

Hurricane ravaged areas should be Bush's No. 1 priority

Recently, President Bush, in a rare admission of failure, accepted responsibility for the federal government's inexcusably slow start in helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina. He also announced numerous programs to help Gulf Coast victims and to rebuild the region, "whatever it costs."

Although Mr. Bush deserves credit for his forthrightness and his commitment to the displaced victims, his failure to say where the money was coming from is unforgivable, especially given the \$331 billion federal budget deficit and the \$4.6 trillion national debt.

The recovery effort Mr. Bush outlined is one of the largest in this nation's history. According to the plan, the federal government will cover most of the costs for rebuilding schools, bridges, roads and water systems. In addition, Mr. Bush promised 100 percent reimbursement to states to cover costs for treating evacuees and \$1.9 billion to help reimburse states for the cost of educating displaced students. Those costs have already been estimated as

high as \$200 billion. That is roughly the same cost that's been spent on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therein lies the problem.

Foreign analysts predict that by the time the United States completes the rebuilding process in Iraq the cost will rise as high as \$450 billion and yet there is little indication that much has been accomplished. Recent elections over a new, more democratic constitution have resulted in a stalemate between the Shiites and Kurds on one side and the Sunnis on the other. U.S. peacekeeping troops are still being killed by radical Islamic terrorists, and there is still no withdrawal date in sight. It is clear to everyone except the Bush administration that the Iraqi people don't want anymore assistance from the United States.

Perhaps Mr. Bush should be reminded of the old saying, "Charity begins at home." Instead of wasting billions more of the taxpayers' money - and American lives - in Iraq, withdraw the troops from the Middle East and divert the funding

to the rebuilding process on the Gulf Coast. That would be the responsible thing to do.

If Mr. Bush is concerned about the rising public anger and his sinking numbers in the polls he can take two additional steps: force the Republicans in Congress to scrap their hefty pork-barrel projects so the money can be redirected to the Gulf Coast and abandon the idea of any further tax cuts, which only benefit the wealthiest Americans anyway.

No one can deny that Mr. Bush made a strong, inspirational statement about the federal government's commitment to helping the victims of Hurricane Katrina in their greatest time of need. He has made similar eloquent speeches in the past, but often his deeds don't match his words.

We need a president who will act responsibly, both morally and fiscally, instead of worrying about his carefully-crafted image as the leader who can best keep America safe.

William C. Kashatus
Luzerne County Community
College
Nanticoke

TIMES
LEADER

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2005 PAGE 9A