

and drawing from other experiences, and experiences I experienced myself a week or so ago in the gulf coast area.

WORST CASE SCENARIO

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. PRICE of Georgia). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 60 minutes.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words tonight, and I appreciate the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) for being here and his consistent approach to good government and good policy. I also understand that the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) has been down to the hurricane-ravaged region to see what is going on down there.

I wanted to take an opportunity to say some words about Hurricane Katrina, about the disaster itself, how it came to that point, what has happened to get us to this point, and what we need to do to get ahead in America and rebuild and reconstruct the ravaged region of the gulf coast.

As I speak, we have another hurricane that is swelling up to a category 4 hurricane. Who knows where it is going to make landfall, or if it will make landfall. If it takes a turn in the wrong direction, it could get the very location that is still underwater from Hurricane Katrina.

I take us back to those days prior to Hurricane Katrina striking that region. I know back as early as 2002 there were significant documents published in the local paper that illustrated the structure of the dikes, the levee system, the protection from hurricanes and flooding that existed around the New Orleans area.

For years they had been building miles and miles of levees and dikes. The original concept of the city, as the city got established and grew, like most cities, it was not the most scientifically identified location, but it was a location good for commerce. If you can pick a good location for commerce, then you will find out that the value of that commerce flowing into that city would be great enough to justify the construction of the infrastructure that was required to, at least within the vision of the people making the decisions and paying the taxes and appropriating the funds at that time, to protect the city with at least minimal advocacy.

As the years went by, New Orleans grew. It began to settle below sea level. And as the Mississippi River would rise and bring its periodic floods, as I have seen in Iowa, and I have worked in the floods of 1993, that water made its way down there and flooded that region too. They built protection, and each device was designed to protect the last flood, and seldom do we design to protect against the next flood.

I do not take issue with the design of the Corps of Engineers, but New Orle-

ans was a city that was growing. And as it grew, the land settled. As it settled, the levees were constructed and the protection was established; but it was more designed for something we had experienced in the past rather than something we might anticipate in the future.

But it was not without anticipation. In fact, the newspaper articles in the New Orleans Times Picayune had laid out, I believe, five different editions of that newspaper that all dealt with the structure of the levee system, the protection of the levee system, and what would happen in the event of certain weather circumstances, particularly hurricanes. Each of those editions had five or six articles that laid out certain segments.

As I sat through the night reading through those, it struck me this was a concise presentation of the circumstances. If one wants to go and visit and understand what happened around New Orleans, I highly recommend that they revisit those pages on the Web site of the New Orleans Time Picayune newspaper. I believe it was 2002, although the articles do not have a date I can find.

What I saw was a Mississippi River leveed off from the city of New Orleans. The levees are 25 feet above sea level. They protect the flooding of the Mississippi River. It gets over 25 feet over sea level, it would spill out over the levees. And as far as I know, it has not done that, at least not from the river itself.

There were also levees designed to protect the city from the surge from the gulf. It is unclear to me the elevations of those levees. Some of them were not as high as the 25 feet above sea level that is the level around the Mississippi River. There are also levees operated by the levee district and in conjunction with the Corps of Engineers. As I picked out of that article, there is cost sharing. First of all, the Corps of Engineers constructs, operates, and maintain the levees on the Mississippi River. The other levees, particularly the levees that are the boundaries of Lake Pontchartrain that keep Lake Pontchartrain from surging into New Orleans, those levees are managed and constructed in conjunction with the Corps of Engineers. And then there are lateral levees that run along some of the canals that are constructed and maintained by the levee district themselves, according to the published documents.

As I look at those elevations, the river elevations, Corps of Engineers, 25 feet above sea level. The hurricane levees around Lake Pontchartrain, approximately 17.5 feet above sea level. The elevations along the 17th Street Canal, there was one elevation that was 4.5 feet above sea level. That canal needed floodgates at the inlet of Lake Pontchartrain to protect the surge from spilling out and breaching the levee on the 17th Street Canal. The other two canals fell in the same category.

But as it laid out this system, the system of levees designed to protect a city that is settling and a city that had as much as 16 feet of water in the city, the idea was, of course, to plan for an expected or an historical event. But one article in there laid out the scenario that was called worst case scenario; and worst case scenario was if a category 4 or category 5 hurricane came into New Orleans from the south and sat with its center near the center of the city of New Orleans, or perhaps a little to the left or west where the counterclockwise winds of the hurricane would drive the ocean water up into Lake Pontchartrain, and there would be a surge of water that actually lifts water up out of the ocean above sea level, as that water comes up it raises an elevation. Water has a tendency to flow downhill. That is one thing I can say professionally: Water runs downhill. The south wind would push that water that was elevated up into Lake Pontchartrain and raise that lake up, a lake that might have a depth between 8 and 20 feet deep, approximately 16 to 17 feet average depth, but half again more water, 8 to 10 feet more water pushed into Lake Pontchartrain. And as the south wind drove that water to the north, and it is a huge lake, that lake had half again more water.

As the hurricane shifted further to the right or to the east, that moved the eye to the east of New Orleans and to the east of Lake Pontchartrain. When that happened, the wind turned around to the north. When it turned to the north, it began to drive that water that was stacked up in Lake Pontchartrain, drive it back to the south. And when it did that, there was a 10- or 12-foot or greater wall of water because there was that much water in the lake, it was 155-mile-an-hour winds driving that water, pushing that surge over the levees, over where the floodgates needed to be and the inlets to the canal levee system.

