that if we are a just country, we cannot be a country where being left behind and being left out has the consequences that happened in the gentlemen's State of Mississippi and in Louisiana last week. If we are to be the country that we say we are, we have to do better by all of our people.

The final point before I yield back my time, I turn once again to the

President and his leadership. This President would not serve himself or our country well if this is turned into an attack on the mayor of New Orleans or the governor of Louisiana. This is not the time to make false comparisons and to wonder whether the governor and the mayor did not do this or did not do that, because there is something we ought to understand: The governor and the mayor lived in the midst of a crisis.

The people who sat comfortably in this city last week were removed from that crisis. They were in a position and had the level head to do better, and they came up with the sea of incompetence that we saw. So how dare we look at the mayor and the governor sitting among their people in the midst of all of this and blame them, when people sat in this city far removed from the danger and could not do better?

Mr. Speaker, again I thank the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) for his leadership, and I hope that his constituents, and know that his constituents, appreciate it. I thank the gentleman for his work as the ranking member of the Committee on Homeland Security, because it ought to be said, What is the measure of homeland security if we cannot find a way to secure our own people in the midst of danger?

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman very much.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PAYNE).

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in expressing my heartfelt sympathy to all of the victims of Hurricane Katrina and their families. Our thoughts and prayers remain with them as they cope with the aftermath of this enormous tragedy. We stand in solidarity with our brothers, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS).

My home State of New Jersey has responded by deploying police officers, firefighters and decontamination personnel from around our State to aid relief efforts in the City of New Orleans. I commend Governor Codey of New Jersey for his leadership in responding to the needs of those affected by the catastrophic conditions in New Orleans and the surrounding areas.

In addition, Continental Airlines, which has a hub in my home city of Newark, is participating in Operation Air Care to provide emergency airlift to more than 25,000 New Orleans residents stranded by Hurricane Katrina. I appreciate the efforts.

Many of our local churches in my congressional district have taken the lead in organizing relief efforts to collect clothing, food and money to help hurricane victims. Over the past weekend I met with Reverend Raymond Jefferson of Metropolitan Baptist Church, originally from Louisiana, who is orga-

nizing a comprehensive statewide relief. Just last night he convened a meeting of concerned community leaders and is working tirelessly to bring refugee relief to the hurricane victims.

My office received a call from a family of 11, who needed assistance, coming up from Louisiana, and we were able to locate housing for them. Then we went to Reverend William Howard's church, Bethany Baptist Church in Newark, to help provide additional social services, including medical attention, preschool for the youngsters, as well as schooling for high school and college students, and Social Security for the elderly. It is really a complicated system, and everybody needs to be involved.

While Reverend Howard and I were meeting with the family at the church, we received a call that the grandfather of the family who had been missing was located at a hospital in New Orleans. This was a great feeling.

Reverend Joe Carter of New Hope Baptist Church started a fund-raising drive on Sunday and will meet with the pastor from New Orleans tonight in Atlanta at a meeting of the National Baptist Convention. So everyone is doing their own thing, collectively.

Let me conclude by saying, unfortunately, much of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina could have been mitigated if President Bush and his director of Federal Emergency Management Agency had shown real leadership by responding swiftly and completely to the warning before Katrina hit the gulf coast. Instead, they seem to be in denial about their woeful and inadequate response, even to the point of blaming the victims.

□ 2030

FEMA Director Michael Brown coldly made the statement that those behind had failed to heed the advance warnings and thus were basically responsible for their own misfortune. It apparently never occurred to him that not everyone had the resources to drive or fly out of the city before the hurricane struck.

Today's Washington Post reported that offers of assistance from other countries were ignored for days after the tragedy. An executive with a telecommunications company based in the Netherlands expressed his frustration with these words: "FEMA? That was a lost case. We got zero help. We lost one week trying to get things so that we could move forward."

I serve as one of two congressional delegates to the United Nations, and it is going to be embarrassing for me next week to be with our allies from around the world who offered assistance which was turned down.

