

# ARKANSAS

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## EDITORIALS

### Now let us praise . . .

*Those who really deserve it*

"They're going to be tired, hungry, thirsty, dirty, scared. If there ever was a time that we needed to show our best human side, it's going to be when these people come."

—Governor Mike Huckabee

**T**HE CAVALRY finally arrived. Or at least the infantry. If Hurricane/Natural Disaster Katrina filled New Orleans with water, the lack of response from the feds filled New Orleans with panic. Arkansas' 39th Infantry Brigade—fresh off a tour in Iraq—has been helping to restore order. Which is the first step toward normal.

There's more to be said about what's going on in New Orleans than the lack of leadership from Washington, FEMA, Baton Rouge or even New Orleans City Hall in the hours before and after this storm hit. And there's more to be said than *Looters Should Be Shot, or You'll Pay at the Pump*.

There are some really good things going on down there. And it starts with first responders.

What more can we say about the 39th? Or the other National Guardsmen down there? We're going to have to get a new thesaurus if we keep on gushing like this.

And there were also the ambulance drivers and doctors and church folks and fire fighters and helicopter pilots who rushed to the scene to volunteer. Bless you. Some people have this habit of rushing toward disaster and danger, instead of away from it. It's not natural. It's like running toward the sound of gunshots. And in some places in New Orleans, that's exactly what it was like. Thank goodness for those very unnatural people who naturally have to help.

And what about the just plain folks in Arkansas? You can't swing a dead cat without hitting some sort of relief operation around these parts: in front of churches, in Wal-Mart parking lots, on the sides of roads. Tens of thousands of refugees are in Arkansas by now, welcomed with open arms—and, more importantly, open homes. Many are being kept out of the elements at hotels and church camps, but many others are in homes—homes of Arkies who've opened their doors to complete strangers. And the state government seems to be doing a stand-up job handling the logistics. (We ain't about to

let Texas get ahead of us on that score.) We were listening to Fox News just the other morning, and there was specific praise for Arkansas, and how this small state has managed to handle the number of people fleeing the coast.

How about the people handing out supplies at the job fair in Little Rock over the weekend? How about 5-year-old Josh Jordan who held a sign up for the bus loads of people coming from points south: "Welcome to Arkansas!" That may be our favorite image of all from the last week; Mister Josh captured—and expressed—the true spirit of this state.

What about Jimmy Moler of Lowell, who led a caravan to Louisiana to deliver water, diapers and food? What about school administrators from Fort Smith to Wynne who've enrolled evacuee kids in their classrooms? ("We'll be able to handle the children. It is our privilege to take care of them.")—Beth Boeckmann, assistant superintendent in Wynne. Thank you, Miss Beth.) What about all of those

the paper has featured in its coverage the last week or so? What about Everyman, who is showing his humanity by reaching out, however he can?

There is good news. There are good people.



**T**HERE HAVE been other bright spots, and bright people, in this whole mess. Like:

—Elaine Chao. Say what you will about the feds (and we'll probably agree, and raise you), but Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao can't be lumped in with the rest of that bunch. We heard one of her interviews the other day. Without being a Pollyanna about it, she said, yes, this is a national tragedy, and, yes, people still need to be rescued, and, yes, it's a terrible thing . . . but . . . but . . .

Mrs. Secretary Chao noted that there's going to be a building boom down along the Gulf Coast beginning approximately now. And she predicts there'll be 25,000 temporary jobs for the evacuees/refugees/survivors/our fellow citizens. Anybody who can swing a hammer should be able to get work in South Louisiana and South Mississippi and all over Alabama in the next year. And Secretary Chao signed a national emergency grant for more than \$100 million that will pay workers to clean up the ravaged areas. Elaine Chao is show-

ing what government can do in times of crisis—when it has somebody in charge.

—Bill Clinton and George H.W. Bush. Again. These two Best Buds will tour the country, again, to raise money for people who've been pushed out of their homes by flood waters, again. We can't think of a better pair. First, they have clout and that Vision Thing. Second, people respond to them. Third, they were politicians, so they know how to raise money. Fourth, neither one is running for a danged thing just now, so they seem plumb out of talking points. Good for them. Did you see their press conference? Reporters were practically begging Bill to rip the Bush II administration for its Katrina response, but the ol' boy wouldn't take the bait. Not now. He said the blame could be parceled out later; now was the time to help folks. He's right.

—Mike Huckabee. He makes us proud. Once a preacher, always a preacher. And at trying times like these, it's comforting to see the preacher come out in our governor again. He's approaching this crisis not like a politician but a human being: Help the people first, worry about the bills later. The paperwork and budget problems we will always have with us. Now's the time to chip in. The Huck has been the anti-Kathleen Blanco, the very picture of a leader, making the rounds at the shelters in shirt sleeves, handing out hot dogs and hugs. He calls to mind another Man from Hope who had a way with people. Mike Huckabee is at his best when times are bad. Like on his first day in office, which almost wasn't, when his predecessor decided, at least for four hours, that he didn't want to be Governor Huckabee's predecessor, but would stay in office despite his criminal conviction. And for one afternoon, this small wonderful state could have passed for a banana republic.

—Wal-Mart. To quote the president of Jefferson Parish, Aaron Broussard, if "the American government would have responded like Wal-Mart has responded, we wouldn't be in this crisis." The retail giant and corporate punching bag has donated millions of dollars in cash and millions more in clothes, water, diapers, and other basics. And talk about your first responders: Wal-Mart's execs had their stores stocked and pallets of essentials ready to go before the storm even hit. Post-storm, Wal-Mart has been equally impressive: Of the company's 126 stores that closed in the immediate aftermath

of Katrina along the Gulf Coast, 109 have already re-opened.

—Texas. Forgive us, but at last count, the Lone Star State we love to hate had welcomed some 250,000 folks from Louisiana. And how about this—San Antonio even agreed to take the New Orleans Saints. Now that's making a real sacrifice.

—The folks at 519 St. Philip Street, New Orleans. For keeping the spirit of the French Quarter alive and weird. No water? No power? No problem. About 10 residents of that courtyard building in the Quarter fired up the barbecue grill and had to dine on ravioli with ragout, crab cakes, andouille sausage and white wine for the duration, poor souls. Palates sated, they then kept their historic neighborhood safe from vandals. That's the spirit! We're reminded of a doctor who got stranded at the Ritz-Carlton on Canal Street as Katrina hit. In an e-mail to friends he wrote (when he wasn't caring for the sick and injured at a French Quarter bar) and said that, if he had to go, at least it'd be in a place with a good wine list. Cheers! You see? We'll always have a New Orleans.

At first, we thought we might be looking too hard for the silver linings. But the bright spots have been so numerous and, well, so bright, they're hard to ignore.