

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized.

**EMERGENCY HEALTHCARE RELIEF FOR THE SURVIVORS OF HURRICANE KATRINA**

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, before the chairman leaves the floor—he has put in a long day today and has some more things probably to do this evening—I wish to thank him for his extraordinary leadership at this time and also the Senator from Montana who was here earlier. They have been working on this bill now for weeks because they are aware of the great need, the extraordinary need of the people from the State I represent, Louisiana, but also our neighbors now in Texas and in Mississippi and in Alabama.

As the Senator from Iowa knows, and the Senator from Montana, this is the largest natural disaster in the history of the United States. We had one hurricane and major levee failings in a region with over 2 million people. Then on the heels of it, we have had another hurricane, not quite as large but equally as damaging to some rural areas, Mr. President, that you are very familiar with, not big cities but small cities that are gone. They are just gone. There is no more city. There is no more community.

All along the gulf coast—you can ask the Senators from Mississippi—Waveland and Biloxi and Cameron Parish, 10,000 people lived there 5 days ago. No one lives there today.

I flew over the other day. There is one building, the courthouse building, that stood in the Audrey hurricane, it stood in the Rita hurricane. When we rebuilt the Cameron Parish, I told them: Go find the architect who built that courthouse because we are going need to have everything built that way if we are going to live here.

This was not a coast of people sunbathing at resorts or second homes. These were people running our pipelines, our gas lines, our fishing industry. These were people running the refineries, the infrastructure that is on that coast. They didn't just go there in the last decade to retire. Their families have been there for generations, all along this gulf coast. When they went there, there was more land and more protection. But because they are not super rich and because they did not have a lot of extra money and because over a lot of decades the Federal Government did not do what it should—maybe we all missed a little bit here or there—the land is washed away. They find themselves more vulnerable.

But they are not sunbathing down there. They are working on the ports, on the oil and gas industry, and they desperately need our help. These people need immediate medical attention and care. As a doctor, you can understand the anxiety of people who do not know

where to go for health care. They are in strange places. They need to be qualified.

This has been well researched by the staffs. We have had input, of course, Senator VITTER and myself, but this comes straight from the Finance Committee, to extend what is already in the law for people to help them get coverage for 5 months, just 5 months until people can catch their breath, get up on their feet, try to find their families, make decisions. They lost their homes. They lost their business.

It also helps private employers. I have had private employers, little ones, medium ones, and big ones pouring into my office. And this is what they say: Senator, we are not leaving. We want to stay. We are going to exhaust the money in our bank accounts to keep our employees whole. But could you please ask the Federal Government to give us a little help here? We want to keep their coverage. We want to keep our employees. We want them to come back. We don't want our companies to leave. But a lot of them had to leave. They had no choice. They are going to Oklahoma, they are going to Houston but at a lot of cost.

I talked to a gas pipeline company. They are having their employees come back this weekend right in Cameron Parish. But they need our help.

One of the things this bill does is it helps them—if they were giving insurance to their people—continue to give private insurance. If some companies had to leave temporarily, their employees can still get private coverage through a program that already exists.

The chairman and the ranking member put their heads together and said, Let us do this for 5 months.

I know there is an objection, because some have expressed a few objections, that said let us not extend it to all States, let us keep it targeted to Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Texas.

We thought about that. But the reason there is one provision that allows the other States to keep their Medicaid, 100-percent reimbursement, is because they have taken a lot of our people. Arkansas didn't have a hurricane, but they took our people. They had 75,000 people.

So if we cut the State of Arkansas' health care benefits which may go into effect soon, that is what we were anticipating. It puts so much strain on Arkansas for the 75,000 people.

We think it is reasonable to ask for a 5-month waiver for all of the States just to help us through this difficult period.

We are not trying to expand a Government program. We are trying to use what is available now in the law and extend it to millions of people who need help immediately.

It is not everything we need in health care. We still have problems with losses because companies are out of business. Doctors who want to stay have no place to work. Even if they

showed up to the hospital to work, the city of New Orleans is still virtually empty. It is a large city. One-half our population has been impacted. Almost half, 4.5 million people, live in the southern part of our State.

