

Quite frankly, I do not think that people in the Senate should be holding her hostage. They may agree or disagree with a particular Executive order by the President. I do not come here to debate that, although I agree with the President on what he has done. But the point is, it is just absolutely outrageous to hold her hostage, and it is time to free her. It is time to let Alexis Herman, who is eminently well qualified to be Secretary of Labor, become Secretary of Labor.

Please remember, this is a Cabinet-level position connected to the concerns and circumstances of the vast majority of people in this country who are focused on living wage jobs, who are focused on employment conditions, and who are focused on being able to make a decent living for their children, who are focused on economic security for themselves and their families. This is no small position. It is time to let her go forward.

Mr. President, I know that if that does not happen, we will have a major confrontation here in the Senate and I wish we would not have to have it. I hope we do not get to that point, but really it is time to let her free and it is time to no longer hold her hostage.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. WELLSTONE. My last point, Mr. President, which is again related—and I see my colleague from North Dakota has now come to the floor—is that one of the things I hope we will do next week—the sooner the better and I hope we will do it right—is, please, colleagues, help all of us out from the States of North Dakota, South Dakota, Minnesota and some other States as well. Many of the people who we truly love have just been devastated by this flooding. It really seems of Biblical proportions. It is unbelievable what has happened.

We are now trying to put together a disaster relief bill to enable people to get back on their own two feet, to be able to rebuild their lives, and to rebuild our communities. The bill that is coming over from the House Appropriations Committee takes us in that direction, but we have to do better on the Senate side. This is, of course, evolving. We do not know the extent of the damage yet. But I ask my colleagues, I plead with my colleagues, please give us all of your support. We are going to have to especially make sure that we get the assistance directly to individuals.

For a lot of our small businesses that have been completely wiped out, completely wiped out—people have just lost their homes—right now we do not have near the direct grant assistance we need, and some of the loan programs just will not help them get back on their feet. All of us are working very hard on this. This is truly an example of there but for the grace of God go I.

Every time there has ever been a disaster relief bill come to the floor of the

Senate, I have never hesitated to support it because I always know that this could happen to anybody.

Nobody in South Dakota or North Dakota or Minnesota asked for this. People did not ask for their towns to be under water, did not ask to lose their homes, did not ask to be refugees, and did not ask to have their small businesses wiped out. If there is ever a role for Government, it is to try to help people that really need help.

Mr. President, I just urge all of my colleagues, please, help us out, Democrats and Republicans alike. Please let us do well for the people in our States. This is something that I think really, truly should and must unite all of us together.

Mr. President, with that, I yield the floor.

Mr. CONRAD addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. CONRAD. I thank the Presiding Officer.

DISASTERS IN NORTH DAKOTA

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I rise today to again update my colleagues on the extraordinary set of disasters that we have experienced in my home State of North Dakota.

As the President knows, we have had really an extraordinary set of events. First of all, the toughest winter in our history with over 10 feet of snow that fell in North Dakota, the most we have ever had, followed by, in the first week of April, the most powerful winter storm in 50 years that saw nearly 2 feet of snow fall in much of the State. It was accompanied by an ice storm that took down the electrical grid for 80,000 people in my State who were without power for a week.

On top of that, there were 70-mile-an-hour winds that were devastating. Then we followed that with a flood that has been termed a "500-year flood." But we are now told in testimony yesterday the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration indicated it was a 1,000-year flood.

In the midst of all that, the city of Grand Forks, a city of 50,000, is almost entirely evacuated, the largest evacuation of a city that we have seen in the United States in anyone's memory. Virtually the entire city, 95 percent of the city, has been evacuated and have been told they may not be back in their homes for as much as a month.

Truly an extraordinary set of events.

Today, I would like to thank President Clinton for traveling to North Dakota to see the devastation firsthand. I would also like to thank the Cabinet officials who traveled with the President, including Health and Human Services Secretary Donna Shalala. Donna has a twin sister who lives in North Dakota and so has a special interest and concern about our State.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman was there. Housing and Urban Develop-

ment Secretary Cuomo was there, and Transportation Secretary Slater. I said to Secretary Slater, who has been there three times in the last 3 weeks, that he about qualifies for paying North Dakota income tax he has been there so often. And, of course, the head of FEMA, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, James Lee Witt, has also been there three times in the last 3 weeks. We deeply appreciate the help that he has brought to our State.

Also with us were high officials of the Corps of Engineers, who have waged a valiant fight. Let me just say that they were fighting this flood in 83 spots up and down the Red River Valley. They won many of those battles. We lost a fight in Grand Forks, but I want to make clear it was not because the corps did not wage a valiant and heroic effort. I think everyone in our State would say the Corps of Engineers has just done a superb job.

Mr. President, we now face the difficult task of recovery. We will be considering a disaster supplemental bill in the committee next Tuesday.

I want to just share briefly with my colleagues photographs from Grand Forks and from other parts of eastern North Dakota so people can see for themselves what has happened.

This shows part of downtown Grand Forks. As someone said to me, it looks like Dresden after the firebomb. After the flood completely swamped the city, 90 percent of the town was flooded, a town of 50,000 people. A fire then broke out that burned much of three blocks of downtown Grand Forks.

As you can see, this is one of the buildings that was gutted. Included in buildings that were destroyed were the newspaper, Grand Forks Herald, which has already announced plans to rebuild, and also the largest bank was destroyed. So we have had just one set of extraordinary occurrences after another.

I talked to one man who called me. He said, "Senator, I'm over in Detroit Lakes, MN. My home has been destroyed. I did not have flood insurance because I was outside the 100-year flood plain. Nobody thought there was any threat to us. My business has been destroyed. All of my inventory is gone. I was trying to reach my insurance agent to find out if I had any coverage, but of course I have no idea where he is. He's been evacuated to some other town."

He said, "I tried to call my banker, but my bank burned down. So I have no idea what the status of my accounts are there in terms of what's happened to receipts. I have 80 employees, and I'm responsible for their livelihood. I have no idea where they are. They were evacuated to different towns."

He said, "My wife turned to me when we were considering all this, and she said, 'Well, you know, let's remember what's important. We have our lives. We're healthy. And we can come back.'"

That is the attitude that has pervaded this community. I am just going