

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