

good work because, indeed, Mr. Speaker, this is what we are a great Nation of, freedom, free people who group together to stand together to help one another and to be there to support one another when times are tough.

Mr. Speaker, we thank them all for their contribution to this Nation. We thank them for their commitment to being certain that American families, that American communities continue to be the beacon of light and hope and freedom for the entire world.

30 SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

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

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, once again, it is an honor to come before the House, and we would like to thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), the Democratic leader, for allowing us to have an hour here on the floor on the Democratic side.

Our 30 Something Working Group has been coming to the floor now for the second Congress, talking about issues that are facing Americans, issues that we are working on here in the Congress, issues that are facing the Congress and things that we feel very strongly about. Every week, we come together to talk about these issues and then we come to the floor.

As of recent, we have been coming to the floor if not every other day, every day, because there are so many issues that are facing the country and this Congress. I think it is important that we continue to not only speak to the Members of this House of Representatives and this Congress, but this administration and the American people.

We have been talking for quite a few weeks now on the action or lack of action as it relates to Hurricane Katrina. We have had a couple of events today that I think is worthy of merit of discussing, and also, as it relates to still, Mr. Speaker, pointing out the fact that we have over 100,000 Americans still in shelters, some based on the fact that we have had a natural disaster, two natural disasters, but some based on the fact of we have not governed in the way that we should have governed to protect those Americans.

Many of the experiences that these Americans have gone through and loss of life has been a breakdown in government operation. Either it be local or State or Federal, it is important that we address these issues.

Before we really get into what we are here to talk about tonight, the last time we left this floor, we talked about an independent panel, a bipartisan independent panel outside of this Congress, to deal with the issues that are facing some may say, well, it is just dealing with the gulf States, but I think that is an understatement. I think we are dealing with all Ameri-

cans when we are talking about \$200 billion-plus of the Federal tax dollars.

I can also share with my colleagues and Members, Mr. Speaker, the fact that it is disturbing to see some of the proposals that are coming out from the majority side that are saying that we should sell 13 national parks to pay for the natural disaster or we should look at wasteful spending. Of course, we have been talking about looking at wasteful spending for a very long time. Of course, the majority side has taken us into a deficit as far as the eye can see, but I think it is important for us to look at Americans that understand that we have to respond to Americans when they are in their time of need, not take away from.

We need to address issues like oil companies making more money than they have ever made before, record profits. Meanwhile, Americans cannot even fill their tank. Folks in my neighborhood, where I come from, they are having to park their cars. The President is saying conserve; if you do not need gas, do not get it. I do not quite get that, but Americans need gas to be able to take their families to work and their children to school.

There are some very interesting statements, some very interesting actions, here in Washington, DC. I think it is important that we not only point out to the Members what the American people, in this time that we live in now here in this country, with all eyes on this Federal Government, that we act responsibly.

I think it is also important that we address the issue of protecting the institution. This institution, which is the U.S. Congress, wherein the Members of the 109th Congress, regardless of whether we are on the majority side or the minority side, it is our responsibility to keep this argument above the belt, and I am very disturbed, at a time of national disaster, in a time of need, that Americans need this Congress, that we are still moving as business as usual.

I am talking about the partisan panel that has been passed by this House to look into what happened in Hurricane Katrina. I know that a couple of hearings have taken place, but it is very disturbing that Americans have to see that we are working against what they have asked for.

Here in my hand I hold a CNN-USA Today poll that was taken the 16th through 18th. Anyone, I am pretty sure, can go on the Web site. I just want to make sure no one sees this as the Kendrick Meek Report or the Tim Ryan Report or the Ms. Wasserman Schultz Report.

The question goes as follows: As you know, some people have called for an investigation into the problems the government had in responding to Hurricane Katrina. Who would rather see conduct this investigation, independent panel or Congress?

Now, it does say problems the government had in responding to Hurri-

cane Katrina. It did not say the Federal Government. It did not say the State government. It did not say the local government. So I want to put that aside because some folks are playing this game as though it is some conspiracy theory to go after the Federal Government because they did not do what they were supposed to do and the local government did what they did right; they had no wrong.

Eighty-one percent, independent panel, 81 percent; 18, Congress. One percent was unsure. I am pretty sure if the question was put out on the issue of do you want a partisan panel to look at the response to the natural disasters, I am pretty sure they would have been a lot lower to Congress, and that is what is happening right now.

I, once again, say that it is important that we have an independent panel. What we mean by independent panel, just like the 9/11 Commission, that brought about the kind of accountability that we are having now. All has not been implemented that the 9/11 Commission called for, but a lot has improved as it relates to communications, the State, Federal and local governments, and I think it is important that we follow that.

Also, I know that we are going to talk about some of the cronyisms, some of the corruption that is going on around, not only this body, but throughout the government structure, and it is important, and I think a lot of this has brought about a lack of oversight, even when it comes down for some of the candidates for some of these appointments as it relates to the plum list, that have been well-documented, these are not my words, well-documented throughout the media and also as it relates to watchdog groups that are watching the Congress for what we do, and the President for what he does.

