

back until we get the truth about what started this war in Iraq, why it was instigated in the first place, and why it is continuing to be carried out in such a failing manner.

POVERTY IN AMERICA

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

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, there is not a lot that I can add to what my colleagues have said about the tragedy of Hurricane Katrina, about the hundreds of lives that have been lost and the billions of dollars in property damage that has been experienced. But perhaps in the midst of this horror, there might be a silver lining. And if there is a silver lining, it might be that we begin to take a hard look at some of the realities of America, realities that are very rarely talked about here on the floor of the House or in the media.

Clearly, one of the realities that we did observe in New Orleans is that there were thousands and thousands of people there who could not flee the flood because they did not have money, they did not have a car, and they had no place to go. And some of them died because they are poor.

But poverty exists well beyond New Orleans. The fact of the matter is that millions of Americans today live in abject, humiliating poverty. And, tragically, in the last 5 years alone, since President Bush has been in office, the number of poor people in America has grown by 5 million.

□ 1630

So not only are we not addressing the problem of poverty; it is becoming significantly worse. And at a time when a lot of my colleagues talk repeatedly about family values, some 17 percent of the children in America live in poverty, which is by far the highest rate of childhood poverty in the industrialized world. Some of the other industrialized countries have poverty rates of 3, 4 percent. We are over 17 percent.

So if there is a silver lining in Hurricane Katrina, it may be, it may be, it might be that we refocus on the needs of ordinary Americans, and we make fundamental changes in the priorities that have been established in this country in the last 5 years.

Mr. Speaker, it is not just that poverty in America is increasing; it is that the middle class in this country is shrinking. We all know about the explosion in technology. We all know that worker productivity in America is rapidly rising; but in the midst of that, what we are seeing is that real wages, inflation accounted for wages, for millions and millions of workers is going down. People are working two jobs, they are working three jobs, and yet they are further behind economically than they were 20 or 30 years ago.

Mr. Speaker, in America when we talk about priorities, when we talk

about our kids, we have got to ask ourselves about our educational system and why it is that throughout this country, in Vermont and virtually every other State in America, our child care situation in America is an absolute disaster. Every psychologist will tell you that the most important years of a person's life are the first few years, and yet in America today we have kids being warehoused in America in facilities where there are inexperienced, underpaid teachers and people who are minding the children. We have millions of other Americans today who would like to go to college, but cannot afford the \$35,000 or \$40,000 a year that it costs.

To my mind we are wasting huge amounts of intellectual capital by not making college available for all Americans. It is a national disgrace that for the first time in recent years, fewer low-income kids are going to college than used to be the case.

Mr. Speaker, while the middle class is shrinking, poverty is increasing. While some 46 million Americans have no health insurance, while the average American today is paying the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, there is another reality taking place in America, and that is that the wealthiest people in our country have never had it so good.

What we are seeing today in America is the widest gap between the rich and the poor of any industrialized nation on Earth, and it is wider in America today than at any time since the 1930s.

Mr. Speaker, to my mind a great nation is measured not by the number of billionaires it has, not by the number of nuclear weapons that it has, but in fact how we treat the least amongst us, the elderly, the sick and the poor. By that definition, we are not doing very well at all.

Mr. Speaker, while average Americans were struggling last year just to keep their heads above water economically, maybe to make a few bucks more than inflation was taking away from them, the CEOs of the Forbes largest 500 corporations in America saw a 54 percent increase in their compensation; 54 percent for the CEOs of the largest corporations, while millions of Americans are seeing a decline in their standard of living.

Mr. Speaker, in the midst of the disaster of Hurricane Katrina, in the midst of a period when we are going to be spending tens of millions of dollars rebuilding the gulf coast, at a time when we are spending \$300 billion in Iraq, our Republican friends and the President of the United States want to repeal the estate tax and provide hundreds of billions of dollars more in tax breaks for the wealthiest 2 percent who are the only people who will benefit from the repeal of the estate tax and half of those benefits are going to the richest one-tenth of 1 percent.

Yes, we can cut Medicaid by \$50 billion. Yes, we can underfund the Veterans Administration so the veterans

go on waiting lists all over America. Yes, we can have children sleeping out on the street. There is no money to take care of those needs, but apparently we have hundreds of millions to give to the wealthiest 2 percent, which will drive up our deficit, drive up our national debt and leave all of that to our children.

I would hope that common sense will prevail and that the President and Republican leadership, at a time of a record-breaking national debt, record-breaking deficits, will not give huge tax breaks for people who do not need them. Instead, let us move forward to lowering our deficit. Instead, let us pay attention to the middle class and low-income Americans who need help.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, if there is any silver lining in the disaster and the horror of Hurricane Katrina, it might be that today we begin reevaluating our priorities.

TWO AMERICAS LIVE IN THE UNITED STATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMAN of New York). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, first, let me just remind those who are listening tonight that there have always been two Americas here in the United States. I was quite taken aback right after the very recent catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina that reporters and many individuals kept commenting that this is not America, we do not know this place, this cannot be America. But my response consistently has been, this is the America that I know and this is the America that brought many of us here to Congress.

