

It's time for a little perspective...by Greg O'Keefe

by Stephen Elliott-Buckley - Thursday, September 08, 2005

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For a little while now I have been hearing from people that President Bush is somehow culpable for the devastation of Katrina. Not so much that he is responsible for the size and intensity of it, although some environmentalists have argued that his—and yet strangely not Congress'—failure to sign Kyoto has wrought this calamity. What has been argued is that Bush failed to provide timely leadership, the kind he provided on 9/11. A hurricane with a week's worth of warning, 24 hour news coverage and a call for a city wide evacuation is not the same as 19 terrorists hijacking planes and inside of four hours bringing down WTC 1 & 2, crashing into the Pentagon and crashing in Pennsylvania. Katrina was not a surprise.

For an excellent piece on the administrative problems regarding the handling of Katrina and its aftermath read this article in the [Wall Street Journal](#):

Many in the media are turning their eyes toward the federal government, rather than considering the culpability of city and state officials. I am fully aware of the challenges of having a quick and responsive emergency response to a major disaster. And there is definitely a time for accountability; but what isn't fair is to dump on the federal officials and avoid those most responsible -- local and state officials who failed to do their job as the first responders. The plain fact is, lives were needlessly lost in New Orleans due to the failure of Louisiana's governor, Kathleen Blanco, and the city's mayor, Ray Nagin.

The primary responsibility for dealing with emergencies does not belong to the federal government. It belongs to local and state officials who are charged by law with the management of the crucial first response to disasters. First response should be carried out by local and state emergency personnel under the supervision of the state governor and his/her emergency operations center.

The actions and inactions of Gov. Blanco and Mayor Nagin are a national disgrace due to their failure to implement the previously established evacuation plans of the state and city. Gov. Blanco and Mayor Nagin cannot claim that they were surprised by the extent of the damage and the need to evacuate so many people. Detailed written plans were already in place to evacuate more than a million people. The plans projected that 300,000 people would need transportation in the event of a hurricane like Katrina. If the plans had been implemented, thousands of lives would likely have been saved.

In addition to the plans, local, state and federal officials held a simulated hurricane drill 13 months ago, in which widespread flooding supposedly trapped 300,000 people inside New Orleans. The exercise simulated the evacuation of more than a million residents. The problems identified in the simulation apparently were not solved.