

[From the Washington Post, September 27, 2005]

FEMA PLANS TO REIMBURSE FAITH GROUPS FOR AID—AS CIVIL LIBERTARIANS OBJECT, RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS WEIGH WHETHER TO APPLY

(By Alan Cooperman and Elizabeth Williamson)

After weeks of prodding by Republican lawmakers and the American Red Cross, the Federal Emergency Management Agency said yesterday that it will use taxpayer money to reimburse churches and other religious organizations that have opened their doors to provide shelter, food and supplies to survivors of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

FEMA officials said it would mark the first time that the government has made large-scale payments to religious groups for helping to cope with a domestic natural disaster.

"I believe it's appropriate for the federal government to assist the faith community because of the scale and scope of the effort of how long it's lasting," said Joe Becker, senior vice president for preparedness and response with the Red Cross.

Civil liberties groups called the decision a violation of the traditional boundary between church and state, accusing FEMA of trying to restore its battered reputation by playing to religious conservatives.

"What really frosts me about all this is, here is an administration that didn't do its job and now is trying to dig itself out by making right-wing groups happy," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

FEMA officials said religious organizations would be eligible for payments only if they operated emergency shelters, food distribution centers for medical facilities at the request of state or local governments in the three states that have declared emergencies—Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. In those cases, "a wide range of costs would be available for reimbursement, including labor costs incurred in excess of normal operations, rent for the facility and delivery of essential needs like food and water," FEMA spokesman Eugene Kinerney said in an e-mail.

For churches, synagogues and mosques that have taken in hurricane survivors, FEMA's decision presents a quandary. Some said they were eager to get the money and had begun tallying their costs, from electric bills to worn carpets. Others said they probably would not apply for the funds, fearing donations would dry up if the public came to believe they were receiving government handouts.

"Volunteer labor is just that: volunteer," said the Rev. Robert E. Reccord, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's North American Mission Board. "We would never ask the government to pay for it."

When Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, religious charities rushed in to provide emergency services, often acting more quickly and efficiently than the government. Relief workers in the stricken states estimate that 500,000 people have taken refuge in facilities run by religious groups.

In the days after the disaster, house Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Tex.) and other Republicans complained that FEMA seemed reluctant to pay church groups. "There are tons of questions about what is reimbursable, what is not reimbursable," DeLay said Sept. 13, noting that Houston alone had "500 or 600 churches that took in evacuees, and they would get no reimbursement."

Becker said he and his staff at the Red Cross also urged FEMA to allow reimbursement of religious groups. Ordinarily, Becker

said, churches provide shelter for the first days after a disaster, then the Red Cross takes over. But in a storm season that has stretched every Red Cross shelter to the breaking point, church buildings must for the first time house evacuees indefinitely.

Even so, Lynn, of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said that federal reimbursement is inappropriate.

"The good news is that this work is being done now, but I don't think a lot of people realize that a lot of these organizations are actively working to obtain federal funds. That's a strange definition of charity," he said.

Lynn added that he accepts the need for the government to coordinate with religious groups in a major disaster, but not to "pay for their good works."

"We've never complained about using a religious organization as a distribution point for food or clothing or anything else," Lynn said. But "direct cash reimbursements would be unprecedented."

FEMA outlined the policy in a Sept. 9 internal memorandum on "Eligible Costs for Emergency Sheltering Declarations." Religious groups, like secular nonprofit groups, will have to document their costs and file for reimbursement from state and local emergency management agencies, which in turn will seek funds from FEMA.

David Fukitomi, infrastructure coordinator for FEMA in Louisiana, said that the organization has begun briefings for potential applicants in the disaster area but that it is too early to know how many will take advantage of the program.

"The need was so overwhelming that the faith-based groups stepped up, and we're trying to find a way to help them shoulder some of the burden for doing the right thing," he said, adding that "the churches are interested" but that "part of our effort is getting the local governments to be interested in being their sponsor."

A spokeswoman for the Salvation Army said it has been in talks with state and federal officials about reimbursement for the 76,000 nights of shelter it has provided to Katrina survivors so far. But it is still unclear whether the Salvation Army will qualify, she said.

The Rev. Flip Benham, director of Operation Save America, an antiabortion group formerly known as Operation Rescue, said, "Separation of church and state means nothing in time of disaster; you see immediately what a farce it is."

