

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 heroes 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

Americans understand what should happen for these Katrina victims now. They need housing. They do not need a lot of talk. Of course, they need sympathy and empathy. They need emotional assistance, but they need housing. They need roofs over their head. They need economic security. They need to know how it is they are going to get a job again, where are they going to get a job again. How are they going to get their home loans resolved?

I was reading an extensive article today how you have banks that were in those gulf coast States that the bank was blown out, the properties that they lent money on are gone, the people are gone. So what happens to the transaction? How do they get the money back? What is Congress going to do to try to help put all that back together and sew it all back together?

Then there is health care. We have to make sure that these people can go to the doctor and get well. Some of them were not well to start with. Some of them were the picture of health and no longer are.

Finally, we have got to make sure that these kids, these thousands and thousands of displaced kids, get back to school somewhere and that the communities that they are going to end up going to school in, we are from south Florida. An influx of children the size of which came out of the gulf coast States is not a depth that our community could absorb. We are already in an overcrowded situation in our public schools, and so are many communities.

So we need to make sure that the leadership in this Congress understands that those are the kinds of tangible things that we need to talk about and stop moving forward with an investigation that is basically turning inward on itself. We need the independent commission. Objective observers, experts, people who can be trusted because it is trust that we need to restore so that when this, God forbid, happens again, and, unfortunately, we know nature will cause yet another problem like this to occur, that we have the accountability in place to know it will not happen. And a partisan committee set up by the Congress with a majority of one party serving on it, whether it is our party or the Republican Party, is not the appropriate way to handle this.

□ 2310

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, this is what has been going on in this chamber for years, I mean, since we got here, since the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) and I got here, and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) got here. Everything has been partisan. The committees have been partisan. Eleven-nine they want the oversight committee to be, which means basically the Democrats do not have any say.

If you have the majority in the committee, that majority party will dictate everything that goes by an eleven to nine vote. We saw it happen with the

prescription drug. We saw it happen with all these other ones.

The bottom line is the committees that are set up now in Congress do not have proper oversight, do not reflect, I think, the will of the American people and I think ultimately do not reflect the truth of what is going on.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to just understand that we have the same thing happening. This is not a mystery.

After 9/11 we did a little work. I tell folks all the time that we do work within the 30-Something Working Group. We do not come to the floor with the Debbie Wasserman Schultz-Tim Ryan-Kendrick report.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. These are facts.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. These are facts. We do not get in the back of the chamber and say this is what we are going to say today; this is the story today; let us look at who said what today in the paper today. We want third party validators, and I am going to tell you what is important here.

We did a little work. We have something in the Congress, and I know many of the Members know. We call it the Congressional Research Service. These are the individuals that are in the Library of Congress.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Nonpartisan.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Nonpartisan, academics.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Smarter than us.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Very smart, I must add, and I am just glad to rub elbows with them. We have been spending a lot of time together. They have been coming over to the office.

Today, we had a conversation, and one of the gentlemen from the Congressional Research Service said, Congressman, I actually had to wear a coat to work today to come over here. I thought that was quite interesting. I want to try to find a little humor within this tragedy, but at the same time it is important, and you have to look at history.

I just want to make sure that Members understand, after the 9/11 Commission, it is almost like the Congress protects or tried to protect itself as an institution. It is just natural. I mean, it is almost like if something happens that may be embarrassing to the Federal Government, we then circle the wagons and say we have to protect the institution, regardless of the fact that it may end up in that circling wagons and protecting the institution, when I say the institution, the Washington Beltway, the inside politics here, partisan politics here in Washington, D.C., we must protect ourselves; we need to protect ourselves.

What do we have to do first? We have to have control of the situation, and so by saying that we will pass a bill on a bipartisan panel, you let the majority side tell you that it is bipartisan. We already said that it is eleven-nine, eleven Republicans, nine Democrats, and under this kind of situation, you are going to need subpoenas to make sure the people can come and testify.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That is exactly right.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Under oath, and let it be known they are telling the truth to the American people.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And so Republicans do not want certain people to testify. They have votes to prevent the Democratic group from saying, hey, we need to talk to this guy from FEMA or wherever, homeland security.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It would be like if Enron executives or Tyco executives suggested that they would do the investigation on what went wrong with their two companies themselves, the corporate executives.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We do not need the government to come in here; we will investigate it. You are exactly right. That is what is going to happen. It is going to be the same kind of cover-up and whitewash, get out the Brillo pads because we are going to clean this up. We need accountability and I think the American people want it and demand it right now.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. There is no question. The latest Washington Post-ABC poll found that 76 percent of the public supports the creation of a 9/11-type independent panel. When we say independent panel, let me just go down the history of what happened after 9/11.

