

Blog Post/Commentary – Hurricane

Like most of us, I've been transfixed by the news and images of the disastrous hurricane during the past week. As a native of the Texas Gulf Coast, I lived with the threat of hurricanes every summer and fall until I moved to North Texas as an adult.

The worst hurricane I experienced growing up was terrifying, but my family was lucky. We lost a few windows, and the fence blew down, but after a few uncomfortable weeks without electricity and other utilities, life essentially went on as before. I can only imagine having my home destroyed and my entire life completely devastated by a hurricane, and for that, I am extremely grateful.

However, even disasters can have positive consequences – including a remarkably strong sense of community, motivating complete strangers to help others. Neighbors check on neighbors, people share scarce resources, and as power outages stretch into days, households fire up their barbecue pit and grill the contents of their rapidly thawing freezer to share with folks they only nodded to before.

Even though we in North Texas are hundreds of miles away from the area hit by this storm, I still see it all around me. Many of our friends are taking in survivors, organizing spontaneous giving drives, volunteering to help a variety of aid organizations and giving as much as they can give in so many ways.

What can we do? Of course, cash donations are always vital to disaster relief organizations, and can be used immediately for critical resources. Regardless of circumstances, each of us probably has more “stuff” than we genuinely need that could be passed on to survivors who lost everything they owned. Whether it's clothes you can no longer wear, extra kitchen items, books, children's toys or any of the other “essentials” of life, go through your cache of surplus stuff and sort out those things you can donate.

Secondly, we can focus on electing legislators and elected officials who will work to make sure we are adequately prepared for potential disasters on a federal, state, and local level, and that services will be provided for all citizens equally. Every day it becomes more and more apparent there were many things that could have been done to prevent much of the tragedy from this storm. What if officials had acted on the environmental concerns outlined years ago, or National Guard troops had reached the affected areas earlier?

Then there are the questions of race and class. Did the federal government fail to act because the people left behind were predominantly poor and black? Or does the prevailing doctrine of “personal responsibility” dictate that those who don't have adequate resources are just out of luck?

Individually and collectively, we should certainly help in the relief effort, but we must also keep our focus on electing representatives at all levels of government who believe in basic American values: fairness, equality and a society that values the contributions of every individual, regardless of their ethnicity or income level.