

and have enforcement mechanisms to go after those who are ripping off consumers. At the Federal level, there is no oversight to protect consumers from this predatory pricing. That is why we need this Federal legislation now. No American should have to pay too much for gas for their automobile or to heat their home this winter because the oil companies are rigging the prices.

Our bill will give the President authority to take immediate action in the face of an energy crisis by declaring a national energy emergency. Our legislation mandates that the FTC, the Federal Trade Commission, for the first time ever will have to define price gouging and the criteria that makes up price gouging. It will also provide the FTC and the Department of Justice with the authority to investigate and prosecute those who engage in predatory pricing, from oil companies all the way down to the local gas stations, with an emphasis on those who profit most. This includes the gouging of gasoline prices, home heating oil, or natural gas.

Our legislation expands the Federal Trade Commission's authority to more aggressively pursue instances of market manipulation, such as geographic price setting or territorial restrictions imposed by refineries and those who are what they call "gaming the system." Our legislation empowers the Federal Government to impose tough civil penalties of up to triple damages of all excess profits on companies that have cheated consumers. It also imposes tough criminal penalties of up to \$100 million on corporations, and fines for up to \$1 million plus jail sentences for up to 10 years on individuals.

This bill will provide relief to farmers and small businesses paying skyrocketing energy and transportation costs, and expand the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, LIHEAP, through fines paid by price gouging companies.

My bill will protect consumers from unfair gas prices and punish those who think that at a time of national tragedy it is the right time to rob Americans of their hard-earned money. It is the right thing to do for consumers and for our Nation's economy.

Look at what has been going on in the last few months, even before Hurricane Katrina. This is an article out of the Soo Evening News, a newspaper in my district. It is July 20, 2005. It is before the hurricane season. That day, in my home State of Michigan, gas prices went up 80 cents; eighty cents in one day, based upon rumor, fear, and speculation. You cannot tell me that no one is profiting excessively from America's fear.

Also, I found an article in the Washington Post with the headline, "Oil Prices Spike as Storm Nears. Jump of \$4.39 is Largest One-day Surge on Record." These are the reasons we must have this legislation. Let us pass the FREE Act.

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

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. POE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

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

(Mr. OSBORNE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. PALLONE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

(Mr. BURTON addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) is recognized for 5 minutes.

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

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

(Mr. STEARNS addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

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

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

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from New York (Mr. HINCHEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. HINCHEY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. 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 come before the House, and I want to thank the Democratic leadership for allowing us, the 30-Something Working Group, to come to the floor to talk about issues that are facing not only young Americans but Americans in general.

The 30-Something Working Group, as I have stated before, time after time, is a group of 30-something Members on the Democratic side of the aisle who meet every week. We come together on the issues that are facing Americans and discuss things that, A, are working or, B, things that are not working on behalf of the American people, and we try to bring that to the attention of our colleagues here in this House.

□ 1800

I think it is important for us to not only be very aware of what is happening now in the action or inaction here in the Congress or here in this House. I think it is also important for us to realize that Hurricane Katrina survivors and those that are still in recovery are in need of a government that is willing to respond not only as it relates to saying, well, we passed the \$62.2 billion emergency appropriation, but to make sure that we never have to be placed in a position that we are in now, not this House, but the people affected by the storm, and not as it relates to the natural disaster.

We know that is an act of God and that will happen; but as it relates to governance, who dropped the ball or who did not respond in time, who did not get a letter because too many people lost their lives because the response was not what it should have been.

Mr. Speaker, it was not the hurricane that killed a number of people, people who have children lost at this point, that homes are devastated in New Orleans because of the flooding. It was not just the storm that made that happen. Governance broke down somewhere. Our reason for coming to the floor today is to not only share with our colleagues but to make sure that we are abundantly clear with the American people about the importance of having an independent commission out of the control of this House and out of the control of this Congress to allow appointments to take place, bipartisan, and independent.

Right now we have a partisan select committee that will be meeting sometime in the very near future, maybe tomorrow, organizing and trying to bring

witnesses before them. I am very, very proud, and when I say very, very proud, this is the moment we live for to be able to stand up on behalf of those who are not here to stand up on behalf of themselves.

We know that the American people have said, 70 percent of the American people have said, they want an independent committee like the 9/11 Commission to look at what happened or what did not happen as it relates to the response and preparation for Hurricane Katrina. We are looking at the number of 200 billion Federal dollars being spent to rebuild and help those Americans get back on their feet.

It is important for us to have this independent commission to be able to make sure that we are not at this point ever again, especially when it comes down to the breakdown of government. I think it is important. I am not trying to be a pessimist in any way, but I think it is important for us to call it what it is. It is a partisan select committee created by the House of Representatives, passed outside of what we call regular order here in the process, outside of regular order, going to certain committees that have oversight over the necessary agencies. But to say we are going to get to the bottom of what happened is just not the way to go about doing it. Not even 50/50, or 10 on one side and 10 on the other side to make sure accountability is there so the American people can have some confidence.

