

Tennessee, listening, we heard again and again the price of gasoline and diesel at the pump was wiping out any margins of even survival for many farmers and people who rely on our transportation industry.

I do want to call upon the energy industry and the energy sector to be a responsible corporate actor. If not, there is going to be a real focus placed by this Congress because they absolutely must respond appropriately. I mention that because of the reports, people calling in about price gouging and excessive profit taking. If that is occurring anywhere, it absolutely must be reported immediately to the Department of Energy and must be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

We have asked the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee to conduct vigorous oversight hearings on what went wrong during those initial days and hours, and what lessons we can learn from this awful tragedy. Most of our response and energy needs to be focused on the victims right now, both their evacuation and responding to their needs, but at the same time that committee will begin their vigorous oversight hearings in an orderly way to collect the appropriate information. Emergency response was unacceptable early on and in many ways I saw it firsthand as a medical volunteer. We have to fix it. Those sorts of things should not happen in America today.

Every issue before us we will be addressing. Again, we are just coming back in. I look forward to doing that. One of the biggest problems on the ground will be the issues surrounding communications, command and control structures, and we will be addressing the longer term issues of housing long term but also temporary housing, and issues such as health coverage and unemployment insurance, getting power back, restoring the ports back to activity, dredging channels for those displaced, and making sure their insurance coverage—if they were so lucky to have insurance—is actually provided to them in a timely way.

Let me close by simply saying I am humbled and inspired by the tremendous generosity of all Americans who have given so much of themselves and their time and their energy over the last several days—and their money—and the resources of compassion. I thank you and I know America thanks you.

We are going to have to continue to invest. We are going to have to continue to pull together. The Senate is rolling up its sleeves. It has done so. We are at work and will work aggressively to respond appropriately.

I am confident that America will be able to meet the challenges that lay ahead. Through all of this, we will be made stronger and better and more unified and more hopeful as we pull together as a government and as a people in this time of crisis. The American people are leading the way, and to-

gether we will all be able to overcome these challenges.

THE SUPREME COURT

Tomorrow, I will have more to say about Chief Justice Rehnquist and the nomination of Judge Roberts for Chief Justice.

Today, let me briefly say the Senate and the Nation mourn the loss of the Chief, as he was affectionately known by so many of us and known on the Supreme Court. We will all miss Chief Justice Rehnquist—from his brilliant legal mind to his efficient and effective administration of the Supreme Court.

We look forward with confidence as the President's new nominee for Chief Justice, Judge Roberts, is considered. Judge Roberts learned from the best. He was, in fact, a clerk, as we all know, for then-Associate Justice Rehnquist. There is no doubt in my mind that Judge Roberts has the temperament, has the skill, and has the mind to lead the Supreme Court for decades to come.

With that, we have a lot to do. I know the Democratic leader has a statement. Then we will have time this afternoon after our lunches for people to come back and make statements as well.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, it is my understanding the Senate, under the standing order, is to go out of session at 12:30 today. Is that right?

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. That is correct.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent, if my remarks take a little bit longer, that we wait until after my remarks to put the recess.

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the August recess was memorable for me for several reasons, not the least of which was my first visit to a hospital on my own behalf since I was 8 years old. I am grateful to the physicians who cared and consulted with me. Admiral Eisold, the Physician of the Capitol, is really a national treasure. The Congress is fortunate to have his curative hand over all we do.

While speaking of admirals, I would be remiss not to mention the Senate Chaplain, ADM Barry Black. After my brief hospital visit, my first public appearance in Nevada was at a faith-based summit I had been planning since January. The event turned out extremely well. The highlight of the summit was a presentation of Dr. Black, our Chaplain. I only wish all Americans—Christian, Jewish, Protestant, Mormon, Hindu, and Muslim—could have heard his presentation on faith and on virtue and why America must be a virtuous nation. His remarks were inspiring not only for me but for everyone within the sound of his voice.

