

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
Washington, DC, May 5, 2010.

Hon. BARACK H. OBAMA,
The President, The White House,
Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT: "If President Obama is ever going to find his voice on Sudan, it had better be soon." These were the closing words of New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof two weeks ago. I could not agree more with his assessment of Sudan today. Time is running short. Lives hang in the balance. Real leadership is needed.

Having first travelled to Sudan in 1989, my interest and involvement in this country has spanned the better part of 20 years. I've been there five times, most recently in July 2004 when Senator Sam Brownback and I were the first congressional delegation to go to Darfur.

Tragically, Darfur is hardly an anomaly. We saw the same scorched earth tactics from Khartoum in the brutal 20-year civil war with the South where more than 2 million perished, most of whom were civilians. In September 2001, President Bush appointed former Senator John Danforth as special envoy and his leadership was in fact instrumental in securing, after two and a half years of negotiations, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), thereby bringing about an end to the war. I was at the 2005 signing of this historic accord in Kenya, as was then Secretary of State Colin Powell and Congressman Donald Payne, among others. Hopes were high for a new Sudan. Sadly, what remains of that peace is in jeopardy today. What remains of that hope is quickly fading.

I was part of a bipartisan group in Congress who urged you to appoint a special envoy shortly after you came into office, in the hope of elevating the issue of Sudan. But what was once a successful model for Sudan policy is not having the desired effect today. I am not alone in this belief.

Just last week, six respected NGOs ran compelling ads in the Washington Post and Politico calling for Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice to exercise "personal and sustained leadership on Sudan" in the face of a "stalemated policy" and waning U.S. credibility as a mediator.

In that same vein, today I join that growing chorus of voices in urging you to empower Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice to take control of the languishing Sudan policy. They should oversee quarterly deputies' meetings to ensure options for consequences are on the table.

There is a pressing and immediate need for renewed, principled leadership at the highest levels—leadership which, while recognizing the reality of the challenges facing Sudan, is clear-eyed about the history and the record of the internationally indicted war criminal at the helm in Khartoum. We must not forget who we are dealing with in Bashir and his National Congress Party (NCP). In addition to the massive human rights abuses perpetrated by the Sudanese government against its own people, Sudan remains on the State Department's list of state sponsors of terrorism. It is well known that the same people currently in control in Khartoum gave safe haven to Osama bin Laden in the early 1990s.

I believe that this administration's engagement with Sudan to date, under the leadership of General Graton, and with your apparent blessing, has failed to recognize the true nature of Bashir and the NCP. Any long-time Sudan follower will tell you that Bashir never keeps his promises.

The Washington Post editorial page echoed this sentiment this past weekend saying of Bashir: "He has frequently told Western governments what they wanted to hear, only to

reverse himself when their attention drifted or it was time to deliver. . . . the United States should refrain from prematurely recognizing Mr. Bashir's new claim to legitimacy. And it should be ready to respond when he breaks his word." Note that the word was "when" not "if" he breaks his word. While the hour is late, the administration can still chart a new course.

In addition to recommending that Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Rice take the helm in implementing your administration's Sudan policy, I propose the following policy recommendations:

Move forward with the administration's stated aim of strengthening the capacity of the security sector in the South. A good starting point would be to provide the air defense system that the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS) requested and President Bush approved in 2008. This defensive capability would help neutralize Khartoum's major tactical advantage and make peace and stability more likely following the referendum vote.

Do not recognize the outcome of the recent presidential elections. While the elections were a necessary part of the implementation of the CPA and an important step before the referendum, they were inherently flawed and Bashir is attempting to use them to lend an air of legitimacy to his genocidal rule.

Clearly and unequivocally state at the highest levels that the United States will honor the outcome of the referendum and will ensure its implementation.

Begin assisting the South in building support for the outcome of the referendum.

Appoint an ambassador or senior political appointee with the necessary experience in conflict and post-conflict settings to the U.S. consulate in Juba.

Prioritize the need for a cessation of attacks in Darfur, complete restoration of humanitarian aid including "non-essential services," unfettered access for aid organizations to all vulnerable populations and increased diplomatic attention to a comprehensive peace process including a viable plan for the safe return of millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

When the administration released its Sudan policy last fall, Secretary Clinton indicated that benchmarks would be applied to Sudan and that progress would be assessed "based on verifiable changes in conditions on the ground. Backsliding by any party will be met with credible pressure in the form of disincentives leveraged by our government and our international partners." But in the face of national elections that were neither free nor fair, in the face of continued violations of the U.N. arms embargo, in the face of Bashir's failure to cooperate in any way with the International Criminal Court, we've seen no "disincentives" or "sticks" applied. This is a worst case scenario and guaranteed, if history is to be our guide, to fail.