By race or class, there are two distinct and separate societies surviving on sheer will and determination here in our own country. It just does not make sense that the richest, most powerful Nation in the world has some of the poorest, unhealthiest, and most vulnerable people in the world. In many ways, Hurricane Katrina has brought to light the shame that the United States really, quite frankly, has tried to sweep under the rug for decades.

Now, the Congressional Black Caucus has represented this hidden America for nearly 40 years in this Congress. The Congressional Black Caucus has consistently worked to eradicate poverty throughout our country. Just look at the disparities agenda put forth by the Congressional Black Caucus under the leadership of our great chairman, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT). Whether it is unemployment rates, whether it is health statistics, whether it is statistics as it relates to decent and affordable housing, the gaps are glaring. The disparities are glaring.

The disparities of poverty severely and disproportionately affect African

Americans and people of color in our country. Let us just for a minute, and I put this chart up here so we can look at the poverty rates right now in the United States and where they were in 2000, in 2000, 11.3 percent was the poverty rate, increasing every year to 2004, which, of course, the Census Bureau has just put out, 12.7 percent, and it is climbing.

So who are the poor? Newsweek magazine, and I hope everyone reads Newsweek this week, September 19, and what Newsweek says. Let me read a paragraph from that article where it describes who the poor are: "With whites making up 72 percent of the population, the United States contains more poor whites than poor blacks or Hispanics. In fact, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that the increase in white poverty in non-urban areas accounts for most of the recent uptick in the poverty rate, but only a little more than 8 percent of American whites are poor." That is 8 percent compared with 22 percent of Hispanics and nearly 25 percent of all African Americans, 25 percent in a country that is 12 percent black. That is the point that we need to make, that people need to understand.

So those naysayers who say we are playing the race card, which we are not, they need to look at the facts. They need to look at the disproportionate numbers of Americans living in poverty who are African American and who are Hispanic. The facts speak for themselves.

We are going to talk tonight about the impact of Hurricane Katrina on people who are poor and who did not have the money to leave and to evacuate, most of whom happen to be black. We are going to talk about that tonight. I hope those who are listening and watching understand that this America that many of us here understand and know, these two Americas that unfortunately we have been faced with, is one of the reasons why we fight each and every day against the budget cuts, against the tax cuts, against putting unnecessary resources into an unnecessary war.

That is why many of us here are here tonight as members of the Congressional Black Caucus, as Americans, as Members of Congress to really call to the attention of the American people the huge impact of poverty, the disproportionate numbers of individuals who happen to be black and Latino in our country. Here we have the greatest, most industrialized, most technically developed country in the world; and we have this unbelievable number of American citizens who are poor.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS), who has been all of his life a warrior, a fighter for the poor, who organized the Poor People's Caucus here in Congress and who will talk to us now with regard to why he has embraced this agenda as his life's mission.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms.

LEE) and also thank the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN), who has been working on this issue.

First of all, I want to continue the discussion that the gentlewoman has been a leader on since she arrived in Congress. There are a few things that I want to add to this discussion because we have to speak truth to this great tragedy.

The first understanding that we have to arrive at is that many people in New Orleans were in dire straits before the hurricane and the mishandling of the hurricane and floods ever occurred. We are talking about a poverty that is so devastating that many of us, including myself, come in and out of New Orleans and never see what is really going on.

Mr. Speaker, 84 percent of the folks there are African American and poor. We have a tragedy that was waiting to happen. Ever since President Lyndon Johnson made the first efforts against a war on poverty, which was aborted shortly after that, we have neglected, generation after generation, to address this problem.

□ 1645

So the second thing that I would make clear to everybody is that New Orleans is not just the only place that there is such devastating poverty that it shocks one to know what it is. When we go to many other parts of this country, there are huge places of depressed areas, of deprived people, of great suffering, of high unemployment, of tragic failings, and hope is missing in a lot of these places.

So what we are doing is speaking not only about Katrina and New Orleans, but we are really talking about this condition of poverty that spreads across this entire country. And we are now forced, with the classic tragic mishandling of the flood, and this is the first time in the President's public career that he has ever admitted that, because of this Federal bungling, that the responsibility is at his level. Now I can suggest to the Members that one of the reasons that he is doing this is that his ratings are now lower, that in seven previous administrations no second-term President has ever been in the situation that he has. Whether that will change what we do remains to be seen. It may be another Rove tactic to get him to go up, but this discussion precedes what the President is going to say almost at the same time tomorrow. What he says will tell us where we are going and what they do.

At the same time that we are getting ready for the President's mea culpa, let us remember that there has been nobody here talking about rolling back the Medicaid cuts and the food stamp cuts and other restrictions. Those are quietly going forward at the same time that we are saying we have got to do more. And this is not just about volunteer help, which we are grateful for, and corporate contributions. We are talking about the government dealing with this problem.

The last point is that we now have a plan in progress in which the Halliburtons are now coming not only from Iraq but all over to begin to take over the reconstruction efforts. From our members in Mississippi and Louisiana, we find that there are no plans for the small businessmen to participate in the rebuilding. So this is a major issue which requires us not just to get the President straightened out. We have got a budget that will take us into an absolute no-way-out trap if we do not really change the terms of what we are doing.