No, because the majority wanted to keep control of the process and because the President and others that are here in this Congress wanted to keep control of the process, we have a partisan select committee that has been appointed and given the charge to find out the truth. I think that not only Democrats on this side of the aisle but some of my good friends on the other side of the aisle should speak out. I know that Democrats have, but I challenge some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to speak out and say this is wrong, because we know it is wrong. We know it is going to be partisan, and we know we will not get the hard questions answered.

We know that if the administration has anything to do with the response, which admittedly the President has said it was not what it should have been, that would have been fine if we were talking about a check that was not mailed out, a rebate check and it was 3 days late. We are talking about loss of life, loss of property. We are talking about children as we speak now that are still missing. We are talking about people who spent 3 days on their own roof or in their attic or 3 days on a bridge without water, without proper sanitation and without a response from the Federal Government to be able to save not only their lives in some cases but also as it relates to saving their property, of making sure that we were there to respond.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the gentleman, and I think

this is an opportunity for us to step up and do this in a way that the American people will see this as an honest attempt to try to figure out what the problems are and what the problem was and what the problem is, and if we continue down the road, what the problems will be.

The real issue I think and why over 70 percent of the American people want an independent commission, bipartisan, half Democrats half Republicans, people who do not sit in this body, people who do not have to ask the administration for favors during the appropriations process, or through the regulatory process, that is, the problem is we have Members who will be on this floor who will need favors from the administration, will be cutting deals in here, will be the same people who are going to try to figure out what the problems are.

I want to say on behalf of myself, I hate this. I hate the fact that we have to come to the floor and talk about this stuff. We spoke about Social Security for months and months. I hate the fact that we have to be critical of this administration. I hate the fact that we have to be critical of Michael Brown and the whole process, but that is our constitutional obligation. When we raise our hands the first week in January every other year, we swear an oath to the Constitution.

The outfit, the gang that is running this place, just cannot seem to shoot straight. They did not tell us the truth with the Medicare prescription drug number. It was \$400 billion the night we voted on it, and it turned into \$700 billion or \$800 billion. There was misinformation before the war on terror. The budget numbers that were given daily, weekly over the past few years are not accurate, never are.

The spiel about the tax cuts are going to create all these new jobs, not true. That is why 70 percent of the American people want an independent commission. They think this is the gang that cannot shoot straight, and it is.

And for the President to be giving a speech on Social Security two days afterwards when all of America is watching this on their television, how far removed is he? How insulated from the average American is he? That is the problem: we have a disconnect between this government and the American people. I hope that this independent commission that we are pushing for, like the 9/11 Commission, will be one that will bring some credibility back to the government, one that will take an accurate look at what happened here and bring us the facts.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ).

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) speaks the truth. There is no question about it. Now we are hearing on CNN, and we have to hear it on CNN, unfortunately, that the Repub-

lican leadership plans to go forward with their partisan committee to investigate Hurricane Katrina. Rightfully so, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI) has refused to appoint Democratic Members, and everyone I have spoken to in our Democratic Caucus, if asked to serve by the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT), we will stand our ground and insist on there being an independent commission.

The example we have been using here on this floor is would the American public be comfortable if Enron executives examined and investigated what went wrong in their corporation and their corporate scandals? How about Tyco? You would never accept those kinds of internal reviews as being accountable, objective, or independent.

If Congress is going to truly inspire the confidence again of the American people, which is what we so desperately need to do when it comes to our emergency preparedness procedures, it is to not engage in partisan infighting and backside-covering, because that is what they are doing here with insisting on having a partisan internal congressional committee instead of an independent, objective 9/11-style commission. It is confidence that we need to restore because it is the issue of security that Americans most want to feel comfortable that their government is taking care of.

That was supposedly why the President was reelected last year. One of the reasons many people cited was because they felt he would keep them safer, this administration would be more likely, supposedly, to keep them safer. I bet a lot of those people are scratching their heads wondering why they cast that vote and where is the action to back up the words that the administration campaigned on all of last year.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I think it is important for us to realize when it is time to lead and when it is time to not only lead but stand up on behalf of the folks that elected us here. It is important for us to stand up.

The American people, they do not want us to be partisan, and they do not want a partisan select committee selected by the House that is partisan. They want an independent commission like the 9/11 Commission. They want that. I guarantee you the folks in Alabama and Mississippi and definitely the people in Louisiana, and I would even say the folks in Florida, want an independent commission.

Members do not see anyone running around here saying we want a partisan commission to look at what happened. I do not see one headline that says we want it to be partisan so we do not find out exactly what we need to find out, not the who done it and who did it kind of thing, but where the ball was dropped so we can save lives, American lives. This is not a foreign country somewhere.

We are saying we need to make sure that we prevent loss of life. There are

Americans that died in the aftermath of this hurricane. I say the aftermath. I cannot help but remember the story where the gentleman was caught on television, and a reporter walked up and said what is wrong. "My wife, she is gone. I was holding her hand. I could not hold on. She said, 'You cannot hold me any longer.'" That was not a natural disaster; that was the fact that we did not have in place what we needed to have in place to make sure the governance, the government, be it local, State or Federal, was responding to these individuals.