□ 2100

And I think we have to be responsible to the American people, Democrat, Republican, Independent alike. We have to make sure individuals that are being placed in these positions have some level of qualifications to be able to fill the position so that American people are not left vulnerable.

And with that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to yield to either of my colleagues, whichever wants to start this discussion.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to join in, and I thank the gentleman again for having me here. There is a lot going on here in Washington. And just to kind of follow up where the gentleman was going, we had about 70- or 80-some e-mails just last week talking about we want to have an independent commission and it should be removed from the traditional partisan bickering that goes on in this Chamber; there should be an independent counsel and independent commission that oversees what is going on with Katrina.

We know about the appointments, and we know that we had a gentleman who was a lawyer for equestrian horse shows that was not qualified, and seven or eight of the top brass in FEMA were political appointees. We know all this stuff, but we need to figure out how to get to the end and how to respond next time. Because next time it may not be a hurricane. Next time it may be a biological attack. The next time it may be a 9/11-type of attack. And though we do not like to talk about these things, our constitutional obligation here is to talk about worst-case scenarios and prepare for them.

If the President and this administration is not going to appoint the proper people, and I saw today or yesterday that Michael Brown, Brownie, is now being hired as a consultant for FEMA. So he is still in the mix.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. If the gentleman will yield for just a second on that point, he is not only hired as a consultant but he has been hired as a consultant to find out what went wrong.

This takes me back to last week. Same thing happening in the White House right now. The adviser, the young lady who is the Presidential adviser on homeland security now, has the task as it relates to the White House to find out what went wrong. These are the people that are making the decisions. That is the reason why we need an independent panel.

Last week we talked about this, and it was a little facetious to say it, but I said, My name is KENDRICK MEEK, and I am going to investigate myself and I will give you the findings in another 6 weeks. I said that to drive a point about the issue as it relates to the response to these natural disasters. And let us not leave Rita out, Hurricane Rita.

The fact is that people lost their lives, and not lost their lives in the storm, but lost their lives in the aftermath of the storm. Their lives could have been saved if we had had people in place that could make sound decisions.

I was reading in one of our publications here that Mr. Brown gave an interview to a newspaper and said, I called the White House and told them we have a problem and we need some help. Well, that is not good enough. Because the whole thing about the Federal Emergency Management Agency is to, what? Be ready to respond to a natural disaster. Now, Michael Brown, he is just Exhibit A as far as I am concerned.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, if the gentleman will yield. It gets worse. I was watching the hearings yesterday. FEMA's responsibility is to coordinate the response of the Federal Government in a natural disaster. They literally are the point agency, and all of the agencies in the Federal Government are basically brought under their direction. So what was Mr. Brown's response to, I think it was a question from the gentleman

from Connecticut (Mr. SHAYS), about what he did to coordinate the disaster response. His answer was that he told the mayor of New Orleans and the Governor of Louisiana that they should issue a mandatory evacuation, and they did not listen, according to him.

That was the sum total. That is what he kept repeating. That was the sum total of his response to the question of how did he coordinate the vast resources that FEMA has at their disposal and every agency in the Federal Government: that he picked up the phone and called two people and told them to evacuate New Orleans. Well, I do not know about you, but if I had at my disposal the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Energy, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the list goes on, I think that I could probably think of a couple more things to do besides make two phone calls.

This was the biggest natural disaster in American history and his response was to make two phone calls. Now, that may have something to do with the fact that his only previous experience was running the Arabian Horse Association, I do not know; but I would think even with a clean slate, and not knowing almost anything, not being an expert in disaster response at all, I would think I could do a little bit more than make two phone calls.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. No doubt about it. This goes right to the heart of every single thing that has happened here in the last 5 years. This outfit does not know how to govern. They do not know how, period, dot, end of story. They just do not know how to govern. They do not know how to control the government. They do not know how to utilize the government for good purposes. They cannot do it with FEMA. They screwed up Medicare. The tax cuts are not working. Their tax policy, it stinks. Our trade policy is no good. Our international relations are atrocious. There are very few countries in the world that even like us any more. We are having hearings on global threats. Who likes us? China is going in and scooping up all the people we have upset over the past few years. What are we doing right, I ask my good friends from the 30-something Group?

And since we are talking about homeland security and communicating with people, most people at home that are watching now understand what has happened here today. Unfortunately, it is a very, very sad day in the history of this institution where someone in leadership has been indicted on the Republican side. And as I am going through my notes here, I am realizing that the leadership over there can get hold of Homeland Security if we have an issue in Texas, a political issue. They can call the FAA and have them track down some information.

There was no hesitation in the calling and using of a Federal Government agency to track down Texas legislators

during the whole redistricting deal, so we know how to get hold of them if we need the Federal Government for political purposes. But if we need to rescue people or to cut through bureaucracy during a natural disaster, all of a sudden we do not know what we are doing.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Let me just say this, Mr. Speaker. I think it is important, very important, and my colleagues heard me earlier mention the issue about protecting the institution and making sure that we carry ourselves in the way we are supposed to carry ourselves, but I am here to say, as someone that knows that this happens when you are in political life, you have some people that are investigated. You have some people that are indicted. It happens. When it does happen, I think it is important for those that are accused, or it is said that this is what you have done and here is my evidence, then it is appropriate for one to say, well, I believe that I am innocent. I believe this is not what you think it is; and in the coming weeks, days, months, or years the truth will come out.