Benham said that his group has been dispensing food and clothing and that "Bibles and tracts go out with everything we put out." In Mendenhall, Miss., he said, he preached to evacuees while the mayor directed traffic and the sheriff put inmates from the county jail to work handing out supplies.

Yet Benham said he would never accept a dime from the federal government. "The people have been so generous to give that for us to ask for reimbursement would be like gouging for gas," he said. "That would be a crime against heaven."

For some individual churches, however, reimbursement is very appealing. At Christus Victor Lutheran Church in Ocean Springs, Miss., as many as 200 evacuees and volunteer workers have been sleeping each night in the sanctuary and Sunday School classrooms. The church's entrance hall is a Red Cross reception area and medical clinic. As many as 400 people a day are eating in the fellowship hall.

Suzie Harvey, the parish administrator, said the church was asked by the Red Cross and local officials to serve as a shelter. The church's leadership agreed immediately, without anticipating that nearly a quarter of

its 650 members would be rendered homeless and in no position to contribute funds. "This was just something we had to do," she said. "Later we realized we have no income coming in."

Harvy said the electric bill has skyrocketed, water is being used round-the-clock and there has been "20 years of wear on the carpet in one month." When FEMA makes money available, she said, the church definitely will apply.

REMEMBRANCES OF SAM VOLPENTEST

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise this evening to share the very sad news that Sam Volpentest—a name many of us in Congress know well—passed away last night at the age of 101.

Here in our Nation's Capital, Sam was a near constant fixture—always searching for new ways to help his beloved community of the Tri-Cities to move forward.

To fully appreciate Sam's contributions, you have to understand something about the geography and history of my State. The Tri-Cities—which are Richland, Pasco, and Kennewick—are located on the Columbia River in the southeastern region of Washington State.

From the Hanford nuclear facility, to the pristine beauty of the last free-flowing stretch of the Columbia River, to the many varied agricultural and business challenges, the Tri-Cities are diverse and very unique.

Located across the Cascade Mountains from Seattle and other population centers, it could be pretty easy for these three communities to have their needs overlooked.

Well, Sam made sure that never happened.

Whenever something important was happening in the Tri-Cities, I could always count on Sam to show up in my Senate office to share it with me, even if I didn't know he was coming.

I vividly remember many years ago when the chair of the Energy Committee cut funding for the construction of HAMMER. HAMMER is a world-class training facility located in Richland, WA.

Well, I like to think I am always on top of the issues affecting my home State, but Sam kept me on my toes. I showed up at my office one morning at about 7:30 a.m. Guess who was already there, standing there, waiting for me outside my door. Sam Volpentest.

Although Sam may have only had about an inch or two on me, that man's passion could move mountains. And on that day, his passion was for building HAMMER.

Well, I didn't want to mess with Sam, so I marched right into that Energy Committee chairman's office, and I fought side by side with Sam to restore those cuts. And we won.

I was proud to stand with Sam at the HAMMER groundbreaking ceremony in July of 1995. Sam was 91 years young at that time. I still have that shovel on display in my office as a reminder of

what we can all do if we have passion and heart, and if we work together.

Just look at HAMMER today. It is a first-rate facility that keeps Hanford workers safe.

HAMMER has created jobs. It has created economic opportunities and development, and it has the potential now to be a Homeland Security training center for first responders across the country.

Our entire country owes Sam a debt of gratitude for all he has done for so many people.

During my years in the Senate, I have worked with a lot of people. But no one—no one—has come close to matching Sam's energy, his commitment, and his success.

Sam has been a role model to me and to all of us who want to spend our lives giving something back to the communities we care about most. I thank him for helping me be a better representative for all the people of my home State.

Sam was a one-person Chamber of Commerce. He was a visitor's center and he was a cheerleading squad all wrapped into one. Sam Volpentest was the heart and soul of the Tri-Cities. He was one of a kind. Sam will be dearly missed, but he will not be forgotten.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2005

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the need for hate crimes legislation. Each Congress, Senator KENNEDY and I introduce hate crimes legislation that would add new categories to current hate crimes law, sending a signal that violence of any kind is unacceptable in our society. Likewise, each Congress I have come to the floor to highlight a separate hate crime that has occurred in our country.

On October 31, 2002, Patrick Vogrich a State-funded caregiver, bludgeoned his disabled client Larry Rap to death with a hammer in an apartment outside of Chicago, IL. The apparent motivation for the attack began when Mr. Rap ran into Mr. Vogrich with his wheelchair. According to police, Mr. Vogrich was convicted of murder on November 19, 2002.

