

Congress Swept Up In 'Revolutionary Tide'

by Debra Hanania Freeman

Despite frantic attempts by the Bush Administration to exonerate itself from an avalanche of charges of criminal negligence and malfeasance in the face of the worst domestic disaster in American history, it seems that nothing can stop what Lyndon LaRouche has called the "incoming tide" of a cultural paradigm-shift against the insanity of the Bush-Cheney crowd.

In the week following the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. Congress essentially ignored the mutterings of a President who is increasingly being described as "dangerous," "unable to deal with reality," and in "deep denial," and began action on aggressive bipartisan measures aimed not only at providing immediate humanitarian relief for the victims of Katrina, but also at launching reconstruction of the entire region.

Echoing the approach outlined by Lyndon LaRouche in his emergency Sept. 3 webcast, Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid (Nev.) moved upon the start of Senate business Sept. 6 with a proposal for \$150 billion for reconstruction. Despite some initial sniping from the Republican caucus, Judd Gregg (R-N.H.), the Chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, not only defended Reid's proposal, but raised it to \$200 billion. Trent Lott (R-Miss.) and Republican leader Bill Frist (Tenn.) also endorsed the proposal.

On Sept. 7, Democratic Senators Reid and Kent Conrad (N.D.), joined by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (Calif.) and John Spratt (S.C.), sent a letter to their Republican counterparts in which they urged their colleagues to suspend bills before Congress to cut government services (\$70 billion in tax cuts and \$35 billion in cuts affecting Medicaid, food stamps, and student loans), and "instead swiftly consider emergency legislation to address the nation's needs after Hurricane Katrina." The letter, which was initially well received, stated, "Now is not the time to cut services for our most vulnerable, cut taxes for our most fortunate, and add \$35 billion to the deficit.

Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.) released a proposal to create a New Orleans and Gulf Coast Redevelopment Authority, modelled on FDR's Tennessee Valley Authority, with the intention of investing \$150 billion in putting people back to work rebuilding their own communities.

On Sept. 8, Reid issued a statement proposing priorities for the session: "We are facing a national crisis. Americans are suffering. We must adjust our priorities. If there is an

immediate lesson to draw from the Federal government's failures last week, it is that there is no time to wait. Families are counting on us, and we owe it to them to do everything we can to help."

Reid demanded that Frist postpone action on the previously announced Commerce, Science, and Justice Appropriations bill, which contains some small business tax incentives, and instead "go direct to the Defense Authorization bill and add proposals to help survivors, veterans, re-examine FEMA, and create Sen. Hillary Clinton's proposed "Katrina Commission." With that done, Reid proposed, "let us get to the Energy and Water bill . . . to help rebuild the infrastructure that has been destroyed along the Gulf Coast. It includes billions for the Army Corps of Engineers and flood control, and it should be a priority in this Senate."

Leading Republicans responded to the Reid proposals immediately. Sen. Pete Dominici (R-N.M.), the Chairman of the Energy and Water Committee, announced that he would convene his committee to provide the Army Corps of Engineers with the money it needs, exactly as Reid had proposed.

Along with the aggressive actions aimed at a swift reconstruction effort, members of the House and Senate also made it clear that they had no intention of shirking their oversight responsibility. Elected officials remained furious at the failure of the Bush Administration to respond to early warnings that a catastrophe was about to hit the region, and were no less furious at the slow response once disaster struck. Their anger and frustration was also clearly shared by the American people.

On Sept. 6, Henry Waxman (D-Calif.), James Oberstar (D-Okla.), and Bennie Thompson (D-Miss.), the ranking Democrats on the House Government Reform, Transportation, and Infrastructure, and Homeland Security Committees respectively, sent a 17-page letter to House Government Reform Committee Chairman Tom Davis (R-Va.) and Don Young (R-Ak.), the Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, as well as the Acting Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security. The letter urges the Republican leaders to accept their responsibility to examine the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina, in order "to understand what went wrong and why." Among the 10 questions that the Democrats posed for the inquiry was, "Has FEMA been undermined and underfunded?" Davis responded with an announcement that he would call the hearing the week of Sept. 12.

Failure of Presidential Leadership

Senator Reid dealt a devastating blow to the Administration when, in a letter to Susan Collins (R-Me.), the Chair of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, he explicitly addressed an issue that, until then, only LaRouche had had the guts to address publicly: the personal failure of leadership of the President. Collins and the ranking Democrat on the committee, Joe Lieberman (Conn.), had is-

sued a letter a day earlier indicating their intention to conduct oversight hearings into the Federal government's response to the tragic events surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

Clearly not entirely satisfied that the hearings would take up the obvious question, Reid wrote to Collins, applauding the intention stated in her and Lieberman's letter, but pressing the point that Federal officials, including the White House, were well informed about the consequences such a storm would bring, as well as the measures that were required both before and after such a storm hit. Reid insisted that it was well known that a major hurricane would inevitably hit this section of the Gulf Coast within a matter of days, yet the residents and local governments were left to "fend for themselves."

Any responsible oversight, Reid insisted, must examine the degree to which Bush's Texas vacation interfered with the response to the hurricane; how it was possible that Bush appeared not to know that the New Orleans levees were likely to be breached, despite numerous reports by his own Federal agencies; whether budget cuts by the Bush Administration thwarted the efforts of the Army Corps of Engineers; and whether the President responded by dispatching a sufficient number of troops and equipment to assist in rescue and evacuation.

The Reid letter hammers away at the absence from Washington of the President and key members of his Administration, both before and after the disaster hit. "How much time did the President spend dealing with this emerging crisis while he was on vacation? Did the fact that he was outside of Washington, D.C., have any effect on the Federal government's response? When it became apparent that a major hurricane was days away from striking the Gulf Coast, why didn't President Bush immediately return to Washington from his vacation and why didn't he recall key officials and staff members back from their vacations? Would the presence of key officials in Washington have improved the response? Why did the Bush Administration fail to act according to their own December 2004 National Response Plan?"