Poverty is now being challenged. We might not be here were it not for the revelations that have been made by most of the press. And for us to be unaware that the black and the poor in this country are now the victims of one of the most federally bungled cleanups in America, we have gotten rid of the FEMA Director, but that is only the tip of the iceberg.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, will the gentleman yield?

Mr. CONYERS. I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, would the gentleman please explain to me, because I quite do not understand it. I heard what he said about the Halliburtons of the world. But could he explain why minorities and women, the people that are most affected by this hurricane, cannot participate in the recovery.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, because these are no-bid, multimillion dollars contracts for which they are not even eligible to bid; and then when they subcontract them out, they subcontract them out to other large corporations and not to the small business people who can best contribute and bring the economy back together.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Just a follow-up, Mr. Speaker.

Can he give me the criteria, how they participate? Is it some kind of campaign contribution? Is there some kind of criteria? I need to be able to go somewhere and tell my small businesses who want to participate how to participate. Whom do they have to write the checks to?

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, what I am trying to do is draw the parameters of where we are today. Today, we are not dealing with the people on the ground that can be of the most help. We have business people, construction people, who actually could be helping, and they cannot get in the door because they do not have the answers to the gentlewoman's questions of where do they go. I have been trying to call the Mayor of New Orleans, and he does not have a phone. Only cell phones, and everybody in America is probably calling him on those one or two phones.

I commend the leader of this Special Order.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) for his comments.

Let me just say I believe, unfortunately, that this Congress and the administration suspended the requirements to include minority- and women-owned businesses in the upcoming contracts, which to me is appalling and unacceptable; and we need to go back and repeat what they repealed.

Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CORRINE BROWN) to come forward and make her statement.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, let me commend the congresswoman for her leadership in this area. Let me commend the Congressional Black Caucus for their leadership; and I also want to commend the American people, because the American people have come forward, the private businesses, the private organizations.

What has been blatantly clear to all Americans is that the Federal Government has been missing in action. We have two Americas. It is tragic. We have one black. Yes, I said it, black, African American. One white. One rich and one poor, and the poorest Americans are still the most vulnerable. We need to ensure that all Americans, regardless of where they live, can find a quality of life and work.

This hurricane has put a spotlight on the tragic situation that exists with this administration, and I call it reverse Robin Hood, robbing from the poor and working people to give tax breaks to the rich. I am going to repeat that. Reverse Robin Hood, and I have said it over and over again. Robbing from the poor to give tax breaks to the rich. That has been the policy.

There are two things that I want to discuss today. In light of the hurricane, why are we doing away with Davis-Bacon? And, two, why are we doing away with affirmative action contracting programs?

Almost as disturbing as this administration's horrible response to the hurricane is their suspension of all labor rules for hurricane-related contracts. Just like in the past, the Bush administration is taking every opportunity to destroy organized labor but has taken it to a new level by suspending all affirmative action programs in contracting. This is a new mandate by this administration, and it will do absolutely nothing to ensure quick or better service for those suffering from the hurricanes but will certainly ensure that none of them are involved with rebuilding their homes and communities. The very same people whose tax dollars will be paying for the reconstruction will be shut out of the opportunity to participate in the cleanup.

Just like in Iraq, where we never had any oversight, we cannot afford to see the repeat of this situation in the gulf States. And let me say again, Iraq, no oversight, over \$1 billion, no accountability. If this had been a Democratic administration, somebody would be in jail, and certainly the Congress would be investigating and investigating, and

there would be hearings and hearings and hearings.

Nothing, nothing goes on in the people's House. The only thing that we do is vote on somebody's courthouse. No discussions about the issues of the day. If it was not for this Congressional Black Caucus, no discussion.

As always, President Bush talks the talk. In fact, I have come to the conclusion that our government is a paper tiger. We talk the talk, but we do not walk the walk. He and his political cronies continue their assault on minorities and the working poor, while lining the pockets of their political cronies and filling their campaign coffers.

Lo and behold, whom do we see getting the biggest contract in the clean-up of the hurricane? I heard one of my sisters last Tuesday night ask the Secretary, the Secretary that was here, can anybody do any business with the Federal Government other than Halliburton? A \$588 billion contract, no bid, no opportunity for anybody else to participate. If I am incorrect, please somebody speak up. None other than Dick Cheney's Halliburton. So while the poor in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi suffer from Federal neglect, DICK CHENEY and his cronies keep getting rich. I said it. If Hurricane Katrina's high winds, rain, and furious power were not enough, the Federal Government's inadequate response to this tragedy just adds gasoline to the fire.

I want to take a moment to thank the people locally in my area of Jacksonville. We have sent over 18 tractor trailers full of goods and services. Goods. I asked them to give me their wish list, and everything on their wish list we filled. And, in fact, I got a call today. We have got another one filled, and we are getting ready to send it to Mississippi.

And let me tell my colleagues something. People from Mississippi and Louisiana are calling me. To this day no one has been to their community. They do not have communication. They do not have water. They do not have lights. What is the problem in the richest country in the world? We are not a third world country. We still have not gotten services to these local communities.

