

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 7, 2005

The Honorable William H. Frist
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Frist:

We are writing to urge that the Senate address the urgent needs of hurricane victims and the problem of rising energy prices before taking up reconciliation legislation that is expected to both cut programs that help these victims and many other Americans and launch another round of tax breaks.

More than a month has passed since Hurricane Katrina destroyed much of the Gulf Coast, leaving hundreds of thousands of Americans with no home, no job and few, if any, resources for basic necessities. Yet beyond approving emergency funding for FEMA and a limited package of tax changes, the Republican-controlled Congress has done little to assist survivors. Although Senate Democrats promptly developed and pushed plans to assist hurricane victims with their health care, housing, education, and financial needs, you chose to have the Senate address other legislative matters that did little or nothing to help. Nor has Congress approved legislation to assist state and local governments, law enforcement agencies and hospitals, many of which are on the verge of bankruptcy, threatening the region's recovery.

While hurricane survivors continue to suffer from neglect, Americans in every region of the country also are suffering from a sharp rise in energy prices. Gas price increases are creating severe burdens on millions of working families who rely upon their cars and trucks for essential transportation. In addition, a wide range of businesses and family farms are suffering from rising energy costs. All of us are hearing from constituents who are pleading for action on energy prices, but the Senate, again, is failing to act. With the approach of winter and higher home heating bills for millions of Americans, these cries will only grow louder.

In our view, hurricane and energy price relief should be Congress's top priorities. Yet rather than addressing the urgent needs of survivors and families and businesses suffering from rising gas prices, the Republican congressional leadership is pursuing reconciliation legislation that could only worsen their plight, with cuts in Medicaid, food assistance and other benefits, and increase the deficit. These priorities seem inconsistent with the needs of the country and the values of the American people.

We therefore strongly urge you to defer your current plans to move reconciliation legislation later this month and instead focus the Senate's attention on meeting the emergency needs of hurricane survivors and on reducing energy prices.

The Honorable William H. Frist
October 7, 2005
Page Two

Thank you for your consideration of our views

Sincerely,

Harry Reid
Jim Gaffney
Patrick Leahy
Paul Sarbanes
Tom Harkin

Max Baucus
Sal Pendergast
Jeff Bingaman
Allyson