As the White House reeled under the charges, Collins wasted no time in responding that her Committee would indeed investigate these and other questions. "Governments at all levels failed in their obligations to protect the people. It is hard to understand the lack of response to a disaster that was predicted for years. It is hard to understand the lack of response in the light of the money that has spent on national security since 9/11," she said. "If our system did such a poor job when there was no enemy, how would we have coped with a terrorist attack that provided no advance warning and that was intent on causing as much destruction as possible?"

As more and more members of Congress found themselves riding the tide of what Lyndon LaRouche has identified as a "revolutionary shift" in outlook, the same view was echoed in countless newspaper editorials across the nation. Although Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

director Michael Brown was the target of much of the early criticism, by the middle of the week of Sept. 5, in the face of the White House's continued failure to provide any leadership at all, the focus shifted to President Bush.

An op-ed that appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* and *Los Angeles Times* by the Clinton Administration's chief budget official for national security, Gordon Adams, was paradigmatic of pieces that appeared across the nation. Adams wrote: "The disastrous Federal response to Katrina exposes a record of incompetence, misjudgment, and ideological blunders that should lead to very serious doubts that the Bush Administration should be allowed to continue in office.

"When the President of the U.S. points the finger away from the lame response of his Administration to Katrina and tries to finger local officials as the culprits, he betrays the unwillingness of this Administration to speak the truth and hold itself accountable.

"We have a President who is apparently ill-informed, lackadaisical, and narrow-minded, surrounded by oil baron cronies, religious fundamentalist crazies and right-wing extremists and ideologues. He has appointed officials who give incompetence new meaning. . . ."

The Thugs Respond

By midweek, with the Congress acting in bipartisan action against the ineptitude of the White House, with a Republican Party increasingly in revolt, and with public opinion against the President showing no signs of abating, the thugs swung into action.

Homeland Security Chief Michael Chertoff, in a pathetic attempt to dull the population's knowledge of the full magnitude of the tragedy, acted on what are reported to be orders from the White House, and forbade the release of any photographs depicting the deaths resulting from Katrina. The President announced that he was dispatching Thug-in-Chief Dick Cheney to the region. But, before Cheney left, he moved to bludgeon the uprising by Congressional Republicans.

Following what well-informed Washington, D.C. sources report as a "pointed intervention" by the Vice President, on the night of Sept. 7, Frist and Hastert reversed their earlier agreement to launch a bipartisan investigation, and announced that they were moving to create what they called a "bipartisan, bicameral commission," *controlled by the Republicans*, to investigate the Administration's failure in the Katrina crisis. Both Democratic and Republican Congressional leaders were stunned at the blatant attempt at a coverup.

Reid and Pelosi made it clear that they would not assign any Democrats to this sham committee. In a statement from the floor, Reid blasted the proposal, saying: "I have no details on this proposal. What little I do know raises serious concerns. . . . One, it's not bipartisan. An investigation of the Republican Administration by a Republican-controlled Congress is like having a pitcher call his own balls and strikes." At a news

conference, Pelosi related that when she had spoken to the President to urge him to fire FEMA head Brown, Bush said, "Why would I do that?" Pelosi told the press, "I said, because of that that went wrong, Mr. President, of all that simply did not go right last week. And he said, 'What didn't go right?' " A clearly furious Pelosi assailed Bush as "oblivious, in denial, and very dangerous."

Reid later said that he would support legislation being prepared by Hillary Clinton to establish an independent commission like the one set up to investigate the events of 9/11. He said that numerous Republicans had already requested copies of the bill.

Despite Cheney's move to obstruct the ongoing work of the Congress, in an attempted coup d'état that echoed his earlier actions to invoke the "nuclear option," there is no indication that Cheney can hold back mounting opposition from Republicans. Leading Republican Senators, including John Warner (Va.), James Inhofe (Okla.), John McCain (Ariz.), Sam Brownback (Kan.), Jeff Sessions (Ala.), Mike Crapo (Id.), and Jim DeMint (S.C.), all said that the proposal threatens to trample the oversight plans of five Senate committees and, as such, they would oppose it. Susan Collins (on the Senate side), and Tom Davis (on the House side), said the proposal would not stop them from forging ahead with their investigations, which have strong bipartisan support.

In an obvious attempt to quell the intensifying political storm, Homeland Security czar Chertoff announced that he was appointing Vice Adm. Thad Allen, chief-of-staff of the U.S. Coast Guard, to take charge of recovery operations in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, and recalling FEMA head Brown to Washington. Chertoff claimed that Brown was not being fired, but it was widely expected that Brown would soon tender his resignation.

Although Brown's removal was demanded by a parade of Democrats, it will do little to halt the ongoing paradigm-shift that actually began even prior to the November 2004 election, when Lyndon LaRouche won a critical fight inside the Democratic Party, that resulted in Democrats reasserting their roots as the party of FDR, and their commitment to the principle of the general welfare. That shift resulted in fierce opposition to Bush's early attempt to destroy Social Security, and gained bipartisan momentum in May, as Cheney's first attempted coup against the Senate was defeated when a group of Democratic and Republican Senators shut down his "nuclear option."

LaRouche moved quickly when Katrina hit, not only defining the direction that was necessary to address the catastrophe, but also identifying the fact that the country could no longer survive with a President who was insane, and a Vice President who was a sociopath. Bush and Cheney themselves may prove to be LaRouche's most effective allies in their own removal from office, so that the Congress can act unimpeded to do what LaRouche has outlined, and "pull this nation together now."