I have papers stacked this high with pictures of people sitting in front of their loved ones because they ran out of insulin or oxygen. This is a failure, and we will never know, we will not know the truth if we allow this Congress, the majority of this Congress to deny the American people, not just the Democrats in Congress but the American people and the victims of Hurricane Katrina, the truth and to make sure and ensure that it will not happen again, because we will be better by having a nonpartisan commission outside of this Congress to evaluate what went wrong, what went right, and what we have to focus on.

□ 1815

We are better now because of the 9/11 Commission. We passed a bill here on this floor because of their work. We were able to save American lives and protect America in the future.

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, I want to piggyback on what he is saying here because not only do the American people want an independent review so that their confidence can be restored. They want their representatives in Congress to be statespeople. They want us to step up and put partisanship aside. My colleagues are veterans of this process, and I have been here 9, almost 10 months now, and the thing that has been the most startling to me is how partisan it is here. It does not need to be this way. I know. I have spoken to some Members even today, some Members who are leaders on the Republican side who I know if we came around the table and sat down and hashed out how we could best approach the review of what happened with Katrina and the response and our lack of preparedness, I know we could work it out. But the leadership here does not allow that to happen. It is all about winning. It is all about "our way or the highway." And Americans are sick of "our way or the highway" politics. They just want us to get it done and do the right thing. And I just do not understand why it has to be about winning, it has to be about we are going to protect our backsides, we are going to make sure that the truth really does not come out. God forbid if we actually admit that we

made a mistake. That is just irresponsible.

And to me the most devastating thing, besides the loss of life and the children, the little babies that we see being held by people who are not their mothers, because their parents are gone and no one knows where they are, the thing that is most devastating to me is knowing that there are millions of people in this country who do not believe in us anymore, who do not believe in this process. Look at the polling numbers on Congress and how Americans feel about the job we are doing. Our constituents might like us as individuals, and that is only some of us; but as a body, as an institution, we have lost their faith. And we have lost their faith because all we do is throw up our elbows and duke it out and fight to the finish. They want us to do our jobs and do right by them, and that means putting aside winning, and making sure that we can come together as Americans, like we did after 9/11, like I saw Congress do after 9/11 when we were all linking arms and working together.

Maybe Katrina, because it only happened to one region of the country, was not a unifying enough event. But if there is ever a time. We just had Rita hit Florida. It is bearing down as a category 5 on Texas now. I mean, clearly no one is immune from this in this country, and it is time that we exercise some leadership. And I think we should ask our leadership, especially the leadership running this Congress, to say to themselves, it is not all about me. That is what the American people want us to do. I just wonder whether they have the courage and the nerve to do it. It certainly does not seem that way.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, it does not look like it. And I think David Broder had a great quote saying that majority Republicans see themselves first and foremost as members of the Bush team. Well, this is not about their team winning. This is not about politics, and we know for the last 5 years it has been all politics all the time here, as I talked about Medicare and all the other issues. And now here we go again.

Here is the thing I think that we need to recognize. When we have this colossal of a screwup, somebody is going to get embarrassed. It is not going to be pretty. Someone has got to hang for this, and someone has got to take responsibility. And that is the thing I think the American people want from their government. They want responsible Members, but they want accountability. And accountability means someone is going to get embarrassed, and it means that someone in FEMA screwed up. But do my colleagues know what? It is not about President Bush. It is not about that one person who screwed up. It is not about the series of people who contributed as the days went on from the screwup. Do the gentleman from Flor-

ida (Mr. MEEK) and the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) know what this is about? This is about fixing the problem, as they said earlier. And if someone needs to get embarrassed, they need to recognize that this Chamber, this country, and the way we respond to emergency situations, whether they are natural disasters or terrorist attacks, that response and our responsibility is bigger than the couple of people who are going to get embarrassed.

There are certain things that are bigger than winning and more important than winning, and that means we have got to make sure that we do this in the right way. This cannot be a whitewash. We cannot get out the Brillo pads and try to make this look clean. We have got to find out where the ugliness is, where the lack of communication was.

Knowing about the simulation last summer in July of 2004 of Hurricane Pam, a simulated hurricane that FEMA did a study on that, if it hit New Orleans what would happen, and they predicted right down the line every single thing that would happen. A category 4 in New Orleans, levees would break, a million people would need to get evacuated. And every other situation that happened, FEMA's response, the simulated Hurricane Pam told us exactly what is going to happen.

So my point is that someone is going to get embarrassed here and it is not going to be pretty. But at the end of the day, the system is going to be stronger because we are going to know what the mistakes were and we are going to know how to fix them. But if they are not willing to find out what the problem is, then they are not going to be able to fix it. And our responsibility is to fix it. So although this may be painful for the majority party and it may be painful for the Bush administration, this system that we have is bigger than all of them put together, and that is what we are here to do is preserve this system.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) heard me once before speak of the fact that it is not personal, it is just business. And that is the reason why we are here. We are here to conduct business.

