

SEPTEMBER 6

Firing Michael Brown is not enough

Calls for firing Michael Brown are understandable. Aptly described as "the blithering idiot in charge of FEMA" by columnist Maureen Dowd a few days ago, he's an easy and appropriate target.

President Bush met with Brown last Friday and publicly told him: "You're doing a heck of a job."

In the grisly wake of the hurricane, Brown's job performance cannot be separated from Bush's job performance. To similar deadly effect, the president has brought to bear on people in New Orleans the same qualities that he has inflicted on people in Iraq – refusal to acknowledge basic realities, lethally misplaced priorities, lack of compassion (cue the guitar), and overarching arrogance.

The Bush administration is guilty of criminal negligence that killed thousands of people last week.

Estimates of the death toll in New Orleans are now in the vicinity of 10,000 people. Whatever the number, many would be alive today if the federal government had given minimal priority to evacuation of those who had no way of exiting the city.

Now, key issues involve accountability and decency.

We should force a genuine national debate on whether George W. Bush and Dick Cheney are fit to be president and vice president of the United States. They should be held accountable.

And we should insist that the country deserves to be governed with decency.

Last Saturday, a headline on the front page of the New York Times summarized a nationwide outlook: "Across U.S., Outrage at Response."

But unless it finds avenues for full expression, outrage is apt to dissipate or implode. The many people across the country who are sickened by the Bush administration's actions and inaction – before, during and after the hurricane – need adequate and immediate ways to respond.

Donations to charities for relief efforts are necessary but insufficient. Traditional political structures offer labyrinths with many twists and turns of cooption. Only inde-

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pendent political activism has a chance to prevent conventional political wisdom from reasserting itself.

Yes, Bush has undergone fierce media criticism during the past week. But it's notable that you could watch wall-to-wall network TV coverage, listen to dozens of hours of NPR News, and read countless daily newspapers – and never hear or see a single reference to the idea that Bush and Cheney should not remain in office.

Could a broad-based grassroots movement heighten political pressure to the point that Bush and Cheney might feel compelled to resign? Even under the most optimistic scenarios, the odds are very long. But demands for their resignation should become part of the media landscape.

Still in effect, the conventional mode in media and politics is to complain without calling for sufficient action. The public discussion of the government's response to the hurricane has got to be widened.

Most pundits and politicians are saying that the Bush administration's behavior in connection with Hurricane Katrina was unacceptable. But failure to demand full accountability sends a message of tacit acceptance.

A grassroots upsurge, encouraged by coalitions working together without reference to political party or ideology, is desperately needed. People should insist that what has happened is literally unacceptable. If a president abdicates his basic responsibility to such a terrible extent, then he should be forced to abdicate his throne in the Oval Office.

Norman Solomon is the author of the new book

"War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death."

For information, go to: www.WarMadeEasy.com