

Let's just make sure we do better next time

There will be many heroic stories from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, but the rap is that help came too late. There is a lot of finger-pointing, a lot of complaints. The recrimination will go on for years, obscuring a very real problem.

Let's face it, no nation is prepared for a disaster of this size. Katrina may be the worst natural disaster in our history, certainly the most overwhelming since the San Francisco earthquake of 1906, which may have killed around 2,500 and spawned a fire which leveled the city.

Yet the fire moved slowly, and most citizens were able to get out of the way. In New Orleans, those who stayed behind were stuck: no communications, no power, no water, no sewers, no food.

There will be a report. There be a death toll, probably in the thousands, easily surpassing San Francisco and New York on Sept. 11, 2002.

Who's to blame?

An act of God, you might say, a hurricane bigger and stronger than most, aimed square at the most vulnerable city in the nation. Thousands fled during the evacuation, taking with them what they could. Too many stayed behind.

Like San Francisco, New Orleans withstood the initial shock. The next day, when two levees collapsed, floodwater inundated most of the central city.

Was help too slow in arriving? Even the president says so.

Was it George Bush's fault?

Is it true, as one black entertainer said on national television, that the president "doesn't care about black people."

Come on.

Arrival of National Guard and Army convoys three days after the levy broke is not that bad, maybe a day later than it might have been.

The most vociferous finger pointing comes from the mayor and other city officials, who's job it was to be prepared for an emergency. The federal government is just supposed to come in and help.

But New Orleans was overwhelmed. The police force, fire department, emergency services, all were unprepared. All collapsed. And maybe, faced with a disaster of the same magnitude, the same would have happened in any city.

In most cities, if there is a flood, the bulk of the town stays dry. You can base support and rescue efforts where the infrastructure remained.

Not in New Orleans.

That's the difference.

Could we face another such disaster? Would we be any more prepared?

Sure. Imagine a terrorist attack with a "weapon of mass destruction" on New York, Washington or any other major city.

Imagine trying to evacuate New York. Or stop an unstoppable plague.

Imagine a massive earthquake along the New Madrid fault in Missouri, leveling both St. Louis and Memphis.

Would there be enough troops to pour in and help?

No, we have a lot to learn about disasters, man-made and natural. We could do a lot more to be ready.

The real answers, though, lie in planning and streamlining the bureaucracy, not in spending a lot of money preparing for what might happen.

We can't know what the next massive disaster will be, or when, or where.

