

with us as we make one step after another toward realizing the vision of restoring our area and rebuilding it to a new, better, higher place.

I look forward to this walk with this Congress over the next months and years. I hope that we will stay engaged as fully as we are in these early days throughout this lengthy process.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCRERY. Madam Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the Bush administration, the Department of Treasury and the IRS for administratively doing a great many things that they could do without legislation to make sure that the needs of the victims of Hurricane Katrina are met vis-a-vis the Tax Code. I want to thank the administration for their important work on this subject as well.

I also want to reiterate my thanks to the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. JEFFERSON) for working so closely with me and my staff to craft these very important individual tax provisions that, thanks to the leadership on both sides of the aisle, we have been able to bring to the floor in such a speedy manner.

Lastly, I would thank the chairman of the Committee on Ways and Means for lending the full support of his staff to this effort over the past couple of weeks. That will continue for some time to come.

I urge all Members to support this important legislation and get this needed relief to individuals who were affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. EMERSON). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. MCCRERY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3768, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds having voted in favor thereof) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCCRERY. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 3768, the bill just passed.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Louisiana?

There was no objection.

ESTABLISHING THE SELECT BIPARTISAN COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE THE PREPARATION FOR AND RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 439, I call up the resolution (H. Res. 437) to establish

the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, and ask for its immediate consideration.

The Clerk read the title of the resolution.

The text of the resolution is as follows:

H. RES. 437

Resolved,

SECTION 1. ESTABLISHMENT.

There is hereby established the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina (hereinafter referred to as the "select committee").

SEC. 2. COMPOSITION.

(a) The select committee shall be composed of 20 members appointed by the Speaker, of whom 9 shall be appointed after consultation with the Minority Leader. The Speaker shall designate one Member as chairman.

(b)(1) The Speaker and the Minority Leader shall be ex officio members of the select committee but shall have no vote in the select committee and may not be counted for purposes of determining a quorum.

(2) The Speaker and the Minority Leader each may designate a leadership staff member to assist in their capacity as ex officio members, with the same access to select committee meetings, hearings, briefings, and materials as employees of the select committee and subject to the same security clearance and confidentiality requirements as staff of the select committee.

SEC. 3. INVESTIGATION AND REPORT.

The select committee is authorized and directed to conduct a full and complete investigation and study and to report its findings to the House not later than February 15, 2006, regarding—

(1) the development, coordination, and execution by local, State, and Federal authorities of emergency response plans and other activities in preparation for Hurricane Katrina; and

(2) the local, State, and Federal government response to Hurricane Katrina.

SEC. 4. PROCEDURE.

Rule XI of the Rules of the House of Representatives, including the items referred to in paragraphs (1) and (2), shall apply to the select committee:

(1) Clause 2(j)(1) of rule XI (guaranteeing the minority additional witnesses).

(2) Clause 2(m)(3) of rule XI (providing for the authority to subpoena witnesses and documents).

SEC. 5. JOINT OPERATIONS.

The chairman of the select committee, in conducting the investigation and study described in section 3, shall consult with the chairman of a Senate committee conducting a parallel investigation and study regarding meeting jointly to receive testimony, the scheduling of hearings or issuance of subpoenas, and joint staff interviews of key witnesses.

SEC. 6. STAFF; FUNDING.

(a)(1) To the greatest extent practicable, the select committee shall utilize the services of staff of employing entities of the House. At the request of the chairman in consultation with the ranking minority member, staff of employing entities of the House or a joint committee may be detailed to the select committee to carry out this resolution and shall be deemed to be staff of the select committee.

(2) The chairman, upon consultation with the ranking minority member, may employ and fix the compensation of such staff as the chairman considers necessary to carry out this resolution.

(b) There shall be paid out of the applicable accounts of the House \$500,000 for the expenses of the select committee. Such payments shall be made on vouchers signed by the chairman and approved in the manner directed by the Committee on House Administration. Amounts made available under this subsection shall be expended in accordance with regulations prescribed by the Committee on House Administration.

SEC. 7. DISSOLUTION AND DISPOSITION OF RECORDS.

(a) The select committee shall cease to exist 30 days after filing the report required under section 3.

(b) Upon dissolution of the select committee, the records of the select committee shall become the records of any committee designated by the Speaker.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 439, the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) and the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on H. Res. 437.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, this debate that we are beginning here is about a very clear choice that is before us. Will we take the responsibility delegated to us as Members of the People's House by the framers of our Constitution to ask the hard questions, admit our mistakes and improve our Nation's government for the benefit of all? Or will we rely on proxies to do our work for us because we have judged ourselves incapable of carrying out our constitutional duty to ensure that we are providing for the general welfare, which is what the preamble of the Constitution clearly states we have a responsibility to do.

I, for one, believe as James Madison, the father of our Constitution, did, that the Constitution vests this responsibility with us. I am ready to accept the challenge as a Member of the House of Representatives. I believe that we have already started this work.

Last night, in the Committee on Rules, many of my Democratic colleagues asked excellent questions. The gentlewoman from New York (Ms. SLAUGHTER), my friend from Rochester, asked very thoughtful and important questions that need to be raised. I noted that the gentlewoman from Sacramento, California (Ms. MATSUI) similarly asked some very, very good questions that should be posed to those dealing with the preparation for and the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Just yesterday the governor of my State, Pete Wilson, and I should say the former governor of my State, Pete Wilson, testified. I do know very well that we have a new governor. His name

is Arnold Schwarzenegger, I should say for the RECORD. But Pete Wilson testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs. It was a hearing that they held on recovering from Hurricane Katrina, and he did this to share his experience and very valuable lessons that he learned from dealing with many, many very, very difficult challenges, disasters that we faced in California, earthquakes, fire, mudslides, the devastation that we faced.

I will tell Members that Pete Wilson handled every single one of those challenges in his 8 years as governor extraordinarily well, and we learned tremendously from the tragedies that we faced in those instances.

□ 1315

As he said, obviously while nowhere near the scale of Hurricane Katrina, and we all know that Hurricane Katrina has been described as the worst natural disaster to ever hit our country, some of the things that were faced in California, there were terrible California floods in January of 1997 that resulted in eight deaths, the evacuation of 120,000 people, relocation of 55,000 people to 107 shelters, damage or destruction of 30,000 residences and 2,000 businesses, and total damage estimates at about \$2 billion. That in 1997.

I talked earlier today, during the rule considering the establishment of this committee, about the Northridge earthquake in 1994, and it resulted in 51 deaths and injured over 9,000 people, left 22,000 people homeless.

The interesting thing, as we look at these figures, is we all know that they pale in comparison to the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina. But, Madam Speaker, I will tell the Members that these were learning experiences for us. One of the things that was most impressive to me and one of the things that we have already found here to be very beneficial was the fact that the private sector has stepped forward and is in many ways doing things the government cannot do. And I think it is often joked about the fact that the private sector is there, ready to meet a need, a need that the government in no way could meet.

We know that for an emergency response like that we faced, clearly the government had to step in. When I say government, I am talking about the local government, the State government, and the Federal Government as well. The Federal Government, obviously, is not the first. It is really the last step. We know that State and local governments have the responsibility to make those recommendations to the Federal Government and then bring them in. We also know that at virtually all these levels of government, we have heard the leadership, from President Bush when it comes to the Federal Government, to Governor Blanco in Louisiana, state that things were not handled as well as they could have been; and both President Bush

and Governor Blanco, Republican and Democrat, have taken responsibility for dealing with this situation.

