

# Opinion

## Our government failed us in a time of need

by Hall Penn  
Editor in Chief

Sometime between September 11, 2001 and this week I must not have been paying attention.

Though I had my doubts, I was pretty sure the money spent on Homeland Security was going somewhere and while I didn't believe it would solve the problem of terrorism in this life, or a thousand lives, I figured that if our country suffered another terrorist attack, we'd at least have some sort of structure in place to minimize the damage. But this past week I learned yet again that the only thing I should trust our federal government to do is to deliver the mail, maintain the roads and protect the borders.

Except, I remembered, the postal service is now privatized, the roads are arguable and seeing as the Governor of Arizona has declared a State of Emergency due to illegal immigration in his state, that's out the window too. So what the hell can we trust our government for?

Recently it seems we can trust them to argue about whether a withered body in a hospice in Florida can be allowed to die. We can trust them to argue about whether or not a great spirit in the sky can be discussed in our public schools as scientific, while letting the funding for these schools drop.

But all of this complaining is inane. Right now people are dying. They are dying because our government dropped the ball. You know about hurricane Katrina.

You know that the levees in New Orleans failed. But what I hope for all of us is that you know that it took days, not hours, but days for the Federal Emergency Management Agency or Homeland Security or the National Guard or even our President to take effective action. It took the Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin, cussing on live radio and calling the federal government "clueless" for them to make a genuine effort to save people.

Now, I know that this was a natural disaster, and while Al Qaeda has reportedly referred to hurricane Katrina as Private Katrina, they can't take credit for the destruction. But that's splitting hairs. FEMA and Homeland Security were set up to save people in this country from disasters. They aren't there just for prevention, no, they are supposed to minimize destruction and damage. But what did they do this week? They led an uncoordinated, uncommunicative and idiotic rescue effort.

People are dying. And whether or not they left the city when the evacuation was ordered shouldn't be used as a talking point for a lesson on personal responsibility. They are dying and they need to be helped.

But our government has failed what people are now estimating to be thousands of dead people. FEMA didn't help. The Department of Homeland Security didn't help. The President of the United States sat around for days and didn't help. And we can't forget that.

We can't forget that there are going to be hundreds, if not thousands of stories like the one Aaron Broussard, president of Jefferson Parish, New Orleans, told to Tim Russert on Sunday's Meet the Press on NBC.

Mr. Broussard said "And I want to give you one last story and I'll shut up and let you tell me whatever you want to tell me. The guy who runs this building I'm in, emergency management, he's responsible for everything. His mother was trapped in St. Bernard nursing home and every day she called him and said, "Are you coming, son? Is somebody coming?" And he said, "Yeah, Mama, somebody's coming to get you. Somebody's coming to get you on

Tuesday. Somebody's coming to get you on Wednesday. Somebody's coming to get you on Thursday. Somebody's coming to get you on Friday." And she drowned Friday night. She drowned Friday night."

Mr. Broussard said "Nobody's coming to get us. Nobody's coming to get us. The secretary has promised. Everybody's promised. They've had press conferences. I'm sick of the press conferences. For God sakes, shut up and send us somebody."

And we can't forget that.

### On the Record ...

"I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees."

—President Bush, on "Good Morning America," Sept. 1, 2005, three days after Hurricane Katrina came ashore

"Louisiana is a city that is largely under water."

—Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, at a news conference on Sept. 3, 2005

"We are still hampered by some of the most stupid, idiotic regulations by FEMA. They have turned away generators, we've heard that they've gone around seizing equipment from our contractors. If they do so, they'd better be armed because I'll be damned if I'm going to let them deprive our citizens."

—Slidell, La., mayor Ben Morris, Sept. 5, 2005

"We've got to solve problems. We're problem-solvers. There will be ample time for people to figure out what went right and what went wrong."

—President Bush, at a Cabinet meeting, Sept. 6, 2005

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