Basically what happened is that the Congress did what it is doing now. It said, oh, we will review this and we will get back to you in some months, do not worry, do not ask any questions. Even after 9/11, it was on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence level. I think the only reason why the Senate, the other body across the hall, and the House got together was that you had Congressman Porter Goss at that time and Senator GRAHAM from the same State, and they knew each other for a number of years. They got their committees together, and behind closed doors, they had meetings. They questioned the CIA, and they questioned a number of other folks as it relates to what happened and what went down.

There are a lot of honorable Members on the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence here in the Congress, some that I know. Some are good friends of mine, but the bottom line is, it is not about relationships. This is about making sure the American people get what they need, not only the truth, but to make sure that we have the ability to correct ourselves. Let me just go down the line here.

Then the 9/11 families, God bless them, came to the Congress for months, talking to congressional leaders. Two times here on this floor an independent panel was introduced in the form of an amendment because that is the only way as Democrats we can get anything to this floor. I must add in case some Members forgot, the Republican party is in the majority. The Republican leadership runs what happens on that side of the aisle, and I believe there was some good-hearted Republican Members. Some of them

are friends of mine. We talk, we read some of the same newspapers. I come from some of the same area of the country, and they wanted an independent panel but could not vote for an independent panel those first two times here in this House. That is the truth.

So when it came down to the amendment in the Intelligence bill that created the independent panel, the pressure from the American people and the pressure from those 9/11 families helped. Once again, I am glad they came up here and forced this Congress to do what it was supposed to do because we never would have had the outcome measures that we had with the 9/11 bill passing on this floor that has made this country safer, that has made it where agencies can talk to one another. It sounds kind of familiar.

FEMA, that is a true, it is an acronym, but it is a four-letter acronym, and a lot of folks have problems with FEMA. I know the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and I have a problem with FEMA as it relates to not letting our constituents being able to make claims. Their homes were damaged, too, and there are going to be problems in the Gulf States as it relates to that.

So I am saying this to make a point. It took an entire year for the 9/11 Commission families and Americans to get justice as it relates to getting a real independent review, and I am talking about the people from the White House, all the way down to the local government, and they came out and it was bipartisan and they worked with one another. These were past elected officials, some individuals that were professionals in the area of intelligence. We had governors on there.

This is the kind of review that the American people deserve and the individuals that have lost their lives and the injured. We still have children now that are still missing. This is not lightweight stuff. This is heavy, very heavy. So it is important that we do this.

I want to talk about Davis-Bacon when we get a chance, but I just want to make sure that we share with the Members that this is nothing new. This is what the Congress does. This is what they do. This is what we do. I am not a part of it because I voted against it, and I am glad that I did, not that I do not want to get down to the bottom of it. I know what the deal is. I know when I see the Potomac Two-Step, when I start hearing the music, I understand what is going on. I understand this is inside the Beltway. I understand there is a Republican President in the White House and there is some protection that needs to take place here. I understand there are individuals that will probably do things better under other circumstances.

So, as we continue to move on week after week on the 30-Something Working Group, this will be exposed. The way when I am talking about right now, where we have on this paper will continue to be exposed to not only

Members of Congress saying, listen, if you do not think that no one wants to say it out loud on the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD, we are going to say it out loud: Protect those families. They need the representation, to make sure we have the independent counsel. Fine, if they want to do the independent panel here. Whatever the majority wants, that is fine.

□ 2320

But we need an independent panel.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And I think the 30-something Working Group is encouraging and 100 percent behind Leader PELOSI on this. We do not want to appoint anyone to this.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is right.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Why justify this? Why give some kind of credence or credibility to this nonsense that is going on? This is America, and so America should have 50-50. The Presidential election was about 50-50, and we should all be right down the line.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And the gentleman is absolutely right, we are here to say it right out loud. I also voted against the partisan committee that was voted on last week.