As I bring it to a close, remember to whom God has given much, much is expected. We cannot continue to run around the world talking about our fighting for democracy, fighting for our neighbors, when we do not fight right here at home for the people who pay the taxes. We have got a lot of work to do in this Congress, and it is not just passing a bill naming a post office.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMANN of New York). The Chair would remind Members that personally offensive references toward the President or the Vice President are not permitted under the rules of the House.

The gentlewoman may proceed.

□ 1700

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, on that question, I understand I cannot discuss their personal motives, but I understand that I can raise their names.

This inquiry should not be on the time of the gentlewoman from California.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMANN of New York). The gentlewoman is reminded that innuendo relating to personal pecuniary gain by the President or Vice-President is improper under the Rules of the House, as I am being informed by the Parliamentarian.

Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I did not understand what you are saying, sir. Would you repeat what you just said?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman will continue with her time.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRIES

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I have a parliamentary inquiry.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman will state her inquiry.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, the gentleman just stated a rule that is unclear. The gentleman was questioned by the gentlewoman from Florida about the rule. The gentlewoman basically said, are you saying we cannot refer to the President of the United States or to the Vice President of the United States? I would like clarification on the rule that you attempted to describe.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Parliamentarian informs me that the rule of the House does not restrict reference to policies of the administration, including criticism or critique, but prohibits personally offensive references, including accusation or innuendo of malfeasance.

Ms. MCKINNEY. Mr. Speaker, I have a parliamentary inquiry. I do not want to take away the time of the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE).

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman will state her inquiry.

Ms. MCKINNEY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if indeed it is a fact that the Vice President of the United States receives a salary in the form of deferred compensation from Halliburton which, in turn, received a no-bid contract to do the cleanup work for Katrina, are we prevented from saying that on the floor of the House?

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman has not stated a parliamentary inquiry.

Ms. MCKINNEY. I thank the Speaker. That means we can speak about these kinds of things.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members should refrain from personally offensive remarks related to pecuniary gain of the President or Vice President. That is improper under the Rules of the House.

The gentlewoman may continue. Thirty-seven minutes remain.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS).

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentlewoman from California for yielding. More importantly, I want to thank her for her passion, her leadership, and her dedication to trying to make sure that America does in fact become the land that we often hear about but the land that we have not yet experienced.

Katrina has pulled the cover, in a real sense and in many ways, off the whole question of poverty, which is something that we do not talk about nearly enough. We often talk about other kinds of issues and other kinds of things, but very seldom do we get to the core of it in terms of saying that poverty continues to be a major problem for a large segment of the American population. As a matter of fact, we saw, and people have already indicated, individuals who did not have enough resources, could not put together enough money, did not have transportation money, who simply could not get away, who could not get out of the path of the oncoming hurricane because their purses were empty.

But they are not empty only in New Orleans. When we look across America, we see large population groups. I think of young men, for example, in my city, the City of Chicago, the city that we call the "city of the big shoulders," a city where more than 50 percent of all of the young African American males between the ages of 16 and 22 do not have a job, do not go to school. How could there be anything other than poverty in a situation like that? I run into individuals in their early 30s who have never had a job in their entire lives, never had a job, who automatically then become a part of the underground economy in many of these areas where we see concentrations of poverty.

I was hoping that we would use this opportunity, but it is clear that that is not the direction in which we are headed. This provides us with a tremendous opportunity to develop massive training programs for individuals so that they can go back and rebuild their own communities, rebuild their own homes. They could develop the skills, and they could experience something that they have never done before in their lives: They could have a job. They would have the opportunity to work.

But even if they get the opportunity, are we saying that they can be paid less than minimum wage in some instances? Where they are almost put back into a slave-like condition, where they are working but at the end of the week have not earned enough for basic food, shelter, and clothing?

So I am afraid that not only is the mishandling something that happened immediately, but it looks as though we are going to mishandle the rebuilding and the reconstruction and the redevelopment of those affected areas.

So I join with my colleagues in suggesting and calling for a real effort on the part of the administration to make sure that those individuals get a

chance not only to live, because a fellow named Thomas Wolf said something once: "To every man his chance, his golden opportunity, to be and to become whatever his talent, manhood, ambition, and hard work will combine to make him." And, of course, if Wolf was around today, he would probably say "him and her," or "her and him." That is supposed to be the promise of America, and that is what we call upon the American people to make sure comes out of the tragedy of Katrina.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the gentleman from Illinois for that very eloquent statement.

Let me just say in reference to the comment made by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. CONYERS) earlier and the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. DAVIS) in terms of the President taking responsibility, which he just said he would take, I think it really warrants us to ask the question, why was he so irresponsible early on in responding to this great tragedy? And that answer has to be gotten, I think, for all of us to be able to understand the direction in which he is going to move. Tomorrow he is going to talk I think about his plan and response, but I would just hope that he would talk about his plan to eradicate poverty by the year 2010, and that is what many of us are working toward.

I would like to now yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATERS) who all of her life has worked to eradicate the conditions which give rise to this very obscene and immoral condition which so many millions of Americans live in.

Ms. WATERS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for organizing us this evening to talk about poverty. As a matter of fact, I know that the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) had already began to organize around the issues of poverty and had been trying to focus us for some time to really get involved in unveiling what is going on in America. And, despite the fact that there are so many competing interests and despite the fact that not enough Members of Congress have the courage to talk about poverty or race or class, Katrina has brought us face to face with what is wrong in America.