But it is another thing entirely when it comes down to intimidation, and that is what I would like to address, especially of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. Some of the press reports that I have read that came out just recently have me a little disturbed. I am a little disturbed that people in power are coming down on a locally elected prosecutor and saying this is politically motivated. They are not indicted. They have nothing to do with the case, but they are coming down on this individual. I think that is wrong.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Let us be sure how this works. This is a grand jury. This is not a prosecutor, this is a grand jury.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. A grand jury has brought this about. But once again I want to state for the record that no one is saying that the person in question is guilty as charged. We do have courts in this land.

But we do know here in this political circle that some people would be lined up out at the door. We have seen it before in the last administration, or when the House was Democratic. Members lined up out of the door to convict on this floor Members that have been indicted or investigated in the past.

Now, I can tell you that I know on this side of the aisle we are better than that. Now, some of my friends on the Republican side did not take part in that, but I am here to tell you that there have been Members that have blown things out of proportion, coming onto the floor with paper bags on their heads, and we have heard Members saying, I am ashamed to be a part of this institution, because someone was accused of not paying a parking ticket. So there are some who have been blowing this thing out of proportion.

But I can tell you what is beyond a coincidence, and that is the number of

inquiries that are being conducted on this Congress from outside officials. The number of inquiries that are taking place, and I am talking real inquiries. I am not talking about someone paid for a plane ticket for someone, or someone had a steak dinner somewhere and somebody is upset about it, or someone did not report something small. We are talking about serious charges. We are talking about charges of speaking to Federal officials and not telling the truth. We are talking about questionable financial transactions. We are talking about a number of things. But I will tell you this, it is beyond coincidence that all of this is happening now.

My point is this, my colleagues. The majority side has not carried out its responsibilities. On the Committee on Armed Services, we have had 110 complaints about contractors overcharging the government, people that are being paid that are not even in Iraq, troops not having what they need when they need it at the height of the fighting; and worse yet, we sit on the committee that has oversight, yet not a mumbling word. Not a mumbling word. Not one real "let us pull you in and talk about it."

Look at Abu Ghraib. It almost took an act of Congress, with Members kicking and screaming, to even get the Secretary there to talk about these issues. If we conducted the proper oversight, maybe, just maybe, FEMA would have been in the position to respond to those individuals that were in harm's way. Maybe, just maybe, we would not have these cost overruns as relates to some of these companies like Halliburton and other companies that are out there that are charging our Federal taxpayers' dollars that are undocumented. Maybe, just maybe, officials in the White House that are running around without any oversight, without anyone saying, excuse me, can you answer this question for me; without anyone questioning them, things would be different.

I will tell you this, and then I will come in for a landing because I know you all want to talk about this subject.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Just get around the airport.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. We have been talking about this for a very long time, and I hate to say it, but in this Congress everybody wants to saying something out in the media. No one wants to come and talk about the responsibilities that we have as Members of the 109th Congress. We have a responsibility. Guess what, this was the Congress before we got here, and hopefully it will be a Congress and an honorable institution when we leave. We are the stewards of this. We are the benefactors of the past blood, sweat, and tears.

Mr. Speaker, there are veterans right now without limbs that are the reason we have the opportunity to come in here and breathe the very democracy we celebrate every day; their life, their

commitment, these families that have lost so much in order for us to come in here. And for us to use our titles to chastise someone for doing what they believe is their job, and not just allegations against an individual but allegations that changed the face of this entire Congress. Members got unelected. If this is true, Members were unelected from this Congress because reapportionment took place. Members were elected and unelected in Texas because reapportionment took place. If that is true, then this is very, very serious.

So I would warn the Members of this Congress on both sides of the aisle to let us make sure that we pay attention to what is going on and make sure we refrain from using our office and our influence, because intimidation is the wrong medicine for this time.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I do not know where to start here, I have so many things swirling through my head. The both of you have been here a couple of terms now, but I just got here. I am a freshman. I have been here all of 10 months. In January, like you did, but for me it was my first time so it was perhaps a little bit more sacred and special, because you know how it is when you do it your first time, you hold up your hand and swear to uphold the Constitution; and when you are doing that, you swear to uphold the integrity of this institution.

□ 2115

We have all served in legislative bodies. The gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN) served in Ohio, and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) and I served in the House and Senate in Florida. One of the things that the staff who have been around a long time, one of the things they impress upon new members, they stress how critical it is that we uphold the integrity of the institution, that the perception of the institution, that each of us as individuals, we impact the perception in America of the American people's view of the U.S. House of Representatives.

Now there is a pall cast over this House. There is a pall cast over this House because it feels like almost every month since I have been here, there is another Member of this body being accused of something.

I recall 11 years ago, in fact, it was 11 years ago Monday, that the Republican Contract With America was issued in 1994. Part of that contract, from my recollection, had to do with the integrity of this House and how the Republican leadership talked then about how they were going to, and they were very sanctimonious about it, they were going to restore integrity to this institution and inspire confidence in the American people.