Let me conclude by saying I received a call from Rome today, and they said they were shocked at the abject poverty in the United States. They did not realize that there was so much poverty in this country. And even The Washington Post referred to people as refugees. By international law, if they

looked it up, one cannot be a refugee in one's own country. Disgraceful, wrong, and that is what the W in George W. stands for. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Mr. Speaker, we often hear it said from this administration that this government should be run like a private business. I would like to ask the Members what business would ever think about retaining an employee who performed as dismally as Mr. Brown did, completely failing to fulfill his responsibilities at a time of crisis?

I was also shocked to hear statements made by others that many of the victims are better off in the shelters in Houston because they were underprivileged anyway. It was said by a very prominent American. Unbelievable. To suggest that it does not matter if poor people lose the roof over their heads and all of their possessions, lose loved ones and have their families separated seems to me to be the height of insensitivity on the part of the overprivileged.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that we will have a thorough investigation into the failings of our government to respond to this cataclysmic event and the consequences it had on all victims and disproportionately on victims and people of color. We are the United States of America, and we certainly can do better.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his comments.

I now yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD).

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD. Mr. Speaker, my prayers and my heart go out to those who have been displaced and the families that have been disrupted by this devastation. I stand firmly with my brothers, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) and, most importantly, New Orleans; the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON); and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) while they meet the challenges ahead and while they grapple with this devastation.

Hurricane Katrina is turning out to be the worst human catastrophe in America's history, far surpassing Hurricane Camille and the 1906 San Francisco earthquake in its destructive and deadly impact.

At this time I would like to thank all Californians for their generosity and outpouring of donations, food, clothing, and opening their homes to the families and to our families of this gulf coast area. My district has a hurricane disaster relief effort, and we are getting big-rig trucks that are taking all of this to those ravaged areas, and we thank my church that raised over \$100,000 on Sunday, Second Baptist Church, Dr. William Epps, in providing donations to the region.

The flooding and physical destruction of New Orleans, a truly historic American city, coupled with the complete destruction of families, homes, businesses, roads, and bridges along this 120 miles of Louisiana and Mis-

sissippi coastline presents a humanitarian challenge of unprecedented proportions with consequences that will be felt for years to come by those who lost loved ones, jobs, homes, and any sense of comfort and security. And the reality of our government's failure thus far to deal adequately with the tragedy that has occurred in New Orleans and along the gulf coast deepens each day.

While Hurricane Katrina could not have been prevented, it is now clear that the flooding of New Orleans that followed Katrina would not have been so devastating if the levees had been rebuilt and the wetlands had not been taken away.

For years the Federal Government had not provided the critical funding that would have made possible the building of sound infrastructure that would have protected New Orleans from this assault that has come to the great people of this great city.

Our figure says it all. It would have cost only \$2.5 billion to build storm defenses around New Orleans capable of resisting a Category 5 hurricane. Katrina was an upper Category 4 hurricane. Nothing about New Orleans in this situation is new. Its vulnerability has been known for decades. This government knew that, yet nothing was done to protect the city and the surrounding communities.

FEMA, supposedly given a high priority for funding in the wake of 9/11, was not visible in the first days following this hurricane. We saw and heard evidence of the lifesaving work of countless private organizations like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army; yet this FEMA was not seen or heard of. In other words, we did not know what they were doing.

And in the days after Katrina hit the gulf coast, we have now learned that in many cases, FEMA was actually an impediment to the ongoing rescue and recovery efforts attempted by State and local officials. I am certain that in the months ahead we will see that FEMA's slow response to this terrible disaster needlessly resulted in the loss of hundreds, maybe thousands, of additional deaths and injuries. Why did this happen in the most powerful country in this world? This question begs for real answers.

