

Senator Mary Landrieu:

Mr. President, I thank my colleague from California, and I am pleased to join my colleagues in calling for the change Americans are hoping for, which this next election opportunity will bring, to focus on issues that need so much change in America.

One of the items on the top of our Checklist for Change is a FEMA that works, a plan that treats local and State governments as respected and able partners, having a disaster plan that spends taxpayer dollars with care and efficiency, having a plan that puts a premium on helping families and extended families stay together through an ordeal that rocks the economic foundation and future of so many families as they are displaced, sometimes for weeks, sometimes for months, and, yes, even sometimes for years.

We need a new FEMA. We need a muscular, robust, able, efficient, and effective FEMA to be a true partner with local and State governments and individual businesses and families in times of disaster.

I have spoken many times on the floor about the disasters of Katrina and Rita and how it affected the gulf coast, from Beaumont to Mobile, with the great city of New Orleans and the metropolitan area being most directly affected. But we are not isolated in that suffering by any means.

This week, we have seen what is happening today in Iowa, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois. There has been \$1.5 billion in damages in Iowa alone, and 38,000 Iowans have been evacuated. More than 3,500 National Guard are deployed. More than 4.8 million sandbags have been used. I could go on and on about the towns that have been completely evacuated.

Yes, New Orleans was completely evacuated. So was Saint Bernard Parish and so were large swaths of Jefferson Parish--a parish of more than 450,000 people--3 years ago this August.

But today the towns of Hartford, Palo, and Fredonia have been completely evacuated--not as large as New Orleans but towns of substantial populations.

The question is, Does FEMA have its housing plan together yet? Is there a plan for people to be able to get their medicines if they are relocated, to get their prescription drugs from their hometown pharmacy or their neighborhood? I am not sure that has been done yet.

So we need a FEMA that works. We need an administration that understands it is not just disasters far away but disasters right here at home and that homeland security starts with hometown security, where people can be secure in their neighborhoods, in their homes, and that the levees that have been put up to protect them will actually hold the water and will not be breached or overturned.

We do not have that confidence right now in America. So not only do we need a new FEMA, but we need a FEMA that will be an advocate for proper investments in infrastructure.

It is embarrassing, I believe, to be in the atmosphere we are in, where people can look up and any day a bridge could collapse or any day a levee could break. We cannot prevent tornadoes. We cannot prevent hurricanes. We cannot prevent earthquakes. But I promise you, we can do a lot more than we are doing now to reform the Federal emergency system so it works better with local and State governments so that when earthquakes happen, when hurricanes happen, when other disasters happen, the people of the United States are getting the help they need.

So that is one of our top issues on our Checklist for Change: a disaster planning and response system second to none.

It is a long list. But it is a list that must get done. That is, in large measure, what this next election is about. It is about the kind of leadership that is going to bring about the changes necessary, so when a business collapses after 20 or 30 years of making a profit, or longer, when families' homes are destroyed, they have a Government they can count on--not to give them charity but to give them a hand up, to respond, to help them get back on their feet economically, spiritually, and emotionally. That is what our Government can do.

So I am proud to join this team. Again, we are asking for a FEMA that works.