I believe that the Government's first duty is to defend its citizens, to defend them against the harms that come out of hate. The Local Law Enforcement Enhancement Act is a symbol that can become substance. I believe that by passing this legislation and changing current law, we can change hearts and minds as well.

SEQUENTIAL REFERRAL RE- QUEST—INTELLIGENCE AUTHORITY ACT FOR FY 2006

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that my letter to the majority leader dated September 29, 2005, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

U.S. SENATE,

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, September 29, 2005.

Senator BILL FRIST,
Majority Leader, U.S. Senate,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. LEADER: Pursuant to paragraph 3(b) of S. Res. 400 of the 94th Congress, as amended, I request that the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006, as just reported by the Select Committee on Intelligence, be sequentially referred to the Committee on Armed Services for a period of 10 days. This request is without prejudice to any request for an additional extension of five days, as provided for under the resolution. Moreover, the amended resolution provides that the period of referral does not begin to run until the committee to which the bill is referred receives the bill, "in its entirety and including annexes." Thus, the 10 days of initial referral will not begin to run until the Committee on Armed Services receives the classified annex to the bill, as well as the bill and report.

I request that I be consulted with regard to any unanimous consent or time agreements regarding this bill.

With kind regards, I am
Sincerely,

JOHN WARNER,
Chairman.

NATIONAL HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, we are currently observing National Hispanic Heritage Month, a time when many members of the Latino community and the country at large remember and celebrate the profound contributions of Hispanic culture that are woven into the great cultural fabric of America. National Hispanic Heritage Month is celebrated between September 15 and October 15, to coincide with the Independence Day anniversaries of nations throughout Latin America. In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson's proclamation of National Hispanic Heritage Month was authorized by Congress. In 1988, the recognition was expanded to a month-long celebration.

America is home to nearly 41 million Latinos, including a thriving population in my home state of Wisconsin. This month, we should take the time to embrace the many important contributions throughout American history of American Latinos that affect all of our everyday lives. This month we celebrate the historic efforts of Cesar Chavez, Jaime Escalante, Roberto Hernandez, Henry Cisneros, Ellen Ochoa and Roberto Clemente, to name just a few. We celebrate their work to break down barriers and create bridges for future generations.

But as we celebrate Hispanic heritage, it is also time to address the challenges that face the Hispanic community, such as access to education and health care, fair working conditions, racial profiling and, for many, an ability to keep their family together while working to become legal, permanent residents of this great country. I am a strong supporter of the SOLVE Act, introduced by Senators KENNEDY and

MCCAIN, that would help keep many Latino families together while their petitions for permanent legal residency are processed. The legislation would help hard-working Hispanics and others become legalized citizens and would offer a new temporary worker program.

While we work to improve the immigration system, we must enhance the education of Latino students. Many Latino students face social, economic, and language barriers that can prevent them from receiving the top-quality education they, like all American students, deserve. We must increase funding for English proficiency programs, programs to help low-income students attend college, and programs to help parents involve themselves in their children's education. It must be a priority for Congress to ensure equal education for all so the Hispanic community can continue to flourish and contribute to American culture.

In closing, I express my hope that the 109th Congress begins to address these and other pressing priorities for Latinos across the country. We should not limit our celebration of National Hispanic Heritage Month to saluting the achievements of Hispanics, we also need to make sure that we act on the educational, health, labor and other needs of all Americans of Hispanic heritage.

WATER TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL AID

Mr. DOMENICI. Mr. President, fresh water is a substance that we as Americans assume will be available when and where we want it. However, the disruption of water and wastewater services following Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita has shown how fragile those assumptions can be. The resulting fear, panic and instability are what we rarely experience in this Nation. However, as we look around the globe, those same fears, sense of panic, and sense of instability is a daily occurrence for over 1 billion people across the globe who have little or no hope for a speedy resolution of their concerns.

We must help solve the expanding problems of insufficient clean drinking water and inadequate wastewater treatment. These are matters of international importance for several reasons. First, we are a member of an increasingly international economy, and the expansion or contraction of economies the world over affects our industry and economy. Furthermore, disease knows no borders and can spread through water. Most importantly, we care about the well being of others. All these national policy goals are intimately related to adequate water and wastewater treatment across the world.

There are many ways that we can help address this world-wide problem. However, lasting solutions require that local individuals and institutions have the capacity to maintain and expand their own services.