I mentioned the fact that we learned things, and I mentioned the private sector. And one example that I like to point to, and I have got this right here, is in the 1994 Northridge earthquake, we had the Santa Monica Freeway collapse over La Cienega Boulevard. The Santa Monica Freeway is the most traversed interstate in the country. A quarter of a million vehicles a day go on the Santa Monica Freeway right over the La Cienega off-ramp. And the earthquake took place in January of 1994, and I happened to be by there, and one of the police officers let me go up, and I actually took a chunk of the Santa Monica Freeway. This has been sitting in my living room out in California for a long period of time. Most people think it is a piece of the Berlin Wall, but it is actually from the Santa Monica Freeway. We can see the rebars here, and this is obviously the freeway itself. And when it collapsed, we saw Southern California, clearly the most populous spot in the Nation, come to a standstill because of the importance of Interstate 10, the Santa Monica Freeway there.

Some projected that it would take as much as a year or 2 years to repair this freeway that had collapsed over La Cienega Boulevard. And Governor Wilson stepped up to the plate and did everything that he could to provide incentives to ensure that it got completed. He wrote a piece on this the day before yesterday in *The Wall Street Journal* in which he referred to the fact that people said it would take a long period of time.

They looked and established this contract with the Myers Company and they were told that they would have a \$200,000 fine for every day beyond what they had contracted for if they did not complete it, but they got a \$200,000 bonus, Madam Speaker, for every day that they got this completed earlier than had been projected.

As I said, some predicted it would take a year or 2 years to complete this. Madam Speaker, in 66 days the Santa Monica Freeway reopened, working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

This is the kind of incentive that we need to put in place to ensure that they deal with this circumstance. And, ironically, Interstate 10 is the exact same route that is going into New Orleans that collapsed following Hurricane Katrina and the breaking of the levees.

So I think that we have the ability to respond, to deal with this, and the United States Congress is in a position to make sure that we look at encouraging the most creative ways to address this challenge, look in a bipartisan way at these problems.

And we have set guidelines. We have got deadlines. But, obviously, if it is necessary, those can be moved if it is essential. But we have a desire to ensure that, as an institution, we come together as the elected representatives

of the American people to do our job. And I am convinced that we are going to have the ability to do that, and we look forward to seeing Members of both political parties join this very important effort, and I am convinced that they will be able to look at all levels of government and the private sector and get to the bottom of that.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, high talk from the majority follows the abysmally low performance of the Federal organizations that they oversee and that our people trusted to protect them in their hour of need. And today we are told it is our constitutional duty to find out why the government was so unable to protect life here at home during and after Hurricane Katrina.

I would like to remind our friends on the other side that one of our constitutional duties as representatives of the will of the people is actually to represent the will of the people of the United States. So let the record show that as of today, according to the Republican leadership, the will of the American people no longer matters.

The fact that 76 percent of the citizens of our Nation want an independent commission to investigate the Katrina disaster does not mean a thing. The fact that over 60 percent of Republicans want an independent commission does not register with them either. Apparently, the people of the United States are to be patted on the head and told, Do not worry. We will find out what happened here.

The fact that thousands of men, women, and children are dead; the fact that hundreds of thousands more have become evacuees in the richest country in the world shows that we do not have everything under control. The fact that we cut corners and underfunded those responsible for maintaining the levees that protected New Orleans by tens of millions of dollars only so that later thousands of lives would be needlessly lost, tens of billions of dollars would have to be spent cleaning up the mess left behind shows that we do not have anything under control. That is really a case of being penny wise and pound foolish.

And now, to show how seriously it takes its constitutional responsibility to get the government back on track, to show that it is not interested solely in rhetoric but also in results, the majority has seen fit to create a partisan political body, which we all know will care more about the political survival of the leadership than the actual survival of the people.

How do we know this? Because the committee put forth by the majority is intentionally designed to be partisan. It has a Republican majority. It includes subpoena power controlled by the majority. And the scope of the investigation will be the whim of the

leadership of the majority. The idea of having a truly bipartisan commission to investigate the tragedy was never seriously entertained. If it was, joint subpoena power would exist in this bill, as would joint control of the committee's operation, scope, and direction.

Instead of this, platitudes promising cooperation and shared power have filled this hall, leaving no room for a resolution calling for either a truly bipartisan committee or, what would be infinitely better, the creation of an independent commission which will actually eliminate politics from what will otherwise be an incredibly politicized investigation.

All of this is obvious to nearly every observer, and yet the leadership tells the Democrats if we are objecting to their Republican-first agenda, we, the Members of the minority, are being partisan. Apparently, in the wake of disaster comes hypocrisy.

Along with its assurances of a fair and honest investigation of the failures of the Federal response to Katrina, assurances which are the product of wishful thinking as opposed to a sincere review of recent history, the majority puts forth empty arguments in favor of this bill.

We created the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA, so only we can investigate it, they argue. That means that this leadership also helped to create the systemic problems which caused DHS and FEMA to fail. What exactly is their incentive to publicize their lack of vision and errors in judgment?

As the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) said earlier today, it would be like nominating Enron to investigate stock fraud because they helped to perfect it, and it would not make much sense.

But the gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) told us this morning that none of this matters. It would be absurd, he says, to think that any Member of this body would not want to get to the bottom of the failures. Madam Speaker, more absurd things happen in this House all the time. For example, some might say that appointing a man with absolutely no experience in emergency management to head the Federal Emergency Management Association was absurd, and yet nobody challenged that appointment until it was far too late.

Madam Speaker, I do not mean to say that the chairman and his colleagues do not care about improving our national preparedness for a future emergency, because I know that they do; but the fact that political pressures have in the past and will again in the future distort and in some cases destroy investigations of government failings when the investigations are carried out by us, this is so obvious that it should be beyond question.

The only real question left before us today is why does the majority find an independent commission to investigate the tragedy so objectionable? Would

any of them like to claim here that the 9/11 Commission was a mistake? They all voted for it. Should we reject the findings of that body? Should we here and now state that because it was not run by those managing the government on September 11, 2001, for that reason, what it discovered was illegitimate? Is there anyone here who would like to state for the record that the creation of the 9/11 Commission was an abdication and denial of our constitutional responsibility as Members of the House of Representatives?

Not one Member of this body would make such a claim, and yet the majority makes this claim about the creation of a similar body to investigate what happened on the gulf coast.

There is only one explanation for it. Dare I say this absurd stance is control. The majority wants to keep the investigation under its control so it can make sure that the answers that the committee produces toe the party line. Thinking about crass political considerations when Americans are dying and are homeless, that, and only that, is an abdication of our constitutional responsibilities as Members of this Congress.

Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Madam Speaker, before I yield time to my friend from Pasco, I would just like to say over the last 24 hours I have been hearing about this ABC/Washington Post poll to which my friend from Rochester has regularly referred, and I have actually taken the opportunity to look closely at the poll itself.

We all know that when one looks at a public opinion poll, it depends on how the question is asked. We continue to hear that 76 percent of the American people support an independent commission and they do not want Congress to take this action. Actually, I looked at the poll itself, and I would like to enlighten my friend from Rochester, if I might. Question No. 19 says: "The Republican leaders of Congress have called for a full-scale congressional investigation of the government's hurricane preparedness and response effort. Apart from this investigation, would you support or oppose an investigation by an independent commission like the one that investigated the 9/11 attacks?" Seventy-six percent support that. Well, of course. Who would not support that? Who would not be supportive of that notion? But we continue that somehow the American people oppose having Congress do its job and they only want this independent commission of unelected people to do their job.