Many in the NGO community and in Congress cautiously expressed support for the new policy when it was released, at the same time stressing that a policy on paper is only as effective as its implementation on the ground. More than six months have passed since the release of the strategy and implementation has been insufficient at best and altogether absent at worst.

During the campaign for the presidency, you said, regarding Sudan, "Washington must respond to the ongoing genocide and the ongoing failure to implement the CPA with consistency and strong consequences." These words ring true still today. Accountability is imperative. But the burden for action, the weight of leadership, now rests with you and with this administration alone. With the referendum in the South quickly approaching, the stakes could not be higher.

The marginalized people of Sudan yearn for your administration to find its voice on Sudan—and to find it now.

Sincerely,

FRANK R. WOLF,
Member of Congress.

FEMA FUNDING SHORTFALLS

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

Mr. BRIGHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to refocus our attention on funding shortfalls in the Federal Emergency Management Agency. On March 24, the House—we in this location—passed nearly \$5.1 billion in emergency funding to help FEMA meet its obligations. This money is not allocated for future disasters or for bureaucratic costs. This is money that FEMA has already promised to local communities to put lives in order after federally declared disasters. Yet the Senate has thus far refused to act on this important piece of legislation. Our constituents can't wait any longer, nor should they have to wait.

The recent flooding in Tennessee, tornadoes in Alabama and Mississippi, and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico underscore the need to pass emergency funding for our disaster management agency. These events are startling in scope and certainly require assistance from the Federal Government. How can we expect FEMA to effectively respond to future disasters if they have yet to meet their obligations from over a year ago?

Mr. Speaker, nearly every day my office hears from local emergency managers, mayors, and county commissioners who express frustration over the fact they're still waiting for the money FEMA promised them. These are not people who expect a handout from the government. They're simply asking about the emergency assistance they were already granted months, and in some cases, over a year ago.

Henry County, which is in my congressional district in southeast Alabama, is a good example of how FEMA's budgetary issues have affected towns across our great Nation. Henry County started a \$153,000 project to replace a large drainage structure under County Road 2 that was damaged during last spring's floods. FEMA approved the project but has not been able to distribute money to the county. In addition to County Road 2, Henry County is still waiting for reimbursement for three other road projects that resulted from flooding in December of 2009.

As you can see, a small county is waiting on two different payments from FEMA—one from a disaster that occurred over a year ago. I am sure that the story is similar in other areas of our great country. What is more troubling is that we are still debating this issue while spring floods are out in full force and hurricane season is less

than a month away. We cannot forget about the promises we have already made as we brace for the next disaster to strike American soil.

Last year saw record disasters around the country. Floods soaked the Southeast, wildfires burned the West, and record snows blanketed the Midwest and Northeast.

□ 1630

It is understandable that FEMA used up all of its budgeted resources. Congress must now act to provide our communities with the funds they were promised.

Mr. Speaker, I am a committed fiscal conservative, and I believe we should closely watch every dollar we spend. I welcome a debate on how to reduce Federal spending and reform the way FEMA operates in order to make it more efficient; however, the time for that debate is not while our communities wait for necessary and guaranteed Federal funds.

In closing, let me once again urge the Senate to act on this very pressing issue. As the summer nears, we simply cannot afford to ignore this problem any longer. The Senate needs to do what the House has already done and pass, very quickly, emergency funding for FEMA, and pass it quickly so that they don't have to wait any longer.

WHAT GOT US INTO THIS ECONOMIC MESS?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. AKIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. AKIN. Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to be able to join you and my colleagues and others who are gathered here to talk about something that has been on our minds for some considerable time now—many months, even 1½ to 2 years—and that is the subject of the economy and jobs and what's really going on in America.

I'm a person who is of that baby boomer-type cycle—I'm 62—and there are many other people such as myself in America that have done a lot of work and tried to save our money and all of a sudden something seemed to go wrong in the economy. We lost a lot of money in 2008, and there is a real concern out there about jobs, the economy, and what's going on in the policies. And so I thought, in that we have 1 hour—we don't have to do everything in 1 minute or 5 minutes, but we have 1 full hour today—that I would open the subject. I will invite my other Republican colleagues to join me. You may see some coming in before long. And I want to talk about this whole situation, and because we have more time, I can go back just a little bit.