Finally, there is a much more profound American problem that this disaster has illuminated, and that is the fact that the victims of the flooding in New Orleans have been, for the most part, African Americans and poor. The lowest lying areas of New Orleans, the most vulnerable to flooding, were inhabited by the city's most vulnerable people. Tragically, these victims, many of whom are children, the elderly, and the disabled, could have been spared much of the pain and massive destruction that was caused by Katrina if only their safety had been our government's priority. Instead, they were essentially left to fend for themselves with even more tragic consequences.

How could this happen, Mr. Speaker, in the world's most powerful and

wealthiest country? Clearly, it was not due to a lack of resources; but, rather, it was the result of our Homeland Security and this administration whose priorities did not include assisting the most vulnerable and needy of our society.

One of the first questions that we will need answers for after the rescue and recovery efforts are completed is what will happen to New Orleans? And these questions should be answered by Congress and the administration.

What will happen to New Orleans?

I will say this: we must have a plan for rebuilding New Orleans and the surrounding gulf coast communities, and we must have it soon. The people of New Orleans and the surrounding gulf coast communities cannot wait too long for solutions to this immediate crisis they now face. Mr. Speaker, we must act now. The people of New Orleans and the people of this country are waiting.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her comments.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Mrs. CHRISTENSEN).

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding to me.

Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in extending my sympathy and that of the people of the U.S. Virgin Islands to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama who have suffered great losses and continue to suffer from the impact of Hurricane Katrina on their lives. They are very fortunate to be represented by the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON), and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS).

I am proud to say that we, who know the fury of these storms, have many who are working in the affected and host communities, that our hotel association and countless individuals and businesses have contributed close to \$200,000 and that number continues to climb, that our National Guard sent many of our able troops to this vital effort, and our university has opened its doors to displaced students.

After 9/11, it was clear that we needed to become not just a stronger America but a better America, one where everyone was treated with dignity, fairness, justice, and compassion. Our leaders, though, urged us to go back to normal, and that was clearly not good enough. Despite the generosity of many good people, we have witnessed what has become normal for far too many in this country: for the poor, the rural, and people of color.

What happened in Alabama, Mississippi, and especially in Louisiana, the extent to which we have not yet seen, brings the issue of health and socioeconomic disparities into stark focus. Based on what is estimated, Katrina's toll will add more than 12,000 preventable, premature deaths to the

close to 100,000 we African Americans experience every year.

I am greatly concerned about all that has to be done now and for recovery and reconstruction; but as a physician, the health care challenges that are immediately upon us trouble me most. I am concerned because as a member of the Committee on Homeland Security, along with the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON), we have been issuing repeated calls for repairing and strengthening our public health system especially in our poor, minority, and rural communities. Calls that went unheeded.

I am concerned because we knew from a New York Academy of Medicine study that people would need more help and information to respond as instructed. I am concerned because another report on national health disparities will be released this week which will again tell us that disparities are widespread and due to persistent and institutional racial and ethnic discrimination and the socioeconomic problems they spawn in communities of color.

And so in the affected areas we have worsening chronic disease, diabetics without insulin for far too long, HIV/AIDS patients without medication, and babies without the proper feeding. Crowding and poor sanitation will increase infectious diseases, and we will have mental health problems now and for a long time to come. In this area the lack of the culturally competent providers we have long pressed for will be acutely felt.

No planning in Iraq, no planning here; yet another crisis has been allowed to develop. The President has not only to own up to the inadequacy of the preparedness and response, but he must also not cover it up. He has to work with us to correct it.

Mr. Speaker, we have an opportunity that the CBC will lead to make this right, to still become a better America. We can do it if we invest in our people and our country instead of giving tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. We can do it if we improve Medicaid, not cut it; if we restore proposed cuts to food stamps, WIC, public housing, small business programs, education, and all of the health care programs that improve the health services and health status for all of us who live here.

We can do it if we do everything that is needed to bring the destroyed places back and the displaced back home; if we strengthen the infrastructure in New Orleans and all around this country and in doing so create jobs and economic opportunity for all. We can do it, and in this time of great tragedy and distress, the time that usually brings people together, my prayer is that we will; and I call on all of our colleagues to support this effort.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for her comments.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. SCOTT).