Then one has to look at Question No. 18 just before that. And I hesitate to raise this, but the fact that this public opinion poll has been continually utilized as the bible when it comes to consideration of our legislative proposal here, Question No. 18 says: "Do you think Democrats who criticize the way

the Bush administration has handled the hurricane response mainly want to find out what went wrong or mainly want to use the issue for political advantage?" And, Madam Speaker, 60 percent said that Democrats want to use this issue for political advantage rather than trying to get at what went wrong.

I would have never brought this up, Madam Speaker, had I not heard that 76 percent of the American people are opposed to having Congress do its job and instead want an independent commission.

Madam Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the very distinguished gentleman from Pasco, Washington (Mr. HASTINGS), subcommittee chairman from the Committee on Rules and the chairman of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct.

□ 1330

Mr. HASTINGS of Washington. Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this time.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of House Resolution 437 to establish a select bipartisan committee to investigate the preparation for and the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Madam Speaker, Congress has an important constitutional role to play in providing oversight to the executive branch and Federal agencies. But more importantly, Congress has a responsibility to the people we represent to investigate the preparation and response efforts to Hurricane Katrina and make recommendations on how we can better prepare and respond to disasters in the future.

Madam Speaker, some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle oppose the idea of a bipartisan congressional committee held accountable to the people and by the people who elect us. But, Madam Speaker, a bipartisan investigative committee held directly accountable by the people is exactly what is needed.

Because we never know when or where the next disaster will strike, it is vital that Congress move swiftly to investigate how local, State, and Federal governments, along with the private relief agencies, can better communicate with one another and coordinate the relief efforts. America must be better prepared to handle disasters in the future.

Madam Speaker, I am saddened that hours after Hurricane Katrina rescue and recovery efforts began, lawmakers were publicly pointing fingers rather than focusing on how to help the victims. Clearly, clearly in hindsight there are things that could have been done better. Only now that victims have been rescued and their immediate basic needs are being met is it appropriate that an investigation of what happened begin.

There is no question that Hurricane Katrina caused great devastation, the magnitude of which becomes more evident every day. But, Madam Speaker,

one of America's greatest strengths is our long-standing tradition of pulling together in times of need.

I am proud that in my home State of Washington, which is located 2,500 miles from Louisiana and the gulf coast, families are reaching out to help those affected. Communities are collecting food, clothing, and cash donations. For example, Washington apple growers have contributed truckloads of world-class apples to people living in Mississippi and the other hard-hit areas and throughout America. Families are opening up their homes, businesses are employing dislocated workers, citizens are traveling to the gulf coast region to help with recovery and rebuilding efforts, and schools are teaching children who have been displaced from their schools, homes, and friends.

America has been challenged by natural disasters in the past, and we will no doubt be challenged by disasters in the future. Only by Republicans and Democrats working together in a bipartisan fashion will the best interests of our Nation prevail.

Madam Speaker, there is much to be learned from this disaster. We must examine what worked, what did not, and what we need to do to be better prepared. The primary focus of this bipartisan investigative committee should be that we should begin to prepare for the disasters ahead and not to assign blame. I, therefore, urge my colleagues to support House Resolution 437.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Mississippi (Mr. TAYLOR), a man who knows of what he speaks.

Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I recently heard the gentleman who represents Hollywood speaking about how it is somehow fair that the only Member of this body that I know of who was there on Ground Zero, who rode with the National Guard to distribute food because FEMA so thoroughly screwed up, who realizes that if it were not for the United States military doing FEMA's job for them, people would have starved to death, people would have died of dehydration, hospitals would not have gotten needed medical supplies, that I will not be allowed to subpoena witnesses.

So as a Member of this body who was elected by as good a margin as anyone else here, I do object that I could not ask for a witness, that I could not subpoena a witness to deliver the message that needs to be delivered about the lessons learned in Mississippi. We do not need to make the same mistakes when the next hurricane hits.

The bottom line is FEMA did make horrible mistakes that came very close to costing people their lives. FEMA could have avoided millions of dollars in unnecessary aerial replenishment of people that we could get trucks to, because they insisted on one point of delivery in a county where very few people still had cars that were running and those that had cars that ran could not get gasoline.

FEMA could have sent thousands of people on their way to their families in other parts of the State, but did not bring gasoline in for them. There are a number of mistakes that we never need to make again as a Nation. And I would hope that I would have the opportunity to subpoena some of the people that need to speak on this. It does not need to be Bush-bashing; it does not need to be anybody-bashing. It needs to be an honest account of what happened.

But how can we do that when one of the people that was at Ground Zero cannot ask questions of witnesses, cannot subpoena witnesses? Is that really fair? Does that really get to the solution of the problem? I do not think so. I think our Nation works best when we work together, and a 9/11-type commission composed of whoever needs to be subpoenaed is what we need to do.

At the end of the day, I am going to vote for a commission no matter how bad, because something is better than nothing; but the American people deserve for us to do it right.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Let me just respond to a couple of points. First of all, under consideration of the establishment of this select committee, we will be operating under the standard rules of the House. The standard rules of the House allow not individuals, but allow a committee to come together and determine who is subpoenaed. And I will tell my colleagues that I know with absolute certainty that the people who are providing the leadership of this committee will clearly want to be in consultation with the Democrats, with members of the minority to ensure that any witness who could help get to the bottom of this problem, to the root of this problem is called before the committee.

And I will tell my colleagues why. I do not represent Hollywood, California, by the way, I should say for the record; I represent areas around Hollywood in suburban Los Angeles, an area that has been impacted by a wide range of disasters.

I think it is absolutely reprehensible to believe that any Member of this House, Democrat or Republican, would want to do anything that would jeopardize the ability to find out exactly what happened leading up to Hurricane Katrina and exactly what happened in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. So I can assure my colleagues that I am convinced that everyone is determined to do that.

I should say that, as I sat down, one of my staff members reminded me that I mentioned this poll from The Washington Post and ABC that is the model, I guess, that we are following for the establishment of this committee; and even though it said that 60 percent of the American people believe that the Democrats would use this issue for political advantage rather than trying to get to the root of this problem, I do not believe it for one minute. I hesitate to say that the American people are

wrong, but I will tell my colleagues this: I do not believe that the American people are right when they claim, to a number of 60 percent, that Democrats do not want to get to the root of this problem, which is what they have said in this much-hailed ABC News-Washington Post poll.

Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DREIER. I yield to the gentleman from Mississippi.

Mr. TAYLOR of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, given the gentleman's desire to see that we get to the bottom of this, given that the gentleman is elected by a majority of the people from California, and given that I am elected by a majority of people in the most affected area, does the gentleman not think it would be fair that I would have the same right, as someone from the affected area, to subpoena witnesses as the gentleman from the west coast of this country would have?

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, reclaiming my time, I will say that that is exactly what exists. The rules of the House that apply for the subpoena process for other committees in the House will apply similarly for this new select committee that is charged with dealing with this circumstance.

Madam Speaker, I am happy to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Lafayette, Louisiana (Mr. BOUSTANY), another individual who was victimized by Hurricane Katrina.

Mr. BOUSTANY. Madam Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding me this time.

Madam Speaker, I rise in strong support of the resolution to create a bipartisan, bicameral congressional committee to investigate the local, State, and Federal response and preparation to Hurricane Katrina. As a member of the Louisiana delegation, I am not interested in polls. I want prudent deliberation, and I want substantive action.