I am happy to report that I am well. I feel fine. I have been advised medically that I have no restrictions on my

activities. I am so fortunate to now return to work in a place that I love—the U.S. Senate.

Words cannot adequately express my appreciation for the thoughts and prayers and good wishes that I received from my Senate colleagues and the rest of the Senate family—some of whom are in the Chamber as I speak—and, of course, my friends in Nevada and around the country. I will long remember the cards, letters, phone calls, e-mails, and other expressions of concern. So even though these words are insufficient, I thank you all for your concern for me.

SUPREME COURT NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, much has happened in the weeks since we adjourned for the August recess. In just the last few days, we have seen tragedy strike the gulf coast and learned that our friend, William Rehnquist, Chief Justice of the United States, had passed. Our thoughts and our prayers are with those struggling to pick up the pieces on the gulf coast following the hurricane. And, of course, our thoughts and prayers are with the Chief Justice's family.

I had the good fortune of working with the Chief on several occasions, the first when I was head of the Democratic Policy Committee. I told my Democratic Senators I was going to ask the Chief Justice to come and talk to us. They said he would never do that. I called him, and he was happy to come. At that lunch, he displayed a great command of the law, of course, a strong commitment to judicial independence, and something that we didn't know existed—a sharp sense of humor. Just a short time later, I got to know him better when he presided over the impeachment trial here in the Senate.

I am grateful to have worked with him, and in addition to have spoken to him on the telephone on several occasions at his office and at his home.

As I have indicated, my condolences are with his family. He will be missed.

Now that the President has said he will nominate Judge Roberts to replace Chief Justice Rehnquist, the Senate's advice and consent responsibility is even more important. If confirmed to this lifetime job, Judge Roberts will be the leader of the third branch of the Federal Government and most prominent judge in our Nation. The Senate must be vigilant in considering this nomination.

I, of course, look forward to consulting with the President on the O'Connor seat which at some time will become vacant when the replacement is chosen. Justice O'Connor, we have heard from this floor and around the country, has been a voice of moderation and reason on the Court, and should be replaced by someone who, like her, embodies fundamental American values of fairness, liberty, and equality.

HURRICANE KATRINA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the work that we have to complete in the waning days of this session is significant and difficult, and nothing we do in the days ahead can be more important than helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina get back on their feet. They are counting on us. It is their time of need. We owe it to them to give them everything we are capable of giving them.

The most terrible tragedies routinely bring out the best in America and Americans. We have seen that again in the aftermath of Katrina, one of the most horrible natural disasters in the history of this Nation.

Americans are coming together and giving their time and money to the millions of victims. They are putting their personal concerns aside so they can put Americans in need first. Now they expect America's Government to do the same.

There are dozens of steps the Senate can take in order to get immediate relief to the victims of the gulf coast—steps we can take to make sure Medicaid is easily and readily available to those who need it, to get families the housing assistance they badly need, and to get resources to the school districts all over the country so displaced children do not lose a precious day of this school year. These items must be our top priority.

I commend the majority leader for clearing the Senate Calendar of the estate tax so we can focus on Katrina. We can do better. Families in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida are counting on us to do that. They are suffering, and they have nowhere else to turn. We owe it to them to make their safety and survival our top priority, and we should give them nothing less.

RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess prior to the hour that was chosen, just a couple of minutes early.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:28 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reconvened when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. VOINOVICH).

Mr. LEAHY. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HURRICANE KATRINA

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, the entire Nation continues to be focused on the millions of Americans who have been devastated and displaced by hurri-

cane Katrina. My heart and prayers go out to the individuals and the families who have had to endure so much over the last 8 days; first, the natural disaster of Katrina and then the unnatural disaster of the delayed and deeply flawed relief effort.

Last week, as this tragedy was unfolding, I was on a congressional delegation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, among other things, meeting with members of the Iowa National Guard who are training units of the new Afghan Army. I will have more to report about that trip in coming days. While this tragedy was unfolding, most of the time I was in Pakistan watching. No matter where we went, it was on television, whether we were going to meet the President of Pakistan or whether we were going out to a small village to visit some schools we have helped to fund in the past in poor villages. Everyone had a television focused on it.