As we stand here today with this picture from Newsweek, with this child's face, this baby's face with the tears running down, the caption: "Poverty, Race, and Katrina: Lessons of a National Shame," we are forced to have to deal with these issues of poverty, race, and class.

There was an interesting debate going on when this hurricane first struck. The journalists would say to African American legislators, did race have anything to do with this? They were looking for the confrontation, helping to draw out the right-wing conservatives so that they could say what they normally say when we begin to describe what is wrong in America: Ah, there they go, playing the race card

again, or trying to marginalize someone when they dare to get up and talk about race, poverty, and class.

Well, what is interesting about this discussion is every journalist who confronted an African American legislator raised the question until finally I said to them, you are asking this question so often, you must know something. You must know something that you want to talk about. Do you think this is about race? And so I say to my colleagues I have decided, based on what has happened with this horrendous disaster, that we must talk about class, race, and poverty.

As a matter of fact, as I sat in my bedroom watching the 20,000 or more people sitting outside the convention center and I heard the head of FEMA, Mr. Michael Brown, say that he did not know they had been sitting there for 3 days, they were without water, they were without food, they were without lights, and that coming on the heels of what had happened in the dome where the evacuees were placed, no electricity, toilets not working, food ran out, water ran out, I got up from my seat and caught a plane and went to Louisiana, because I could not sit there any longer watching what was happening to the most vulnerable people in the world.

Going there, going to these shelters, going to the Louis Armstrong Airport, watching people suffering, thousands of people without water, without food, without medical care, old women in wheelchairs who needed their medicine, people with diabetes and high blood pressure and the morgue that was being placed right there in the airport to accommodate the people who were dying on the sidewalks, I decided that it may not be politic to talk about race or class or poverty, but, Mr. Speaker, when I came to this place, I came to talk about those issues, and I decided that I, too, had been organized by the right-wing and others not to confront the issues in ways that I know I feel deeply about.

So I do not care what happens and from whence it shall come. In addition to everything that I do, call me whatever you want to call me, say that I am playing the race card, say whatever you want to say. I am going to talk about race, I am going to talk about poverty, and I am going to talk about the class issues of America.

We are brought face to face with these issues, looking at what happened in New Orleans. The population of New Orleans is 448,000 people; 67 percent of the city's population is African American. About 27 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. The city's median household income is \$27,514. Two in 10 households in the disaster area had no car, compared with 1 in 10 nationwide. About 4.5 percent of the disaster area received public assistance. Nationwide, the number was about 3.5 percent. In 2000, New Orleans had the fifth highest poverty rate and the fourth lowest household income of major American cities.

In the lower ninth ward neighborhood, which was inundated by the floodwaters, 98 percent of the residents are black, and more than a third live in poverty. Sixty-five percent of these families are one-parent families. The housing in New Orleans is much older than the national average, with 43 percent built in 1949 or earlier, compared with 22 percent for the United States and only 11 percent of them built since 1980, compared with 35 percent for the United States.

□ 1715

New Orleans public schools are 93 percent black; 55 of the State's 78 worst schools are in New Orleans. The State of Louisiana rates 47 percent of New Orleans schools as academically unacceptable, and another 26 percent are under academic warning.

About 25 percent of New Orleans adults have no high school diploma, and we can go on and on and on. Louisiana has the largest percentage of children living in poverty, 30 percent.

Louisiana and Mississippi have the highest infant mortality rate in the Nation, 10.3 percent per 1,000 births. Louisiana and Arizona have the biggest teen dropout rate in the Nation. Well, as we travel around the Nation and we take a look at poverty, today we are talking about New Orleans, but let us take a look in St. Louis, Missouri, let us take a look in Philadelphia, let us take a look up in Harlem, let us take a look in Appalachia. Let us take a look at poverty in America.

We cannot continue to place our heads in the sand. Why do we have this poverty? Why it is that public policy no longer discusses poverty, race, and class? It is because the right wing conservatives have been very successful at silencing those of us who should be discussing it.

They have pulled every trick in the book. They have their talking heads on Fox Television and other right wing stations that are basically undermining us and basically denigrating us whenever we talk about these issues.

But, ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced that we are going to have to do this, not only for ourselves but for America. The attitudes that have come out of this hurricane, the President's mother, Mrs. Barbara Bush, said the people in the Dome were disadvantaged anyway, they were better off.

Attitudes. You know, people want us to say the President went into the White House and said, we are not going to go to New Orleans to help the black people. No, we are not saying that. We are not saying that it is that obvious, that it is that overt. It is about attitude. It is about the kind of attitude that drives your actions.

When you have Barbara Bush saying, well, they are better off. People who are dying in the Dome, people who are dying outside of the convention center, they are better off, so why should we care? I mean, it is that kind of attitude that leads to the kind of policies and

the kind of marginalization that leads to a lack of concern and resources for the people who so desperately need it.

Attitudes. We have one of the Members of my committee that I serve on, the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER), who said God had done what we had not been able to do in getting rid of public housing. Attitudes that lead to the kind of decisions that result in racist actions.

