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

(Mr. RANGEL addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

#### ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak for 5 minutes.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Georgia?

There was no objection.

#### HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER

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

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise this evening with a heavy heart. What we have witnessed during the past few days in New Orleans and the gulf coast of Mississippi and Alabama is unreal. It is unbelievable.

This did not have to be. We were told by the National Weather Service and by the media that a dangerous storm, a very dangerous storm, was on the way; but something went wrong. Somebody someplace at the highest level of this government fell asleep at the switch.

Our government had time to act, but we failed to move. The strength and the might of the most powerful Nation on Earth, the only remaining superpower, could not defend, could not protect, could not save her people.

Even a mother hen in time of great trouble, in the midst of a mighty wind, would gather her little chick under her wing. Can we do any less?

I do not understand how we can put a man on the Moon, how we can go to the bottom of the ocean, or conduct a war thousands of miles away, yet we cannot save our own citizens here at home.

What happened in New Orleans is an embarrassment and a national disgrace, and it must never ever happen again. Some people are trying to blame local and State officials for this disaster, but as Harry Truman suggested, the buck stops at the top.

What this disaster has showed us is that this Nation is still divided by both race and class. This administration never had an urban policy. It never tried to find a way to help the poor in America.

There were people with very little means who were left out and left behind in New Orleans. They did not have an automobile or an SUV. They could not buy an airplane ticket to go to Dallas or Houston, Chicago, or Atlanta. They were left out and left behind, not just in apartments but waiting in water up to their waists, to their chests, over their heads. They have

been trapped for decades in lives of poverty and neglect.

Do not tell me that our government cannot be responsible. Do not tell me that it is hard to respond. When we get ready to go to war, we do not ask two former Presidents to go pass around a tin cup to raise money. We authorize, we appropriate, and that is what we should do now.

Do not tell me that this Nation cannot respond in a crisis when the safety of the American people is at stake.

In 1957, when there was a crisis in Little Rock, Arkansas, at Central High, President Eisenhower sent in the Federal troops.

In 1961, when there was a crisis during the Freedom Rides, Americans were beaten and brutalized, President Kennedy placed the city of Montgomery under martial law and sent in the National Guard to protect the lives of local citizens.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson did not hesitate. He used his capacity, he used his power as Commander in Chief to call out the Federal troops to protect Americans as they marched from Selma to Montgomery.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are the most powerful Nation on Earth; and we are able, we are able, we have the ability, we have the capacity to respond in a crisis. We have the means. Now we just have to find the will.

A great nation is defined by the methods it uses to defend the dignity of humanity. This hurricane has put us to the test, and it is my hope and my prayer that some good can come out of this very bad situation.

People have lost their lives. Families are broken. Mothers are here. Fathers are there. Children and grandchildren are someplace else. We may never really know how many people died because of this disaster. There are people suffering from dehydration. People cannot get their medicine. They are stranded for days and cannot get food to eat or water to drink. A great Nation, a proud people should be able to do better.

The American people have taken the lead. They have poured out their compassion and come to the aid of their fellow citizens. They have expressed a sense of righteous indignation. They have called us on the telephone. They have e-mailed us. They are demanding action. They want to know why this has happened; and Mr. Speaker, it is the role of their government to respond.

We must deliver Federal support to help rebuild New Orleans, to help rebuild the gulf coast of America. We must deliver Federal support to help rebuild the lives of thousands of American people and help them find their way back home; and if we do anything less, if we fail to act, then I am afraid the spirit of history will not be kind to us.

#### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT'S RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WATSON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WATSON. Mr. Speaker, we got word today that there will be a bipartisan, bicameral investigation into what went wrong in the Federal Government's response to Hurricane Katrina. This is welcome news. A full investigation will help us understand, in detail, how we can improve our disaster response capabilities to prevent this sort of mishandling from ever happening again.

The problem is that an investigation will take months. Meanwhile, it is clear that the Federal Government still does not have its act together on this crisis; and in the meantime, people are dying.

Here are just a few of the recent fouls-ups:

In the Gulf of Mexico, the USS Bataan, a Navy hospital ship, has been sitting in the Gulf of Mexico since Hurricane Katrina hit. Yet the Bataan's hundreds of hospital beds are still going empty.

FEMA has requested hundreds of firefighters from around the country to rescue Katrina victims, but for 4 days they have been sitting idle in a hotel at the Atlanta airport and playing cards while studying FEMA history. Said one Pennsylvania firefighter, "On the news every night you hear hurricane victims say, How come everybody forgot us? We didn't forget. We're stuck in Atlanta drinking beer."

On Tuesday, FEMA asked the South Carolina Department of Public Health to scramble on only a half hour of notice to receive 180 injured evacuees from New Orleans. The South Carolina doctors then waited for hours for the evacuees to arrive in Charleston. It turns out that FEMA had sent the evacuees to the wrong Charleston: Charleston, West Virginia, instead of Charleston, South Carolina, where the doctors were waiting.

Now we hear that the director of FEMA, Michael Brown, waited hours after Katrina hit before submitting a plan to send FEMA personnel into action. This despite the fact that the President of the United States had declared a Federal emergency 2 days before Katrina hit.

Mr. Speaker, Republicans are eager to accuse anyone who questions the Federal Government's response of "playing politics." But this is not about politics. This is about getting answers as to why our Federal Government cannot protect its citizens. We cannot sit still waiting for hearings when it is clear that Americans are suffering and dying while their government officials learn on the job.

Mr. Speaker, the Director of FEMA, Michael Brown, needs to go and to go now. This is not a political act; it is a humanitarian act. Who knows how