Mr. Speaker, that was the worst case scenario, and that was the scenario that was laid out in the newspaper in 2002. It was the scenario that hit with Hurricane Katrina when Lake Pontchartrain spilled over the levees. Once it breaches a levee and the water starts to flow, the velocity of the water erodes the soil out and creates wide gaps in the levees and lets more and more water come faster and faster, and New Orleans began to fill up. We saw the low parts of New Orleans on our television screens, and I saw them from the air a week ago last Sunday. That was the worst case scenario that hit.

I pose one more thing into this question. There were a couple of other things with regard to how people responded, and perhaps we will get to that, but the scenario was this. By my information and I have not checked the actual river flows, but by my information, the Mississippi River was running at one of its lowest levels. It was at least a seasonal low, if not an historical low. As I flew down from New Orleans to the gulf, south about 90 miles of

channel to get to the Gulf of Mexico, and looked at the devastated communities down there, the 25-foot levees down below were breached. I would say they were topped. The river levees were topped by water that surged over the top, which said that this low-flow Mississippi River saw such a surge from the ocean that it came up and went over the top of the 25-foot levees, 25 feet above sea level, surged over the top of those levees and flooded the bottom ground between the gulf levee and the Mississippi River levee and washed out anyone that lived in that half-mile stretch that lives in between the two levees, all of the way from New Orleans down to the Gulf of Mexico.

That surge in that river, that surged all of the way up into New Orleans and put pressure on the entire system, I wonder what it would have been like if the Mississippi River had been running at a high flow as opposed to a low flow. It would have been worse yet if that had been the case.

I looked at what caused that disaster and how it came about and how it was predictable, it was predicted, and what we might have done and what we might well do. That will be something that I will commit a lot of my energy to in the upcoming months, to have some oversight on the planning process, since it is my background and my life's work and my history of having been flooded. I had four large construction contracts going on in 1993 in Iowa, and had them all underwater intermittently throughout that spring and early summer, and, by the 9th of July, having them all underwater with some of my equipment as well. That helps me empathize with the victims of this flood. My house did not wash away, my business nearly washed away. That season was washed away, and it put all of us through a lot of work and stress and economic hardship that I think served me well to have been tested in that fashion. Hopefully I will be able to use and draw on that experience as we reach out a helping hand to the people on the gulf coast.

As far as that background and that history subsequent to the floods of 1993, we did flood mitigation work and worked in conjunction with the victim communities throughout the region in Iowa all through the balance of the decade. We were not able to do any flood mitigation in 1993 because we were one of the companies that was underwater; but by 1994 we had pulled ourselves up out of the water and we had gotten our contracts finished and we reached out and we did flood work.

We have done work on all of the reservoirs in Iowa on the Missouri River and Mississippi River. So we have extensive experience in that kind of work and elevations and drainage and hydrology and water flows and elevations and the impact of the velocity.

□ 2215

So these are things that I will pay close attention to as we move forward

with putting a plan together for a solution for New Orleans and the region in the gulf coast.

The gentleman that is here tonight that spoke briefly with a 1-minute speech is the gentleman from Georgia. And this gentleman is a doctor from Georgia, a colleague of mine, a classmate of mine, elected to come in for the 108th Congress together. A gentleman who has given a lot of his life for the betterment of this country, including who-knows-how-many babies delivered, how many passionate speeches on the floor based on that experience, and the times that he has taken his profession to support his work here in Congress but also the times he steps away from his work in Congress to lend a healing hand to people who need that.

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

Mr. GINGREY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Iowa for yielding to me in this Special Order tonight. Of course, he brings to us an expertise that few Members of Congress really have and an understanding of this rather complex system of levees. The city of New Orleans, how it is constructed and how it is protected, and the lower Mississippi, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING), of course, understands that and had an opportunity within the last 10 days to actually go down to the area of devastation, as he points out; and I am very happy that he is going to be working to try to restore and get it right as we seek to rebuild.

I had, Mr. Speaker, an opportunity that I want to share with my colleagues. It was entirely different really, not from the engineering technical perspective, which I have very little expertise on. But as a physician Member of the Congress, I found myself going into the Labor Day weekend enjoying a dove shoot. The opening day of dove season in my great State of Georgia was that Saturday of Labor Day, the long Labor Day weekend. And as I was sitting in a dove field waiting for these few birds to come over that I had very little chance of hitting, I began to feel a little bit compelled to do something, especially as a physician Member.

And I was fortunate enough, when I got back home, to call around and realize that there was an opportunity to go into Louisiana, into Mississippi, and to try to help out a little bit. A lot of folks have done that; and I am sure that they felt, coming back from that experience, just as I did, tremendously gratified to have made the effort.

But I basically, Mr. Speaker, hooked a ride with an angel flight. Angel flights are private pilots or corporate pilots who are willing in an emergency situation to donate their aircraft to fly either medical personnel or supplies and equipment into an area. And that is exactly what I ended up doing. On Sunday morning of the Labor Day weekend, a good friend, a compassionate citizen from Rome, Georgia,

Mr. Bob Ledbetter, Jr., allowed me to fly down on his plane, an angel flight, to Baton Rouge with medical supplies, three nurses, two from Emory, one from Cobb County.

We basically went to one of the largest shelters in Baton Rouge, 5,000 people there at the River Center, took those medical supplies. And then I spent some time seeing patients. No life-threatening emergencies, but stress patients that have been through a lot, fatigue, some who had swallowed the contaminated water and were suffering symptoms from that. But mainly I just had an opportunity to talk to evacuees to get a sense of what they went through and to also see volunteers who were just working day and night with very little sleep and doing it in a most compassionate way. Not perfect order, but organized to the best of their ability.