As I was there watching it unfold, I had this terrible feeling of helplessness; also, I must add, a feeling of embarrassment and being ashamed that our Government was not responding more forcefully to this disaster.

I will take advantage of this first opportunity to be back in the Senate to speak publicly about the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina. There is no question FEMA has failed and, more broadly, the Federal Government has failed the people of the gulf coast. In other parts of the country that are vulnerable to similar natural disasters or terrorist attacks, Americans are saying: There, but for the grace of God, go I, go me or my city. It is important those responsible for this systematic failure be held accountable and plans and procedures be put in place to avoid any recurrence of this failure.

I know I will not be the only Senator demanding hearings and rigorous oversight by Congress in the weeks ahead, but that is in the weeks ahead. That is down the road. Today, we must focus on the immediate and longer term human needs of the people of the gulf coast. As ranking member of the Agriculture Committee and of the subcommittee on Labor and Health and Human Services of the Committee on Appropriations I will do my part, again with my distinguished chairman, Senator CHAMBLISS of the Committee on Agriculture, and Senator SPECTER, who is chairman of the subcommittee on Labor, Health, and Human Services, along with Senator COCHRAN, the full chairman of the Committee on Appropriations, to see we provide maximum resources for relief and recovery efforts across the gulf coast region.

For instance, we need to make sure USDA, the Department of Agriculture, is able to meet the food needs of the victims and to assist hard-hit agricultural producers. We will also need to extend emergency Medicaid benefits to hundreds of thousands of victims. I will work closely with Senators and officials from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, to ensure that their needs are fully and effectively met.

Indeed, in recent days, my staff has been meeting with Senator LANDRIEU's staff to share the experience and the expertise we gained in the wake of our widespread flooding in Iowa back in 1993. Some of the visual images, especially of New Orleans and some of the other towns along the gulf coast totally flooded with water, brought back memories of the flood of 1993 in Iowa, when whole towns were wiped out, some never to be rebuilt. People lost their homes, life savings, and mementos, such as pictures and family albums, the things that mean so much in our lives.

I remember 1993 and those floods in Iowa. At that time, I cochaired a task force, along with Senator KIT BOND of Missouri, whose State was also devastated by the same flooding, to identify the types of assistance that would be needed, as well as the best way to secure that assistance in Congress as well as in the executive branch. I am hopeful our past experience can provide a roadmap for officials responding to this latest disaster.

Some of the needed assistance is obvious, beginning, of course, with food. We must make sure these people who have been displaced to other States get adequate food and nutrition, and shelter, of course. It is so wonderful to see so many people opening their homes, their communities, their facilities, to take care of people who have been displaced from their own homes and communities. But we need to provide shelter in the longer term. Where is that going to come from? People cannot live for 6 months, 9 months, 2 years, in the Astrodome or in any other public facility which is housing these people now. We have to find adequate shelter.

Many of the people who have been displaced—let's face it, the vast majority are very poor people, and I will have more to say about that later—need health care assistance. Many of the communities are already at the breaking point, in terms of providing health care to the poorest of their citizens.

We need to be doing something about at least those three things—food, shelter and health care—right now. In the weeks and months ahead, more will be needed, including grants to individuals. Grants to individuals helped immeasurably in my State of Iowa after the flood of 1993, to help them move back, to get a start, to buy simple things like a bed, a stove, a refrigerator.

Loans will be needed to small businesses to get them back on their feet. Think of all the small Main Street businesses wiped out. They are going to need help to get back on their feet.

We need buyouts of homes in frequently flooded areas. Senator BOND and I also worked together after the flood of 1993 on hazard mitigation. Sometimes individuals located in an area constantly under flood threats or which has been flooded numerous times need to be relocated. We did that very effectively in both Iowa and in Missouri.