And something else we should address out loud are the ludicrous comparisons that have been made to other so-called partisan or internal congressional investigations. They are comparing the Katrina committee that was formed in the Congress last week to the Iran-Contra investigation. Well, there is absolutely no comparison. The Iran-Contra investigation was by a Democratic Congress versus a Republican administration, where clearly there would not be the legislative branch and the executive branch walking in lockstep. Clearly there was the accountability there when you have two different party leaderships running those two different branches of government. So that is a ludicrous comparison and makes absolutely no sense to use it, and it is disingenuous to use it.

And to add insult to injury, and I also hope we spend some time talking about this, what the leadership in the Congress is talking about, as if it is not bad enough we are not going to really get to the bottom of why there was a serious lapse in emergency preparedness and disaster response in the gulf coast States, now, during the rebuilding effort, when we have all said and all Americans have locked elbows and said we will rebuild the gulf coast region and we will do everything we can to help them, and we absolutely should, what are they talking about here in the Congress? They are talking about massive spending cuts, including cutting the prescription drug benefit for our senior citizens in Medicare; eliminating it, repealing it, or delaying its implementation as an offset to paying for the reconstruction of the gulf coast States.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I do not want to cut my colleague off.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Go right ahead.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It is about priorities. Priorities.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Bingo.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I want to say that out loud. And I cannot say we, because we are not a part of that, but the majority, the majority leadership, I will put it that way, and the White House, would much rather protect billionaires in receiving taxes. For instance, let us say that they decide to repeal this tax cut for 2 years for billionaires. Let us make a sacrifice on behalf of the country.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Let us roll back a piece of it.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Roll back a piece of it. So maybe they cannot buy another yacht for 2 years, but just hold it off for a couple of years to give us the money to be able to respond to not only the natural disaster but also as it relates to what is going on in Iraq right now. That is coming in. That train is going to roll in here again to the tune of \$50 billion.

Priorities. We would much rather take prescription drugs away from seniors. And I am smiling because it just seems like a bad dream. We would much rather cut the transportation bill.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. That is right.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. That is going to put people to work and allow local communities that have traffic congestion, to let that continue because we want to protect the few.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I am sorry, we are all just champing at the bit tonight, but including in a region where the plight of over 100,000 people after the hurricane was the result of their poverty. So now we are going to go in, and the second proposal for spending cuts as opposed to rolling back the tax cuts is to repeal or eliminate or delay massive transportation funding, particularly in communities where mass transit is necessary and the only way poor people can get to work is using mass transit. So they are victims of a natural disaster; and now, a few months later, we will make them victims of a congressional disaster.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. If I can say something here. We are taking from the poor to give to the poor. That is exactly what we are doing. My district is one of the poorest in the country, and they say they want to take the \$15 million, which is not really a whole lot of money, for projects that are going to increase economic development in a district like mine, and I know my colleagues have some areas in the same way, and shift it to poor people?

Well, what have the wealthiest people in the world or in the country been asked to sacrifice in the last 5 years? Nothing. Bill Clinton said he got four tax cuts. This guy makes millions of dollars a year. He gets four tax cuts in the last 3 or 4 years. This President needs to have the guts, and I choose

my words carefully, the guts to ask his wealthiest contributors to pony up and actually help the country.

This is not partisan. This is not about a particular insurance industry or pharmaceutical industry. This is about the country. Can we for once make a decision that is based on the whole country, blue States, red States, everyone included? We are all going to help them. We are even going to ask the wealthiest people.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. They have a name for it. They are calling it Operation Offset. This is their plan. They are going to come back here in a few days and propose Operation Offset, which is going to say that we are not touching the tax cuts. In fact, I will quote. I believe it is the chairman of the Republican study group, our colleague from Indiana. He said, we need to rebuild. We can find the cuts in Washington, D.C. to do that, I really believe that. And his proposal is to set aside all those additional highway projects and delay the drug benefit by a year. Those are just some of the proposals that are expected to come down the pike.

Now, before I yield to the gentleman from Florida, I represent a district that is not poverty stricken. There are poverty stricken sections, but there are communities in my district that are quite wealthy. And I have people in those communities stopping me in the supermarket and saying, Debbie, keep my tax cut. These are people that need help. We need to make sure they can have health care and that they have a roof over their head. So there are people out there that benefit from these tax cuts that get it, so why do they not get it here?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And if we just had the leadership, my friends, to ask those people. It is not like the American people are not generous at this point. They have given everything, if you just ask them.