I want to give very high marks to the Red Cross, Mr. Speaker, at the River Center in Baton Rouge. If the gentleman from Iowa will allow me, I would like to mention some names of people that I felt need some pats on the back and some accolades.

First, I met the director of the Red Cross effort at the River Center, Mr. Jeff Schnoor. His name is a little difficult to pronounce, but Jeff is a retired military man, 21 years in the military, a single parent, I think from San Antonio, had been working with the Red Cross for 12 years, been through a lot of disasters, but told me that this was the toughest assignment that he had ever had. And he handled himself in that entire center with 5,000 evacuees with such calmness and patience. It was a very difficult time, but he handled it extremely well.

I also was able, Mr. Speaker, to meet with a group of physicians who had gone down from Atlanta, and I want to particularly mention Dr. Cecil Bennett. He had an organization that he put together through his Atlanta primary care practice, some of his partners, some of the nurses that work for him, and he called this Operation Brother's Keeper. And his focus was to not let these angel flights just come down with medical supplies and personnel and fly back empty, but he was determined to see that any evacuee, displaced person, that had family or friends in another State, particularly in Georgia, to be given an opportunity to fly back and to get into maybe a less crowded situation and join family or friends in another location.

And so when I came back from Baton Rouge, it was with another angel flight pilot, Mr. Steve Stemmer, in a very small plane carrying the pilot, myself, and four evacuees, one of whom had just had a baby a week before the hurricane hit. So it was really quite a thing to see.

There was a couple in Baton Rouge. We had worked all afternoon in the shelter seeing patients; and then, lo and behold, it got to the wee hours of the morning and we realized we had no

place to sleep except maybe on the concrete floor. And this couple, Eva and David Kelley, took in six of us, and their teenage boys had to sleep on the couch, and they gave us their beds.

I guess what I want to say, and I appreciate the gentleman from Iowa for giving me the opportunity, is that I had a chance to see the best of human nature. I know right after the levees broke and we were all so shocked to see all that water in the city of New Orleans and particularly shocked by the looting and the kind of mob behavior that we see in situations like that, maybe that did bring out the worst of human nature in a very limited few; but what I saw, Mr. Speaker, was the best of human nature in the majority, the vast majority of people.

And not just in the volunteers and the professionals, the Red Cross, who were doing their job, but really in the evacuees themselves. They are good people. They explained to me why they did not leave. I was very curious to know if they had been able to hear the warnings. In almost every instance, Mr. Speaker, they had clearly heard the warnings. Some of them had never been out of the city of New Orleans in their entire lives, and they had been through plenty of near misses without this big perfect storm flooding their city, and they knew that some of the neighbors in the past had actually left their property, only to come back and find New Orleans dry but their property totally ransacked and looted and destroyed.

Even if they did not own, if they were renting property, everything that was in there was theirs. It was their stuff. They had that pride, that sense of ownership. So it gave me a much better understanding as to why these people did not leave. They were not stupid. They had a good reason.

So we need to continue to be compassionate and realize that, while it is hard to look for any good out of such a tremendous disaster, natural disaster, I think we do have a chance, if we all pull together and do not get into too much partisan bickering over this and finger-pointing, to help New Orleans and the gulf coast and the State of Mississippi and Louisiana rebuild and maybe make the lives better for a lot of these people that did not have such a good existence prior to this storm.

So I thank the gentleman for allowing me to come and share just a few thoughts tonight with my colleagues.

Mr. KING of Iowa. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) for his presentation tonight and also for his service and for getting in there as he did early and seeing the situation there and reaching out a helping hand. I know that his experience there and the perspective that he picked up down in that region will serve him well as this Congress makes decisions on the taxpayers' dollars and, when we appropriate those dollars, when we direct those dollars, that they go to the most good and to the greatest use that they possibly can.

I also want to point out that many of us in this Congress recognize that there needs to be a private sector solution to this, that we need to help those people that need and deserve the help, but at the same time the government cannot be the solution to everything, that the human spirit will win out with all. And as the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) said, the spirit of the people down there showed very much the positive sides of this.

I saw some things too that strike me in a way as a sense of humor that helps people adjust to the disaster. Having been through some disaster myself, I understand that psychology that one cannot just wallow in feeling sorry for oneself. The poor me's do not clean up anything. And after a couple of weeks of people coming up and saying, I am sorry, I am sorry, one gets to the point of saying all right, but now I want to go to work and it is time to start cleaning up the mess and putting this thing back together.

One of the things that I saw was in a sporting goods store that was boarded up with plywood in Slidell, Louisiana. It had a series of windows there with about a four by eight sheet of plywood over every one of them. And as I looked at that, the one on the left said in big red letters, "Looters will be shot." And the next window to the right said, "Survivors will be shot again," and there were three more windows with plywood on them painted on in big red letters, "And again and again and again."

And I walked in there to talk to that gentleman, and he had not had a problem with looters. His sporting goods store was full of inventory, and he was open for business that day, and he was selling product over the counter. I did not notice that there were any lights on in there. I suspect there was not any electricity, but he was doing business, and he had protected his place. I think the signs on the windows had to help, and it also helped him send a message to the people that were looting and shooting in the city off to their south and west, and that would have been the city of New Orleans. I believe Slidell was pretty close to the center of the worst of it. Although a fair amount of the town seemed to remain intact, once we got out into the countryside, there was not much left in a lot of those regions to the south and somewhat to the west of there.