Congress has the obligation and duty to conduct a thorough investigation to provide the American people with answers. The investigation must be expeditious and thorough, without interfering with the recovery efforts. The idea of an independent commission is not the best option.

It is the responsibility of Congress to look at the Federal agencies this body created to respond to disasters. It is the responsibility of Congress to identify the deficiencies and correct them.

As a result of the 9/11 Commission, Congress responded with legislation based on their recommendations. Now is the time for Congress to provide scrutiny on how the law was implemented.

A separate so-called independent commission would simply be a redundant step. The American people demand prompt answers and solid solutions to the bureaucratic and legal hurdles that were impediments to the response to Hurricane Katrina. I personally experienced these.

As a member of the Louisiana delegation, I also believe that the Members

from impacted regions must have a participating voice in the investigation to provide firsthand knowledge of frustrations and impediments that our offices confronted. It is urgent that deficiencies in command, control, communication, and response be corrected. A bipartisan, bicameral congressional committee for oversight and investigation is the first step.

I urge my colleagues to support this resolution so that Congress can exercise its duty and obligation to the American people.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ).

(Mr. MENENDEZ asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MENENDEZ. Madam Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to this partisan resolution that spits in the face of the American people's call for a robust inquiry that is independent of politics.

Yesterday's report by the 9/11 Commission provides data to back up what every American learned by watching the government's dismal response to Hurricane Katrina: that 4 years after 9/11, our Nation is still not prepared to respond to a major crisis, in this case a disaster that had been predicted, gameplayed in an exercise run by FEMA, and which we knew about 24 hours in advance.

As the relief and recovery process continues and the rebuilding process begins, the American public must have complete confidence that their government is up to the task. Unfortunately, the Republicans have chosen to play politics and flaunt the will of the American people by instead proposing a select committee that is not bipartisan, that will not have an equal number of Democrats and Republicans, and will not have bipartisan subpoena power.

Let us be honest. How can the American people trust this Congress to not only investigate this administration but also Congress itself? Because the actions of the Congress are definitely one of the things that needs to be investigated. The Republican Congress was responsible for cutting the budget of FEMA and the funding for the levees around New Orleans. An outside evaluation of Congress's actions is needed, not an internal review.

Can the American public all of a sudden expect the Congress to investigate this administration after 4 years of basically no congressional oversight? Yes, the rules of the House have been used to stifle honest, robust inquiry. This is the Republican Congress that has not conducted true oversight hearings into the decision to go to war in Iraq, the lack of a success strategy in Iraq, the outing of a CIA operative, among many others.

So we can stick our heads in the sand and pretend the government has handled the recovery well and basically do nothing, or we can appoint a truly

independent commission to help avoid these mistakes in the future. The vast majority of the American public supports the establishment of an independent, bipartisan commission so that the inquiry focuses on the facts instead of getting bogged down in partisan politics.

That is why the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS) and I introduced legislation to establish an independent, bipartisan commission modeled after the successful 9/11 Commission to investigate the government's response to Hurricane Katrina and make recommendations for reforming the Nation's disaster response system.

The commission would be charged with evaluating what the government could have done to avoid the mistakes that exacerbated the crisis faced by hundreds of thousands of Americans along the gulf coast and caused untold loss of life. I mean, how is it possible, for example, that 4 years after September 11, our local first responders still do not have interoperable communications systems that can talk with each other as they carry out their life-saving work? That is why the commission would have the full authority to question the government officials, examine government documents, and hold public hearings.

Finally, I want to remind my colleagues that despite overwhelming public support, it took months to overcome White House opposition and establish a 9/11 Commission, basically only getting the President and the Republican Congress to that point by dragging them along, kicking and screaming. We have heard all the same lame excuses we heard today as we did when we were trying to establish the 9/11 Commission.

Today, there is unanimous agreement that the commission had the courage to ask the tough questions that Congress did not and that developed reforms that, if implemented, would make our Nation safer. That is what we need to do. Let us create an independent commission. Let us not deceive the American people through this committee that will do absolutely nothing to get to the bottom of the problem.

□ 1345

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I have listened to these terms: "sticking our head in the sand"; "ignoring the problem." I have no idea what anyone is talking about when they say things like that. It is absolutely absurd to believe that any Member of this institution does not want to do everything possible to ensure that we find out what happened leading up to Hurricane Katrina and what has happened since Hurricane Katrina has hit.

Because we, at this moment, live with the threat of Hurricane Ophelia off the Carolinas, so we are moving as expeditiously as possible to get this bipartisan committee put together, where the committee itself will deter-

mine how someone is subpoenaed, just as is the case with every committee.

I hope very much that the gentleman from Mississippi is appointed to serve as a member of this select committee. He obviously has strong feelings. He has made it very clear that, as someone who was victimized by Hurricane Katrina, he should in fact be able to subpoena; and I can assure him, under the standing rules of the House, as a member of the committee, if the minority leader chooses to appoint him to that committee, he will be able to participate in determining who testifies before that committee.

So we are in this together, Madam Speaker, whether Members like it or not.

Again, I do not believe that Washington Post poll that the Democrats want to use this for political gain. I believe the Democrats, along with Republicans, want to find out exactly what has created this challenge at all levels of government and even in the private sector, with which we are contending at this point.

Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the gentlemen from Florida (Mr. SHAW).

Mr. SHAW. Madam Speaker, reading the resolution, it simply says that there is hereby established a select bipartisan committee to investigate the preparation for and the response to Hurricane Katrina.

There is so much we can learn, so many missteps, but so many things that were done right. And I think it is time for us to come together.

I have served in this body now 25 years; and in that 25 years, a little over half of it was under a Democrat House and Democrat leadership, Tip O'Neill, Jim Wright, three Speakers in all on the Democrat side. And I can tell you, the ratio of this committee, we would have just rejoiced in getting 9 out of the 20 spots during that period of time. I think it is tremendously fair, and I think the Speaker has been very fair in what he has talked about.

Now anyone in this House that would suggest that any Member of this House or any Member of either party would whitewash or push something under the rug that could mean the life and death of the American people or the destruction of property because it is politically expedient, I just cannot imagine that. I cannot imagine that possibly happening.

There is going to be good people appointed to this committee, and they are going to be people that really care. And I think after they look at it and after this report comes out, the American people will have faith once again in their Government.

You know, criticism has always been made suggesting that Congress cannot have oversight over the laws that we pass ourselves. What do we do every day? We do that in committees every day. We have hearings. I do not care whether it is a Ways and Means Committee, the Appropriations Committee,

Transportation Committee, whatever committee we are talking about, we are constantly examining and reexamining the laws that we have passed and the laws that have been passed by previous Congresses. That is our job. That is what we are supposed to do. And for us to suggest or for me to suggest that we need to push this off to some independent body and not do it ourselves does not make a whole lot of sense.

And, by the way, one of the recommendations that came out of the independent body from 9/11 was to put FEMA under Homeland Security. Now everybody is clamoring, saying that was a mistake. I think it was a mistake, and I think we need to very closely examine what we are doing.

We need to do something else, too. We have appropriated an awful lot of money to be spent down in that area, and we are going to appropriate a lot more. I think the President estimated that it could be \$200 billion. And we have to watch and see how that money is being spent.

We saw FEMA make some big mistakes in the past down in Miami/Dade County, where they were paying for funerals last year where there was not a hurricane. They were paying for funerals where there was not even a corpse. They were paying for all kinds of things, and that area should have been actually taken out of the disaster relief area when it was passed.