And we are not even asking average Americans to give. We are just saying the top 1 percent of the people; \$70 billion in tax cuts over the year, primarily to the top 1 percent. Will somebody in Washington, D.C. who has the hand on the lever of government ask these people to contribute to what is going on here?

No, they want to come to Youngstown, Ohio, where 50 percent of the kids going to the school district in Youngstown live in poverty. They want to ask them to give up the millions of dollars in transportation money that will build a roadway to build an industrial park so that we can get jobs to help grow our economy so that people can actually pay property taxes and so that we can fund the schools so that maybe some of those kids do not live in poverty. They want to take it from us.

And honest to God, honest to God, I raise my hand right now, if the President was willing to ask the top 1 percent to give up their tax cut, I would be willing to give up some of my trans-

portation money. I really would. Honest to God, as much as it would hurt my community, I recognize the situation that the country is in right now and I would be willing to say, Mr. President, how much do you need? As long as everyone is sharing the burden here.

I just cannot accept the fact that they are going to ask us to give up our money for poor districts and not ask the wealthiest people in the country. That is insanity. It is criminal.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Look at us. We are here on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives saying that the President, the leader of the Free World, the last standing superpower on Earth, that he should ask the most wealthy, the individuals that are receiving unprecedented tax cuts, that we have to say, can we please ask for some of that money back, even though you did not ask for it?

What happened to the leadership? It goes to show you what kind of government we have right now, especially when it comes down to the majority. We have to ask billionaires. Please, we are the Congress. But it is quite interesting, my colleagues, that we do not have to ask the elderly that are going to be delayed in their prescription drug benefits. We just do it. Or the majority just does it.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. We do not ask them.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. We tell them what we are going to do. We do not have to go out and ask mayors, Governors, people in local communities, like my colleague mentioned in Youngstown, and I am pretty sure my colleague and I from Florida can give similar examples of where to help our communities. Does anyone think the President is going to ask, can we have some of that transportation money back, even though I signed the bill?

□ 2330

I am not justifying all of the projects in the transportation bill. We know there are some issues within that bill. But this is the kind of America that we are living in right now. We are living in an America where on the one hand we are saying we have to ask the individuals that have, and I am not talking about the folks that are making \$100,000 or \$200,000 a year, I am talking about the folks who are making millions and millions a year. We have to go to them, head down, and say is it possible, if you will, please, allow us to have some. So that means if you are walking into a drugstore, that you are not going to be asked about your options.

And I want to segue over to Davis-Bacon, and I want to give our Web site out so that we hear from some folks on this. We need some feedback here in Congress. We need some intervention on behalf of the American people.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We need some adult supervision.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. It cannot be the water because I am drinking the

water here in the Capitol, and I am not running around saying that we need to protect billionaires.

I also want to talk about, and I do not want folks to get confused there were no recommendations; there was a bill dropped today by the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) dealing with contractor fraud, making sure that the victims in the Gulf States do not become victims again, not by Hurricane Rita but Hurricane Washington, D.C. that is going to take away the opportunities that will come out of tragedy.

And that is a very substantial bill, something that I can say from the Democratic side of the aisle that we have been putting out proposal after proposal, day after day. If we were in charge, if we were the committee chairpersons, if we had a member of our caucus that was the majority leader, it would not be a letter, it would not be a proposal on an idea; the American people will see action carried out and will give another voice in this perspective.

Let me mention something about Davis-Bacon, and let me say the Congressional Research Service, I was reading in the newspaper, some Members of Congress on the majority side were saying they are concerned about Davis-Bacon because of the unions. Let us do "operation cleanup" here. We had the Congressional Research Service look at that. I did not think about Louisiana as being a union State, nor Mississippi nor Alabama nor Florida.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. They are right-to-work States.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. That is what I am talking about.

Actually Mississippi, quite interesting, is number 45 in the Nation as it relates to being a unionized State. Mississippi, union members as a percentage of employment, 4.2 percent. Wow, if we do not do something about Davis-Bacon, that 4.2 percent, that is going to suck up all of the money.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Those union dues, and let us make that quite clear, the argument against having Davis-Bacon involved in FEMA is that the money will go to union dues in those States. And 4.2 percent of the workers in Mississippi are union workers, and this administration is trying to give us a bunch of bunk that the FEMA money is going to go to union dues when only 4 percent of the workers are involved in unions. It is bunk.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, we get excited with third-party validators, and we come out with the truth, versus what individuals who may sit in the back of this Chamber asking what are we going to say today. Let me say this: Louisiana, the State where obviously a lot of this money is going to be spent, 6.8 percent organized labor. We have to watch out for that 6.8 percent.

