

PROVIDE FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE OR GO GALT?

We awake to a changed and battered country this morning. CNN's headline at CNN.com currently blares "Millions wake to devastation", while AP gives us a state-by-state rundown of the effects of Hurricane (and then Superstorm) Sandy. At a time, though, when the natural American response is to help one another, we have perhaps the strongest example of what is at stake next Tuesday as we go to the polls for a Presidential election. Here is Mitt Romney in the Republican debate hosted by CNN:

[youtube]http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTSHxR_4rc8[/youtube]

The idea that an "immoral" FEMA should be disbanded in favor of private sector disaster response did not go over well with the editorial staff of the New York Times. From this morning's editorial:

Over the last two years, Congressional Republicans have forced a 43 percent reduction in the primary FEMA grants that pay for disaster preparedness. Representatives Paul Ryan, Eric Cantor and other House Republicans have repeatedly tried to refuse FEMA's budget requests when disasters are more expensive than predicted, or have demanded that other valuable programs be cut to pay for them. The Ryan budget, which Mr. Romney praised as "an excellent piece of work," would result in severe cutbacks to the agency, as would the Republican-instigated sequester, which would cut disaster relief by 8.2 percent on top of earlier reductions.

Does Mr. Romney really believe that financially strapped states would do a

better job than a properly functioning federal agency? Who would make decisions about where to send federal aid? Or perhaps there would be no federal aid, and every state would bear the burden of billions of dollars in damages. After Mr. Romney's 2011 remarks recirculated on Monday, his nervous campaign announced that he does not want to abolish FEMA, though he still believes states should be in charge of emergency management. Those in Hurricane Sandy's path are fortunate that, for now, that ideology has not replaced sound policy.

A common refrain for the Galt crew is that they want to go back to the basics of the Constitution. And yet, here is the Preamble:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

The simple truth is that if we wish to provide for the common defense and promote the general welfare in the face of such a huge storm, then a Federal agency coordinating the preparations before the storm and the response afterwards is the most efficient plan. Putting disaster capitalists in charge instead would only lead to many more deaths and huge delays in response times.

As the country responds to this terrible blow from the storm, it is worth considering whether we wish to go back to the ineptitude of the Katrina response (or worse) or if we want to work together for the common defense through a properly funded FEMA.