As the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) has spoken about taking a ride back to Georgia with some of the evacuees and reaching out a hand to help, I wanted to point out, Mr. Speaker, the effort that we have done within the district that I represent, roughly the western third of Iowa. There are 32 counties there, and they range all the way from Minnesota down to Missouri. And we looked on television as we saw the tens of thousands of evacuees that were trapped temporarily in New Orleans that were being evacuated out. They were going to the Astrodome.

They were going to the River Center, as the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. GINGREY) mentioned, in Baton Rouge, and around that region in the country. There were cities that more than doubled in their population in a matter of a few days.

And we watched that unfold, and we saw that tens of thousands had been taken to the Astrodome in Houston and received their cot, and the cots were lined up side by side with barely enough room to walk in between them, where people's new home was a small bag of some possessions that sat underneath their own personal cot, which was laying out there in the middle of everywhere with hundreds and hundreds of people all in one room sleeping together and set up with food lines and passed drinks and receiving medical care and doing all we could do at the time.

□ 2230

But they needed to be relocated some place more permanent, some place that they could call home.

I know that there were some States that set up cots within their city centers and some of those were used and they needed them. But we looked at it from a different perspective, where I am from, and we looked around and asked the question, how could we best serve some people? How could we best reach out to people in need?

We came up with the idea that I call the "package deal." We sent a message out to each of the county seat mayors in the 32 counties, asked them to hold a meeting and ask to come to that meeting their emergency manager in the county, several of their top employers, their pastors, the school administrator, and any other volunteers and groups that would like to, especially the service clubs that are very effective in our region, such as the Rotary and Kiwanis and the Optimists and the Lions who all have a significant role to supplement the work of the churches.

We asked them to identify the package deal, as I referenced, and that is, with this vision in mind that we could invite people into our communities and save family units. So that when the plane landed or the bus pulled in, the mayor would be standing there to greet the family or families, and alongside them would be the pastor of their choice, if they had a choice, and next to the pastor would be the sponsoring family that would be sponsoring the newly-arriving family or the sponsors of the families, and perhaps a school administrator there.

But the essential core would be the mayor for the ceremonial duties, so to speak, and the formal welcome; the pastor for the spiritual support which we know that everyone needs; and the sponsoring family would help the new family get acquainted and be absorbed into the community, so that they would know when they set foot on the ground that they could lay their head

on a pillow that night that would be theirs and a home that they could call home, at least for a while, and a refrigerator that had food in it, and that the kids could go to school the next day.

As we put that package together and the inventory came together, we have since identified perhaps two dozen households and sponsoring families of the package deal, and I would think there are that many again in Iowa that are almost ready to say, yes, we will be happy to sponsor a family.

So we are moving forward with that process. We have some families who are placed in the region. Most of that comes from family connections or church connections, and we are reaching out to expand them. It is important for us to do all we can to donate money, commit our time, and it is also important for us to identify the resources in our communities and be able to offer a package deal where a family needs a new community and a new home to adopt them, either temporarily or, if they choose, permanently. All we ask from them is be a good citizen and you can stay here as long as you want or need to, and we are going to help you find a job. Part of the job prospects was part of the offer that we put together.

As one of my district people who will be heading this up had to say, whether or not we get a long line-up of people that are willing to come and accept this offer and take a trip to get relocated in our part of the State, as long as we offer them an option, it gives them at least some power. People that do not have options do not have hope, people who have been loaded onto planes and flown across this country and landed into cities in different States and when they got on the plane, they did not know where they were going, and I am told that sometimes they did not actually know where they were when they arrived. They found out soon enough. Mostly, though, I can confirm that in the heat of the evacuation attempt, which was a successful effort, it was not practical to be negotiating with people that were under stress on where they would go. It was just important to find a place for them to go, and the rest could be sorted out later.

So even though it sounds a little bit inhuman to load people on airplanes and fly them places, by the same token, when you go into a situation where you have that many tens of thousands of people in one place, and if you begin to negotiate and you say, here is the offer, I want to fly you off to Minneapolis, for example, somebody is going to hold out for Las Vegas or Des Moines, or wherever it might be, and then you end up with a chaotic situation when you have to act, act fast, load the plane, get going so that plane can get out of the way for another one to land and get turned around.

So I visited the area, and I left Ames, Iowa in a small plane at about 6:15 in the evening on Saturday, it was Sep-

tember 10, and flew down there and landed at Little Rock that night, pretty late, and left Little Rock early in the morning at 5:15, in keeping with the flight plan that we had filed. We flew on in to Louis Armstrong International Airport and landed there about 7:26 a.m., Sunday morning, September 11. Somehow, it seemed that we had not come all that far in 4 years when I got a look at New Orleans, but certainly that thought came to mind, that reverent day to commemorate September 11, it became September, 2005, and a great, great city was under water, and a huge, huge area of the gulf coast had been destroyed and blown away and washed away by the surge of the storm, an area roughly 90,000 square miles, perhaps the size of Kansas.

But as we landed there that morning, I got out of the plane and walked into the airport service center there, and there were three men that had spent most of their time working there, had not really been outside that area that I could tell. Some had lost their homes, or at least they were flooded, wind damaged, temporarily at least. They were living off of military meals, ready to eat, they seemed to be everywhere down there and there was not much of anything else, but there was plenty of water. So there was bottled water and food, the essentials of life; there was shelter there.