In addition to all of this, we find that there are things still going on in Louisiana that we thought we would never see again in life. There were a group of people who were told to cross a bridge to get to safety and to high land.

These African American women and men, for the most part, with a few whites with them, started across the bridge to a little town called Gretna, I believe. And they were met by the police officers with guns. And they shot their guns over the heads of women and children, mostly African American women and children, and said, get back over to New Orleans, this is not the Superdome, we do not want you over here. You cannot come over here.

And for those people who managed to get past them at the end of the bridge, they came and they took their food and their water away from them and drove them back on the other side of the bridge.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would not be worth my salt if I did not direct my attention to these atrocities. I would not be worth being elected to the Congress of the United States of America if I did not stand up for the least of these and the most vulnerable of these.

We have seen the face of poverty. It was reflected in a profound way, people trapped and died because they did not have transportation. People died because they did not get rescued. Their government let them down. People said do not point the finger. How many fingers do I have?

I am pointing them all. Because in addition to whatever mistakes were made at the local and the State level, in the final analysis, we have the most powerful government in the world, and they let the people down. They let the people down even though we had the resources, we have the helicopters, we have Navy bases. We found a Navy base over in Alexandria, Louisiana, England Air Force Base, that is boarded up that has 450 rooms, dormitories, that are not being used.

We had ships fully equipped with all of the medical equipment right there right off the coast. Unused. We have the resources. We have the National Guard. We have the money. We have what it needs.

Now, people want to ask me, did it happen because of race? I submit to you that when you have the kind of attitudes that speak like the President's mother, Barbara Bush, who spoke like the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER), who acted the way the police officers acted that drove my people back across the bridge shooting guns

over the heads of women and children, that results in racist acts.

It results in the kinds of decisions that marginalize, that deny, that cause people to die and to be harmed unnecessarily. And so poverty is an issue that we must pay attention to.

Today, we are focused on New Orleans; but tomorrow, we have got to focus on poverty all over the United States of America, whether we are talking about New Orleans or any of the other cities that many of us represent.

I am grateful to be able to be in good strength, and I am grateful that I have found my courage again, the courage to do what we should always do. I am so grateful that I am resigned, and I have resolved that this Congress is going to hear about this day in and day out.

Never again shall I find myself in a position where I am crying and lamenting after the fact. I have got to be in the faces of those who make public policy. I have got to use my influence. I have got to do everything that I can possibly do.

The President of the United States does not back up. They are in our faces. Yes, Mr. Speaker, he gave another no-bid contract to Halliburton. We have criticized him time and time again about Halliburton and the fact that they stole our money in Iraq, they cheated us. But they do not back up. They stay in our faces with their policies, and we have got to stay in theirs.

Ms. LEE. I want to thank the gentleman from California (Ms. WATERS) for that very clear and powerful statement also. If there was any doubt who was left behind in the Gulf region, I think the entire country knows now who was left behind.

Let me yield now to the gentleman from Georgia (Ms. MCKINNEY).

Ms. MCKINNEY. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commend my sister colleague, the gentleman from California (Ms. LEE), for introducing comprehensive poverty legislation of which I am a proud cosponsor.

It is high time that we talk about poverty; and when we talk about poverty, I would like for everyone to see this beautiful black face, this beautiful black baby, who has a tear rolling down her cheek, which epitomizes in so many ways the conditions of Black America which now have been revealed for all of the world to see.

But I came down here not to take very much time, but to say to my sister colleague that she said she was not going to play the race card.

Well, you do not have to, because the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER) already has, if the reports from The Wall Street Journal are correct. And so I would just like to read into the RECORD what it is that The Wall Street Journal says that the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER) had to say.

He said, according to The Wall Street Journal: "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We could not do it, but God did."

Now, when the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER) made that comment, he was talking about that baby. And there are some of us, some of my colleagues outside of this body, who are very concerned about what the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER) had to say.

But I also know that the mainstream media do not always get it right. So I would like to hear publicly from the gentleman from Louisiana (Mr. BAKER) to see if this is exactly what he said and what he meant.

Because, if it is, I can guarantee you there will be many people who will have something to say to him. The public policy we make here is all about attitudes, and when you have got this kind of an attitude making public policy, you cannot help but have tears rolling down the faces of America's children.

Ms. LEE. I want to thank the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. MCKINNEY) for her very passionate statement and for asking the tough questions, as she always has and will continue to do.

I would like to now yield to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. DAVIS). We all know that poverty knows no boundaries. We see high incidences of poverty all over our country in rural and in urban areas.

We know much of your community is a rural community steeped in poverty.

Mr. DAVIS of Alabama. Thank you for organizing this Special Order tonight. Because our time is limited, I want to make my remarks suitably brief. But I want to pick on something that has been a theme of what I have heard from a lot of my colleagues in the last several minutes.

We have talked a lot, appropriately, about the question of national will in this country of ours, and I am reminded that several hours ago we passed a resolution on the floor honoring a woman named Rosa Parks who was a seamstress in the city I was born in, Montgomery, Alabama.