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) for yielding to me, and again I concur with all of our colleagues in expressing our partnership, our involvement, our support of the gentleman from Mississippi, the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS), and certainly the gentleman from New Orleans and Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON).

I want to start out by certainly illustrating an opportunity that our President has to truly lead here. We know that there has been a failure in national leadership. We have talked about that. We have criticized that. But we are going forward now, and there are some important points that need to be made, and I want to appeal to our President because I think he has an excellent opportunity to make up some lost ground on regaining the position of national leadership on this issue because it is not too late because we have got to move forward.

And I think one of the first orders of business, Mr. Speaker, is that the President would reach out to the African American Members of Congress. We are the duly elected representatives who need to be involved in every critical process going forward. We all know the faces on the television cameras. The majority of the victims were African Americans and poor. We know that race and poverty and class play a part in this. Who better to make sure that this Nation is sensitive to that important fact?

□ 2045

It is not something to be brushed under the rug; it is something to be lifted up. For if it is true, there will be more than 10,000 or 12,000 individuals left, and as the water recedes in New Orleans, we owe it to those who have lost their lives, who because they were poor did not have a way to get out. And many in this Nation feel that our national leadership failed them.

Now is the time to pick up from there, and the first order of business would be to reach out to members of this Congressional Black Caucus and make sure that members of the Congressional Black Caucus are active in the investigation committees going forward, to make sure we are there to ask the right questions, to get the right answers, and there will be credibility going forward.

It is important for members of the Congressional Black Caucus to be on the spending committees. So far, there has been \$10.5 billion put forward. There is another \$50.5 billion that will be put forward later this week, possibly tomorrow. We must be at the table. We must help to decide where that money is going.

And then, Mr. President, here is a sterling opportunity to lead. It is going to take at least \$250 billion or \$300 billion, by all of the estimates that we have examined, and I have been on the phone to Harvard economists and others who have said that it is going to

take at least \$300 billion. We need a huge investment in New Orleans, in Louisiana. We need something there that will attract people to come back to New Orleans. One of the sad things I heard so many people saying is, I am going from New Orleans, I am not coming back to New Orleans. Fats Domino said it well: "I am walking to New Orleans."

All of us need to walk back to New Orleans. We need people coming from everywhere to walk back to New Orleans so New Orleans does not lose a beat; and in order to do that, we have to put a sizable investment in New Orleans. \$200 billion, \$300 billion, I do not know the figure, but it is certainly more than 50, certainly more than 100. I would think \$300 billion. And we have to think that way. That is what it takes for public works and transportation.

Then we need to determine, what do the victims need to rebuild their identity. They have no license, they have no addresses, they have no money; and where can they get immediate financial help? We have an excellent opportunity for leadership. I look forward to doing it, as do all of us here in the Congressional Black Caucus. This needs to be a partnership and a two-way street, and we look forward to working to make this a positive out of a negative.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Mississippi for yielding, and also to the gentleman from Louisiana, I want to thank him for his leadership and his hard work 24/7 in helping communities, your communities, work through this devastation, and also in leading this Congress in an effective response. We stand with the gentleman from Louisiana. Our constituents extend their desire to help in whatever way possible and to help in a very real way.

Mr. Speaker, I said earlier, and I have to say this again, that the world is watching. The world is watching as our Nation has been exposed. If anyone has ever doubted that there are two Americas, Hurricane Katrina and our government's shameful response have made this division very clear.

New Orleans is a city where 65 percent of the population was black. Nearly 30 percent, or 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. People died because they were poor and black and young and old and disabled. The incompetence and the indifference demonstrated by this administration in responding to this tragedy was really quite shocking, but it was not surprising.

For some of us, however, this is an America that we know very well. It is an America that has often been swept under the rug by lawmakers and the

media. This is the America that many of us know, and that is why the Congressional Black Caucus and so many in this House fight each and every day against these obscene tax cuts for the wealthy, and Medicaid and housing and health care budget cuts.