Their telephones, I believe their land lines were not functioning, but their cell phones were working, and my cell phone did work. So I called over to the joint operations center, which was across the other side of the air strip, and they sent a car to pick me up. I arrived at the air strip there sometime after 8 o'clock that morning, perhaps 8:15, 8:20. As I walked into that center, I met officer after officer that was there on duty in that center where they are controlling the communications for the rescue and recovery and the evacuation of New Orleans.

It took about an hour to discuss some of that through with the officers that were there, and they asked if I would stay for the 9 o'clock briefing, which began precisely at 9 o'clock, and I did stay for the briefing. It seemed as though they directed a lot of their briefing to me, and I say that because some of the details that they went into I suspect everyone in the room knew those answers except for myself. So as they directed that briefing on me and invited me to ask questions, I did ask a few; and in the end, they asked me if I would say a few words, and I did.

Good people there. They had pulled that together. I am going to guess that there were 40 to 45 people in the room, each representing their own government agency which would have been Federal and State and city, as well as the nongovernment agencies, the non-government organizations, the NGOs that were there. As I listened to them talk about what they had done, how they adapted and what they were plan-

ning to do, and I looked at the list, the checklist, the problems that had been raised and posted and the solutions that were proposed and how they arrived at that, it was a textbook study, I think, on how to put together a rescue and recovery operation.

The communications had been wiped out in New Orleans. In fact, Michael Chertoff stood here and gave us a presentation on the disaster of Katrina in a session of Congress in his briefing and, as he described this, he said that if the military were going to attack a city, the classical attack would be to go in and wipe out the power and the communications, which Hurricane Katrina did for the city of New Orleans, wiped out the power and communications; and then it would wipe out the transportation routes, destroy the ability, disturb the ability to get in or out of the city of New Orleans, and then attack. That is exactly what the storm did. It wiped out the electrical power, wiped out the communications, took out the cell phones even, and then wiped out the access to and from the city, even including the part of the causeway; flooded the approaches to the bridges, you could not get in or out of New Orleans, it was a stranded city, and then the attack was the water that flowed in and filled that city up, as much as sometimes 16 feet of water.

So that classical attack that came to New Orleans shut off all of the communications, made victims of hundreds of the rescue workers whom the rescue plan was designed to put to work to help save others, but they were victims of the storm and the attack, so to speak, themselves. I would describe what happened, and each of us, I think, in this country now could go down the path of criticizing a number of public figures in this event; but in lieu of that, I will take my colleagues back to the storm that I described earlier. This storm that was the worst-case scenario, that was the classic military-style attack on the city of New Orleans, the hurricane that positioned itself so that it was almost perfect.

If you were on the side of the hurricane, you would say it was a perfect storm. It was a perfect storm in that it came with the velocity and the power and the intensity and the speed and exactly in the location that it could do the most damage. It positioned itself so that it stacked all that water up in Lake Pontchartrain, then it positioned itself to surge the water back out of Lake Pontchartrain, flowed over the levee dikes, breached the dikes, and then began lowering the water level in Lake Pontchartrain while it filled the city of New Orleans.

That all took place, and it took place even though man had prepared for a bad disaster. But it was the perfect storm; Katrina was almost the perfect storm. It could have been a little more intense, it could have clearly been a Category 5, but it was nearly the perfect storm to destroy New Orleans and destroy the gulf coast and destroy the

whole flow of the channel in the bottom ground all along from New Orleans all the way down 90 miles to the Gulf of Mexico along the Mississippi.

That perfect storm, Mr. Speaker, and then I would add to that another perfect storm, another perfect storm, which was the chain reaction of disaster that came when the plans for the storm and the plans for the hurricane reaction, the evacuation of people and then the recovery and the response to the storm, broke down. And it can be argued that it broke down at nearly every level at one point or another.

Having been in business for 28 years, I have seen a number of times when I have called it in business a chain reaction of disaster. In my business, the earth-moving business, I talk about this scenario: somebody forgets to load the grease tubes onto the maintenance trailer, and then they show up at the job and there is no grease. Then the man who is doing the greasing does not grease. Then, because of that, then a bearing goes out. Because the bearing goes out, the machine breaks down. Because the machine breaks down, it is not there to support the other machines; and when that happens, the whole job and the whole operation breaks down, and all for want of a grease tube.

Sometimes, the disaster could have been worse for want of better communication. As the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. STUPAK) spoke here earlier in his Special Order perhaps 30 minutes ago or more, they did not have the ability, the interoperability to communicate across the different levels of law enforcement. I know that we had law enforcement sometimes standing on one side of the river or even opposite sides of the road with water in between and could not get to each other because their radios would not communicate because of frequency problems. We have the technology today to tie that all together and make that work. That was not the case down in New Orleans in many of those cases.

So because of that lack of ability to communicate between the law enforcement officers, because the power was out, the lights were out, because we had vandals and because we had looters and, in fact, on Monday, and the storm was still passing through on Monday, by Monday afternoon at 3:30, there were looters in the streets with guns, shooting, robbing, breaking in, and stashing that loot in places where they thought they could go back and get it, and many of them did. That was another piece that broke down, was the public order.

But, also, the worst-case scenario that was in the paper described that small boats would have to come in as volunteers and penetrate into the city and haul people out. Yet there were 1,000 people outside the city on Thursday morning I think, 1,000 people outside the city with boats preparing to go in, and the first boat that went in got shot at. So they were turned back and prevented from going into the city.

