



Thoughts From . . .

CAPITOL HILL

By Congressman Rodney Alexander



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Lessons learned after nature's fury

WASHINGTON, D.C.--As the flood waters continue to recede from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita all along towns and cities located in the Gulf Coast area, it is important that we continue to focus on rebuilding our homes, businesses and lives. Now is not the time to focus on the politics that will divide us as a nation.

I remember the first time I surveyed the damage of Katrina's wrath, thinking that I've never witnessed the degree of this devastation in all of my life. But this disaster, like all other disasters in American history, has forced us to reflect on our strengths and assess our vulnerabilities. The Sept. 11th tragedy forced us to address our vulnerabilities in airline security and military intelligence, and changed the focus of our military to protecting America from terrorism.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, however, shed light on the weaknesses of our levees, flood structures, coastline and faulty evacuation plans.

I realize that the federal cost of repairing and rebuilding Louisiana will be billions, but this disaster, if not addressed by federal dollars, would undoubtedly set Louisiana back economically for decades. However, not all of the burden should be placed on the back of the federal government; we need the strength of free enterprise and business as well. Taxpayers throughout the nation are watching us, and they demand that we spend federal dollars prudently.

I agree. One way to do this effectively is to appoint a strong leader to oversee the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast and to cautiously watch every dollar spent. I think that President Bush should fill this void with the likes of a strong military leader or someone with impeccable business credentials. Regardless, this leader must not practice partisan politics. Rather, he or she must have one goal in mind: rebuilding a stronger, more vibrant Gulf Coast.

While congress continues to focus on rebuilding the Gulf Coast, it is my job--as the representative of the 5th District--to continue doing the work that I was elected to do.

As the only member of Louisiana's congressional delegation on the Appropriations Committee, I must continue working toward improving levees and infrastructure in the 5th District. Since I was elected to congress three years ago, I've made it a priority to make sure that our 5th District levees are secure enough to protect both our cities and farm land. It is important that members of congress appropriate enough funding to rebuild the levees surrounding New Orleans to withstand nature's fury, but I know that cities like Monroe and Alexandria need flood protection, too.

Those are just a few concerns that I've already brought to the attention of my fellow colleagues in congress, the Army Corps of Engineers and local levee boards.

Right now, my district has shouldered much of the responsibility of providing food, clothing and shelter for evacuees. Most of this responsibility has been handled by our local churches, schools and small communities. Fifth District residents have been compassionate and caring for over a month. I'm reminded of how compassionate Americans can be during trying and turbulent times, but the 5th District has gone beyond the call of duty. Local mayors, police jury members and law enforcement officials have worked night and day to help meet the needs of these evacuees. Most of the work that they've done has been behind closed doors, without the recognition they truly deserve.

Finally, as members of congress return to Washington, D.C., it is important that we--as elected officials-- work together. It angers me greatly to see other elected officials conduct media interviews and point fingers at others, blaming them for these natural disasters. This is not the time for such behavior. Right now it is time for Americans to come together and work toward restoring and rebuilding, just like Americans focused on rebuilding New York and other areas that suffered attacks following the Sept. 11th terrorists attacks. There will be time to study and investigate this disaster in the future, but today it is up to us to rebuild what nature has destroyed.

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