My constituents have a pretty significant difference in the way they define integrity. My kids are watching tonight. The 6-year-olds are awake, and they are watching and I have to go home and explain to them why this man is all over the news; and, Mommy,

what did he do? I have to have that conversation, as do parents across this country, every other week.

The reason that is important is not just because we want to uphold the impression and integrity of this institution, let us bring it home here. It exemplifies why we need an independent commission. If there are Members' ethics called into question, how are the American people going to be able to expect and get an independent, objective investigation of what went wrong?

The example that the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) just used is a good one. It would be like, to use the example of Enron executives saying Mr. Prosecutor, you do not have to do the investigation about what went wrong at Enron, our CEO and our executive board will take care of that; or Tyco.

Now we are doing that in this very House of Representatives, people who have been accused of wrongdoing, for whatever reason, not related to Hurricane Katrina, but we have got to make sure that this institution's integrity is upheld and maintained.

While you have people who are in the midst of their own personal situation, it is inappropriate, on top of the fact it was inappropriate to start with, to have a partisan select committee investigate the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, now it is underscored even more so because there are people's integrity called into question in this Chamber. We need to make sure that we can restore the American people's confidence in the direction that this country is going, in the job we are doing here, and without an independent investigation of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we are not going to be able to do that.

I am hopeful in the coming years, I will be able to talk to my kids and tell them this is an institution in which they should be proud that their mom is serving and there are people who are serving in it who have the highest values.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, I want to try to break this down because we do not want to accuse anybody, and I want to make a different point. The indictment today that was filed against the majority leader, and everyone will read it in the newspaper tomorrow and hear it on the news, I am not explaining anything new, but the basic charge is in Texas there is a law that does not allow corporate money to get involved in political campaigns.

The charge is that corporate money went into this leadership PAC and that money made its way into the State elections for senators and legislators within the State of Texas. The Republicans then, with that money, ended up winning seats and taking control, then using that power to then reapportion congressional districts off-cycle. We normally do it every 10 years. So every 10 years when you do the Census, you reapportion congressional districts. But they did this 3 years after the Census. This did it in 2000.

This is the allegation. They took this corporate money, won the seats, did the redistricting again and got rid of four out of five Democratic Members in Congress because of the redistricting. It is alleged this corporate money made its way to influence elections here in the United States Congress and Democrats lost five seats.

Now that if it is true is horrendous and a total breach of trust for the American people, if that is true. But I want to make another point. This highlights, whether this is true or not, this highlights the number one problem in the United States Congress. There is so much money in this institution it sickens me, and I know it sickens the 30-Something Group, because that money influences too much of the policy that comes forth, and every single decision that is made in this Congress is about money. It is about fund-raising, it is about how we can squeeze somebody else for another dollar for our front-line candidates.

The policy that comes through here consistently reflects how can we raise more money. That is the problem. I think that is the issue that the incidents today lead to. This institution has become more about money than about governing. When you have your policies set around money, you end up getting bad policies and you end up getting an abuse of power. That is exactly what happened.

Look at the Medicare bill. At 3 in the morning, they told us it was \$400 billion, that was a lie. It ended up being \$700 billion, and the actuary was told not to tell Members of Congress, elected officials in the United States of America, that they were not allowed to know the true cost of the Medicare program. Give me a break. They knew there were Members who would not vote for a bill that cost more than \$400 billion, so they said \$400 billion. Weeks later we find out it was \$700 billion. That was a lie.

The war and all of the nonsense leading up to it was a lie. Every single thing. We are safer now since we elected this new President and we have the Republicans in control; wrong. We saw what happened with Katrina, another lie.

We are good stewards of the government, less government more efficient; wrong. Cronyism at FEMA, eight of the top people all political hacks, and people died because of it.

Our responsibility here is to oversee this kind of thing, and everyone keeps telling us we are safer and we saw it was not true. After September 11, we do not have time to be nice. We do not have time to sit here and accept everything at face value. This has all led to an abuse of power.

Homeland Security and the FAA was used during this whole Texas debacle to track down Texas legislators who feared their government so much they fled to Oklahoma. They feared their government and they fled to Oklahoma. And then the war, again misin-

formation coming from the government. Again, FEMA, cronyism, abuse of power again.

And now, which really, really frightens me, we have this President talking about getting rid of the Posse Comitatus law in the United States of America which means if you do not think using Homeland Security and FAA to abuse power is not enough, if you do not think appointing cronies at FEMA to oversee emergency management in the United States of America is enough of an abuse of power, now the President is suggesting that we get rid of Posse Comitatus, which means the military can take over emergency situations and have police powers in your communities. Now wait a minute, this has got to stop somewhere.