I have very good friends on the other side of the aisle. I am talking about good friends that I had long-lasting relationships with prior to becoming a Member of Congress. As it relates to this select committee, those individuals that were fortunate enough to be appointed by the House leadership, many of them are good friends of mine. I mean, these are individuals that I talk to, and we talk about football and we talk about things that just regular everyday associates would talk about.

But it is not about them. It is about the fact that there has been a select committee elected on partisan lines, partisan lines, with a partisan vote that will meet tomorrow and, as we read through the media, will meet next week, a partisan committee to carry

out a bipartisan job. A bipartisan job. How can they carry out a bipartisan job when from the beginning it already smacks of political overtones? It is almost like, as the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) said, and I think she said it right, we are going to do our in-house investigation. What usually happens when people do an in-house investigation is someone screams for an independent investigation. For those men and women that are in business out there in America, they always have to get, 9 times out of 10, an outside audit for their company versus an inside audit. Independent it is called. And I think it is important for an independent commission, when we get one, because we are willing to fight. The Democrat side of the aisle is saying we are willing to fight on behalf of what the American people want.

Now, I did not hear one speech during the creation or the vote last Thursday on this partisan commission or select committee of saying that the people want a partisan select committee, and I am here to say that it is important that we have one. Not one speech. But that is what we have now. Because there are some individuals here in the Beltway that want vindication and validation, which, I guess, vindication, not rightfully so, but just to say, well, I had nothing to do with it and to beat up on Michael Brown of all people. And I think there is pretty much consensus on the fact that he did not possess the experience and the leadership qualities to be able to carry out the mission of being Director of FEMA. We know that. I mean, that is almost like the President's showing up 3 or 4 days later, or what have you, after he was supposed to be there, and saying there are a lot of homes, a lot of flooding going on. And people say, oh, really? We saw that on TV like 4 days ago. We are getting blankets and all these things in now when they should have had them 3 days ago. The world watched people on top of their roofs, and thank God for the Coast Guard who were there trying to pluck people off when we had mountains of Federal resources sitting somewhere at some staged area while people are there starving.

I went to Mississippi, Hancock County. Folks said they had sanctioned looting. The mayor standing out in front saying go in and get what they need, the essentials to survive. In America. This is not behind a war zone. This is not in a fort area. This is America where they can go in and help people, but failed to do so.

Once again I want to make sure that I am crystal on this and we are crystal. We are not only talking about what did not happen as it relates to the Federal response. We are talking about the State response. We are talking about the local parish response. We are talking about whoever was in charge of carrying out the plan, making sure it does not happen again. This is not isolated

to the Gulf States. This is America, because we all learned what happened on 9/11 happened here in Washington, DC, happened in Pennsylvania with the plane going down, happened in New York City. But guess what? Having that independent commission helped prevent terrorism throughout the country. LAX is a more secure airport because of the 9/11 Commission. More secure. And I think it is important that we realize that this battle is not on behalf of what we want on the Democratic side. The battle is worth fighting on behalf of the American people. And I will tell the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ) and the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) I know for a fact that there are some Republicans that sit on that side of the aisle that know 110 percent that we are right. And I will say this, just like I have said it before, when it came down to some of the votes that took place and when I called for some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to go see the wizard, get some courage, and stand up publicly to this rhetoric of a partisan select committee to investigate yourself.

If I messed up and I was to come to the floor and say I have decided that I am going to investigate myself, I mean it sounds a little funny because it is.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. It would be funny if it were not so sad.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. If it was not so sad. I will investigate myself, and we will be back in a number of months and give our findings. That would be fine if we did not live in a democracy. But we do live in a democracy, and I think it is important that we call it for what it is. It is a partisan select committee based on trying to find out what happened or what did not happen in Katrina, and it is not bipartisan.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will continue to yield, let us put a little meat on this bone. Let us put a little meat on this bone. Why do they not want us to look at this thing? Because they know what we are going to find out. They know we are going to find out that FEMA became a haven for political hacks, period; end of story, dot. Political cronism at its best. College roommates, the campaign manager's college roommate gets the head of FEMA. They get the head of FEMA? They have no emergency management experience at all, none. James Lee Witt, who was there for President Clinton, was the FEMA emergency manager for Arkansas. So if we have a bipartisan commission that maybe is not run by this House, that will come out. It will come out that eight of the top-level people in FEMA were all political cronies, all political hacks given a job. We do not give people jobs in FEMA. We give people ambassadorships who make big campaign donations. We know that happens. But we do not put them in charge of FEMA.

What would come out is that we would find out that FEMA's budget was slashed.