So this the committee has a big, big job; and it should be done in the Congress. I do not want an oversight committee, independent of the Congress, not elected people, that are overseeing it and seeing how this money is being spent, \$200 billion of American taxpayers' money.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. HOYER).

Mr. HOYER. Madam Speaker, Democrats want to make sure that we help the victims of Katrina first; secondly, we want to make sure that there is oversight on the money that we are spending, a lot of money; and, thirdly, we want to have an oversight, meaningful, in depth, honest, searching, courageous as to why the Federal Government was so inept in its response and so late.

The good news is that the men and the women of the National Guard, the Coast Guard and other elements of the Federal Government are now acting so courageously and effectively. That is what we want, and that is why we oppose this bill which would create a partisan congressional committee to investigate the inept Federal response to Katrina. Because we believe it is imperative to establish an independent commission modeled on the highly regarded 9/11 Commission.

I will ask my friend who chairs the Rules Committee, who used to come to this floor on a regular basis and say, when Democrats were in the majority, why will you not allow us to consider an alternative? Are you afraid that the

majority of this House will say, yes, a commission is the right way to go? Are you afraid that you cannot keep your Members in line? Are you afraid and therefore do not give us an amendment, do not give us a motion to recommit with instructions?

What is the fear? It is the fact that you are so focused on not having meaningful oversight, of keeping it in-house, of not having independence, that you do not allow us and the American public's representatives to have that alternative considered on the floor.

Ladies and gentlemen, oppose this resolution and continue to demand an independent commission, just as the American people want. We did it with 9/11. We can do it with Katrina. We can do the work that the people expect us to do. Vote against this resolution.

Madam Speaker, let no one be mistaken about why Democrats oppose this legislation.

We oppose this bill—which would create a partisan congressional committee to investigate the inept Federal response to Hurricane Katrina—because we believe it is imperative to establish an independent commission modeled on the highly regarded 9/11 Commission.

We are not alone.

In fact, a Washington Post-ABC news poll revealed this week that 76 percent of Americans support an independent commission.

Some Republicans support such a commission, as well.

Just this week, the Republican Senator VITTER of Louisiana—whose constituents were directly affected by this devastating hurricane—expressed his support for a commission.

Yet, Madam Speaker, this Republican majority today has denied Democrats the opportunity to even consider the bill offered by Mr. HASTINGS, which would create such an independent commission to investigate the local, State and Federal response.

Let's be clear: There is not bipartisanship coming from the other side of the aisle regarding the creation of real oversight.

The Speaker and Senate majority leader announced this proposal without even consulting Democrats.

The reality is, if this Republican majority were charged with investigating the actions of a Democratic administration, there is no doubt in my mind that its oversight would be real and vigorous.

But as the columnist David Broder pointed out recently: "Majority Republicans see themselves first and foremost as members of the Bush team—and do not want to make trouble by asking hard questions."

This majority has refused to conduct oversight over this administration during the last 4 years.

Why should we believe that it is prepared to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities now? We have no basis for believing that. And, that is why an independent commission is needed.

I urge my colleagues to vote against this bill.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I am pleased to yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. DOGGETT).

Mr. DOGGETT. Madam Speaker, calling this partisan Republican scheme

"bipartisan" reminds me of those tin-horn dictators who attempt to mask their authoritarian regimes by calling their countries "democratic."

We need an independent citizens commission like the 9/11 Commission to explore the failures of every level and every branch of Government. The administration and its House Republican cohorts oppose this independent citizens commission just as they opposed the 9/11 Commission and just as the administration erected roadblocks to that Commission's work at every turn.

I say to them: Save the stonewall to rebuild the levees. With thousands stranded, this administration would not lead, and now it wants its buddies in the Congress to lead the cover-up.

As with the formation of the 9/11 Commission, if enough Americans get informed and demand a genuine, independent investigation, we can end this Republican charade.

Our safety demands real accountability. With such incompetence and indifference, what reason is there to believe that what we have witnessed might not happen in our own backyard, that the fate of those we saw in New Orleans would not be the fate of other people, be they poor folks in the Rio Grande Valley from hurricane, flooding or any other disaster, be it human-caused or natural or both? Without knowing objectively what, why, and how the rescue mission failed, there is no way to ensure that the horror that we have seen would not be repeated in our own communities.

There is nothing to prevent these folks from having all of the congressional investigations, all of the budget hearings that they want to have. What we are asking for today is that you not have a sham "bipartisan" commission. You bring in the citizens from around the country and have the kind of independent inquiry that led to a best-selling book, by the 9/11 Commission.

We owe it to the dead, to the displaced, to all who could become the next victims of a catastrophe to support a true and genuine, independent inquiry.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Madam Speaker, I yield 2½ minutes to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PASCARELL), a member of the Homeland Security Committee and ranking member of the First Responder's Committee.

Mr. PASCARELL. Madam Speaker, and so it continues. This is a partisan, counterfeit commission if I have ever seen one proposed today, and I have two simple questions: Will the administration escape accountability again? And the second question is this: Will the administration get away with another failure?

Please note the word "escape". In fact, if you look in the Bible, the Old Testament, Leviticus, chapter 16, verse 8, we find the origin, the etymology of the word scapegoat, the goat that departs.

In scripture, you had two goats. One was sacrificed for our sins; the other escaped, was let go. That is from the English word scapen, the Old English, a form of escape.

So, Brownie, he was sacrificed, and yesterday all of his minions resigned, all of these people that were hired. We better have an objective review of what happened. We better have an objective view, or else we are never going to get to the truth.

This is the most redactive, the most secretive administration in the history of the United States. It has nothing to do with political partisanship either. None whatsoever.

We have seen it repeatedly. This is the administration that can show negligence, ineptitude, and dangerous arrogance without ever enduring the burden of even limited liability. Policy disasters abound, yet culpability is never encountered.

□ 1400

No one who has followed the workings of this body believes that a commission made up of apologists will ever hold the administration accountable for anything.

This is far too important for business as usual. I implore my colleagues to vote against the bill, to demand the creation of a truly independent commission. It worked 4 years ago. It will work now.

I do not think there is anything wrong with this. And when you talk about the ability to subpoena, the majority will have the right to oversee whether we can subpoena particular people. This is phony. All we ask for is to let us come together. We agree we need to send help down there. We are doing our best, both sides of the aisle.

Let us have an independent review of what has happened and what is going on. We are talking about people's lives here.

Mr. DREIER. Madam Speaker, coming together is what this is all about. This is a bipartisan committee that has been proposed by the Speaker, and we look forward to seeing those minority Members who are going to be part of this process.

Madam Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentleman from Miami, Florida (Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART), the very distinguished chairman of our Subcommittee on Budget and Process Reform.

Mr. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Madam Speaker, it is a curiosity to see how our friends on the other side of the aisle have now discovered, it seems like they discovered the Mediterranean today when they say that independent commissions in their view, so-called independent commissions, are not political.

It is not by chance, Mr. Speaker, that the first article of the United States Constitution created the Congress, article I created the Congress. Among the duties of the Congress, constitutional duties of the Congress, is the responsibility of oversight.

When a so-called independent commission is created, we have to ask ourselves, who funds the independent commission? Congress, created by the first article of the Constitution with the duty of oversight.

Who appoints, Mr. Speaker, the so-called independent commissions? Congress or if Congress authorizes the President, the President authorizes. The decision is ours. Ours is the duty under the Constitution to investigate. Ours is the duty to carry forthwith oversight.