Alabama, a lot of jobs with municipal workers, 8.8 percent, not even 10 percent of the workforce. So how in the

world can anyone be scared of Davis-Bacon and the prevailing wage?

Before I put this letter down, let me mention that Davis-Bacon, we talk about prevailing wages. These were two Republican Members of Congress who passed this legislation. Davis and Bacon were both Republicans. We all know that. They did it after World War II to make sure there was a prevailing wage and people would have an opportunity to support their families.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Please explain prevailing wage.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I am getting there.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Sorry.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. This was during rough times in the United States. In Louisiana and most of the parishes, prevailing wage is \$9.60. It changes from county to county, but mainly \$9.60. Minimum wage is \$5 and change, and is not a wage that anyone can say I am going to rebuild my house making minimum wage. But when Federal dollars are being spent in contracting, the prevailing wage is supposed to be in place to make sure that the worker, the individual that is going to work. And I am talking about fact, not fiction.

On Sunday I flew with Members of Congress over Louisiana. I was speaking with the Governor of Louisiana, and she told us she wants her people to make prevailing wage. She wants to make sure that Louisianans who want to participate in the rebuilding of their State, that they are not cheated, that they are not left behind, that other individuals from other States or other countries, and I have to add that too, come in and take these jobs away from these people who are victims. Better yet, we are going to do wonderful things in the Gulf States, and this also is evident in my community, Miami-Dade County.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important. And the only way the proclamation can be overturned that the President waives the Davis-Bacon requirement is through an act of Congress. That means both House and Senate would have to pass an act overriding the President or saying that Davis-Bacon should be reinstated. Subsection 6 of Davis-Bacon allows the President in time of national emergency to be able to waive the prevailing wage.

We do not hear any discussion about waiving the prevailing wage in Iraq contracts or Afghanistan contracts. It really benefits the contractor. I can see if it was something there that said if we waive Davis-Bacon, then we can save money. That is what they are saying, but that is not actually what will happen. Contractors will make more money because they do not have to pay the people who are out there punching in and punching out every day.

□ 2340

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And, Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, it is important to understand that

there is not the oversight that he talked about earlier tonight and we talked about last week; there is not the oversight of the contractors. We have got Halliburton. The same people that have been the contractors in the war, the same process, the same procedure, is the same thing that is going on down in the Katrina States.

So we are taking the workers and we are saying they cannot make the prevailing wage here with 8.8 percent, even lower in some of the States, and then we are also not going to have the oversight of the contractors. So what are the contractors going to do? They are going to squeeze the worker. They are going to take the money without the oversight. They are going to get everything that they want. And I do not think that the American taxpayer is going to be happy with that. If people have got problems with this, give us a ring here on the Internet: 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov. Send us an e-mail.

We are going to continue this discussion in the weeks and months to come because we are not going to sit by and let this administration steamroll the workers that want to go back and help rebuild their own community.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Do not leave the Congress out because we have a responsibility too, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We have a constitutional responsibility to make sure that this institution has proper oversight. Article I, section 1, this House right here governs the country, the people. And 11 to nine in the committee is not going to be sufficient. So we are going to keep the pressure on, and we are going to make sure that this administration adheres to the standards that the American people want, not what the majority wants.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, to stay on Davis-Bacon for a second, there was also some irony in the President's waiver because last year when it was 2004 and we were in advance of a Presidential election, he took great pains at expressing his deep affection for Florida and Floridians, talked about how important a State we were and made many trips to our State. Interestingly enough, he waived the Davis-Bacon requirements for Broward, Miami-Dade, and Monroe County in this last go-round with Katrina.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Make sure we clarify because I want to make sure that Members do not get confused. Under Katrina he did. But there were how many storms last year during the Presidential election that came through Florida?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. There were four storms last year that came through Florida. Not one of them did he do that. And after Katrina, in a year that is not an election year, he waives

the prevailing wage requirements in Davis-Bacon in three counties. Yet FEMA, his administration, has refused to reimburse and grant individual assistance reimbursement for people who had their homes damaged, looking through their roof at the sky that were victims in Florida of Hurricane Katrina.