This has got to stop somewhere, and it all comes back to this money being so ingrained into this system that it drives everything. And too much money, too much power, one party control here, House, Senate, White House, leads to an abuse of power. That is what you are seeing on the news tonight and that is what you will see on the news tomorrow. You will hear about it for the weeks and months to come because one-party rule in the United States of America is bad for our government. Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Mr. Speaker, listening to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN), I am thinking about all of the reasons I ran for Congress, and I decided that public service was a career choice for me, and that is because I want to make the world a better place. We all do. Certainly the three of us do. Our colleagues do. The vast majority of the Members here want to do that. It leaves such a bad taste.

What has happened over the last several months and what came down today with one of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle, what came down a few weeks ago with another colleague on the other side of the aisle, the whole thing swirling around with Mr. Abramoff and the lobbyist, and we even had a gangland murder connected with that in my district in Hollywood, Florida, it is so pervasive, it is so disturbing, it gives me deep concern that people end up thinking that we are all just like those individuals who have strayed.

We have got to make sure that we can restore some confidence, we can go back to why we all ran in the first place and move this country in the right direction again. You have got cronies and phonies that are infiltrating the government. The culture of corruption that has become so pervasive here, not just in this body but at the executive level as well, it is worst than startling.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, maybe if we were not so concerned in this House, the other body, the executive branch, about raising money and putting our political friends into cer-

tain positions all over, maybe this government would do a better job of actually executing its job. We spend so much time, not we, but the ruling party here, the Republican Party, spends so much time trying to raise money and squeeze donors and appoint their college roommate's friend to the head of FEMA. Maybe if we spent, if this government spent as much time and energy and the resources to actually govern the country, maybe we would be doing a lot better.

Poverty is up. Our education levels are not where they need to be. There is a widening gap between the wealthiest people in the country and the poorest people in this country. We saw a good example of that in New Orleans, but it is the same in every city in United States of America, structural poverty that is here in this country. Maybe if we were spending a little more time actually trying to run the country instead of raising money and appointing political hacks, maybe we would be a little better off.

We talked about the money and how it influences everything here. Is it a coincidence that through all this, all this money that is involved in this whole system, it is a coincidence that the wealthiest people in this country are getting tax breaks? That is like a direct connection. A lot of money donated from the wealthy people in the country, and the wealthy people in the country get a tax break, and everyone else seems to suffer.

We are not saying for one moment that we do not think that our government needs reform: Education, health care, it needs reform. We are the reform party. This group has had control of this Chamber for over 10 years now.

□ 2130

No reform at all. Numbers are not up where they need to be up. They are down where they need to be up, and they are up where they need to be down. It is about reform. But to see the influence of money in this Congress and then to see the wealthiest people who are contributing get the tax cuts just does not seem fair.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, I think it is important going back to protecting the institution, going back to making sure that we do what we are supposed to do as the 109th Congress. I cannot speak for the 110th Congress. It is up to my constituents if I am to make it there. But I tell my colleagues this: being a Member of the 109th Congress in the minority or the majority, I think it is important that we share with our colleagues the importance of their duty of making sure that they do what they are supposed to do, because this is not about friendships.

We were not elected to come up here to be friends with one another. We were elected to come up here to represent our districts and the American people, to be able to make sure that democracy stands for another 200-plus years

and beyond. That is our job. Our job is to come up here to protect the welfare of those individuals who cannot protect their own welfare, and we are here to make sure that there is a government in place for when they need it.

Some people in our country do not want anything from government. But guess what. When they need it, it should be there for them. No one is trying to get into anyone's life. But I can tell the Members this right now: the reason why we are here on this floor and the reason why we come to this floor week after week is to make sure that we raise the issues of the American people, Democrat or Republican alike. It does not matter. I do not ask my constituents, when they come to my office, I need to know their party affiliation. I do not go and chastise in a general sense of the word Republicans because some Republicans that I know, many that I know that are supporters of mine, either it be politically or friendship-wise or what have you, they do not share some of the things that I see the majority side acting on now.

If it was not for this side of the aisle pushing after 9/11 for an independent commission and if it was not for the work of those families, there would not have been an independent 9/11 Commission. There would not have been the testimony by not only White House officials, Pentagon officials, CIA, FBI, DEA, name it, transportation officials. We never would have gotten close to the bottom of what really happened if it was not for the push on this side.

The gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), our leader right now, was called a tainter by the Republican side for calling for an independent commission. There is a lot of name calling that goes on here on this floor. I for one do not like to name call. I just like to speak of the truth, period. When I talked about the allegations today, if they are true, then it is a problem.

The 9/11 Commission would not have seen the light of day if it was not for what we are doing right now, giving voice to those who sent us up here to give voice to them. After 9/11, Democrats called for a Department of Homeland Security. It is well documented. The majority-side leadership said we do not need a Department of Homeland Security. The White House said we do not need a Department of Homeland Security. And now we have a Department of Homeland Security, not because they thought it was a great idea. It was because of the pressure that was brought upon by us and also by the American people.

I think it is also important to talk about the issue of Social Security. The 30-something Working Group cut its teeth on the issue of Social Security, making sure that every American has the opportunity to have a guaranteed benefit. Whether it be a Democrat, Republican, young, old, disabled, retired, a survivor of someone that paid into Social Security, we fought for that. We

stood here on this floor. We called out the leadership on the majority side. And the American people then, when we were making that argument, were on our side and we were on the side of the American people, period, dot.

