September 12, 2005 Texans and all Americans have responded wonderfully to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, opening their wallets and their homes to help displaced victims. Private donations already have topped $600 million. This outpouring shows there is hope for rebuilding and breathing life back into New Orleans and other destroyed communities, if the American entrepreneurial spirit is permitted to operate freely. When it comes to government relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Katrina, Congress must be very careful with the nearly $52 billion dollars approved last week-- almost all of which goes to FEMA. The original $10 billion authorized by Congress for hurricane relief was spent in a matter of days, and there is every indication that FEMA is nothing but a bureaucratic black hole that spends money without the slightest accountability. Any federal aid should be distributed as directly as possible to local communities, rather than through wasteful middlemen like FEMA. We cannot let the Katrina tragedy blind us to fiscal realities, namely the staggering budget deficits and national debt that threaten to devastate our economy. Why does Congress assume that the best approach is simply to write a huge check to FEMA, the very government agency that failed so spectacularly? This does not make sense. We have all seen the numerous articles detailing the seemingly inexcusable mistakes FEMA made - before and after the hurricane. Yet in typical fashion, Congress seems to think that the best way to fix the mess is to throw money at the very government agency that failed. We should not be rewarding failure. Considering the demonstrated ineptitude of government on both the federal and state level in this disaster, the people affected by the hurricane and subsequent flood would no doubt be better off if relief money simply was sent directly to them or to community organizations dedicated to clean-up and reconstruction. Indeed, we have seen numerous troubling examples of private organizations and individuals attempting to help their fellow Americans in so many ways over the last ten days, only to be turned back by FEMA or held up for days by government red tape. We have seen in previous disasters how individuals and non-governmental organizations were often among the first to pitch in and help their neighbors and fellow citizens. Now, FEMA is sending these good Samaritans a troubling message: stay away, let us handle it. The examples of FEMA blocking relief efforts are numerous: Wal-Mart trucks containing water and supplies were turned away; the Coast Guard was prevented from delivering diesel fuel; a 600-bed Navy hospital was left unused; firefighters were ordered away from flood sites; donated generators were refused; and rescue attempts by private citizens were rebuffed. Is FEMA really an agency that should be given another $50 billion? In several disasters that have befallen my Gulf Coast district, my constituents have told me many times that they prefer to rebuild and recover without the help of federal agencies like FEMA, which so often impose their own bureaucratic solutions on the owners of private property. Once again the federal government is attempting to impose a top-down solution to the disaster. No one questions where this $52 billion will come from. The answer, of course, is that the federal government simply is going to print the money. There will be no reductions in federal spending elsewhere to free up this disaster aid. Rather, the money will come from a printing press. The economic devastation created by such a reckless approach may well be even more wide-reaching than the disaster this bill is meant to repair. We should consider more constructive ways to help New Orleans and the other affected areas recover from this tragedy. There are numerous approaches, such as the creation of tax-free enterprise zones, which would attract private capital to the area and result in a much quicker and more responsive recovery. Katrina's victims and the rest of the country deserve a more sustainable and financially rational approach than simply printing and spending money.