□ 1830

All the offense that the Clinton administration was playing with FEMA to prevent some of this stuff: budget cuts, tuck FEMA in with Homeland Security, make it more bureaucratic, and you put a bunch of political hacks in charge of it. That is what is going to come out. That is what is going to come out. You cannot run down government at every turn. For the last 10 or 15 years down here, everybody has just been running down government: Government cannot do anything right, government is the problem, government is bad, government is in our way, government this, government that. Every problem in the whole world was the government's. And then when we need the government there to help, well, no wonder it is ineffective. It has been disrespected, the budget has been cut, we do not have professionals there. We need the best and brightest in government. If you keep running it down, you are not going to get them.

So that is the meat on that bone, is that they are going to find out it was a haven for political hacks, the budget was cut, no professionals over there, no certified emergency management specialists. And that is what happened, and that is what will come out if there is a bipartisan commission.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, let us make the meat on that bone turkey, and let us talk turkey now, because beyond the partisan commission and beyond what we are saying, which is that there should be an independent commission so that we can truly get to the bottom of this, let us go a step further, because there are other things going on in Congress related to the reaction to Katrina.

We know that for the next several years we will have what will be a massive public works effort to rebuild the Gulf States, which we will be behind wholeheartedly, because there but for the grace of God go we, and we would want our colleagues to do the same and be supportive if it happened in our State. Our colleagues were very supportive of Floridians when we faced Andrew down and the follow-up to Andrew. But there are going to be some serious needs that will need to be met.

How is the Republican leadership talking about responding to those needs? Well, let us go through it. First, they are talking about keeping the tax cuts in place: Let us not touch the tax cuts, because wealthy people, they need them. It is really important. So those are off the table, those are off limits. On top of that, they are saying, you know, we got some concern occasionally about the deficit, so the right-wingers on the other side of the aisle are saying that, you know, the cost of rebuilding the Gulf States is going to be prohibitive, and we want to preserve wealthy people's tax cuts while we are rebuilding the Gulf Coast States, so we need to look to some more spending cuts. And where are they talking about those spending cuts being from? Well,

they are starting off with delaying the prescription drug benefit for Medicare recipients, for senior citizens who can barely make ends meet, for senior citizens who have to choose between medicine and meals, for people who literally live, bottom line, day to day. Then, they are also talking about cutting transportation projects, thousands and thousands of transportation projects, billions of dollars.

Now, who did Katrina hurt the most? The poor people, the people who are poverty stricken, 100,000 of them at least, who could not get out of New Orleans and who had to go to the Superdome to be able to find refuge. So how, when we are trying to find them jobs, are we going to get them to those jobs if we cut transportation projects, if we do not have mass transit assistance? That is how poor people get to work.

Where is the heart? Where is the trust? There is no heart in this leadership, no caring, no feeling. It is all about them. It is, you know, we got ours and the people that support us, we gave them theirs, and we are going to make sure they keep it, and everybody else be damned. That is what these people are all about.

When it comes down to it, over the next 14 months, as we go through a discussion with the American people about the choices that they will have, it is going to be about trust. Who do you trust to take care of you? Who do you trust to be there for you in your time of need, to protect you when you are in potential danger, and to be there for you when it is time to clean up and help you move your life forward?

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And let us be honest. This outfit, this gang has had their chance for the last 5 or 6 years, in Congress for the last 11 years, going on 12 years. They have had their chance. Look at FEMA. Look at the economy. Look at the tax structure. Look at the Medicare program. Look at the health care situation. Look at the poverty that we saw, with no real attempt to even try to fix it. I mean, let us be honest, there has been no attempt, none. Tax cuts? Wait a minute. How are tax cuts helping people that can barely survive?

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, in the last few minutes, and if the gentleman from Florida wants to go over this, I would be happy to yield to him.

We have on our side of the aisle a series of proposals, an action plan that Leader PELOSI has put forward related to housing and economic security and health care that we are going to be talking about over the next several months, because it is not all about complaining. It is not all about we do not like what they are doing. We have a series of proposals that we want to see happen to ensure that people can move their lives forward. We have to make sure that these people have health care. We have to make sure that they have roofs over their heads. We have to make sure that they have ac-

cess to jobs and job training. We have to make sure their kids have a place to go to school and that the communities where these kids go to school can actually make sure they have room for them, like our community. The people coming down to south Florida, we are exploding in our public schools. We could barely take on another kid who is moving to south Florida voluntarily. So we have plans, and we are going to make sure that those plans are outlined and that we pursue them and that the American people understand that we are going to be there for them when they need us.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, plans would actually be action if we were in the majority, or if we had a majority party that were willing to move in a bipartisan way in responding to the aftermath of Katrina. And also what Hurricane Katrina has exposed in America is the fact that we are not prepared to face a natural disaster or a disaster, period. We are not coordinated in this country to be able to have a response that will be appropriate to the American people in their time of need.

Mr. Speaker, the gentlewoman left off with what is being proposed, and what is also being proposed is a \$9 billion cut in student aid. I know we passed a bill to kind of help with a Pell grant, but this week the majority comes back with a \$9 billion discussion of helping to pay for Katrina. So it is almost like I am going to give you something, but I am going to take \$9 billion back.