If they are not going to reimburse people and they are going to have to rebuild themselves or be left out in the cold and not rebuild at all, then what is the burning need to waive Davis-Bacon and the prevailing wage requirements in those counties? I guess only to help contractors, only to ensure that whatever building is going on is going to put as much money in the pocket of a contractor and workers be dammed because they really do not matter anyway because it is not an election year.

I mean, the way that we can ensure that we prevent this fraud and abuse in contracting is stop the sweetheart deals, stop the monopoly contracts, make sure that we have some bidding and responsible bidding so that we know that the contractors that can actually do the work for a responsible amount of money are the ones that get the contract.

We have a funeral and cemetery company that got a contract, a no-bid contract, in Louisiana to bury and, I guess, deal with the bodies, and there are so many of them; and this is the same company that was prosecuted for throwing bodies into the forest of a cemetery in West Palm Beach, Florida. Prosecuted. Buried people in the same grave, moved bodies from one grave to another. This is the kind of track record this company has, and now they have been given a sole-source contract in Louisiana. I mean is it not time that we stop the madness in giveaways that this administration has been in lock-step involvement in trying to help corporations as opposed to real people since the day that they walked into the White House?

I mean, our legislation that was introduced by the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) today would do several extremely important things. One is it would establish an independent commission to prevent fraud and abuse. I mean, that is essential. We have to have some reviews of the process. We have to review contract awards to ensure that the Federal Government is complying with the competition requirements that there are. I mean, the implication of potential payoffs is just rampant without that type of review.

We have to review whether contract awards are based on merit as opposed to relationships between awardees and Federal Government officials. I do not know if it is any coincidence, but the Vice President is the former CEO of Halliburton; and I would love to see how many contracts Halliburton has

gotten. I am sure there is no coincidence there. Nothing granted to Halliburton based on relationship with the administration. Right? Could not possibly be.

Review in realtime the spending that is going on under ongoing Federal contracts to determine whether it is wasteful, whether they are actually doing the job that we contracted with them to do. In Florida there is a huge review going on over the private contracting that the government has been involved in because in almost every instance none of the private contractors are meeting their obligations. They are not meeting their accountability standards. Money is going out the door.

At the Federal level, we deal in the billions. Billions. People do not have any concept. It is hard to get our mind around that much money. If we do not adopt an independent commission and start injecting, insisting, on some accountability, then it is mindboggling how much waste we are going to let go out the door.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, reclaiming my time, as we look at our constitutional responsibility as Members of Congress, it gives me no pleasure to be a Member of the 109th Congress, the highest deficit in the history of the Republic. I think that there is a real reason to have not only debate but also action as it relates to the deficit. And when we give irresponsible tax cuts, we spend like we are in the black versus the red, and we continue to spend. We cannot control ourselves and we are spending.

Now, when it comes down to the reality of where we are now, that is the reason why people have insurance. That is the reason why folks save money. They save in a bank account for a rainy day. The majority has not allowed that to happen here in this Congress.

On the Democratic side of the aisle, every time it comes down to the budget, it is a partisan vote. On our side of the aisle, the amendment comes down to pay-as-you-go. Pay-as-you-go. For every dollar we spend, we have to represent how would we pay for that dollar that we are spending, how would we reduce the budget at the same time we are passing legislation to spend Federal dollars. That is not anything new. I mean, this is what happens.

So the Congress when the Democrats were in control, we balanced the budget. Balanced the budget. Surplus. The surplus is getting so small now in the rear-view mirror, we can barely see it. Not because of our doing, but because of the majority side.

So it gives me no pleasure to be a part of this Congress, the highest deficit in the history of the Republic, because someday I am going to be walking around somewhere with a big hat on, fishing on a peer somewhere, and someone is going to say, you were part of the Congress in the 108th and 109th Congress when they just ran the deficit through the roof. What did you do? So

I think it is important that we point this out.

□ 2350

Now, there is a good, healthy discussion; and we know that we have individuals that are living in large homes that are making very little sacrifice as it relates to the Federal commitment to education, to health care, to making sure our men and women have the equipment that they need over in Iraq and Afghanistan and other foreign lands, and now we have a natural disaster here in the country. Better yet, we have people that are saying here in the Congress, not only are we repeating what the Majority side is saying, oh, well, maybe we should ask, or maybe they should ask the wealthy Americans' top half percent, what have you, to give back some of what we have given them. Better yet, it is not carried out the same way as it relates to asking a senior citizen who cannot afford prescription drugs or asking a mayor or a State: the transportation dollars that we gave you, we want to take them back, or asking a child that is in an overcrowded classroom who every year, under the threat of losing Title I, reduced lunch, asking them to make a sacrifice; no, it just happens to them. That is the difference. That is the difference.