When Rosa Parks made the decision to stand up by sitting down, by refusing to give up her seat on the bus, my grandmother was a 46-year-old woman who lived in Montgomery; my mother was a 12-year-old child. And they both vividly remember at times when they were escorted or asked to leave the front of the bus, to go to the back.

And in that generation of Americans, there was a certain percentage of people who felt that, well, it is just the way it was. There was a certain percentage of people who felt that racial segregation, separating people based on color, was just in the fabric and the atmosphere of what we were as a country.

And when the Rosa Parkses of the world asserted themselves, a lot of people dismissed their effort. A lot of people said that it is a quixotic venture.

And here we are 50 years later with a whole lot of political power for this community, a whole lot of an ability to stand here and to talk about these

kinds of questions. We are a long, long way from the Montgomery, Alabama that Rosa Parks and my mother and grandmother lived in.

What has changed about that 50 years is our will changed as a country. Our sense of what we would and would not tolerate changed over a period of time, and that which seemed tolerable many years ago, all of a sudden came to be seen as intolerable. It is my sincerest hope, as a Member of this House, that when our time is long done, when the youngest of us here have left this body, that some group of Americans will look back and they will say that we managed to take these questions of poverty, impenetrable, cutting, wounding poverty, off the table, that we somehow managed to find a way to build enough of a net in this country that everyone who tries to build a family has a maximum opportunity to do it, that we managed to build enough of a net in this country that when anyone gets sick, that we find a way to give them a quality of care, that we found a way to build enough of a net in this country, so that if there is an ambition in our children, the ambition will always be rewarded.

The hope that I have is that we will one day reach a point where these kinds of questions come off the table, just as the question of what side of the bus you can sit in came off the table. If we are going to get to that point, it will require a lot more than the reaction to Hurricane Katrina.

It will require a lot more than the reaction to the Gulf that was exposed in New Orleans. It will require a sustained commitment to be serious about these questions. It will require a sustained commitment to talk about issues of day care for working mothers, issues of health care for indigents, issues of exclusion for all kinds of groups who have been marginalized in America.

But I think those things are within our reach. The reason I think so is because I think that we have the capacity as a country to come back to a vocabulary and a dialogue of national greatness. We have the capacity as a country to talk about a vision that will make America great, that will not simply be based on the force of our arms, that will not simply be based on our intercontinental ballistic missiles, but will be based on the quality of the institutions that we build.

□ 1730

I will end by mentioning someone that I know inspired many of my colleagues in this body, Robert F. Kennedy, the Senator from New York who died seeking to change the country by winning the presidency.

He often ended his speeches by saying, "Some men see things as they are and say why? I see things that never were and say why not?"

That has to be the constant challenge of all the Members of this institution who style themselves as progressives. The constant challenge has

to be that we will see a range of visions, a range of opportunities and quality of life for our people that we have not previously seen and that we will have a national will to move toward that time.

So I thank the gentlewoman for organizing this event. I thank my colleagues for speaking.

In the final seconds I have here today, I will simply make the point that all of our citizens in this country ought to understand that we are impacted when some of our people do not share in the same circle of opportunity, but yet they are working and striving and pushing themselves every day to do it. That exclusion and that absence does not just wound African Americans, it does not just wound Latinos, it wounds everyone in this country that shares our national identity.

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his statement also raising the need for sustained commitment, because that is what this country and the President must do and develop a plan to eradicate poverty by 2010.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from California (Ms. WATSON).

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for her bill, H. Con. Res. 234, to require the President to immediately present a plan to eradicate poverty by 2010. Her resolution is indeed timely.

Hurricane Katrina has rubbed away the scar tissue from a festering national wound which is poverty and the growing economic divide that continues to afflict our great Nation.

Mr. Speaker, only a few weeks ago, the U.S. Census Bureau released its annual report on poverty income and health insurance coverage. The report documents that poverty rose by 1.1 million people from 2003 to 2004. The number of Americans without health insurance also rose from 45 million in 2003 to 45.8 million in 2004. Shame.

The facts presented by the Census Bureau report are incontrovertible. Poverty is on the rise throughout the United States of America, and let me briefly cite a few other startling facts taken from the latest Census report.

In 2004, 37 million Americans lived in poverty, up by 5.4 million from the previous year.

More than one in six American children now lives in poverty.

The poverty rate for African Americans was 24.7 percent in 2004. The poverty rate for Hispanics stood at 21.9 percent for the same year.

The real income of American households declined in 2000 among all income groups.

In my home State of California, 13.2 percent of its residents, or 4.4 million people, currently live in poverty; and 18.5 percent of Californians, or 6.7 million people, do not have insurance coverage.

The U.S. Census report is not the only recent document that details the

growth of poverty in the United States. Today, President Bush addressed the opening of the United Nations World Summit on Poverty and Reform. Earlier this month, the U.N. released a shocking report on global inequality that is critical of American policies towards poverty abroad as well as here at home.

Among its many startling conclusions, the U.N. report reveals that infant mortality has been rising in the United States for the past 5 years and now is the same as Malaysia. America's African American children are twice as likely as whites to die before their first birthday.

The U.N. report also notes that although the U.S. leads the world in health care spending, this high level goes disproportionately to the care of wealthier Americans. It has not been targeted to eradicate health disparities based on race, wealth and the State of residence.