Mr. Speaker, I am so glad that we have the opportunity to come to the floor, and we have had to double up on 30-Something, because it is too much, too much going on.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Too much to talk about.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. I will tell my colleagues, and I will warn my colleagues on the majority side, especially those who are making decisions, it is time to start making the right decisions. When you have 8 States who say that they want the Federal Government or this Congress to investigate oil companies, we are paying \$3.50, \$3.90 a gallon; meanwhile, profits still soaring as it relates to the oil companies that are saying, oh, we have to go up on gas prices because the oil production is not what it should be. But they are not hurting. There are some people who could not make it to work because they could not afford to put a quarter of a tank of gas in their car or their truck if it was a small business. Sure, prices went up, because they could not move product. Diesel fuel went up, let alone jet fuel. Flights were canceled. But, meanwhile, the folks that provide the oil, they are having record profits. So eight Governors have asked for intervention by this Congress.

And, I have been passed a note here that they are also predicting that gas, based on what Rita does, could go to \$5 or better. So I hate to say to not only

my constituents, but also Members of this Congress, run out and fill your tank now, because Rita is a reality, and it is going to be a category 5. Because we gave money away to billionaires, not to the folks that we are talking about, not the folks that are on the cover of these magazines. What happened? How did it go wrong? Is this America? Question: Is this America?

Deficits. The deficits were here prior to Katrina, prior to Rita. When this administration came into power, that is when we started getting into deficits. We had surpluses as far as the eye could see.

So I am saying that, and I am hopeful that some of our friends, especially the ones making decisions on the other side of the aisle, will say, well, you know, maybe we need to rethink this.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Maybe we made a bunch of mistakes. Maybe we made a couple mistakes.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. They do not make mistakes.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Maybe we need to sit down as adults and look at how we can approach this and use not only the contributions, but the wisdom of all Members of Congress into, into what? Achieving what the American people want. That is not a radical idea. That is very simple. We have one side of the aisle that is saying that we want to do that. We have one side of the aisle, if given the opportunity to be in the majority, will do that. But tomorrow, I say to my colleagues, there will be a committee meeting, a partisan committee meeting, to organize themselves to get to the bottom of what really happened and did not happen, to report to the American people the truth. I will tell my colleagues right now that that just will not fly.

I am asking, as a member of the Democratic Caucus and asking as a Member of Congress period, and Leader PELOSI, the Democratic leadership, I am on the second floor of a 9-floor building. Hang in there, because there are a number of people and Americans, Republicans, Democrats, Independents, those that cannot even vote yet and those who choose not to vote are counting on our leadership to make sure that this never happens again.

They deserve an independent commission to be able to look at what happened, what did not happen. Subpoena those that need to be subpoenaed and pulled in, because Michael Brown, as far as I am concerned, is just crust on the pie. We are not really getting down to what is in the pie when we deal with Michael Brown. Michael Brown is so exposed he is just like the Washington Monument that sits in the Mall; everyone can see it all over Washington, D.C. If you get lost here in Washington, D.C., just look for the monument and you know you are on the right track. Michael Brown is there. I feel bad for him, because the guy cannot even go to the Mall without people looking at him and saying, it was you. No, it was not Michael Brown. It was those individuals that allowed Michael Brown to be

the director of FEMA. It was those individuals that made partisan decisions based on political activity in a partisan campaign, and said we are going to park our people here, our precinct captains in the emergency management agency. In our time of need, we want our friends, political friends, to be in those positions.

Better yet, even if FEMA, let us say if they did not have the ability to be able to govern themselves in a time of a natural disaster and respond, those individuals that were overseeing FEMA, it goes further. Yes, the Department of Homeland Security, you have people in the White House that are in charge of certain agencies that bring about accountability on those agencies on behalf of the President; you have so many people that are from the top, which is the President of the United States, Commander in Chief, if you want to speak militarily, all the way to the parish commissioner or levee board in New Orleans. In that track, need it be elected, appointed, they have to be brought in to task to make sure that it does not happen again.

Were there plans? Of course there were plans to be able to evacuate people, to be able to make sure that the Federal response is staged, and to go in when the winds die down to 40, the wind count or what have you. I am not a meteorologist; I feel like one, because when you watch TV, and it is hypnotic watching the reporting of this, 40-mile-per-hour winds. But it did not happen. And we can get down to the truth. It very well could be; I mean, I heard some folks from Louisiana saying, yes, the National Guard was in there trying to do the best they could. They did have food in the Superdome. They did have food in the Civic Center in New Orleans. No, we were there. We were here in the streets. They were not here by themselves. We will never know the truth until we have an independent commission.

I am glad, once again, I am going to say it again just in case. I want it to be printed correctly in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD that the leader, by not appointing to this partisan committee, select committee, partisan, I want to say that, partisan committee that will have partisan findings, I commend not only her leadership, not on behalf of the Democratic Caucus, but on behalf of the American people. The question should not be, why are you not appointing Democratic Members to this partisan committee? It should be, why do we have a partisan committee, select committee in the first place for this bipartisan job?