I would like to go back to how is it that we were kind of cruising along, things seemed to be going pretty well by about 2006 or so with the economy,

2007, and then all of a sudden, in 2008, we really seem to have come to "grief on a reef," so to speak. So what went on?

Well, let's go back to an interesting article in the New York Times, not exactly a conservative oracle. It was September 11—not in 2001, but September 11 in 2003—the New York Times reported this, that there is a new agency proposed to oversee Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. Well, why would there be a new agency to oversee Freddie and Fannie? Well, Freddie and Fannie were these quasi-governmental agencies, and their job was to help provide Americans with affordable loans so Americans could buy houses.

So here we have in this article, it says: The Bush administration today recommended the most significant regulatory overhaul in the housing finance industry since the savings and loan crisis a decade ago.

Oh, my goodness. So President Bush is saying we need to overhaul Freddie and Fannie. They were quasi-private, quasi-public. Why would he want to overhaul? Well, they just had misplaced a few hundreds of millions of dollars and gave people a lot of concern that maybe Freddie and Fannie were not in good shape economically. Well, then the question becomes, if they're not in good shape, what would that mean? Well, that would mean, guess what? The American taxpayer may be asked to bail out Freddie and Fannie. So the President is saying, Hey, I need some more authority to make sure that Freddie and Fannie don't do some dumb things that cost us a whole lot of money. So that's what the President is saying in this article. Again, this is 2003.

Following that, we read further in the article, and we have another interesting situation here where we have the gentleman now who is in charge of trying to fix these Wall Street institutions, that is, our current Congressman BARNEY FRANK. And this was his statement in the same article in 2003: These two entities, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, are not facing any kind of financial crisis. The more people exaggerate these problems, the more pressure there is on these companies, the less we will see in terms of affordable housing.

So this is something we have a clear party line difference. The President is saying Freddie and Fannie are not managing things properly, they were a risk to our economy, and you have a Democrat, who is now the ranking guy on this committee, that's saying, no, they're fine, Freddie and Fannie are just fine.

Well, of course, hindsight is always 20/20. It was obvious that what was said here by Congressman FRANK was completely wrong. Freddie and Fannie were in trouble. They did mismanage things, and they have now been taken over by the Federal Government, more or less. And guess who has to pick up the tab? You guessed it. The American taxpayer.

Now, how did this whole situation develop and what happened? Well, part of what happened was people came to the conclusion some number of years ago that it would be nice if people could get loans to buy houses. And what happens for the people who don't have very good credit ratings? How about the people who are a bad security risk? What are we going to do with them? Well, we're going to say, You can get a loan, too. That's what he's saying in terms of affordable housing.

So somehow, in the name of compassion, we came up with this idea that the government was going to allow people to get loans and not check whether the person had a capacity to repay the loans. And at the height of the big bubble that was going up on home prices, just about anybody, regardless of their credit rating or anything else, what job they had, could go in and get a loan to buy a great big house. And it worked pretty well for a couple of years. You could go in, buy a house, and then wait a couple of years. The price of the house would double, and you would sell it and buy some other big house.

And you could pyramid your money up even though you were borrowing money and you didn't have any way to pay it back, because these loans were so good you wouldn't have to pay anything for a number of years at all. You could get a loan that would say you don't have to pay anything for a couple of years at least. So you could buy something. It would appreciate. You could sell it, and then move on and do that. And so people were starting to do that with houses. The trouble was, of course, that the bubble burst, and all of the house of cards came tumbling down.

Now, we understand what caused the problem originally was the concept that the government requires the banks to make loans to people who can't afford to pay. That's a bad policy, because when people can't pay, somebody's going to have to pick up the tab. And guess what happened? You guessed it once again. It was Uncle Sam passes it on to the taxpayer to pick up the tab for this failed policy.

So you want to ask, How did we end up with this 10 percent unemployment? How did we end up with a very weak economy? How did we get into this trouble? The trouble was caused, about 90 percent, by the U.S. Government. It was caused by people who meet in this Chamber and various administrations.

At the end of the Clinton administration, the Clintons decided that what they were going to do was to increase the percentage of those bad loans that banks had to approve. What did the banks do with them? They passed them on to Freddie and Fannie. What happened to Freddie and Fannie? Well, Wall Street sliced and diced the loans up and sold them all over the world, and Freddie and Fannie then get into a big problem.

Now, what was the political organization that forced all of these loans to be