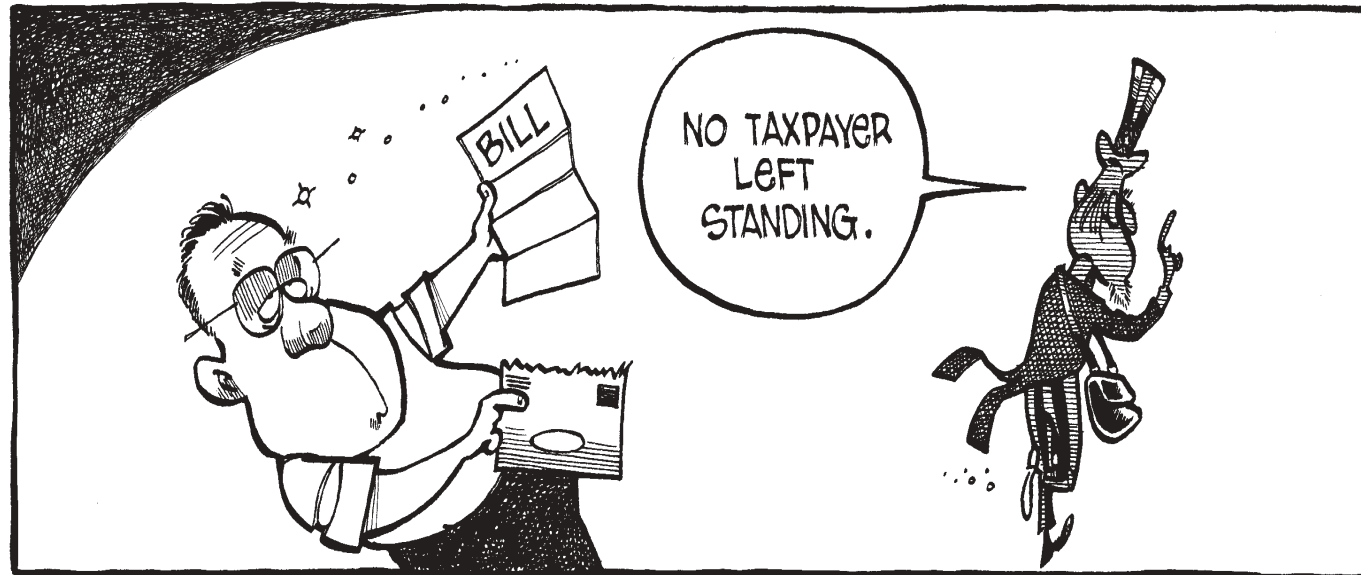
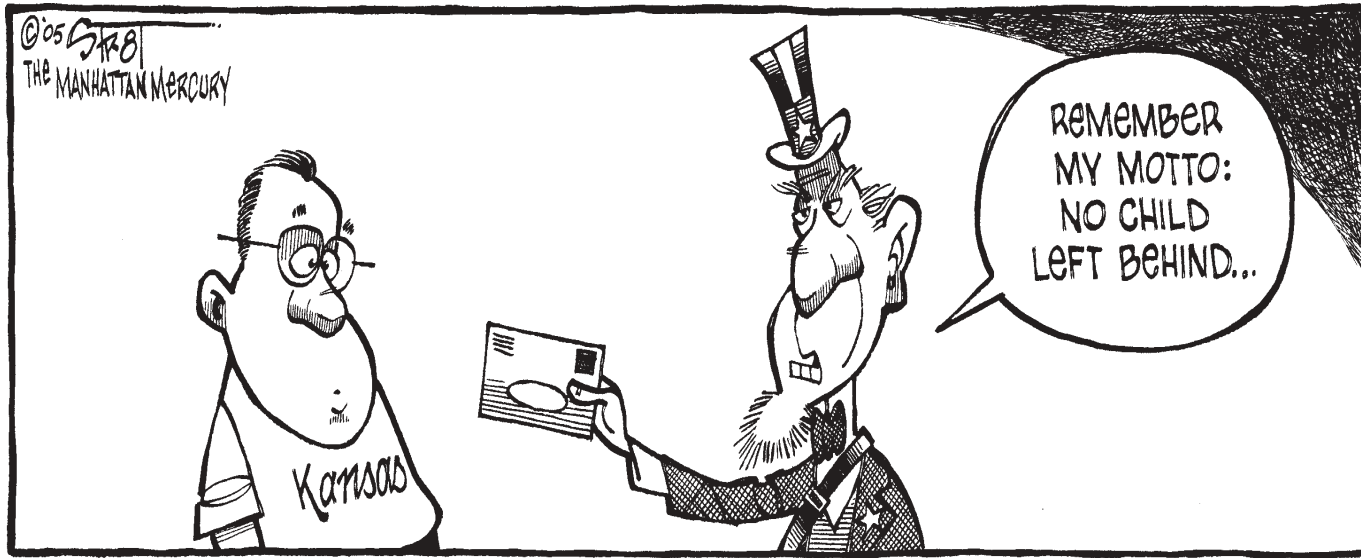
But we can learn from this one.

And as the bodies stack up in those temporary morgues, God have mercy on their souls, we need to stop arguing and whining and start learning.

Even a day's improvement in the response would have meant a lot.

And it will the next time.

— Steve Haynes



Finger-pointing isn't the thing to do

I guess it's human nature to want to blame someone. But, right now, in the middle of the greatest natural disaster this country has ever seen, finger-pointing seems like a poor use of time and energy.

I can't imagine the enormity of the situation in Louisiana, Alabama and Mississippi. The devastation just goes on for miles and miles. Then throw in the factors of looters and loss of all communications and the mess just gets worse. Oh, and don't forget, the nuts who were shooting at the very people who were trying to rescue them. You didn't see anyone taking potshots at rescue workers in Indonesia after the tsunami, did you?

Experts are saying preventative measures to fortify the levees should have been done 20 years ago. Which doesn't help anyone now. Local officials say "somebody" should have got to them sooner. How could they? Honestly, this was a situation there was no contingency for. I heard a weather forecaster say, in

Out Back

Carolyn Plotts



regards to New Orleans, Katrina was a 500-year storm. Is it too soon to start preparing for the next one that might not happen for another 500 hundred years?