Everyone has been impacted by these two disasters. A large population in Texas, a large population in Mississippi, and a medium-sized population in Alabama have been affected, but not to the level that, of course, Louisiana has taken. It has taken a hit to its major metropolitan area, as well as then being followed up by another major hit to the rural area to the western side of our State.

I say "rural"—there are good-sized cities, such as Lake Charles and other cities that are in that area.

We have large cities, medium-sized cities, and small villages and communities—such as Cameron—that have been very hard hit.

It is very important that we try to work through whatever the difficulties might be. We don't have that much time.

If we can move on this package in the next day or two, and work out whatever objections there are, I think it would be a great signal to send from this Congress.

I know we have to get it past the House. I know we have to get it signed by the President. But the President has been to our State many times. I have been with him on almost every trip. He has assured me that he understands that people are in desperate need, and he wants to see the Federal Government use the resources that we have to meet that need. I know we can't do everything. But this is minimal. This is basic coverage for people who have nothing right now.

While churches are helping and while the private employers are doing a good job, private employers cannot take on more risk than is their fiduciary responsibility. They have a responsibility to their stakeholders, to their shareholders, and to their board of directors. They cannot run charities.

That is why we have the role of Government. That is why we have to step up and meet them halfway.

I am proud of our employers, but they need our help. The business community needs us to be a partner, and part of this bill would do that.

I see the Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question through the Chair?

I came on the floor late. I heard Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY talk about this bill. I want to try to bring it down to the most basic information, so if someone misses the debate, they will understand what we are talking about.

This is generally what we are trying to do. We are taking people who are displaced out of their homes, out of their jobs, out of their communities because of the hurricanes—people who, frankly, are going through a lot of personal and family hardship at this moment—and saying that one thing we

are going to help you with immediately is to make sure that you have health care. If you qualify, you would have Medicaid—that is for people in the lower income categories—or if you had private health insurance where you used to work in a business that has gone away, we are going to step in here for 5 months and say, We are going to give you this peace of mind. You will know that you have health insurance.

Is that what this bill does?

Ms. LANDRIEU. That is what this bill does.

Mr. DURBIN. I understand that this is a bipartisan bill that Senator GRASSLEY, Republican of Iowa, Senator BAUCUS, a Democrat of Montana, have written to make sure that the millions of people who have been displaced will have basic health care.

Is that is what this bill does?

Ms. LANDRIEU. The Senator is correct. That is what this bill does. Senator VITTER from Louisiana and Senator LANDRIEU—and I am almost certain that every Senator of the affected States—have signed off on this, asked for it and said “yes.” We desperately need it.

Mr. DURBIN. I would like to ask the Senator how many times she has brought this bill to the floor. How many times have we tried to provide this basic health care, basic protection to these victims of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita so far?

Ms. LANDRIEU. I believe the Senator from Iowa and the Senator from Montana have been working on this for 2 weeks. We are into our fourth week of Katrina and the first week of Rita.

But again, it is the largest natural disaster that has hit the Continental United States. We are getting ready to rebuild, after we work out our differences, a major American city for the first time since the Civil War and the region that surrounds it. We are learning as we go. There is not a textbook to follow. So we have to use our common sense. We have to trust each other on some of these things.

The Senator from Iowa and the Senator from Montana have run this committee, and their members have put a great bill together that is modest but so needed.

I am hoping the Senator from Illinois can help us figure out how to move this legislation quickly.

Mr. DURBIN. If the Senator would further yield for a question through the Chair, I thought our biggest complaint about the Federal Government's response to Katrina was that, even when we were warned, we weren't ready. Many of us are calling for a non-partisan, independent commission to answer some basic questions. Why weren't we ready? But when it comes to this issue about health care for the victims of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, we know what the need is. And apparently, because of objections heard on the floor of the Senate, we are delaying, postponing, this basic health care for these victims of this hurricane.

Ms. LANDRIEU. That is what it seems to be. It is unfortunate.