Now when it comes down to Katrina, when it came down to responding to Hurricane Katrina, we were brought up here in special session over a case in Florida. We have got to come up here, and we have got to vote to try to save someone's life. We can get into all of that, but that is the past. We came up here for that. And after Hurricane Katrina, the Democratic leadership called for a special session. Oh, we do not need to do that. The American people demanded that the Federal Government do more than what it is doing right now. The President said, I am calling Congress back to session. There was a question, did the Democrats not call for that? Yes, they did too, but we are all in this thing together.

There should be an emergency supplemental. Oh, we do not need that, not now. Then that happened.

We called for Michael Brown's resignation because it was obvious. Here on this floor, I remember like it was yesterday, we called for it. I personally said if they are in a football game and they are within the first quarter and they have a quarterback that is not necessarily going to get them to the goal line, it is time to change personnel. A week later the President said, Michael Brown, you are doing an excellent job.

This goes into exactly what we are talking about. If it is left up to the majority, and I will not say us because we are here speaking now after 9 o'clock at night, children at home, loved ones at home, but we are here on this floor. Not because it is good for our health. It is because we care about what happens in this institution and this country. The bottom line is if it is left up to what the spin machine puts out from the majority side, we are in trouble.

Three days later, the Director of FEMA is sent back to Washington, then later resigned. We brought that issue up to the American people that he should be removed. Now we are at the independent commission. We have Members making statements that it is a shame that Democrats are not participating in the partisan commission.

The American people can see it. Go on CNN, USA Today Web site. This poll is there just as clear as my name is KENDRICK MEEK. As a matter of fact, I will give out the Web site: www.pollingreport.com/disasters. We can get third, fourth-party validators. We called for an independent commission. Eighty-one percent of the American people called for an independent commission. I was talking with some of my Republican colleagues yesterday that are in leadership, and I told them they could save the country a lot of pain and frustration if they were just to say doing this in a partisan way is not the right way to do it. We should

have an independent commission. If they are calling for it or the American people are calling for it, let us find a way.

I just want to finish this actual conversation that just took place yesterday. If they want it, we should just do it because we have nothing to hide. We are calling for an independent commission outside of this government because it does not have the ability to investigate itself. We cannot do it. We can just not do it because I am going to tell my colleagues right now, they say one thing and they do another. When I say "they," I am talking about leadership on the Republican side.

The President said, I am a fiscal conservative. He has not vetoed one spending bill since becoming President. An unprecedented highway bill with all kinds of pork projects in it and everything. He is not even saying, I am going to stand for what I told you I would do, and we are not going to spend. Unprecedented spending. Unprecedented deficit. I mean, this is like opposite day. This is like, I am a fiscal conservative. No, I am not. I believe in responsible spending. I really do not. The action does not follow the words.

But in this case in the posture that we are in now, as Members of Congress, as we go to our districts, people cannot help but say, Wow, you are a Member of Congress? You are going to admit to that? You are actually going to admit that you are a Member of Congress? So you must not care about spending, or you must not really have control over no-bid contracts or companies that are already under investigation by the very government that has called them into question.

So what I am saying is that when we talk about credibility, when we talk about name-calling, remember the Democratic leader was called a tainter, and worse, I am pretty sure, in private. But I think it is important. And I call on all of my colleagues, Democrat, Republican, and the one Independent we have, that it is more important now than ever that we go see the wizard and get some courage and heart, and I will not even go to the third one as it relates to mine because I know that we know better. We need to be man-up and woman-up and leader-up enough to say this is not right and we have got to stop it.

And I believe, as I close on this point, Madam Speaker, that the American people will smile on those that are trying to do something about the present situation and frown on those that just watch what is happening and say that it will go away. It will not go away. This is reality. People cannot afford to put gas in their tank; meanwhile companies are making record profits and no one is saying anything about it.

Eight States have asked the Congress to look into this issue of record profits of these gas companies. Has it happened? No. Do my colleagues know what I hear today? There are Members here looking at an energy bill. We are

going to help the whole gas thing, and we have to go into the Arctic natural reserve and look for oil. People have hidden agendas that they want to carry out on the pain and suffering of Americans. As I speak right now, 100,000-plus in the middle of a basketball court in a shelter without a home, which could have been prevented if we had been on our j-o-b and making sure that the Corps of Engineers had what they needed to make sure that they can build that levee around New Orleans, to make sure that FEMA was able to respond to these folks. To make sure that the Congress, as they said, or the majority said, does what they were going to do from the beginning of being fiscal conservatives.

They have been just the opposite. The President said, I will make sure that we do not carry out wasteful spending. Maybe, just maybe, we would have no no-bid contracts going on with record profits. Maybe companies that are under investigation by this government and Departments will not continue to get billions of dollars in contracts. Maybe, just maybe, we would have some accountability if, only if, we had Members that were willing to stand up and face the music on our responsibilities and tell whoever is saying that we have to look the other way: I am sorry. We have a constitutional responsibility because someone woke up early Tuesday on election day to make sure I was elected to come here to Congress.

