

my colleague and our leader that the President of the United States, when he was Governor of Texas, had a reputation as someone who reached out as a uniter, bringing together the two parties in a bipartisan way. Since the President has been elected President and has served in that capacity, he has chosen to change, for what reason I do not know because the country yearns for bipartisanship. That was clearly one of the messages that came out of last year's election, the 2006 election, that the people of this country are tired of the partisan bickering, and they want us to come together. Yet, as the majority leader was just recounting, there has been occasion after occasion where it seems, unnecessarily, that the White House has gone out of its way to attack someone simply because they were a member of the other party.

I want to give the Senate an example. Because I had been twice before, over a 6-year period, to visit the President of Syria, immediately upon the Iraq study commission report that recommended that we open up to Syria, this Senator from Florida decided that I was going to go back, hoping that there might be some encounter in that conversation with the President of Syria that might crack the door a little bit. I did that in the week before Christmas.

The White House chose to attack me for having made that trip—however, very conveniently not attacking any Republican Senator who happened to follow, as did two Democratic Senators and one Republican Senator in a week or two after I made that trip.

So, too, it is noteworthy that the White House chose to attack Speaker NANCY PELOSI in her visit with President Assad while being mute about the congressional delegation that had just visited President Assad 4 days earlier, which included my good personal friends, the Congressman from Virginia, FRANK WOLF, and the Congressman from Pennsylvania, JOE PITTS.

When we are facing an issue of war and peace, as we are now, we have to come together. The person at the top has to set the standard and the atmosphere. These kind of attacks that become personal, as they were against Speaker PELOSI, are not going to do anybody any good.

Mr. REID. Will my friend yield?

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I will certainly yield.

Mr. REID. I certainly appreciate the Senator being here on the floor this afternoon. The Senator comes from the fourth most populous State, but soon to be the third, a State large in area with lots and lots of people moving there—thousands of people every month. It is a State that this good man has represented in so many different ways.

We first served together in the House of Representatives. If there were ever a person who served in Congress who served as a moderate, it would be the

Senator from Florida. He is a person who is always looking for consensus, always trying to work things out, understanding that the art of legislation is compromise.

I so appreciate his brief statement today, and I apologize for interrupting it. I would just go back to more than 6 years ago when President Bush was elected. I, too, was so enthused about his coming here. He told me: I want to be a uniter, not a divider. I have been stunned by what has been going on. It started with Social Security; Medicare; the recent flap with the Attorney General, the Katrina situation, wiretaps, stem cells, Terry Schiavo, energy—on and on, with all these things that we, with rare exception, with a little bit of patience, with a President willing to work with us, could have done on a bipartisan basis. On the war, we have to resolve that on a bipartisan basis. This legislative body is reaching out. That is what we are doing.

I say to my friend, I appreciate very much not only his statement today but who he is, who he represents, and how he represents the people of Florida. We need more BILL NELSONS in this Congress of the United States.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I am grateful to the leader. I believed it was necessary. Partisanship has gotten out of control around here. I was so encouraged, the day that we were sworn in when the two leaders, the Democratic leader and the Republican leader, convened us in a private meeting in the Old Senate Chamber. There was a wonderful spirit. It clearly was, in large part, as a message from the American people that they were tired of the partisan bickering. That was clearly one of the messages from the election.

We started off in this mutual camaraderie of how we can make a body like this function that cannot pass anything unless we have 60 votes out of 100 Senators in order to shut off debate. That means we have to have coming together. As the Good Book says, "Come, let us reason together."

It is harder and harder to do that in a poisonous, partisan atmosphere. But it has to be set at the top.

I cannot tell the White House what to do. I can sure recommend. But there is something that I can do; that is, I am responsible for myself and my actions and how I treat others, treat others in this Chamber.

There is an age-old principle, and it has to be: Treat others as you want to be treated. I will put that in the old English, which might be a little bit more familiar: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

If we had a little bit more of that, we could sure get some things done around here. Typically, what happens in these 51-to-49 votes, there is not that much difference that we couldn't have 10 votes on that side of the aisle or 10 votes on this side of the aisle go one way or another in reaching a mutual consensus. Yet over and over it has been avoided.