□ 1845

Restore this bipartisan job. It is bipartisan because that is what we call it. No, that is not bipartisan. You have 11 members on the majority side, including the chairman who controls everything, and you have nine members on the minority side who cannot even

call a committee meeting or call a witness up without the permission of the majority.

So once again, we are in a situation where we are saying, we will investigate ourselves and we will get back to you in a number of months on our findings of what we did wrong.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, you know, it certainly does not have to be that way. It certainly was not that way when the shoe was on the other foot, because some people listening might feel, well, you know, this is just the way Congress does it. Congress is a partisan body, it is a political body; and you know when one side is in charge, they run the show. They run these investigations, and that is just the way it is.

Well, in this situation, you have got a Republican Congress investigating a Republican administration. And let us go back to the Reagan years when you had the Iran-Contra scandal. Then you had a committee set up within the Congress, which was a Democratic Congress investigating a Republican administration, so obviously there was some inherently built-in accountability in that situation.

And when it came to the way that committee was appointed and developed, even internally within the Congress there was mutual agreement on both sides of the aisle that it was done in a bipartisan fashion. And I will quote then-Representative DICK CHENEY from Wyoming who is now our Vice President. He said, because he was one of the key sponsors of the committee of the legislation that created the Iran-Contra Committee, he said at that time, "I must say the majority has been exceedingly fair in the proceedings. The leadership of both parties has worked in a truly bipartisan fashion to create this committee," referring to the Iraq-Contra Committee.

Well, it is really unfortunate that when the shoe is on the other foot and they have the opportunity to do the right thing and work in a bipartisan fashion, that they are choosing not to. And it is certainly within their discretion. It is within their choice, and they are just wiping their hands and refusing to do it.

I know the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) is pulling over our 30-something board, and we want to let people know how they can get in touch with us, and we want and we urge their feedback. We want to hear from people.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Before I give away the magic address here, I think we just need to call this what it is. This is a Republican committee. This is a Republican committee that will oversee a Republican mess.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Period. Dot.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Period. End of story. Dot. And you might as well put Ken Melman or Ed Gillespie in charge of the committee, because you are going to get a political response. You are going to get a political whitewash from this whole thing.

And the American people are going to let this stand. I made the prediction last week, and I stand by it today, the American people will not let this stand. When there are 11 Republicans there tomorrow organizing this committee, you will be able to do it in a phone booth, because the Democrats are not going to be around. We are not going to lend any credence to this at all.

And put Ken Melman in charge of this committee because that would reflect accurately the end response in what it is going to be. 30somethingDems, 30 the number, somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

E-mail us. Let us know what you think. Tell us your thoughts. Share with us.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, the way I want to conclude for us, or my portion of the conclusion, is to reiterate that at the end of the day we have plans.

If we were in charge, we would be moving to ensure that we got health care to the people who are victims of Katrina. We would be making sure that we helped get them some economic security. We would make sure that there was some accountability in the process of the doling out of contracts for the clean-up and the construction.

We would be making sure that education was of primary and paramount concern. We would be initiating an agenda to assist people and restore confidence in the emergency preparedness and disaster response procedures in America.

Because Katrina was not the first hurricane that bore down on our country; and as we have Rita churning in the gulf as a Category 5, we know she is not going to be the last. And, you know, I think we should conclude by praying for the people who are going to be experiencing Rita in the next few days and sending them our best wishes and urging them to heed the warnings that your emergency managers are going to be sending out to you.

So I look forward to joining you again as we do each week, and now, you know, in double session, because we have so much to talk about and let people know what is going on here in the Congress.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. The gentleman from Florida (Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ), you are 110 percent right as it relates to individuals taking Rita very seriously. Also I am hoping that emergency management, FEMA and other agencies, are doing the appropriate things that they need to do to be able to stage themselves so that individuals do not wait 3 days, 3 or 4 days.

We are coming in for a close here, but this is Louisiana, Mississippi, or the eastern part of Louisiana, Mississippi, and, also Alabama, and we have some of Florida in there, or all of Florida. I think it is important for us to understand, in this area right here, this is where Katrina struck.

The individuals that lived here had a slow response, but a response. A slow

response. We had loss of life here after the storm because people could not get what they needed as Americans. Here, this same area, President signs a proclamation waiving Davis-Bacon which will allow these individuals in these States, and these communities right here, real people in these counties and the parishes right up here in Louisiana, same place, same President, flying in there, four, five visits, what have you, that are without a prevailing wage, which means a contractor can go in and say, no minimum wage for this job, even though Federal jobs in other parts of the country that are paid for with Federal dollars, paid for, they make a prevailing wage.