I happen to know that there was a fleet of air boats that came from Georgia, and they waited to get the orders to go in. They wanted to go in and save people. They could not get orders to go in, partly because of the security, and I think partly because the communication was breaking down; but, nonetheless, they decided to take matters into their own hands, went into the city, and that small group of air boats rescued 800 people. That was a point of light in this disaster of the storm, and it happened over and over again, people taking charge, people acting, reacting, responding, taking initiative the American way.

Sometimes when top-down management is destroyed because of communications or the plan just does not work, people have to take over and recover. We have done that in wars from the beginning of time, or the beginning of this country; and we have served ourselves well with that kind of initiative and that kind of inspiration that comes from that.

But the communications broke down, the plan that was there for evacuation filled up the civic center, filled up the Superdome. There did not seem to be adequate water or supplies or medicine or order in the Superdome, and it filled with people and put a lot of pressure on the people that were in there. We know that bad things happened inside that building, and they will unfold as time goes on.

The Superdome was surrounded with water, and yet I have reports that some people drove to the Superdome presumably before it was completely surrounded with water, parked their car, and walked in. If they could drive to the Superdome and park their car, they could drive out of New Orleans and evacuate themselves. Why did they not do that? So the questions remain, and many of them that are critical of government have been publicly aired, and I will not dig down into that.

But I will just say that from a weather standpoint, Mr. Speaker, we had a nearly perfect storm, from a chain reaction of disaster, from a break-down of communications and power and cut-off of the transportation routes, and then the inability of the local law enforcement people and the local security people, those who were not already victimized by the flood that were on duty, their inability to communicate with each other, and then their inability to communicate with the chain of command, going up from the city to the State to the Federal Government.

□ 2245

It had to have been extraordinarily difficult to get enough information to make an informed decision in a time of crisis like that, and it was immobilizing.

So the perfect storm of the weather, and almost the perfect storm of the chain reaction of disaster that flowed from lack of communications, inability to communicate with each other, and

then sometimes the inability to agree on what the next appropriate action was, not having had thought this out in advance, in my history I will look back and tell you that much of what I have seen in the form of people who appear to be quick thinking, were really people who had thought ahead and simply reacted to the scenario that had played out in their mind.

And I do not know that this scenario had been played out in the minds of the local leadership, but I did read this scenario in the newspaper. And again these questions will be asked. They will be answered. And I think that America will get a reasonable perspective when Congress gets finished with our hearings sometime in the future. Right now, we are in the recovery and planning the reconstruction mode.

A few other things that come across my mind. I stopped and talked to a shrimper down at Slidell, Louisiana. He had five boats. Two of them were west of New Orleans; they survived the storm. Three of them were east of New Orleans; all of them were blown up on high ground.

He had a friend who had been running a video tape on the day that the water surge came in. I think there they said the surge was perhaps 17 feet. As the water began to come in the house, he turned on the video player. And within 3 to 5 minutes the water had filled the house to the point where he was going up the stairs. His wife was trying to save the dogs and go up the stairs, and the last sounds in the film, I am told, and I hope to be able to see that film, is the sound of this individual that is chopping a hole in the roof so he can get out on top of the roof with his wife and the dogs, to save themselves from the flood.

That 17-foot surge of water there, which in some cases was as high as 27 feet, that filled the House up in just a few minutes, in 3 to 5 minutes the water came up. It is not quite like a tsunami that breaks like a surfer's wave, and it is not quite like a wall of water, but I understand, and wish I had seen film of this, it is more like a big surge of water, a big belly of water that just rolls up and goes over the top of anything in its path.

And the power, the power of that water, of the wind too, but of the water is awesome. I have spent my life in the construction business. I have worked with asphalt, base courses and overlays. And I saw hundreds of feet of asphalt surfacing, 4-inch overlay, that had been washed off of the highway down along the levee east and south of Slidell on the road going to New Orleans.

Any water that hits powerfully enough on the top of a levee to wash off 4 inches of asphalt in great slabs and wash it several hundred feet out onto the land, is a powerful, powerful wall of water.

And I want to take you down, in your mind's eye, Mr. Speaker, down south of New Orleans, down along the Mississippi channel, along that channel

where I flew that Sunday, September 11, with the Corps of Engineers as they went down to review the levees and the places where the levees had been breached going south. It is perhaps 90 miles of river from New Orleans south down to the Gulf of Mexico. There is a 25-foot-high levee along on each side of the Mississippi River that contains the river, and there is also a 25-foot-high, approximately 25-foot-high levee that keeps the gulf from washing out the back side of that levee.

Now, as you fly down there, the communities that used to exist in that stretch, and this stretch is perhaps, it varies in width, but perhaps a half a mile wide, on average, with the bottom ground in between the two levees, the gulf levee on the west side, and the Mississippi River, that is the west side of the Mississippi River, about a half mile of bottom ground in between. There are similarities on the east side of the Mississippi too, but just speaking of the west side.

When you fly down through there, on that bottom ground you will see the places where the communities used to be. And these communities used to be communities, because the wind came up and blew hard and blew a lot of these communities away. Shattered the buildings and tore the buildings down and blew them away. And anything that stayed was flooded. The water surge in the Mississippi River surged over the top of the Mississippi River levee, and filled that area up in between those two 25-foot-high dikes with water; then the surge came from the gulf side and did the same thing.