This is the America that I know, and this is why I have said over and over again that the war against Iraq, based on distortions and false information, did not have to be fought. We did not have to spend over \$300 billion and deplete the resources that could have gone to domestic security, economic security, and taken care of our people right here at home.

Each and every Member of Congress should be frightened to death, seeing the lack of preparedness and the unacceptably slow and deadly response by our government. People died who would not have died if our government had responded quickly and efficiently. This is a crime.

Each and every Member of Congress has had a glimpse of what could happen in their districts should a natural disaster or, God forbid, a terrorist attack occur in the future.

Now Americans have risen to the occasion and asked what they could do to help. And after listening to a very disappointing briefing by Cabinet Members and, however, listening to Members of Congress from affected districts who, in spite of the odds, again have been responding around the clock to the survivors of this devastation in heroic ways, I have a few thoughts that I think we should do immediately.

Well, of course, we must recognize, first of all, and thank individuals and organizations who have continued with monetary donations and also providing donations of medicine, clothing, bedding, and hygiene articles. But do my colleagues know what? The Federal Government must step up to the plate and lead this effort. We must help find temporary transitional housing so that people can live with dignity and respect until they can return home.

And we must insist that the Red Cross hire staff, and many of us have had experience working with the Red Cross; they need to hire staff and volunteers who reflect the populations that they serve, such as African Americans and Latino volunteers and staff. They should be brought in.

Mental health professionals should also be sensitive to, and they should be of, the diversity of the affected populations and understand the cultural background of those who have been traumatized. And they should understand, quite frankly, that they just left a war zone, and post-traumatic stress syndrome will be setting in. And we must insist that the rebuilding process takes into account the populations who have been displaced. Developers should not just come in and create a city where no one can afford to return home. There must be affordable housing and good-paying jobs for those survivors of this devastation.

Also, we must ensure that survivors' losses are not compounded by financial institutions. Credit card late fees and penalties and mortgages, all of these issues must be addressed, and we must make sure that our Americans are protected from predatory lenders at this time of extreme need.

Let me just say, quite frankly, we must not allow military recruiters to take advantage of the misfortune of hurricane survivors. They should not be allowed to access temporary housing and shelters to recruit the destitute and the vulnerable. As the proud daughter of a 25-year career military officer, I honor and thank our service men and women for their bravery and service, but I do not believe that recruiting traumatized survivors of this hurricane is the right thing to do.

The world is watching, and I thank the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) and the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) for leading the way.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the subject of this special order.

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

There was no objection.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Houston, Texas (Mr. GREEN).

Mr. AL GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Mississippi. I would like to extend my sympathies to all of the persons who have suffered.

Mr. Speaker, I am not asking for help for the survivors because they are black, of the black race; I am not asking that they be helped because some of them are of the white race. I am asking for help because they are all of the human race, and that is the race that counts.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that we must do something that is critical: We must not continue to call them refugees. Because, Mr. Speaker, these are tax-paying Americans. They have earned the right to be called American citizens who are in need of our help. So I beg today that we extend the hand of friendship and that this Congress spend whatever is necessary to restore their lives.

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, this is a Congressional Black Caucus hour. We wanted to talk about Hurricane Katrina and its impact on our Member districts. What I would like to do is offer the balance of my time to the gentleman from New Orleans, Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON).

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Mississippi for his expert handling of this hour to help to bring to the attention of the American people the particular plight

of African Americans, the particular plight of people who are impoverished, the particular plight of disadvantaged citizens who have been afflicted by this storm, and the hope and promise that our Nation holds for them and for my great city of New Orleans and the gulf coast region. I want to thank the gentleman for his attention to this matter, and I thank my colleagues for joining us in this very special and important hour.

Mrs. JONES of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, while there has been much devastation brought upon the Gulf Coast from Hurricane Katrina, I hope that apart from its devastation, we can say that Hurricane Katrina brought to light some of the atrocities that have been going on for years such as the poverty crisis in this country.