I am hoping, through the Chair to the Senator from Illinois—and I see that our minority leader from Nevada is here with us—that we could do our best in the next 24 hours, either through action on this floor or meetings, to answer questions that a few Senators may have. I have heard objections, such as too much corruption. We have problems with Mississippi spending money and corruption, but we shouldn't blame these people. All they want is health care benefits. We can fix that issue. We can work on that issue.

But let us not hold up health care to people until we get the system perfect. If that is the case, we should stop working tonight. The system is never going to be perfect. It can be better.

Let us not take it out on these people. They have already been victimized outside of any of their control.

The Senator should know that one of the objections was that we shouldn't expand a Government program.

But again, I just want to reiterate to the Senator that this is not an expansion. It is in the law. It is 5 months of special help to people who need it and to people who have private insurance that have lost it and can't have it, if we don't meet their employers halfway.

The only expansion for the country is to say in the next 5 months the Federal Government will not cut any State's Medicaid Program because so many of our States are helping our people. Again, in Arkansas, 75,000. It would not be fair to Arkansas, even though they didn't get hit by the hurricane, to cut their State program when they are absorbing some many extra people from Louisiana, Texas, and Mississippi.

I think that makes common sense.

I see the Senator from Nevada. Maybe he can shed some light on this.

I will yield the floor. I have spent the time and more than I was asked for.

I thank the Senators who are here who are trying to get this important bill passed by the end of the week.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VITTER). The Senator from Nevada.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I want the RECORD to be spread with my appreciation for the statements made today by Senator BAUCUS, Senator LANDRIEU, and Senator DURBIN regarding this most important issue. We saw with Katrina that we have in America a safety net that has some holes in it. We saw in graphic description some of the people fell through that safety net.

That is what this is all about—helping medically. The poorest of the poor in our country are helped by Medicaid. That is what this is all about.

For those people who are watching this, who are listening, this is an instance where there is a bipartisan measure that is now before the Senate that should pass. The Finance Committee, under the direction of Senators GRASSLEY and BAUCUS—Republican and Democrat—came up with this most important piece of legislation. They did

it. They worked it out. No one can challenge the conservative credentials of either of these Senators. They are both fiscally sound. They do good work for their Finance Committee.

There are a few people on the Republican side of the aisle who are holding this up. It is not right. No one wants to waste money for Katrina. No one wants to waste money with the billions of dollars that will be spent with Katrina.

I would be happy if Congress selected someone to be a czar to make sure the money was spent properly.

But here we have people who are waiting. This is going for 5 months. They will be waiting for the most simple medical measures that would help them—and help the States that are taking care of them.

The State of Arkansas alone has 60,000 evacuees, most of whom, in some way or another, their family member, would qualify for some part of this.

It is the right thing to do to help States such as Arkansas.

#### PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

Mr. REID. Mr. President, in 1918, the Spanish flu pandemic swept the world for a number of reasons—not the least of which we had soldiers coming from all over the world going places and coming home. As a result, this pandemic that swept our world claimed the lives of about 50 million people, and 500,000 people in the United States alone before it completed its deadly run.

Today, many public health experts are warning us that another flu pandemic is not a matter of if, but when. They tell us that this next pandemic has the potential to be every bit as devastating as what the world witnessed nearly 100 years ago.

A flu pandemic occurs when a new strain of flu emerges in the human population and causes serious illness and death and can easily spread between humans.

The avian flu, referred to as H5-N1 flu strain by scientists, already meets the first step: Roughly half of the 115 people who have been diagnosed with this virus to date have died. At present, all that stands between avian flu and pandemic status is the fact that scientists do not believe the avian flu can easily be transmitted between humans.

Scientists fear it is only a matter of time before the avian flu virus mutates into a form that can spread easily from human to human.

According to the Centers for Disease Control Director Julie Gerberding:

... many influenza experts, including those at CDC, consider the threat of a serious influenza epidemic to the United States to be high. Although the timing and impact of an influenza pandemic is unpredictable, the occurrence is inevitable and potentially devastating.

That was her word, “inevitable.”

You do not have to be an expert to understand the dramatic toll a flu pandemic could have on our Nation and on