I felt compelled to say these things.

THE NATIONAL GUARD

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I want to share another idea, and this has nothing to do with these weighty matters, but it certainly has to do with some weighty matters about whether the National Guard of this country has the proper equipment.

There was a General Accounting Office report from last summer that showed that the National Guard is woefully inadequate in its equipment. It pointed out in that GAO study that my State of Florida had only 53 percent of the equipment that it ought to have. It said the State of New Mexico National Guard had only 33 percent.

What is happening is what you would expect: As the National Guard units in America are activated to go over to Iraq and Afghanistan, they take their equipment with them, and so often it is worn out or it has to stay for others to use, and they come back and they do not have the equipment; or it is like the 11 helicopters of the National Guard in Florida—a year from now, they are planning to take those helicopters from the Florida Guard and send them over to the Middle East. Can you imagine if that occurs and the Florida National Guard is faced with a major hurricane and they do not have any helicopters? Hurricanes are indiscriminate in the way they come in and tear up everything over a large swath of property, so that in a big one you cannot traverse the roads because everything is suddenly on top of them. So often you have to have helicopters to get supplies and personnel in to people who are hurting.

That is one example. That is a year from now if they take the helicopters from the Florida National Guard because they need them over in the Middle East. But let me tell you the condition of it today. The Florida National Guard—and I am quoting their own figures—is short 500 humvees. They are short 600 trucks, and this is either a 5-ton truck or a deuce and a half, 2½-ton truck—600 short. They are short 500 long-haul trailers, they are short 20 wreckers, and they are short 4,400 night-vision goggles. What do all of those shortages have to do with anything? It has to do—if the big one comes and the big one is a category 4 or 5 hurricane hitting a densely urbanized part of Florida direct from the water, the Florida Guard is going to need every bit of equipment it can get to respond to that emergency.

Let me give you another example. The report 6 months ago was that Fidel Castro was going to be dead within 6 months. Looks like that may have changed, at least by the more recent reports. But what happens and what will be the political condition in Cuba when he does pass away? Is the then caretaker government going to be in sufficient control, or is chaos going to

erupt and suddenly a mass outmigration of thousands and thousands of people trying to get to the United States? That is also when you need the National Guard.

Now, I have talked with the Coast Guard and the Navy, and they have a plan whereby they have an entire sentry line of ships that they line up, which I have questions on and we will talking about on another occasion, about that plan, because they have only modeled it if 10,000 were to flee. What happens if 100,000 flee? They are not prepared for that, and everybody in authority with that plan will tell you they are not prepared for it. But whatever it is, if it occurs, which we hope and pray that it will not, the National Guard is going to be a major component of trying to restore order and keep order. Their equipment has been depleted.

Now, if we end up having the typical category 1, 2, and 3 hurricanes, which are severe hurricanes, the Florida National Guard tells me they have adequate equipment, they certainly have the personnel, and they are the best trained in the country, they know how to handle hurricanes, and they are the best of the best. But if they do not have the equipment—they tell me they do for up to a category 3—but if the big one hits, then they are going to have to rely on getting equipment from other National Guards around the country. So what is the lag time on that? And when they reach out to another Guard—for example, the Pennsylvania National Guard with which they have a compact to share equipment—is the Pennsylvania Guard going to have sufficient equipment that they can lend to Florida in an emergency?

These are serious questions which need to be answered before the hurricane season and before any kind of potential outmigration from the island of Cuba so that we have preparations, they are adequately equipped to go along with the experts and expertise of the trained personnel and all of the emergency responders who would respond to that kind of an event.

I am going to continue to sound the alarm until we get some response. I do not believe the Florida Guard has the equipment for a category 5 hurricane coming right up Tampa Bay or hitting directly from the east coast from the Atlantic, in a high urbanized area such as the Dade-Broward line. So I am going to continue to ask this question, as uncomfortable as it will make some people, until somebody will respond.