What we are doing today is trying to do our duty in creating a bipartisan committee of this House with the solemn obligation of investigating this tragedy, this ongoing tragedy that is going on now in the gulf States, and to do so as soon as possible.

I am proud of the fact that the House is bringing forth this measure today, proud to support it; and I ask all of my colleagues to do so as well.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 4 minutes to the gentleman from California (Mr. WAXMAN).

Mr. WAXMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to address the House on this subject that is before us today. I have served in the Congress for 30 years, the first 19 in the majority, the last 11 in the minority, so I have seen life from both sides. And let me tell you, today is one of the low moments.

We have just experienced a national tragedy that has caused immeasurable pain to countless Americans, and yet here in the House of Representatives, nothing seems to have changed. The House is not rising above raw partisanship even in a time of national tragedy.

Republicans are saying, well, we should just trust them because they have created something they are calling bipartisan. Well, the right way to create something that is bipartisan is for the two parties to talk. Instead, the Republicans met among themselves without talking to the Democrats and have proposed this select committee on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

The majority cannot define bipartisanship for the minority. The majority has to make the real effort and be willing to do some work, maybe hard work with the minority to achieve bipartisanship.

Well, why are we suspicious? They did not talk to us. The committees in the House and the Senate that have oversight jurisdiction were starting to hold hearings and suddenly the Republican leadership said, well, we are going to have a House-Senate committee. And suddenly it is not a House-Senate committee; it is a select committee.

Well, look at the record how Republicans have done oversight. Have we really looked at how the White House used the intelligence, as faulty as it was, that was the basis for going to war in Iraq? No, we have not had hearings on that. We have not looked at that.

Has the House looked at the question of the outing of a CIA agent by people

in the White House in order to punish her husband who was critical of the Iraq war? No, no hearings on that.

The actuary working for this administration withheld from Congress on the costs of the Medicare prescription drug bill. Should we not try to find out what happened? Both Republicans and Democrats were denied the facts before we voted on the bill. No, nothing on that.

We had more hearings when the Republicans were in charge and there was a Democratic administration on whether President Clinton misused his Christmas card list for political purposes. That meant 7 or 8 days of hearings. But we cannot get hearings on these important subjects. And now we are told there is a bipartisan committee, a select committee, that is going to look into this matter.

Well, if you really wanted bipartisanship, I say to my Republican friends who run the House, you need to at least talk to the Democrats and make an effort. But when you do not make an effort and you have a record of abusing the power that you have in running this institution and ignoring the oversight responsibilities on really important matters in order to protect a Republican administration from possible embarrassment, we have no confidence whatsoever that we are going to get to the facts of what went wrong in dealing with Hurricane Katrina.

We need to rise above this raw partisanship and join together, if not on an independent commission which I think makes the most sense, at least on a committee that is equally divided, with the powers equally divided, where the intent is to work together. But we looked at what is being proposed, and the only conclusion that many of us can reach is that this is going to be a committee to pretend to do an investigation but not find out the truth.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. EMANUEL).

Mr. EMANUEL. Mr. Speaker, following Hurricane Katrina there are many questions that must be answered. To answer them this body should create a bipartisan commission of experts to investigate the failures and flaws of the system just like we did after 9/11, which I would like to remind my colleagues led to enactment of legislation that helped this country protect itself because the process had integrity.

The enacting and recommended legislation also received bipartisan support. The purpose of a 9/11-like independent commission is not to fix blame, but to fix a problem. And what we are debating today is not sufficient because if it were truly bipartisan, it would be bipartisan from this point of origin. And the beginnings of this commission, or the beginnings of this select committee, do not bode well for what was intended as a bipartisan effort by both Democrats and Republicans to find out

what happened and what needs to be done.

Rather than debate a bipartisan commission, what we are debating today will amount to nothing more than a whitewash because of the long list of items that my colleague from California (Mr. WAXMAN) just mentioned. From the intelligence failures to the true cost of the prescription drug bill, all these missed opportunities were left purposefully and consciously, not looked into, not asked into. If you do not think you have a problem, you will not fix a problem.

Mr. Speaker, hundreds have died, thousands have lost everything, billions will be spent rebuilding the infrastructure and people's lives. The stakes are simply too high not to know what went wrong.

Look what happened today in the New York Times. Michael Brown, the former head of FEMA, talked about where the Louisiana Governor failed, but also talked about where Secretary Chertoff failed. Brown's statement can probably be discounted somewhat as sour grapes, but recent stories by KnightRidder and others raised serious questions. KnightRidder raised questions about whether Mr. Chertoff delayed the Federal response. Memos were written to him, and according to a Presidential directive, he had authority and control and did not act for over 36 hours and was nowhere to be found.

While everyone has blamed Mr. Brown, it was Mr. Chertoff who was responsible for managing the national response plan according to the Presidential directive.

At the same time, an independent commission could monitor the contracts awarded during the reconstruction. Already a disturbing trend has emerged of awarding no-bid contracts, reconstruction contracts, to politically connected firms.

USA Today points out many of these companies have been fined millions of dollars for overbilling the government during hurricane rebuilding efforts and other government projects. In fact, one company is fined a \$3.2 million fine for what they overcharged during Hurricane Hugo. So the same cronyism that led to Mr. Brown's appointment is now guiding the awarding of contracts to the rebuilding of New Orleans.

We need a 9/11-type commission, an independent commission, that basically takes the facts where they lead them, has the integrity of this body and the American people and the confidence so they can recommend the changes. Because after 4 years from September 11, what we saw and over the last 3 weeks is not the best of America in the sense of government's response. We saw the best of America from the American people, and we now need a commission to make sure that we finally fix our response for when a natural disaster or other type of disaster hits this country. We need a bipartisan 9/11-style commission.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 2 minutes to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE).

(Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas asked and was given permission to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I never rise on this floor addressing the question of Hurricane Katrina without thanking all of the enormous outpouring from Americans of charity and concern, particularly commenting on my city and my State that have welcomed now almost 245,000 survivors into the State of Texas and now close to 100,000-plus in Houston, in my congressional district and other congressional districts in the area.

One of the first things I did in visiting those survivors in the Astrodome was to apologize on behalf of the Federal Government. Each meeting I subsequently went to and each time I was able to touch a survivor or hear their story of pain, I again apologized for the complete collapse and ineffectiveness of our ability to deploy in advance of Hurricane Katrina, to be able to be on the ground with resources whether they be the National Guard or the military or FEMA or anyone else that might have contributed to the saving of lives or, in fact, providing the survivors with a pathway out of Mississippi or Alabama or New Orleans.

So I accept and respect the apology and the acceptance of responsibility by the President, by the Governor and anyone else who chooses to do so, because the Federal Government is a safety net; and I think Americans understand that. But, Mr. Speaker, moving checkers on a checker board is not, in fact, a solution to our problem. So we cannot make, if you will, anew something that is broken.

The idea of a commission similar to the 9/11 Commission speaks volumes for the accuracy and the responsibility that so many elected officials have spoken about. Be reminded that the 9/11 Commission working in a bipartisan fashion, equal numbered in population, if you will, reflecting different views, was able to bring out the dirty laundry but also the good points. They reminded us that one of the key elements of failure in 9/11 was the lack of interoperability. As a member of the Homeland Security Committee of the Congress, I believe a 9/11-type Commission for Hurricane Katrina would pay tribute to the survivors and deceased alike and provide America with the necessary truth!