Countries that spend substantially less than the United States have, on average, a healthier population.

For a century in the U.S. there has been a sustained decline in the number of children who died before their first birthday. But since 2000 this trend has sadly been reversed.

The U.S. is the only wealthy country with no universal health insurance system. Shame on us.

The United States, along with Mexico, has the dubious distinction of seeing its child poverty rate increase to more than 20 percent.

The U.S. ranked 17 out of the 18 OECD countries in the highest level of human and income poverty. The only OECD country the U.S. is ranked ahead is the country of Italy. Even Ireland ranks higher.

Poverty is a systemic issue, and we need to move on it now.

ERADICATE POVERTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. KUHLMAN of New York). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. WATT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WATT. Mr. Speaker, I simply want to thank my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus who are taking the time and consistently putting forward this message that poverty and race and the convergence of them in this country must be an issue that we deal with.

I found it extremely ironic as Chair of the Congressional Black Caucus that it has taken a disaster like Katrina to refocus attention on the issue of poverty in this country. In fact, it has been interesting to see how this has evolved, because the Congressional Black Caucus has been dealing with this issue of poverty and the disparity in economic means between African Americans and other Americans in this country this entire year.

We developed an agenda in January of this year which was printed, re-

leased, covered and written about in the press. Press people were calling me, saying you have positioned this in a different way than it has been positioned in the past. And then all of a sudden what I found was quietly into the night the discussion about poverty and the convergence of poverty and race and class went quietly into the background.

What has been interesting since Katrina occurred is that the same press people who wrote about our positioning of this issue have been on the phone to me, saying why have you all not been talking about this? Why have you not kept this issue of race and class and poverty in front of us? We should have been talking about this.

And I have to remind them that, yes, look, you wrote about this in January and February of this year, and you must have forgotten about it. We have not forgotten about it. We have been talking about it all year.

It did not take a hurricane to make us patently aware that poverty exists in this country. In fact, what I would submit to you is if the same kind of catastrophe occurred in any city in America and the same amount of advance notice was given to the people of that city, the people who would get out would be the high-income people. They would heed the notice. They would have the resources to move away from the disaster that is coming down the pike. And the people who would not be able to heed the notice and the entreaties to get out of harm's way would be poor people; and in every city in America, every place in America they would be disproportionately African American, Hispanic and other minorities.

That is not only true of a hurricane. When you are poor, you cannot get away from bad health conditions, because you cannot take the preventative steps that you need to take to get treatment. When you are poor, you do not have the option of sending your kids to private school to get them away from bad schools. You do not have the option of doing a lot of things that we take for granted in this country.

So maybe my staff member is right. We do not like to talk about that in this country. We do not like to talk about poverty in this country because we have this notion that we all are equal. We are not equal except in writing.

Under our Constitution, we are created equal. We are supposed to be given equal opportunity, but when somebody starts at the 70 yard line in a race of 100 yards and somebody else is starting at the zero yard line, making up that difference is an impossible task, and we have got to recommit ourselves to making up that difference. It cannot be done just by people running faster and harder and longer. We have got to commit ourselves as a Nation to fighting poverty and its convergence with race.

WINNING THE WAR IN IRAQ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. PENCE) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. PENCE. Mr. Speaker, I thank the Speaker for the opportunity to address the House this evening, really by way of reporting on a congressional delegation trip that I had the privilege of leading at the very turn of this month, the very last days of August, the very first days of September.

Our journey took us on a diplomatic mission through Egypt. We met with military commanders at Central Command in Qatar. But clearly the most memorable and meaningful time of our trip, which included the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HENSARLING), who we will hear from in a few moments, and three of our Democratic colleagues, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS), the gentleman from Hawaii (Mr. CASE), and the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MCINTYRE), it took us for two full days into Iraq.

I rise tonight anxious to hear my colleagues' reflections on this trip and trips that they have taken as the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) will join us. But I rise today to make a very simple assertion, that from what I saw on the ground, flying into Baghdad on C-130s, flying around to outpost bases far outside the Green Zone in Baghdad, far outside the safety net of the center of our operations in Iraq, what I herald from the soldiers, not just in official meetings but in informal interactions and what I heard from our commanders was a simple message: We are winning the war in Iraq.

□ 1745

I know, Mr. Speaker, that that is a very different message than most of the American people, some of whom may be looking in tonight, are getting from national television and from the newsprint.

The headlines today were resplendent with over 100 killed in a series of car bombs and suicide attacks in Iraq; but let me say emphatically again, from our meetings with General Abizaid at CENTCOM, to General Petraeus in Baghdad, our meetings with members of the 3rd Infantry Division and A Company of the 138th Signal Battalion from Indiana in Ramadi, I heard it again and again: we are winning the war in Iraq.

That is not a slogan. It is an objective fact, based on a few simple observations, because as many who are strenuous critics of the war would assert, we have endured casualties, the precise number still less than 2,000, but every single loss, including the 10 heroes from my congressional district, is grievous to every single family. I will not for a moment trivialize a single American loss; but as we heard from one soldier after another, some with four stars, some with one, some with