I think one potential solution is that there be an agreement which would be cut with the Active-Duty—correct that—with the Army Reserves located in Florida that have equipment that there will be an immediate lending of that equipment and/or personnel to the Florida National Guard in the case of a major, catastrophic hurricane hit.

When a hurricane hits, it is a matter of life and death. As time goes on, as expert as our emergency responders

are—and they are expert because they have been through a lot and they are quite experienced and well trained—the ability over time to get those supplies in, even supplies that have been prepositioned closer to where the hurricane is going to hit, the ability to get that transported in is critical in those first days because there is no power.

You wonder, night-vision goggles—what does that have to do with it, that the Florida Guard is 4,400 pairs of night-vision goggles short? It is because, in the aftermath of a hurricane, there is no electricity. Everything is dark at night. As troops are moving through all of that debris, they have to be able to see. That is what those night-vision goggles are for.

So this Senator will continue to sound the alarm. We will get the answers. And the good Lord willing, despite the warnings from La Nina in the Pacific that this is going to be a terribly active hurricane season in the Atlantic, the good Lord willing, we will not have that active hit on the mainland of the United States, but we better be prepared.

Mr. President, I yield the floor, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. NELSON of Florida. I ask unanimous consent that there now be a period of morning business with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

COVER THE UNINSURED WEEK 2007

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I rise in recognition of Cover the Uninsured Week, which is being held this year from April 23 to 29. As many of us know, this nonpartisan initiative was created to focus the Nation's attention on one of the most serious challenges facing our health care system—ensuring access to quality, affordable coverage.

Since the first annual Cover the Uninsured Week was observed 5 years ago, the health care crisis has, unfortunately, worsened. At last count, nearly 46 million Americans lacked coverage, including 400,000 in my home State of Nevada. More than 100,000 of these uninsured Nevadans are children. The context for these numbers, which are staggering in themselves, is even more troubling. For too many, premium costs are escalating faster than they can manage while benefits are deteriorating.

Being a hard-working American is also no longer a ticket to health coverage, as shown by the fact that 8 out of 10 uninsured people either work or are in working families. Even when they can find good health insurance, many families must shortchange other basic needs to afford out-of-pocket expenses or forgo necessary care altogether.

Every year we update these statistics and findings about the uninsured, but the same themes still ring true. The goal should be to ensure that all Americans can access and afford the health care they need, regardless of their income, age, employment, or health status. Sadly, we as a nation continue to fall short.

Cover the Uninsured Week is an opportunity to reflect on more than just this current state of affairs. It is also a time to call for a new direction on health care in America. Whether one is a Democrat or Republican, a Member of Congress or the State legislatures, we must all work together to heed the voices of the American people who are counting on us. So in honor of this year's Cover the Uninsured Week, let us all renew our commitment to improving our health care system. I look forward to a strong debate in the Senate on these vital issues, including the next step of updating the State Children's Health Insurance Program to better meet the needs of the Nation's children and families.

VIRGINIA TECH TRAGEDY

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I have one other short comment I would like to make, and then I will yield the floor or note the absence of a quorum.

The Governor of Virginia has asked our country to take a moment of silence to remember the tragedy this week at Virginia Tech at noon today. It is also a good time for us to think about our responsibilities in the U.S. Congress. There is hardly any way we can express our grief to these families and to that university for what they have been through this week. It is of such a scale that it is hard to imagine. We want them to know we have been thinking about them, and we would like to do whatever we can to help them and to help make sure nothing like this happens again.

So while Virginia Tech and the Commonwealth of Virginia are reviewing their responsibilities in light of the tragedy this week at Virginia Tech, we in the Federal Government ought to be reviewing our responsibilities too. Our focus should be on whether Federal laws or regulations unwisely restrict or limit how universities are able to deal with students who have mental health problems or who otherwise exhibit behavior about which parents, authorities, or other third parties should know.

Generally, and many Americans do not know this, under Federal law universities cannot tell parents about