It is not a union issue. This is an American issue. We want to make sure that these folks rebuild. Better yet, the \$62.3 billion-and-change that we have appropriated here in this Congress, when it comes down to these individuals receiving a paycheck when many of those jobs have been shut down and some have decided was the final blow for them to move somewhere else will not be able to receive a prevailing wage on the tax dollars that they have given in this area.

That is why we need an independent commission. These individuals, these very real people right here in Hancock County in Mississippi, one of the hardest hit areas here in a FEMA trailer waiting to speak to an operator, I know personally that they were outside for 2 hours waiting to get into this trailer of 10 phones. 10 phones.

They deserve an independent, bipartisan commission to make sure that the Federal response is better, quicker. So this goes far beyond regular order that we say here in the Congress. This is not a committee that has been standing for 50-something years and that is just the way we do business. This is a natural disaster and failure of governance.

And that is where we come in, on the failure of governance side. These are real Americans that are suffering. I ask our Republican leadership, do not allow this institution to do what it is doing now.

Do not split us further by having a partisan committee meet tomorrow because they can, not because it is the right thing, it is because they can. That is wrong.

If we were supposed to be the shining example of government, elected in a democracy, do not allow that to happen. Do not do it because you can. Because I can do things as a grown up, I do not do certain things in front of my children, because it is a bad example. This is a bad example.

And I will tell you that it is far beyond regular order. I am talking to my colleagues in this Congress, and you know exactly what I am saying. This is far beyond, because we are in the majority. That is right. We are supposed to have more people on the committee. This is a natural unprecedented disaster.

And this was a slow response or no response at all. So I say to Members that it is important that we do this. I want to thank, Mr. Speaker, our Democratic leader for allowing us to come to the floor once again.

I want to also say that it is an honor to address the House of Representatives, but this is a very pressing time, not only for our country, but also as it relates to our leadership, and I hope that we can come together and make sure that we have a bipartisan independent commission that the American people are calling for so badly.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed without amendment a concurrent resolution of the House of the following title:

H. Con. Res. 242. Concurrent resolution providing for acceptance of a statue of Po'Pay, presented by the State of New Mexico, for placement in National Statuary Hall, and for other purposes.

The message also announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 1713. An act to make amendments to the Iran Nonproliferation Act of 2000 related to International Space Station payments.

U.S.-ISRAEL RELATIONS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SODREL). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, I think I will be joined by some colleagues shortly, I hope.

Congress recently returned to Washington following a busy month of work in the district. For a majority of August, I traveled throughout North Carolina's 5th District and conducted scores of meetings with veterans, teachers, and many other constituent groups.

During this time, I gained valuable insight into the needs of the people I serve and look forward to continuing to address their concerns. The needs of my home district have always been and continue to be my number one priority.

However, as a Member of Congress, it is my duty to educate myself on internal affairs and foreign policy, especially when it pertains to the Middle East. While our foreign neighbors may be far away from northwest North Carolina, our relationships with them affect everyone.

For 1 week in August, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to Israel with several colleagues. This educational trip gave me the opportunity to witness how America's national security interests are directly tied to developments in the Middle East, and specifically to Israel's own security.

Strategic cooperation between our country and Israel, in intelligence-sharing, fighting the war on terror, strengthening homeland security, promoting democracy, and increasing technology development is vital to the well-being of my constituents and, indeed, all Americans.

For most of the 1,500 years before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, the land of Israel was the independent home of the Jewish people. Since then, it has been occupied by many powers, from the Romans to conquering Arab armies to the Ottomans to the British.

Despite these periods of foreign occupation, there has always been a continuous Jewish presence, and the land of Israel remained the focal point for the Jewish people.

The United States and Israel have long maintained a strong friendship since the modern Jewish state was founded in 1948. In fact, we were the very first Nation to recognize Israel, just 11 minutes after its founding.

Our two countries share much more in common than many realize. We believe in freedom and equality and share many basic rights, such as free elections, a free press, and freedom of religion. We were both founded by people seeking freedom from tyranny, and we both continue to serve today as symbols of liberty in a world plagued by oppression.

Mr. Speaker, I would like now to recognize my colleague, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MARCHANT), who has joined me and allow him to share some of his perspectives on this trip that we took in August, and then I will come back to the podium and speak some more.

Mr. MARCHANT. Mr. Speaker, last month I was fortunate as a Member of Congress to travel to Israel and witness firsthand the peace process that is currently taking place.

□ 1900

The trip was a unique opportunity to learn more about relations between the United States and Israel. This country has maintained a longstanding friendship with the Jewish state since its creation in 1948. Today, cooperation between the U.S. and Israel is essential as we fight the war on terror and promote peace in the Middle East. Israel is, has been, and will continue to be an important ally in the goal to spread democracy worldwide and promote peace in the Middle East.

I was privileged to have the opportunity to meet with many high-ranking officials from the region, including Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as well as Former Prime Minister BiBi Netanyahu and Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Talking with these leaders provided me with valuable insight into the ongoing peace process and plans for the region. While their approaches are different, their common goal remains the same: peace and fulfillment of the Jewish homeland.