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Vol. 154

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2008

Nos. 98-99

Congressional Record



United States
of America

John
Your outstanding leadership
during the 2008 flooding
has proven my confidence
in you was not misplaced.
Thanks for your commitment
to Agency and public service.
your friend
John Durbin
6.20.08

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 110th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

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No. 99

House of Representatives

The House was not in session today. Its next meeting will be held on Tuesday, June 17, 2008, at 12:30 p.m.

Senate

MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2008

MIDWEST FLOODING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, this Father's Day weekend I celebrated by buying a dehumidifier. I live in the Midwest, and we have had a lot of rain, but I am lucky because my problems with a damp basement are minor—very minor—in comparison to what people all across the Midwest are facing. We have seen this before. I was hoping and praying we wouldn't see it again for a long time, but our colleagues from Iowa and Minnesota and others have spoken on the floor about the devastation that is a result of massive flooding in the Midwest and Wisconsin as well.

Tens of thousands of our neighbors in the Midwest have suffered staggering losses and need help and our Government needs to be there, as promised. In my State of Illinois, the same floods that have devastated our northern neighbors are now heading our way. We are in a race against time and nature.

By Wednesday of this week, at least in the Quincy area of the Mississippi River, we expect the Mississippi River to reach its crest. It is the mightiest river in North America. It is a beautiful river and a big part of America's history but, boy, when the rains start falling and all those rivers start feeding into it, the Mississippi can become almost uncontrollable.

There are fears that the flooding along the Mississippi in Illinois could reach historic levels that we experienced during the great flood of 1993. I know all about that one. That was a flood on my watch. I was a Congressman in central Illinois, with a big swath of Illinois and the Mississippi River in my district.

It was one of the most costly and devastating natural disasters ever to hit our country. It didn't come with the intensity and immediacy of a Hurricane Katrina and certainly didn't cause the long-term devastation they felt in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Floods in our part of the world are a gradual, building thing that seem like they will never go away. More than 50 people died in 1993. Thousands were forced to evacuate their homes, as hundreds of levees failed up and down the Mississippi River. The economic damage exceeded \$15 billion.

The experts told us after that flood that it was a 500-year flood event. So we thought we would be able to brag about that for the rest of our lives, and generations to come will point back to 1993. Well, here we are 15 years later, and we seem to be on the verge of another similar disaster.

Many times, weather-related disasters, such as Katrina, give us no warning. They strike in a matter of minutes, hours or days if we are lucky. This is different. We have seen this crisis coming for quite a while.

Illinoisans are working hard and fast to try to prepare for the worst and to minimize the damage.

Last Friday, when the Senate adjourned, I went back to my home State and drove over to Quincy on the Central Illinois Expressway and met with Mayor John Spring and then went down to Grafton, IL, and met with Mayor Richard Mosby. Senator OBAMA was in Quincy on Saturday.

In those cities and towns up and down the Mississippi River, people are

filling sandbags as fast as they can do it. They are fortifying existing levees and creating levees to protect businesses and homes and valuable infrastructure.

I commend all the residents, volunteers, emergency workers, and the more than 400 members of the Illinois National Guard, who are working to brace our State for these floodwaters. Many people are working around the clock.

That is one of the nice things about this great Nation. I take special pride in the Midwest, which is where my roots are. When an emergency such as this arises, I have watched how people rally around and try to help.

Again, I was with Mayor Spring in Quincy on Friday. People were literally spending their entire day filling sandbags. It is hard work; many times it is back-breaking work, repetitive. But the spirit in that meeting place was as good as anyplace I have ever been. They all felt they were pulling together for their neighbors, their community, their city, and for their State. They felt a special kinship.

It is not unusual, of course, to see the great efforts of the Red Cross. They are always there trying to help people along, providing a sandwich and a bottle of water to the folks who need it when they are working. Also, other volunteers, including folks at a age where they could not pitch in and fill a sandbag, but they were making sandwiches and cookies to bring to the volunteers. It is that kind of a community outpouring that means so much.

The official Government agencies were sure there doing their part, including FEMA and our Illinois counterpart, coordinating the disaster response, along with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Over the weekend, two levees in our State—in the towns of Carman and Keithsburg—failed. Hundreds of residents in those towns have left their homes. Another levee broke last week in the town of Lawrenceville, on the east side of the State, and residents are stranded there without drinkable water.

Floodwaters are starting to seep into other towns along the river. Heavy rains are still falling north of us, pushing the river higher by the day.

Our Governor has already declared 15 counties in Illinois State disaster areas.

At the urging of Senator OBAMA and myself, Governor Blagojevich wrote to President Bush and asked him to declare a number of Mississippi River counties Federal disaster areas. Quincy is preparing for the worst. The river is expected to crest at 32 feet. One of the main concerns there is the water intake plants that provide water for the region. If it goes down, it may take months to restore it. That will be a hardship on a lot of people we hope to avoid.

I was with GEN Bill Enyart, head of the Illinois National Guard, Friday

night. I said: Bill, I hope that as a special project the Illinois National Guard will join with Mayor John Spring to try to protect that waterworks. It is important. Bill answered the call immediately and called Mayor John Spring and sent 100 members of the Air Force National Guard there to start sandbagging around the water treatment plant, trying to save it before the river crests on Wednesday. All those volunteers and emergency workers—even State prisoners released from the local prisons and correction camps—are working side by side to fill sandbags.

I also wish to say a word about State Senator John Sullivan in that area. He rolled up his sleeves immediately and went to work. I was with him Friday. He is roaming up and down the river trying to make sure he gives a helping hand where needed. He calls State and Federal agencies to see where they can be of assistance. He is a terrific public servant, and I was glad to be with him at that time.

Senator OBAMA came to Quincy over the weekend and looked at the situation and pitched in as well, filling sandbags, and he was able to see how our State is being affected.

The volunteers worked through Father's Day. The celebration with family was short-lived. They tried to do their best to tame the mighty Mississippi River. These volunteers are demonstrating amazing spirit. A flood is a devastating prospect to face and envision. But these folks have responded with resolve and determination. I am proud of them, and I am so proud to represent them. Their work may save homes, businesses, and lives. Every sandbag that is filled may make it much easier for communities to get back on their feet when the floodwaters recede.

State and local leaders in Illinois are also working around the clock to prepare for the worst. We know, from looking at neighboring States, that the severity of this flood will be more than the people of Illinois alone can absorb.

The magnitude of this disaster will require action from the Federal Government.

I have stood in Congress for over 20 years, and every time some section of our Nation has been victimized by a disaster, I have always felt that is when we come together as an American family, when we draw on our national treasure and the efforts of American workers across the country to come to the rescue of our neighbors in trouble. Well, now it is time for the Midwest to ask for that help.

I know this Congress and President will be forthcoming. They have done a good job so far. We have to make certain we give them all the tools they need to move quickly back home to prepare for the worst, to try to avoid tragedies that can be avoided, and then to clean up afterwards and get on with their lives.

Senator OBAMA and I will work with the Illinois congressional delegation to ensure that the communities and the people affected do not face this disaster alone. America and this Congress and Senate will stand with them.

I yield the floor.