So whatever repercussions that may come out of this pressure, so be it. That is the bottom line because I will not, as a Member of this Congress, look my constituents in the eye and say I was in the minority and it was not much that we could do because there were powerful people on the other side of the argument who would have done things to me and would have said things about me and would have looked at me funny if I would have said something.

This country would not be independent if we had leaders like that. I would not be in Congress if we did not have leaders that were willing to fight to make sure that I could make it to Congress. The lights would not be on on this building if veterans did not lay down their life to make sure that we are able to salute one flag here today. That is how deep this argument goes.

And for those who have a problem, a problem, with our exercising democracy under this flag, then they have a problem with America. That is the bottom line. That is what it is, period, dot.

Madam Speaker, I am sorry, but I just had to share the fact that the reason why we are here is to make this country better. The reason why we are here and we argue the way we do night after night is to make sure that those who are in power, those who are committee chairmen, those who make the decisions on what bills come up, what bills do not come up, that we work on

their conscience, that we remind them of their power and we remind the American people that if they want a change, then they will have their opportunity to make that change. And when they have that opportunity to make that change, then they need to make that change at the right time.

But I will tell the Members we cannot even last that long if we continue to act the way we are acting here, especially on the majority side, like it is just another day at the office.

People are suffering. People cannot put gas in their tanks. Folks are being threatened by the fact that they are going to roll back a prescription drug benefit that poor people have. Folks do not even know if their kids can get title I lunch. Meanwhile, no one speaks of billionaires getting tax cuts. We are going to sell national parks. There are questions of drilling where we have never drilled before. We do not even know if there is oil there; but because we are in this situation, we have individuals with power that want to come in and take advantage on the backs of suffering and death and lack of governance.

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

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

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Madam Speaker, the thought occurs to me that people might be wondering why this even matters. I mean, so many times I talk to people and they say to me it is just the way politics is. They are going to reward their friends. They get into power and they are going to reward their friends, and that is just the way politics is.

And what I have to say to them, what we are trying to say to them, is that this culture of corruption is pervasive.

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The culture of corruption is pervasive. It would disturb me deeply if it was just Members of Congress and we could say, there are some bad apples where people have gone astray and that is all it is. But it goes so much deeper than that with this administration, with the leadership on the other side.

This is how deep it goes: We have got cronyism and corruption that runs all the way up the ladder. I will just outline for you what I am talking about. Let us look at the appointments that have been made.

As recently has come to light, Mr. Brown was totally unqualified to be the director of FEMA.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. "Brownie."

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. Brownie's previous experience was being head of the Arabian Horse Association. I saw him attempt to defend himself at the hearing the other day, and he outlined his vast array of experience being the assistant to a city manager, essentially a glorified intern. But, to me, I just feel like there needs to be a couple more lines on the resume when it

comes to the man who directs the response of the Federal Government to natural disasters.

Let us take if it was just the Congress or just Michael Brown heading up FEMA where the cronyism stopped. Then I could say, you know, occasionally that is going to happen.

But let us look at the gentleman who was appointed as the Deputy Commissioner for Medical and Scientific Affairs at the Food and Drug Administration. The Food and Drug Administration is charged with assuring the safety of everything from new vaccines and dietary supplements to animal feed and hair dye. They are the one that approve medicines and say whether medication can go on the market.

So Mr. Scott Gottlieb was named the Deputy Commissioner, and he was 33-years-old. This is the 30-something Group, so we are not going to be critical of that. But this is a person who got his medical degree at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and his previous experience prior to taking this job at FDA, and they declared him a "noted authority" who had written "more than 300 policy and medical articles," his biography neglects the fact that many of those articles that he wrote criticized the FDA for being too slow to approve new drugs and too quick to issue warning letters when it suspects one already on the market might be unsafe.

I think if you asked the family members and people whose loved ones died from taking Vioxx and some of the other inhibitors that people have had horrendous reactions and even deaths from because some of these drugs have been raced to the market too quickly before they have been fully vetted by the FDA, I think they might take issue with the fact that the person in charge of that is slightly less than qualified.

His previous experience before that was to be the editor of a popular Wall Street newsletter, the Forbes-Gottlieb Medical Technology Investor, in which he offered such tips as "three biotech stocks to buy now." This is the deputy commissioner of the FDA in charge of medical and scientific affairs.

If it was just the FDA, if we were going to stop there and it did not go further than that, I might be able to write it off. But then let us go travel over to another agency. We have another agency, the Office of Management and Budget, in which an ex-lobbyist with minimal purchasing experience was overseeing \$300 billion in spending, until his arrest last week. The person who was in charge of procurement for the Office of Management and Budget was responsible for \$300 billion in spending until he got arrested.

So you can see where we go. You peel back layer after layer after layer. So we are not casting aspersions randomly here. We are not just being partisan. There is a culture of corruption that is pervasive, and, my god, we have an opportunity in the next 13 months to take our message to the American people and help tell them that we are

going to come and restore their confidence; that we have got competence and we have got integrity and we know how to make sure we can expand access to health care.

