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Getting Beyond Politics

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NCR Today

This morning, on the Diane Rehm Show, a panel discussed whether it was wise of President Obama to ask his two immediate predecessors to coordinate America's efforts to provide relief to the suffering people of Haiti. Most of the criticism has focused on President George W. Bush's failure to effectively help the people of New Orleans when the levees broke after Hurricane Katrina.

This criticism is as misplaced now as it was deserved after Katrina. Bush is no longer in charge of the government and it is President Obama's responsibility as Commander-in-Chief and President to coordinate the immediate combined military and civilian efforts to save those trapped in the rubble, bury the dead, and bring food, water and medical aid to the survivors. Bush and Clinton will have a different task, to raise money and to keep the American people mindful of the suffering in Haiti after the CNN cameras are gone.

The former presidents also have a different role and they fulfill it merely by accepting President Obama's invitation and that is to show that there are certain times and situations when partisanship simply does not matter. We have little in common with the people of Haiti. We are rich and they are poor. Our culture is Anglo-Protestant and theirs is Franco-Catholic. What we share, however, is not just a hemisphere but a common humanity. In times of crisis, that is enough. The choice of two former Presidents from rival parties and with wildly different approaches to the leading political issues of the day shows that the issue of helping the people of Haiti is not a political issue. It is a human issue. I hope both Bill Clinton and George Bush work wonders for wonders are needed.

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