

possible to help the citizens affected by Hurricane Katrina without unnecessarily blowing an even bigger hole in the budget deficit.

INTRODUCING A BILL ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL INDEPENDENT INQUIRY COMMISSION ON DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

**HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 8, 2005*

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce legislation establishing a National Independent Inquiry Commission on Disaster Preparedness and Response (NIICDPR) to examine and evaluate the Federal Government's response to Hurricane Katrina and assess our ability to respond to future large-scale disasters.

While the long-term impact of Hurricane Katrina will be felt for years, our evaluation of the Federal Government's response to, and preparation for, this and other major disasters—natural and man-made—must begin immediately.

Mirrored after the 9–11 Commission, the NIICDPR will consist of 10 members with no more than 5 being from either the Republican or Democratic parties, thus ensuring an independent and diverse make-up of commission members. The NIICDPR will be afforded the same powers which the 9–11 Commission enjoyed and will be tasked at finding the answers to the critical questions that we all have. These include but are not limited to:

Were we adequately prepared to respond to a disaster of this magnitude? Are we any more prepared today than we were before Katrina?

What plans were in place before Katrina made landfall to meet power, utility, and telecommunications needs following the storm? What plans are in place for future disasters?

What was the availability of adequate resources to meet the needs of displaced individuals and families, including temporary housing, medical services and facilities, transportation, and food and water supplies?

Did our federal disaster response plans consider the needs of all communities? What plans existed to ensure that underserved communities reached safety before and after Katrina?

How effective was the Federal Government in its rescue and other life-saving techniques?

Was the federal response to Hurricane Katrina efficiently coordinated with State and local governments? Was it adequate and appropriate in size and scope?

What improvements do the Executive and Legislative Branches need to make to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our disaster response programs?

Mr. Speaker, my Congressional District received the brunt of three major hurricanes last year. As I said earlier today, certainly our first priority has to be to rescue those who are still alive and provide them with housing, medical attention, food, and water. However, as the Gulf Coast turns to the recovery and rebuilding processes, the billions that Congress will spend will not be enough to fix the problems that exist within FEMA.

Based on my own personal experience dealing with FEMA and its director over the last year, I warn the Members of this body that the problems you see today are just the tip of the iceberg—and it has nothing to do with the magnitude of the disaster.

Inconsistency in FEMA regulations, constant reinterpretations of the Stafford Act, federal officials treating local emergency operations centers like revolving doors, lack of coordination, and FEMA's fluid and unclear chain of command are just a few of the many significant and real problems that Floridians dealt with last year and are still dealing with today.

I have literally begged the committees of jurisdiction in this body to hold hearings on these shortcomings. I even introduced bipartisan legislation in March with our colleague, CLAY SHAW, to address a slew of institutional problems within FEMA that we experienced first-hand last year.

Yet every time we take our concerns to the committees, we're told, "It's not a big enough problem to consider on its own." Well, Mr. Speaker, is the problem big enough now? How many people must die in a disaster before something becomes a "big enough problem" in this Congress?

Accountability is the only way to restore integrity in a broken system. An independent commission is the first step in repairing our disaster response system, which we all now know is woefully inadequate.

I ask for my colleagues support for this legislation, and I urge the House Leadership to bring it swiftly before the House for its consideration.

EXPRESSING CONDOLENCES OF NATION TO VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA

**HON. CHARLES A. GONZALEZ**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 8, 2005*

Mr. GONZALEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share my thoughts on perhaps the worst natural catastrophe to occur in America in my lifetime. Hurricane Katrina wreaked devastation beyond any we've seen and we will feel its wrath for years to come. As a Nation, we will continue to grapple with the destruction and the task of rebuilding.

In the days and weeks to come, we will keep the survivors and victims in our thoughts and prayers while we begin the arduous process of surveying the damage. As of yet, we still do not know how many lost their lives during the onslaught of the storm or in the aftermath. The early estimates place the lives lost in the thousands, and the coming days may push that tally higher.

We will also pray for the survivors many of whom have been evacuated to the surrounding states. I am proud that San Antonio, my hometown, is opening its doors for thousands of Americans who have nowhere else to go. In some ways, this is America's finest hour as strangers have opened their homes and communities to people who departed from New Orleans on buses or planes often with just the clothes on their backs.

Of course, we cannot praise enough the brave men and women of the Gulf region's police departments, rescue teams, the National

Guard, and the Armed Services. Time and again, they risked their lives to rescue the thousands of stranded people in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. When their Nation called, they answered. This week, we will fill the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD recounting their bravery and selflessness in the face of horrors and danger rarely seen in this country. They did better than could be expected with the resources and supplies they had.

Inexcusably, the administration failed both these heroes and those in need of aid. In the days after the hurricane had passed, the slow and inadequate response created another crisis that compounded the initial damage. Who was not angered and frustrated as the images from New Orleans washed over us like the floodwaters that engulfed the city after the levees were breached? How is it possible that we could not transport food, water, and medicine to the thousands trapped in the city? How could the conditions in the Superdome and the Convention center grow so dire?

We could assemble one of the world's most formidable military forces to invade Iraq which is halfway across the globe, yet we could not transport the essentials to a major American city. This simply boggles the mind and moves the conscience to anger and shame. Because the various governmental agencies lacked direction, thousands may have died days after the storm subsided. Will the administration continue to blame the State and local governments for being unable to coordinate a relief effort too big for any one entity save the Federal government? This is unacceptable, and clearly Congress will need to investigate and remedy the shameful shortcomings of the current Federal emergency management system.

Some of my colleagues say that the race and the poverty of the victims dictated the speed of the relief effort. Some would also condemn the fiscal priorities of an administration that has pursued reckless tax cuts during a time of war and while our national infrastructure literally crumbles. Early reports indicate the administration cut funding for the Army Corps of Engineers to maintain the levee system in New Orleans. Yet, until all the facts are in, I urge my colleagues to reserve judgment, yet failing to fully investigate this calamity no matter how painful or embarrassing it may prove would breach our duty to the American people. We owe this to those the administration failed.

H.R. 3673, THE SECOND SUPPLEMENTAL FOR HURRICANE KATRINA

**HON. MICHAEL M. HONDA**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 8, 2005*

Mr. HONDA. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support for H.R. 3673, the Second Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Hurricane Katrina Response. This measure provides an additional \$51.8 billion for hurricane relief, with \$50 billion of that for relief and cleanup activities by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, \$1.4 billion for hurricane-related activities by the military, and \$400 million for the Army Corps of Engineers for restoration work on navigation locks and for channel dredging.