For far too long, we as a nation have neglected the underprivileged of this country. We are quick to criticize other countries for not taking care of their own, however, we have all but forgotten the poor in our own country.

A recent study by the Population Reference Bureau noted that Orleans Parish, Louisiana and Harrison County, Mississippi, the counties that are home to New Orleans and Biloxi respectively, had median household incomes of just \$31,369, 44 percent below that of the national average of \$44,684.

Additionally, 23.2 percent of the people in Orleans Parish and 14.6 percent of the people of Harrison County are below the poverty rate. Disproportionate rates of those people are African American. A whopping 35 percent in Orleans Parish and 27.4 percent in Harrison County.

High proportions of elderly residents of the Gulf Coast have disabilities as well. In New Orleans alone, 56.4 percent or 28,195 elderly resident have disabilities, compared to the national average of 39.6 percent.

About 9 percent of households in New Orleans did not even have a vehicle available to escape the storm. And for those who did have transportation, add to that the steadily rising gas prices which now exceed \$3.20.

This is simply unacceptable. The world is watching. And they are waiting to see if we are going to do right by our own citizens. If we will pull together to do what is right. We can send massive amounts of aid to tsunami victims, but we can't bail out the Gulf Coast. We fight for democracy across the globe, but when our own needed help we were slow to respond.

There is a gospel song that says, "Sweep around your own front door." Today, I say America it is time for us to sweep around our own front doors. We can no longer put on blinders to the poverty crisis that is now staring us in our face.

We must work within this Congress to put in place legislation that will help these victims not just over the next few months, but for years, because that is how long it will take for us to heal from this natural disaster.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the ongoing crisis for those who have evacuated Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, and to recognize the extraordinary efforts of Texans. And in particular residents of Dallas.

For the people along the Gulf Coast, I wish to express my deepest condolences.

This devastation has cost many individuals their homes, jobs, belongings, and worst of all their lives.

Almost a quarter million evacuees have traveled to Texas. Seventeen thousand of which have come to Dallas. This is an extremely traumatic situation. Many of these individuals are looking for missing family and friends. Most do not know if or when they will be able to return home.

The one bright spot is the thousands of Americans who have opened their hearts to volunteer time and money. I truly believe it is the personal efforts that make the greatest impact.

During this time of tragedy many heroes have emerged. Local residents, churches, and businesses in Dallas have overwhelmingly offered assistance.

The efforts of those who are volunteering their time at Dallas area shelters have made an immeasurable impact. In addition, many Texans have offered jobs or opened their homes to evacuated families.

I know that the generous spirit of Texans and of all Americans will help to aid this transition. When these dislocated people return to their communities, immediate economic opportunities should be given to them first so they can rebuild.

Mr. Speaker, we now look towards this Administration to exhibit the same type of sacrifice and humanity that countless Americans and charities have displayed.

I question those policies that stretched those National Guard units that could have rendered more immediate aid in New Orleans and elsewhere. First responders have not been given the tools they need. And this Administration drastically underfunded the Army Corps of Engineers, who are responsible for maintaining the levees surrounding New Orleans.

It is time to acknowledge our dependence on fossil fuels—whether foreign or domestic—which set the stage for further economic displacement ahead.

It is neither premature nor unpatriotic to raise questions as the federal government recovers its footing after an initially dismal performance. The point is that even though the government is now showing signs of progress, much work remains.

I can assure the Administration we, as Members of CSC, will do our best to work with them towards fulfilling our commitment to the American citizens.

I will be offering a comprehensive education appropriations bill along with Congressman HINOJOSA. There are currently 160,000 displaced students as a result of Hurricane Katrina. The Texas Education Agency predicts that as many as 70,000 displaced students will enter Texas schools this year.

This bill sets up a \$500 million fund for displaced students within the Department of Education. From this fund, states will receive \$3,000 for each displaced student that enters their school systems. This money will provide funding for additional classrooms, teachers, books, and supplies. These young people have been through a traumatic experience and providing a safe stable school environment is vital.

