Now the other senator, Republican of Minnesota, originally from Brooklyn, New York, Senator Norm Coleman. He was in Minneapolis earlier today to survey it.

Would you agree with what Senator Klobuchar had to say about this incident, senator?

We don't have him. Oh, I'm sorry, I thought we had him.

We will take a break and come back and we're going to meet safety engineers. Don't go away.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

KING: We're going to meet two engineers involved, one from the NTSB and another, the director of construction engineer programming at the University of Southern California.

I want to get a quick word or two with Senator Norm Coleman, Republican of Minnesota. We heard from the Democratic senator from Minnesota earlier.

How bad was it, Norm?

SEN. NORM COLEMAN (R), MINNESOTA: It takes your breath away. And by the way, you know, Republican/Democrat, this is one where our hearts cry out for those who have been -- we know are gone -- for those who we will find out will be gone.

Yesterday was a day of horror in Minneapolis. We're going to have some tough days ahead as we move from rescue to recovery. So there's going to be some tough stories. We will morn and we will pray and we will rebuild. And then we'll find out how the heck this happened, Larry.

KING: Are we going to look at other bridges? COLEMAN: I think we have to. I think we have to take stock of our infrastructure. In fact, we just passed out of the Senate today something we were working on before this grave calamity and that is to put together a commission to take a look at the nation's infrastructure to come up with a plan to, you know, figure out what we have to do to do it and then get it done. We've got a lot of old bridges. We've got a lot of bridges that have been listed as structurally deficient. It doesn't mean that you can't drive on them but I would guess that a lot of people today are pretty unsure. And we've got to do something about it.

KING: Thanks, Norm. We'll be calling on you a lot in the days ahead.

COLEMAN: Whatever you need, Larry. Thank you.

KING: Senator Norm Coleman, Republican of Minnesota.

Joining us now from Minneapolis is Jim Burnett, the former chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board; and here in Los Angeles, professor Hank Kaufman, director of the construction engineering and management program at the University of Southern California, professional engineer, 40 years experience.

Jim, is it too soon to know what went wrong?

JIM BURNETT, FORMER CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD: Well, of course, the investigation is just beginning and almost all of the evidence is either at the bottom of the Mississippi River or under tons of concrete. So although there's certainly investigative activities that are being pursued already, it's going to be a long time before the key evidence is available.
KING: Professor Kaufman, could this be the natural happenstance of aging?

HANK KAUFMAN, ENGINEERING PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA: Yes, that -- certainly all signs indicate to that. It's 40 years old and like anything else, like a human body, it needs taking care of. And that's maintenance as we go along.

There's been a lot of preliminary guesses at what actually was the cause. And frankly, the answer would be we don't know yet. It's going to take a good 6 to 12 months for thorough engineering investigation.

KING: Are you fearful of other bridges in other places?

KAUFMAN: They're certainly of great concern but again, I'd like to reassure what the senator said that our bridges are safe to travel on.

Engineering tends to be a very conservative profession and we have a big safety factor drawn in there. If there's any -- we do have a regular inspection program so any danger of a bridge collapsing we are concerned with it.

KING: Jim, is this preventable?

BURNETT: Yes, I think the safety board and certainly I operate under the theory that all accidents are preventable, some of them are more difficult to prevent than others. A good bridge inspection program, one would think would have prevented this. And I'm not in a position to criticize that program. We think Minnesota's had a good one. But inspections have to be evaluated and action has to be taken when problems are uncovered. All of those decision make you -- that decision-making process will have to be scrutinized.

KING: Professor Kaufman, what does structurally deficient mean?

KAUFMAN: That's a very good question and there's a lot of confusion exactly what the definition is. It does not necessarily mean, and I want to stress, that the building or the bridge is in imminent collapse status. It might mean that there might be some loose joints to be taken care of, it might need some painting, it might need some rusting. So it doesn't mean that it's going to collapse. Any bridge that is in that danger will be quickly corrected.

KING: Any problem, Jim, with this particular, they call it steel deck truss bridge design?

BURNETT: Well, I don't know that there's any problem with it. This is a fairly long span. It's not the longest but that obviously is demanding on the structure. So I think the Federal Highway Administration has already ordered an inspection of similar type bridges and that's called for, I think. But we may have to do that again once the safety board knows what we're looking for.

KING: Professor we have bridges over 100 years old in America, right?

KAUFMAN: Well, certainly. For instance, the Brooklyn Bridge is 150, 160 years old.

KING: Should I worry driving over it now?

KAUFMAN: No, because we have a constant maintenance record of that. We have inspections if not every year, every other year. We have inspectors going out, logging any repairs to be done.

KING: Did they miss something in Minneapolis?

KAUFMAN: That's a good question and we don't know yet. And we're certainly going to take a very thorough
investigation. It's almost like what happened in Katrina down in New Orleans. It takes years for us to really figure out what the collapse are.

We do what we call forensic engineering. We go out there, we investigate, we strengthen our codes, we change our codes, like, for instance what happened to the '94 North Ridge earthquake, we went through and we retrofitted all our bridges in the State of California so that this kind of incident wouldn't happen again. KING: A long time before we get to concrete answers, no pun intended.

(LAUGHTER)

KING: A long time.

Thank you, Jim Burnett, the former chairman of NTSB, we remember many hours with you in the past; and Professor Hank Kaufman of the University of Southern California.

Don't forget to check out our Web site, CNN.com/LarryKing. You can send an email or a video question to upcoming guests, participate in quick votes or download our current podcast, which is Michael Moore. It's all at CNN.com/LarryKing.

Tomorrow night, Dog the Bounty Hunter. He's got some news to tell us and more on the tragedy in Minnesota.

Anderson Cooper is there. "AC 360" starts right now.

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