Heavy winds blowing almost everything out of its path, and destroying almost everything, and then the water in from the Mississippi River side, from the east side sloshed in, and then the surge from the gulf side sloshing in as well, and filled that area up twice. And there is no place for the water to get out, Mr. Speaker.

And the communities as we flew along there, I saw the water towers, and could read the water towers of most of them. As you go south from New Orleans, it goes Belle Chasse, is one community; next community is Port Sulphur; the next community is Empire; the next community is to my left, Mr. Speaker. This is what is left of the community of Buras, Louisiana.

This is the best side of the water tower. This water tower has been blown down, crushed. The other side is dented and caved in. The legs are wandering back across over here. This picture is the best side of the water tower, because that is the side that has the city's name. That is why we chose this picture to put here tonight. This is what used to be the City of Buras. These homes that are here, it is unlikely that they are sitting on their own foundations, but there were a few that were, but most of them were just gone, washed away, blown away, double flooded, and destroyed.

But I have never, in the tornados that I see, living in the part of the

country I do, I have never seen a tornado take out a water tower. I have never seen a wind take out a water tower. I have never seen a force take out a water tower. But this force took out this water tower. And I do not know whether it was the trash that was blown into it or washed into it, or the wind itself, or the combination of the trash, the wind, and the water. But it caved this water tower in.

By the way, there is your dish up here on top. Perhaps the cell phone tower was on top of the Buras water tower too, and they were out of communication. But that gives an example of how bad it was.

In these communities, as I mentioned earlier, Belle Chasse, Port Sulphur, Empire, Buras, and then from there further south, Buras is about 65 miles south of New Orleans, then Boothville, then Venice. Venice, by my math at least, is the last community before you hit the Gulf of Mexico, perhaps another 18 or 20 miles.

Here is another sign of the spirit of the people in Louisiana. And as you can see, as I could see from the air, still flooded, this water surge, this is the Mississippi River right here on top. And the surge has come over the top and dropped silt up here on top. This is all trash that has been pushed in from the flooding. This is in between the two levees. It goes half a mile width. This set of homes is essentially nothing left here. Shattered shards of what used to be buildings, and water standing perhaps 6 or 8 feet deep in this area. Yet after it has been up as high as here, you can see the trash has floated to here from the inside.

But one thing that did survive, Mr. Speaker, was the flagpole. And the first thing that had to happen was, the person that owns this land had to come in by boat and bring in Old Glory and run her up the flagpole as a sign of patriotism, as a sign of God and country, as a sign of defiance, that they were not going to let this storm get the best of them, Mr. Speaker.

And I am encouraged by the spirit of the people that I met, and awed by the power of the storm, and by the breadth and the magnitude of this disaster, Mr. Speaker. And I am also motivated by the challenge that lays before us all as we reach out to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

And I visited the shelters also the next day, and I slept on a Red Cross cot, and appreciated their hospitality. I was not aware until the next day that there were people sleeping without a cot, perhaps not too many miles from where I was. As I looked at that effort that was done by Red Cross people and volunteers of all kinds, some of them had been working 18, 20 hours a day for 13, 14, 15 days in a row, now more days than that. They have committed and sacrificed a lot to help others out. And we all need to do the same. I am going to continue in my efforts.

And I am going to look forward to the challenge of rebuilding. And I am

going to look forward to, in 10 years, 20 years, going back down to the gulf coast, Mr. Speaker, and seeing what has been brought about by the reconstruction effort that we will see.

And I want to be sure that the work that we do builds adequate levees, adequate protection, adequate hurricane walls and flood walls so that a category 5 hurricane can be withstood by the protection that will be reconstructed around New Orleans and around the other communities in that area.

I do not know if they will rebuild Buras. I do not know if they will rebuild these communities down there. I will say, I cannot imagine them not. But it is still highly vulnerable, and I do not know that there is very much more that we can do to protect the people of that area.

So as I add it all up, I would say, in summary, that we have to be prudent and responsible in the spending that we provide. We have to look to the private sector to contribute as much as it can. We have to get a handle on how many insurance dollars are there. A handle on how many people will not be going back to New Orleans, and I believe that number will be significant.

We need to reconstruct New Orleans in the areas where it is not likely to go underwater again first, and get a handle on how many people the population of New Orleans will be in the short term, say within the next 2 to 5 years; and the lower part of the bowl may be better used, instead, for some public purpose like a park, a golf course, rather than housing, which is going to be very, very vulnerable.

But we can do three things to protect New Orleans and protect them from an engineering prospective. One is to build a hurricane levee and hurricane walls at the outlet of Lake Pontchartrain, so when another hurricane comes, the low pressure center and the southern wind that pushes that water up into and surges into Lake Pontchartrain cannot get into Lake Pontchartrain. Keep the water out of Lake Pontchartrain is number one.

Number two is build hurricane gates at the inlet of the canals, like the 17th Street Canal and the other canals along that area, so that if the water does get into Lake Pontchartrain, or there happens to be a high wind that comes from the north, that we can protect the inlets of those canals as well as the rest of the area along Lake Pontchartrain was protecting.

And then the third thing is to raise the pump stations, the many pump stations that are there in New Orleans that found themselves underwater, out of commission, and we fit those pump stations with a backup redundant system so that if the power goes out they can still run, whether they be diesel engines or whether they be generator run, the city power that might run the pumps needs to be backed up with a generator on that location. They need to be well above the elevation where the highest likely water can be.

