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SUN HERALD EDITORIAL

Presidential veto would break faith with South Mississippi

President Bush has visited South Mississippi 15 times since Aug. 29, 2005.

He has hugged our people, wiped their tears and heard the voice of a region that has spoken clearly and carefully as to the specific needs that will allow it to recover and survive.

On his most recent visit here, on the second anniversary of the great storm, he sat in a room in Bay St. Louis with our political leadership, including Sen. Trent Lott, Congressman Gene Taylor and local mayors and county supervisors, and they told him that the thing we need most now, the one thing that is necessary for our rebuilding and recovery efforts, is multiple-peril insurance.

So it was with disappointment, sadness, and perhaps bewilderment, that we learned Wednesday that the president was being advised to veto this most important piece of legislation on the very eve of debate in the House of Representatives. It is inconceivable that a president who has seen firsthand this flattened region, and has been thoroughly briefed on the roadblocks to rebuilding posed by the insurance industry's intransigence, would yield to such a suggestion.

We have gone back and reviewed the sweet words and promises that the president has uttered on each of his visits. And while we have appreciated each visit, and the support, including billions in aid that he has supported and that the Congress and the American people have provided us following the worst natural disaster in American history, we must regard his administration's threat of a veto as breaking faith with our people, tens of thousands of whom are still struggling to survive in the devastation zone.

Not that this legislation is designed solely to meet the needs of the Gulf

Coast. It would help shield communities on both the East and West coasts that are in harm's way. Must a more politically potent community be devastated before the White House appreciates the necessity of a federal, multiple-peril insurance program?

Political

leaders sometimes are forced to choose between competing interests, but surely President Bush will not choose to support the interests of big insurance companies over the people of South Mississippi whose hopes for the future are invested in this legislation.

Mr.

President, your heart and head must have spoken to the clear need for this legislation. Far more important, we believe, than the suggestions of policy bureaucrats are the firsthand knowledge and judgment that you must have gained from all of those trips, and the sweat and tears of a people who are pleading for the opportunity to stay and rebuild their shattered homes and lives.

Mr. President, we know that you heard us in those hours and days after the storm. Please, hear us now.

This

editorial reflects the views of the Sun Herald editorial board:
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