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1415

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1 minute to the gentleman from North Dakota (Mr. POMEROY).

Mr. POMEROY. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding me time.

My heart and the hearts of those I represent are with all who have been devastated by Hurricane Katrina. We know a bit about what it is like to have devastating loss in a flood. The

City of Grand Forks flooded in 1997. Fifty-seven thousand people were evacuated, but the Federal response was immediate and lives were saved. Here, the Federal response failed and lives were lost. We need to know why.

This is about learning what happened so it never happens again; and no Republican controlled, no congressional, partisan hearing process could ever get to the bottom of it. We need an independent commission. It literally is a matter of life and death, no partisan whitewash. We need an independent commission so we learn what happened so it never happens again. Lives are at stake.

Ms. SLAUGHTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield 1½ minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. LARSON).

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from New York for the time.

The citizens of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama deserve nothing less than the citizens of New York and New Jersey and Connecticut, those in Pennsylvania and our own Pentagon who received an independent commission, one that was heralded for its results and for its independence and its ability to work together. It served as both healing the Nation and bringing people together.

The citizens of those States, the residents of the city of New Orleans deserve the same as the great City of New York. The citizens who were stranded in the Superdome or in the convention center deserve nothing less than what this Nation received with an independent commission.

The spouses of so many of our Members, who have not been recognized at all, deserve nothing less than to make sure the efforts that have gone on already and the answers that everybody seeks are provided by an independent commission, an independent commission blessed by both the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. HASTERT) and the gentlewoman from California (Ms. PELOSI), coming together in the way that we should as a country.

We all stand prepared to work together. The citizens of Louisiana and Mississippi and the great City of New Orleans deserve nothing less.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, the United States of America has gone through the worst natural disaster in our Nation's history. Time and time again, we have been hearing people say that. It is unimaginable what people have gone through. I have to admit I cannot imagine the suffering. I have seen it on television, I have heard it reported by my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have been victimized themselves, but it is impossible, it is impossible to imagine how horrible this has been.

We do know one thing, both President Bush, Republican, and the Democratic governor of Louisiana, Governor Blanco, said that mistakes were made

leading up to Hurricane Katrina and mistakes were made in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Everyone has acknowledged that.

We have an opportunity, we have an opportunity to come together, as we have in previous disasters, and deal with it, meet our constitutionally mandated responsibility for oversight of the executive branch to investigate and look at what happened at all levels of government, local government, State government, the Federal Government, even the private sector. We have a chance, Mr. Speaker, now to do that.

That is exactly what the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT) has proposed, working with our colleagues in the other body, to come together with a committee that will allow Members of both political parties to raise any question that they want, to allow this committee to have the authority to subpoena witnesses, bring them forward. I have to say that it is very obvious to me that this is our chance to do it.

We are dealing with a hurricane right now in the Carolinas. We are dealing with other potential disasters on the horizon. I believe I have a responsibility to the people whom I represent, I have a responsibility to all the American people, just as we all do, to make sure that the problems that we faced leading up to and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina never happen again.

Mark my words, everyone, Democrat and Republican alike, wants to ensure that we are able to address those concerns. That is exactly what the establishment of this commission will do.

I am perplexed, Mr. Speaker, with the arguments that I have heard from my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. They want to increase their level of participation, they want to be able to get to the bottom of this, and yet they are saying let us give up our responsibility under article 1, section 8 of the Constitution that charges us with this duty.

This is our responsibility. This is a very important part of the reason the American people elected us as representatives, to come here and do their bidding, to do their job, to make sure that we find the answers to these very important questions.

I hope that we will be able to have that sense of solidarity, and so I am saying on behalf of the gentleman from Illinois (Speaker HASTERT), I know that he looks forward to having our colleagues on the other side of the aisle appointed, along with those who he will appoint to serve on this very important committee, and with that, with our quest of trying to ensure that we never go through what we have gone through in the past several weeks, I urge support of this very important resolution.

Mr. TOM DAVIS of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Res. 437, establishing a select bipartisan committee to investigate the preparation and response for Hurricane Katrina.

We have all spent much of the past two weeks witnessing and examining the aftermath of this catastrophic disaster. It has become increasingly clear that local, State, and Federal Government agencies failed to meet the needs of the residents of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Now it's this Congress's job to figure out why, and to make sure we as a country are better prepared for the future.

First and foremost, our thoughts and prayers go out to the hurricane's victims, their families, and their friends. The loss of life, of property, of livelihoods and dreams has been enormous. And we salute all Americans who have stepped to the plate to help in any way they can.

Congress has a responsibility to conduct oversight, but at this stage, the oversight needs to conduct oversight in a manner that does not interfere with rescue and relief efforts. Many questions need to wait; no one wants to take people away from the massive job at hand.

But I also think some issues can and should be looked at now. Members want to begin doing oversight, and the American people are demanding it as well.

The formation of a bipartisan select committee, composed of Members from the numerous House committees that bear responsibility for various aspects of our Nation's failure to respond to this disaster, would enable this Congress to take a thoughtful.

Whatever the threat, Katrina has forced officials across America to take another look at disaster plans that may not be as solid as they previously thought.

It has forced officials across America to take another look at the laws and regulations governing disaster response to identify ways to cut bureaucratic red tape in order to respond as quickly as possible.

This is not the time to attack or defend government entities for political purposes. This is a time to do the oversight we're charged with doing. Our goal should be to investigate aggressively what went wrong and what went right. We'll do it by the book, and let the chips fall where they may.

It's hard not to point fingers and assign blame in the aftermath of tragedy. I understand human nature, and I understand politics. But I think most Americans want less carping and more compassion. I think most Americans want a rational, thoughtful, bipartisan review of what went wrong and what went right. I think most Americans want to know we'll be better prepared the next time.

It remains difficult to understand how government could respond so ineffectively to a disaster that was predicted for years, and for which specific dire warnings had been issued for days. If this is what happens when we have advance warning, I shudder to imagine the consequences when we do not. If ever there were a time for leaders at all levels of government to come together and review and coordinate their emergency plans, it's now.

Some people are suggesting that only an independent body could properly investigate the Katrina tragedy. I think that point of view diminishes this House and the Members of this House. The voters didn't send us here to appoint commissions to do our jobs for us.

All over this country Americans are digging deep and making sacrifices. If we can't lead this Country then let's at least follow their lead and stand up and do our job.

Mr. HONDA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to House Resolution 437, legislation that proposes to establish a partisan committee to investigate the Bush Administration's clumsy response to Hurricane Katrina. This Congress has a proven history of lax oversight of the Administration, and I do not believe it can be trusted in this case to undertake a truly independent and probing inquiry.

Like most Americans, I welcomed the resignation of FEMA director Michael Brown. He proved himself grossly under-qualified for the important job of FEMA chief, the key position for coordinating governmental response to domestic catastrophes. His previous professional experience with the Arabian Horse Association proved inadequate training for the awesome challenges any FEMA chief can expect to face. Mr. Brown's appointment to this critical position, when compared to his woeful qualifications, reveals a disturbing willingness to place cronyism over competence.

Mr. Brown's unjustifiable appointment to FEMA is not the only outrage in the Katrina tragedy. President Bush himself has acknowledged his own failure and that of the entire Bush Administration. As the floodwaters rose and the cries went out from stranded victims, George Bush seemed not to notice. Only when his handlers realized the gravity of the situation—days after federal action could have pre-empted untold numbers of deaths—did the President rouse himself from the vigors of ranch life and deign to respond. This he did by cutting his five-week vacation short by two days, and dipping the wing of Air Force One as he jetted by.