So those are the things that I will be taking a look at and weighing in on. These will be the things that I think Congress has the responsibility to consider. And as we encourage the people of New Orleans to keep the faith, keep the spirit, show this American spirit you have for the most part. And sometimes on television the best side of New Orleans was not shown.

But as this saga unfolds, Mr. Speaker, we will continue to see the best side of humanity, and a lot of it exists in the people in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

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

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honor to address the House. And I want to thank the Democratic leader, Democratic leadership, Democratic whip, and also the chairman of our Democratic Caucus and also the vice chair.

Mr. Speaker, as we have been doing, week after week, and for now two Congresses, a Congress and a half, coming to the floor, sharing issues and concerns of the American people, need it be the 30-somethings that are out there, or young people in America, and those that are underrepresented in many cases as relates to their everyday lives, and so we take honor and privilege in coming here.

□ 2300

The 30-something Working Group consists of Members who are in their 30-somethings on the Democratic side of the aisle. We get together every week and talk about the issues that are facing America. Then we come to the floor to be able to share with our colleagues some of the good things that we are doing and also some of the things that we can improve on.

Mr. Speaker, I would just like to start out by saying now I have the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) on the floor here with me and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is on his way.

I must say from the outset that I am very proud of the work that so many individual Americans have done in volunteering their time and also contributing to the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and I close to our districts received some weather today from the ongoing system that we have in the gulf, but we pray and we hope that it weakens before it reaches the gulf coast area. And I would also add that there are so many unsung heroes and heroines in this country that have done, some have done their job as it relates to first responders, others have volunteered their time because it was the right thing to do.

As I said last week, we are in the first couple of minutes in the first quarter as it relates to the recovery of Hurricane Katrina. We are going to talk this week about many of the issues that are facing the people in the Gulf State areas and Americans in general. Because we have appropriated the largest supplemental appropriations in the history of the United States of America outside of war with the \$62.3 billion just as a down payment to start helping the Gulf States recover, Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago and last week, I am really concerned about the Federal commitment to the South, not only in what we say but mainly focusing on what we do. And I am disturbed in many areas of how we are starting out on the part of what we do.

Now, one may say, \$62 billion, that is a lot of money. It is. More money than has been appropriated to any disaster thus far, and it will continue to grow because of the needs and because of the work that needs to be done. But it is one thing to appropriate. It is another thing to make sure those dollars go to the right, not only areas, but also it will go down to the people that are involved in the recovery process.

We are going to talk a little bit about Davis-Bacon and the waiving of Davis-Bacon by the President. We will also talk about the issue as it relates to no-bid, no-requirement contracts that were given to companies that are participating in Iraq and that are under investigation on their Iraq contracts; but they were in the part of the group of big contractors that received contracts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. And how does that play as it relates to sending a strong signal to the South and to the Gulf States that we mean business when we say that we are about them recovering.

I would also add, Mr. Speaker, last week we took some action here on this floor. I personally voted against it because I felt that it was important that we have an independent commission look at what happened. And we are joined by a super, and when I say "super," a supermajority of Americans that have said they want an independent commission to look at what happened and what did not happen and to make sure it never happens again.

Now, not on the natural disaster side. We cannot legislate, we cannot stop natural disasters from happening. That is an act of God. But one thing we do have within our power is making sure that we govern in a way that the people of the United States, no matter where you are, that you will be protected and the government will not fail you.

When I say "government," I want to make sure that we do not get confused. I am talking about Federal. I am talking about State. I am talking about local. And in the case of Louisiana, parishes, presidents, government facilities that were opened, plans that were available that were not executed on all levels. Some of this we already know.

Last week, I brought many of these publications to the floor. This is just a few of them. There are news reports and accounts of people just not doing what they are supposed to do. So we need to make sure that we do not fail the people that pay taxes, the people that woke up one Tuesday morning to vote for representation, that we do not fail them as it relates to being the stewards of the very government that they pay taxes to.

I am glad, Mr. Speaker, this week to share the floor with my good colleague and friend of many years, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ). It is great being on the floor with the gentlewoman again.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, it is, once again. This is a regular weekly event for us, and it is an important thing we do. And I really enjoy spending the time with you on the floor and with our colleague from Ohio just trying to talk to folks in our generation. So often when I talk to friends of mine and neighbors and colleagues in the 30-something range, they sort of tell me, they scratch their heads and wonder, you know, most of the stuff you all talk about in Congress has no impact on my life.

They really think, because what they are doing is they wake up in the morning. They get their kids ready for school. They get themselves ready for work. They get in their car in their garage. They drive out of their garage. They go to work. They pick up their kids, they come home and park the car in the garage again and start it all over the next day. And when you are living that kind of life, trying to balance work and family, trying to in many cases live paycheck to paycheck, it is very difficult to listen to the debate on this floor and understand how the things we do affect their lives.

But if there is anything that we could do to show our generation how government impacts their lives and can significantly alter their lives or through inaction how it can alter their lives, it is the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Because we have so many glaring examples of what went wrong, of what should have happened and did not, and how hundreds of thousands of people's lives have now been turned upside down. And normally, I think people that are in our generation look at, and quite honestly, older and younger than our generation look at the victims of Hurricane Katrina or of any tragedy which is a natural human thing to do and say to themselves, you know, that is not me. That is them. That would never happen to me. I do not live in a community where that could happen.

But the gross underpreparation and disregard for the potential for a Katrina to happen, I mean, substitute any potential disaster in my region of the country and there but for the grace of God.

We have got to take the next step and help not just our generation but all