I did manage to get a call through to the sister of an old friend of mine who lives in Houma, La., located about 60 miles southwest of New Orleans. They are all fine and suffered only minor damages plus the inconvenience of no phone or electricity for three days.

After watching the horror of hurricane Katrina, I think us Kansans will gladly take a good 'ole tornado any day. We usually know they're coming; we can get

down low enough to ride it out; and we probably aren't going to drown when it's over.

—ob—

In greeting a friend, I asked how she was. "Just peachy," was her answer.

Hey, that should be my line. I'm the one who's been making peach pies and peach jam for a week now. Just finished the last batch this morning.

But, I couldn't leave well enough alone. Someone brought two bags of elderberries to the office and offered them to anyone who wanted them. I guess I must have been the only one with my hand up, because now, I have a sink full of elderberries. I had no idea how teeny, tiny elderberries are and how long it takes to de-stem them.

They had better make good jelly or I'm going to demand my money back. Wait a minute — I didn't have to pay for them. Guess I better just shut up and say, "Thank you."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

Donations needed to help refugees from New Orleans

To the Editor:

We are all aware of the horrific devastation that Hurricane Katrina has left on the Gulf Coast area, the now 1.5 million people affected by this tragedy. Also, the many displaced men, women, and children that could use our help. While we can not do it all, we can make a difference.

Clean, used clothing, and any personal care items will be collected at the St. Francis Parish Center. Also Whitefields Coffee House has volunteered to accept donations.

I will be at the parish center on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Sept. 14, 15, 17, 21, 22, and 24. Volunteers are welcome to join me.

Items can also be dropped off at the Parish Hall on Sundays. Please pay attention to signs and lets try to stay focused. Let's not to create a mess at the parish hall. They were very kind allowing us to do this.

Cash donation can go to the Almena State Bank in either Almena and Norton. This money will be used to help with the transportation of the goods and to buy additional items.

I have been in contact with the Houston Chamber of Commerce, the Astro-

dome, and the Salvation Army in Houston as well as other organizations in that area — they said the following items are needed:

- Men's, women's and children's clothes of all sizes, bath towels, blankets, shoes, and toiletries like toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, women's sanitary items, (all kinds), baby and adult diapers and baby wipes.

These items will be trucked to the Astrodome in Houston, where there are 25,000 people waiting for our help.

I have been told that, of course, it would be great to have these items now, but it will be needed more in about a month, even six weeks. These victims are functioning in survival mode at this time and still "processing" what it is they have just gone through. Also, the very basics are being provided.

(I for one, cannot even imagine what it is that they are dealing with — or living with 25,000 other people.)

These items will be boxed according to size to make it easier for the workers distributing it, so, if you can box or sack things according to size, it would be a big help.

Hoping this might be a huge project, (and the phone calls so far have indicated

that it will) I ask you to give me a call if you can or are able to help.

We can bring a bit of hope to those that have lost it; this is a time for the nation as a whole to come together.

(Be honest, we would want it if a disaster happened here, wouldn't we?)

As great as it is for the state of Texas to come forward so very quickly, they don't need to do this all alone.

We can all help, we as Americans, may be different threads, but are all of the same cloth. And yes, believe it or not, are all connected. We were put here to help each other through this journey.

Mother Teresa once said "We can do no great thing, only small things with great love."

I ask that you show LOVE and help the victims of Hurricane Katrina.

This project started with an idea, and has come together rather quickly, so if you have any questions — I can be reached at (785) 669-2273.

Or as I said, I will be at the parish center on the days stated.

Thank You all for your support, time and donations, God Bless you!

Julie Laurin
Long Island

WRITE:

The Norton Telegram encourages Letters to the Editor on any topic of public interest. Letters should be brief, clear and to the point. They must be signed and carry the address and phone number of the author.

We do not publish anonymous letters. We sign our opinions and expect readers to do likewise.

We do not publish form letters or letters about topics which do not pertain to our area. Thank-yous should be submitted to the Want Ad desk.

Letters will not be censored, but will be read and edited for form and style, clarity, length and legality. We will not publish attacks on private individuals or businesses which do not pertain to a public issue.

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