Our priorities are straight. We know that the Federal Government can do something about gas prices, and not just have the President stand behind a podium and say, "You know, if you don't have to drive, please don't." That is their conservation policy.

So before I go further than I should, I am going to turn it over to the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. RYAN).

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. That was beautiful. You know, you play sports when you are a kid, and I know the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) was a college athlete, a college football player, a great athlete back in his day, a little slower afoot now than he used to be. But if you used to play sports as a kid and if you would not start or you did not get in the game right away, you would be watching everybody play and you knew you were better than everyone else that was playing, and you just thought, put me in coach.

Well, the Democrats are saying, put me in, coach. We will do better than this. And quite frankly, it does not seem that hard, given everything that has been going on, the corruption, the cronyism.

Democrats know how to run the government. Are we perfect? No. But we had a great FEMA director, we knew how to respond. We passed the first Family and Medical Leave Act. We know what families need and we know how to deliver.

In 1993 we balanced the budget, leading to the greatest economic expansion in the history of the United States of America, without one Republican vote. Al Gore had to come to the Senate to make the tie-breaking vote. Many people on this side of the aisle lost their seats because they made a tough vote that was in the best interests of the country, but not in the best interests of their own political careers. If you get a chance to read President Clinton's book, he highlights a couple of those people who made those tough votes.

My point is that the Democrats know how to govern. Are we perfect? Absolutely not. But you do not see this nonsense going on. They had to spend \$40 million to chase our President around for something that had nothing to do with the public affairs of government. Was he wrong? Absolutely. But we are talking about the public affairs and public responsibilities.

Put us in, coach.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Give the website.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. The website is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov. If you think we have cronies in government, do you think there is an abuse of power, a waste of money, things are tilted too much, the website is 30somethingdems@mail.house.gov.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, with that, I

just want to thank the Democratic leader for allowing us to have this time. Also I want to commend you both for doing your homework. I believe we will be back tomorrow, the 30-something Group tomorrow afternoon after votes.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. SCHMIDT). The Chair must admonish Members that remarks in debate should be directed to the Chair, and not to persons who may be viewing the proceedings.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

By unanimous consent, leave of absence was granted to:

Mr. GUTIERREZ (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today on account of illness in the family.

Mr. COSTA (at the request of Ms. PELOSI) for today after 5:00 p.m.

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. DEFAZIO) to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. DEFAZIO, for 5 minutes, today.

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

Ms. WOOLSEY, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. KAPTUR, for 5 minutes, today.

Mrs. CHRISTENSEN, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. WATERS, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. TOWNS, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. MILLENDER-MCDONALD, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. NORTON, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. BUTTERFIELD, for 5 minutes, today.

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

Ms. WATSON, for 5 minutes, today.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, for 5 minutes, today.

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

Mr. KINGSTON, for 5 minutes, today.

Mr. POE, for 5 minutes, September 29.

Mr. MCHENRY, for 5 minutes, September 29.

Mr. NORWOOD, for 5 minutes, September 29.

Mr. GINGREY, for 5 minutes, September 29.

Mr. GOHMERT, for 5 minutes, today and September 29.

Mr. BURGESS, for 5 minutes, today.

(The following Member (at his own request) to revise and extend his remarks and include extraneous material:)

Mr. DREIER, for 5 minutes, today.

SENATE BILL REFERRED

A bill of the Senate of the following title was taken from the Speaker's table and, under the rule, referred as follows:

S. 37. An act to extend the special postage stamp for breast cancer research for 2 years; to the Committee on Government Reform; in addition to the Committee on Energy and Commerce and to the Committee on Armed Services for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned.

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

Mr. Trandahl, Clerk of the House, reported and found truly enrolled bills of the House of the following titles, which were thereupon signed by the Speaker:

H.R. 2132. An act to extend the waiver authority of the Secretary of Education with respect to student financial assistance during a war or other military operation or national emergency.

H.R. 3200. An act to amend title 38, United States Code, to enhance the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance program, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3667. An act to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 200 South Barrington Street in Los Angeles, California, as the "Karl Malden Station".

H.R. 3767. An act to designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 2600 Oak Street in St. Charles, Illinois, as the "Jacob L. Frazier Post Office Building".

ADJOURNMENT

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

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 9 o'clock and 53 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Thursday, September 29, 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:

4250. A letter from the Under Secretary, Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics, Department of Defense, transmitting a report on status of V-22 Osprey Aircraft before resumption of flight testing, pursuant to Public Law 107-107, section 123 (115 Stat. 1031); to the Committee on Armed Services.

4251. A letter from the Engine Manager, Department of the Air Force, Department of Defense, transmitting a request for a congratulatory letter for the retirement of Master Sergeant Christopher A. Shipp; to the Committee on Armed Services.

4252. A letter from the Administrator of National Banks, Comptroller of the Currency, transmitting the issues of the Quarterly Journal that comprise the 2004 annual report to Congress of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency; to the Committee on Financial Services.

4253. A letter from the Regulations Coordinator, CMS, Department of Health and Human Services, transmitting the Department's "Major" final rule — HIPAA Administrative Simplification: Standards for Electronic Health Care Claims Attachments