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## Tapes show Brown as a victim of politics

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Why would a venerable newspaper like the Times Union uncritically accept the judgment of a partisan political body like the House select committee investigating Katrina? Calling it "select" is apt, for the committee contains only Republicans.

It's convenient for House Republicans to put all the blame on Michael Brown. It diverts attention from the White House and Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff.

It should strike the public as odd that House Republicans issued this "supplement" a month after the committee's mandate expired. Had they been serious about it, they could have included this with the report. They had the information. The committee interviewed Michael Brown on Feb. 11, four days before issuing its report.

So what changed? Why did Republicans feel it necessary to issue a supplement?

There's a one word answer: Videotapes.

On March 1, The Associated Press obtained teleconference videotapes that demonstrate beyond doubt that Michael Brown was the one senior administration official ably doing his job in connection with Hurricane Katrina. They also show why some in the administration wanted Brown not to answer the questions of congressional investigators.

The Republican "supplement" is yet another attempt by certain Republicans to whitewash the role of the administration. Two years before Katrina, Michael Brown warned that DHS was crippling FEMA's ability to respond to a catastrophic disaster. In March 2005, shortly after Secretary Chertoff took office, Brown again sounded the alarm. He also told the White House the same thing. His warnings fell on deaf ears.

Last August, Michael Brown repeatedly warned the White House and Secretary Chertoff that Katrina was likely to be "the big one." He repeatedly talked with the White House -- deputy chief of staff Joe Hagin, then-chief of staff Andy Card and President Bush himself -- both before and after landfall, giving them up-to-the-moment, blow-by-blow accounts of what was happening in New Orleans and elsewhere along the Gulf Coast. Brown repeatedly informed Secretary Chertoff of the same thing.

Yet, almost since landfall, the Bush administration has been diverting the media's -- and the public's -- attention about shortcomings in the government's response to Katrina onto Michael Brown.

One senior administration official told Brown on Sept. 7 that the media maelstrom surrounding him fit perfectly with administration desires. Referring to a Cabinet meeting held the day before, this person told Brown "someone commented that the press was sure beating up on Mike Brown, to which the President replied, 'I'd rather they beat up on him than me or Chertoff.' "

When the post-Katrina investigations started, many criticized Brown for not cutting through red tape. Now the House Republicans criticize him for cutting through red tape.

Were the House Republicans' charges even true, they would be nonsense. But they're not true. They're false.

Michael Brown repeatedly urged everyone to move forward all their resources, to "push the envelope, even to jump over the envelope." He was on the job, doing his job, and making sure that the people above him -- both the White House and Secretary



Chertoff -- were fully aware, in a timely manner, of everything that was going on.

The administration, with an assist from House Republicans, has decided that the only senior administration official who took Katrina seriously must remain the designated scapegoat.

I hope the public will reject this shameful attempt once again to divert attention from the necessary reforms to restore FEMA.

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