

Biden in Houston: Indifference and contempt for victims of Texas catastrophe

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Visiting Texas 11 days after the onset of a man-made disaster that killed dozens of people and caused tens of billions of dollars in damage to homes, hospitals and schools, President Joe Biden barely took notice of the mass suffering while offering a political amnesty to the Republican state government. He made no mention of the fact that over one million Texans were still without clean water as of Thursday.

Speaking at a stadium fitted out as a mass vaccination center, Biden devoted the bulk of his brief remarks to touting his vaccination program and stressing the need for “unity” with the Republican Party. By virtue of his near silence on federal aid to the victims, Biden made clear that the millions of working class Texans devastated by days without power or clean water would have to fend for themselves.

Biden’s silence on the conspiracy between the energy giants and the state government to maximize profits by leaving the electrical system utterly unprepared for a winter storm did not come as a surprise. What was noteworthy, however, was the extent to which he went out of his way to embrace Governor Greg Abbot.

Insisting that both the Texas disaster and the pandemic were not partisan issues, Biden repeated his calls for “unity” with the Republicans and hailed the supposed success of the US response to COVID-19 just days after the death toll surpassed 500,000.

Biden boasted that he had provided millions of gallons of water and 125,000 blankets to Texans, a drop in the bucket compared to the scale of the human disaster. He made no announcement of additional aid nor indicated how the federal government would help in the coming weeks or months.

Instead, he offered empty words. “We will be true partners to help you recover and rebuild from the storm and this pandemic and economic crisis,” Biden said. He

added that his administration was in it “for the long haul.”

Biden’s words ring hollow for millions still dealing with the aftermath of Storm Uri. The nearly week-long power outage, which left more than 14 million without water, is on track to becoming the costliest disaster in Texas’ history, surpassing the \$125 billion in damage from Hurricane Harvey.

Hurricane Harvey devastated Texas’ Gulf Coast region in 2017, but last week’s storm impacted every region of the state. According to state officials, all 254 of Texas’ counties were affected in some way by the storm.

According to Texas Department of Emergency Management head Nim Kidd, state organizations reported spending \$41 million on the disaster and local governments spent \$49 million as of Monday. Kidd told the *Texas Tribune* that only a fraction of local governments have reported their spending. Moreover, the expenses reported account only for emergency costs. The longer-term cost of damage to the state’s infrastructure is unknown.

The crisis has not ended for millions, and many may never recover. After the freeze, workers came home to collapsed roofs, extensive water damage, and insurance policies that did not fully cover damage caused by inclement weather. The loss of income, under conditions where the country’s second most populous state came to an economic standstill for nearly a week, is massive.

To date, the Biden administration has granted \$45 billion to \$50 billion in aid through the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Not only is this inadequate to cover damages expected to total hundreds of billions of dollars, but the relief has been made available to only 108 Texas counties, leaving millions

of residents without federal assistance.

Biden boasted of the supposed success of his vaccination program while speaking in a state that has fully vaccinated only 5.8 percent of its population. He felt obliged to admit that new COVID-19 variants could result in a surge in infections and hospitalizations.

“... cases and hospitalizations could go back up as new variants emerge,” Biden said. He added that now is “not the time to relax,” and stressed the need for social distancing and mask-wearing. He did not attempt to square these warnings with his insistence that schools be reopened for in-person instruction five days a week.

Toward the conclusion of his remarks, Biden extended a hand to Governor Abbott and Senator John Cornyn. “I’m a Democratic president,” Biden said. “We disagree on plenty of things—there’s nothing wrong with that—but there are plenty of things we can work on together. One of them is represented right here today—the effort to speed up vaccinations.”

Texas’ state government, dominated by the Republican Party, has been caught in a social crime. State officials, in collusion with the energy corporations, willfully ignored recommendations to winterize the state’s power grid for the sake of profit. The result was a dilapidated grid that could not survive a single cold snap, leading to mass suffering and many deaths.

Texas lawmakers have not given any indication that winterization of the state’s infrastructure will take priority. Both houses of the state legislature have released preliminary budgets for the next two years, but neither allocate money for measures to prevent another power grid failure.

Biden’s olive branch to the criminals in power makes it clear that no one will be held accountable for the death and social misery resulting from a money-making scheme between corporations and the state government.



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