I will also introduce a bill that would call on the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure that the displaced survivors of Hurricane Katrina and first responders receive the mental health services they need.

Mr. Speaker and colleagues, think of the incredible stress these people are experiencing.

There is anxiety. There is depression. There is a sense of hopelessness.

I am a former nurse, and I worked in the mental health sector. I feel strongly that these displaced individuals, many of whom are left with nothing, desperately need mental health services to address the trauma they have endured.

This bill will call upon Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice to address those needs. Mental health should not be forgotten.

Mr. Speaker, the Federal Emergency response to this calamity was disappointing. When I visited my District in Dallas and saw the suffering of many displaced individuals, I was struck at how far-reaching and long-term these issues will be. Let us make good legislative decisions to help them in the best way possible.

Mr. JEFFERSON. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to reclaim my time to address the House for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KIRK). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Texas?

There was no objection.

COMING TOGETHER FOR THE VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA

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

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I hope that as my colleagues have spoken now for almost an hour, the American people will understand the depth of passion and concern that we are now experiencing as Members of the United States Congress.

In particular, I want to acknowledge the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) and the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS) and the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. THOMPSON) for the devastation that they have experienced in their districts and simply suggest that this is not a question of "I's" and "me's," but it is a time now for "me's" and, if you will, "us's," a time for America to come together, and a time for us to stand steadfast and to be able to be the wind beneath the wings of those survivors.

I will also say, Mr. Speaker, that it is not a time to shy away from the critical questions that need to be asked and answered.

There are many people now today that had homes and had a sense of comfort and might now be sitting with their family around a television set, just finishing dinner, going out, coming back in. But, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is, they had a home. And unfortunately tonight, as we stand in this wonderful testament to democracy, we have Americans who have experienced a brutal and unending disaster in their lives.

□ 2100

And so I come today most of all to offer my deepest sympathy for the ones who lost their lives, and my deepest expression of concern to the survivors. And they are survivors. For those of us who watched in utter shock the events of the last week, what an opportunity to come face to face in my own city of Houston with the survivors. What an opportunity to be able to see the greatest expression of charitable output, if you will, by the city of Houston and Harris County, as people worked day in and day out, first working with no road map, no structure on how to receive hundreds and hundreds of buses and thousands of people, almost 1,700 in one night, coming, individuals with the same clothing that they had on, suffering from overexposure, water, fear, trauma, individuals who had come from the Superdome and ultimately the Convention Center who thought they had been abandoned with no food, no water and no clothing and disaster amongst them.

These individuals survived, and they came with a resilient spirit, and they buoyed the volunteers, and they buoyed the leadership of our city and Harris County. They worked to improve the conditions of the Dome, albeit as I walked and saw the throngs of people and sometimes the despair in senior citizens begging to go home, as they sat by the wheelchair of an elderly person, sitting with no clothing, people looking for their loved ones, holding up signs, where is my daughter, where is my son, my grandmother, my mother, my husband, my wife; doctors coming in in throngs from the medical center and all around the community; clothing being brought time after time. It was an amazing outpouring, but yet there was despair.

But still, the volunteers in Houston kept meeting and meeting and meeting, recognizing that they could not give up as well. And now the George R. Brown Convention Center, opening its doors with people and wonderful sites for the children and libraries and the medical MASH unit.

And we have gotten better, Mr. Speaker. We know how to do it now. And these are, in fact, our brothers and sisters. And, yes, there is something to the story of the Good Samaritan. We are, in fact, not doers of the deed, but we do it; and we understand what it means.

But at the same time we rejoice that there are survivors, we must recognize that there must be an inquiry. And as we speak, I am writing legislation entitled the Katrina Inquiry Commission, because we remember the 9/11 Commission, and we are grateful for it.

I am also associated with writing legislation that will drop tomorrow that provides relief for the survivors, so that if they are in bankruptcy, none of the benefits from the Federal Government can be used to discharge debts.

We are also looking to provide more technology and working with FEMA