I think the Members need to understand, when we start talking about the differences and say, are there any great ideas, there are a number of great ideas, and there will be action carried out with those great ideas, if we were in the majority, to bring about the philosophy of this Congress, of the majority of the Congress to go to the White House. And the real issue, when you start looking at responsibility and start talking about responsibility of this Congress, I think it is important for us to understand, and I keep saying the majority runs this House, and the minority, we try to make sure that the American people get what they need. We offer amendments on the Floor many times which are voted down in a procedural vote.

But it is important as we close here tonight to let the American people know that there are amendments and there have been amendments here in the House and on the other side of the Rotunda, and this Congress that has been offered to create an independent commission to make sure that we never, ever have to go through what we are going through again, not only the natural disaster issue, but on a governance issue. Now, because of a lack of governance, a lack of follow-through, a lack of oversight, \$200 billion is on the horizon of the Federal tax dollar going to the Gulf States, rightfully so; guess what? If we were on our j-o-b on the oversight, if the State government was on their j-o-b as it relates to the oversight, if the levee board down in New Orleans and the parishes in the area were on their j-o-b, then maybe, just maybe, we would not be spending \$200

billion. And the \$200 billion, the way the majority would have it, will affect every man, woman, and child, individuals that are not billionaires. But, better yet, the majority is proposing with a straight face, with a straight face that we should bring about cuts for every-day Americans, but protect, protect those individuals that go and put their card in the ATM and do not even worry about how much money they get out, because they do not have to worry about it.

So I think it is important. I am not here to say, well, you know, we need to do X, Y, and Z and every American needs to, we need to take the tax cut, no. Some of the tax cuts are good for working families. But when you have billionaires that we cannot even man up and woman up and leader up, and we are not even willing to go see the wizard to get some courage, we are saying, we are going to ask them to give back some of the money that we have given them that they did not even ask for.

So I think this debate may very well be healthy, and I hope that the American people see exactly what is going on here in Washington, D.C., and I hope that some individuals that look at this entire situation say to themselves, hey, I am a Democrat and I disagree with that, or hey, I am a Republican and I disagree with that; or I am an independent and I disagree with that; or I am not even registered to vote, but I disagree with that, but I am going to get involved. Because we need the kind of representation here in Washington, D.C. that is going to protect the country, not just a few individuals, that is going to make sure that we do not waive Davis-Bacon and prevailing wage, to make sure that victims that swam and were clinging on to their roof, in the attic, had to leave some of their family members in the attic who died, behind, for the sake of making sure that contractors, of all people, get their just due out of the contract.

So I think it is important that this is very real and we need to make sure that every American understands what is going on, and is not just the minority side saying, well, they are not doing this and they are not doing that. We have ideas. We have proposed those ideas, you can go on the website and find those ideas. But, guess what? They will never surface to legislation unless we move in a bipartisan way and look at this. We do not have the ability, and when I say we, the majority of the Congress, the way it is operated, we do not have the ability to do it in a bipartisan way on this issue. It is evident. And we are going to continue to provide that evidence to the American people.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, as we have the last few minutes here, let us just recap what is not happening that should be happening.

The American people clearly have indicated that they want an independent commission. They want a commission that is going to truly investigate what happened so that it never happens

again. Instead, they get a partisan committee created in Congress with an imbalance of Republicans to Democrats and Congress investigating itself. What are they getting? Instead of a bipartisan effort to truly rebuild the Gulf States, they are getting proposals to cut prescription drugs for senior citizens, transportation projects for people that are in dire need of being able to use that transportation and unclog the arteries of America, billions of dollars in proposed cuts in higher education, in college aid in the budget; only a couple of weeks delay in the reconciliation process, our budget reconciliation process which is also a round of cuts; a response from the Republican leadership here that the answer to their ballooning the deficit is to cut into the hearts of the people that need it the most.

Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, what we are proposing is an independent commission. We are proposing a review, a thorough review of the contracting process to make sure that there is some accountability in the way we spend these dollars. We are proposing housing and economic security and education assistance for the Katrina victims that need it the most. And I have to conclude by saying that we also have proposed passing legislation to ensure that all victims of Hurricane Katrina, including those in our home State of Florida, get reimbursement for the damage that they received, because they certainly are not getting that help right now.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the gentlewoman. I want to thank not only the gentlewoman from Florida, but the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) and the rest of the 30 Something Working Group for doing what they do. We would also like to thank the democratic leadership for allowing us to come to the Floor again, Mr. Speaker, to not only share with the Members, but the American people, about what is happening here in the Congress. We passed out our e-mail address; again, it is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Ms. ESHOO (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of an airplane mechanical problem.

Mr. FORD (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. MENENDEZ (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today.

Mr. MANZULLO (at the request of Mr. DELAY) for today on account of inspecting hurricane damage.

SPECIAL ORDERS GRANTED

By unanimous consent, permission to address the House, following the legislative program and any special orders heretofore entered, was granted to:

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. McDERMOTT) to revise and

extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mrs. McCARTHY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DEFAZIO, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. PALLONE, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. MEEHAN, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. McDERMOTT, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. CARSON, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. CUMMINGS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. KILPATRICK of Michigan, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Members (at the request of Mr. GINGREY) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. GUTKNECHT, for 5 minutes, September 23 and 27.

Mr. OSBORNE, for 5 minutes, today and September 21.

Mr. BURTON of Indiana, for 5 minutes, September 21, 22, and 23.

Mr. RAMSTAD, for 5 minutes, September 21.

Mr. BRADLEY of New Hampshire, for 5 minutes, September 21.

Mr. GINGREY, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. MILLER of Michigan, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BURGESS, for 5 minutes, September 22.

Mr. STEARNS, for 5 minutes, September 21.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

Mr. Trandahl, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled a bill of the House of the following title, which was thereupon signed by the Speaker:

H.R. 3649. An act to ensure funding for sportfishing and boating safety programs funded out of the Highway Trust Fund through the end of fiscal year 2005, and for other purposes.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 58 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Wednesday, September 21, 2005, at 10 a.m.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS, ETC.

Under clause 8 of rule XII, executive communications were taken from the Speaker's table and referred as follows:

4007. A letter from the Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service, Department of Agriculture, transmitting the Department's final rule — Tomatoes Grown in Florida; Re-

visions in Requirement of Certificates of Privilege [Docket No. FV05-966-1 FR] received September 15, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

4008. A letter from the Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service, Department of Agriculture, transmitting the Department's final rule — Irish Potatoes Grown in Washington; Modification of Pack Requirements [Docket No. FV05-946-3 IFR] received September 15, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

4009. A letter from the Administrator, Agricultural Marketing Service, Department of Agriculture, transmitting the Department's final rule — Walnuts Grown in California; Suspension of Provision Regarding Eligibility of Walnut Marketing Board Members [Docket No. FV05-984-1 IFR] received September 15, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

4010. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — Cyhexatin; Tolerance Actions [OPP-2005-0160; FRL-7732-8] received September 14, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

4011. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — Bacillus Thuringiensis Cry34Ab1 and Cry35Ab1 Proteins and the Genetic Material Necessary of Their Production in Corn; Exemption from the Requirement of a Tolerance [OPP-2005-0211-FRL-7735-4] received September 14, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

4012. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — Aminopyridine; Ammonia, Chloropicrin, Diazinon, Dihydro-5-heptyl-2(3H)-furanone, Dihydro-5-pentyl-2(3H)-furanone, and Viclozolin; Tolerance Actions [OPP-2005-0209; FRL-7732-5] received September 14, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Agriculture.

4013. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — National Priorities List for Uncontrolled Hazardous Waste Sites [FRL-7968-3] received September 14, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

4014. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — Approval and Promulgation of Implementation Plan; Minnesota [R05-OAR-2005-MN-0002; FRL-7969-7] received September 14, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

4015. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — Approval and Promulgation of Implementation Plans; New York; Revised Motor Vehicle Emissions Budgets for 1990 and 2007 using MOBILE6 [Region II Docket No. NY69-280, FRL-7968-1] received September 14, 2005, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. 801(a)(1)(A); to the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

4016. A letter from the Principal Deputy Associate Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting the Agency's final rule — Approval and Promulgation of Implementation Plans; State of Missouri; Correction [R07-OAR-2005-MO-0003; FRL-7969-