The American people witnessed the Bush Administration negligent response to Hurricane Katrina, and they want a full account of the political and systemic shortfalls that contributed to the inept and late federal response. That is why so many Americans oppose a partisan committee like the one proposed in this legislation. In fact, 71 percent of the public said that the proposed congressional investigation would "get bogged down in politics" rather than "focusing on the facts."

Such skepticism is well-founded. The Republican majority of this Congress consistently refuses to ask tough questions of the Administration or hold it responsible for its misguided policies and outright dishonesty. The Congress, for example, did not probe the Administration's faulty rationale for war with Iraq, unlawful disclosure of a CIA agent's identity, deceptive cost estimates for its prescription drug proposal, and unethical dealings with energy lobbyists. Having turned a collective blind eye to these wrongdoings, there is no reason to believe that Congress will suddenly reverse course and put national interests above their political loyalty to President Bush.

A recent poll revealed that 76 percent of Americans support the creation of an independent commission akin to the one formed by Congress after the September 11 terrorist attacks. My Democratic colleagues and I have proposed just such a commission to examine the conduct of the Federal Government, including the Congress, before, during, and immediately after Hurricane Katrina swept through the Gulf Coast region.

Many in Washington, DC prefer a partisan inquiry into the Federal Government's response to the worst disaster in a Nation's history, but my constituents have been clear: the government's response was appalling and

they want a full and independent investigation. They want to know the truth, so that in the future, such tragedies are minimized and responded to with speed, skill, and experience.

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, this is a very important debate for our country. I cannot imagine anything more important to the American people than an independent investigation of why the response to Hurricane Katrina fell so short of expectations. We need a full accounting of what went wrong at all levels of government so such failures don't happen again.

I support the appointment of a non-partisan, independent commission—modeled after the successful 9/11 Commission—to investigate the response to Hurricane Katrina. An independent commission is the only way to get to the bottom of this. The commission would look into every aspect of the preparation and response to Hurricane Katrina, and let the chips fall where they may. The American people have made it clear this is what they want as well. A new Washington Post/ABC poll found that 76 percent of the public supports the creation of an independent commission. The Leadership of the House badly misreads the public mood when it disregards the clear wishes of the American people for a non-partisan investigation. We need to look at our government's weaknesses and correct them.

I oppose the straightjacket procedure under which the House is considering this legislation. The Majority calls this a "Select Bipartisan Committee," but the legislation was drafted behind closed doors with no input from Democrats. This is bipartisanship? The Leadership of the House will not even allow Democrats the opportunity to offer a substitute and have a straight up-or-down vote on it. Is the Majority's position so weak that it cannot withstand a debate?

I don't think the American people are going to have much patience for partisanship on this issue. They want answers and a measure of public accountability, not a partisan whitewash. There are hard questions to be asked about the slow, disorganized, and woefully inadequate response to a natural disaster that left a major U.S. city uninhabitable.

The proposal before the House calls for a House investigation that would be completely controlled by the Republican party. Republicans would outnumber Democrats on the Committee 11 to 9. There would be no bipartisan subpoena power. With all due respect, this would be an investigation in name only. It would have no credibility with the American people. You can't have a comprehensive and fair investigation when the people controlling that investigation have a vested interest in the outcome.

I urge the House to reject this unfair procedure and reject the very partisan investigation it seeks to establish.

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H. Res. 437, which would establish a partisan committee to investigate the Hurricane Katrina preparation and response. I agree with the vast majority of the American people, who favor an independent commission of experts similar to the 9/11 Commission.

Perhaps the American people, like me, are skeptical of the investigative integrity of the Republican Majority. After all, these are the same people who took more than 140 hours of testimony to investigate whether the Clinton White House misused its holiday card database but less than five hours of testimony

about prisoner abuse in Iraq. The Downing Street Memo has sent shockwaves through the world and confirmed our worst fears about the Iraq war sham, but mum's the word from Republicans in Congress. You also won't find a single committee hearing about Valerie Plame, no-bid Halliburton contracts, or U.S. citizens being imprisoned without a trial.

However, now they say that we should trust them to do a thorough investigation and not hide any damaging evidence regarding the woefully inadequate response to Katrina. Given their history, I think the American people deserve better than an empty promise. It is an insult to the thousands of dead, the victims of rape at the Convention Center, the people who waited five days for buses that never came and so many others who suffered needlessly, to suggest that one year before an election, this Republican Congress is going to pursue indictments not only of their President, but of themselves.

After all, the senior Members of Congress who would populate this Committee are the same ones who advocated moving FEMA into the Homeland Security Department, zealously pursued the downsizing of disaster prevention and response programs, starved wetlands restoration and Army Corps of Engineers funding, and presided over rising poverty rates that make Americans all the more vulnerable.

These foxes have already systematically dismantled the henhouse, sat idly by while the hens suffered, and now want to appoint a committee of foxes to find out what went wrong. I vote no on this ridiculous proposal.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SIMPSON). Pursuant to House Resolution 439, the resolution is considered read and the previous question is ordered.

The question is on the resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. DREIER. Mr. Speaker, I object to the vote on the ground that a quorum is not present and make the point of order that a quorum is not present.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from California (Mr. DREIER) was on his feet.

Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

FURTHER MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A further message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed with an amendment in which the concurrence of the House is requested, a bill of the House of the following title:

H.R. 3649. An act to ensure funding for sportfishing and boating safety programs funded out of the Highway Trust Fund through the end of fiscal year 2005, and for other purposes.

COAST GUARD AND MARITIME TRANSPORTATION ACT OF 2005

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. TERRY). Pursuant to House Resolution

440 and rule XVIII, the Chair declares the House in the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill, H.R. 889.

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IN THE COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Accordingly, the House resolved itself into the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union for the consideration of the bill (H.R. 889) to authorize appropriations for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2006, to make technical corrections to various laws administered by the Coast Guard, and for other purposes, with Mr. SIMPSON in the chair.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The CHAIRMAN. Pursuant to the rule, the bill is considered as having been read the first time.

Under the rule, the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR) each will control 30 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Alaska (Mr. YOUNG).

Mr. YOUNG of Alaska. Mr. Chairman, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

H.R. 889, the Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation Act of 2005, authorizes funding levels for the Coast Guard in fiscal year 2006 and makes several changes to current law related to the Coast Guard and to the maritime transportation system.

This bill is the result of a bipartisan effort; and I greatly appreciate the efforts of the bill's original co-sponsors, the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LOBIONDO), the subcommittee chairman; the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the full committee ranking member; and the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER), the subcommittee ranking member.

This bill provides the Coast Guard with the necessary resources and authorities to protect the safety and security of lives and property on U.S. waters.

H.R. 889 authorizes a funding level of nearly \$8.7 billion for the Coast Guard for fiscal year 2006. This authorization level includes an amount of \$1.6 billion to accelerate the delivery of new vessels and aircraft as part of the deep-water program. The Coast Guard's legacy fleet is deteriorating at an unacceptable rate, endangering the safety of the Coast Guardsmen on board and the general public.

We must provide the Coast Guard with these new assets, and I urge my colleagues to support full funding for this program this year and in future years.

As this body's only licensed mariner and the representative of the State that includes more than half of this Nation's coastline, I recognize the importance of making certain that the Coast Guard has the tools necessary to carry out its many and varied missions.

Earlier this year, the Coast Guard responded to a major oil spill in my