



## Season of Prayer

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*An examination of rebuilding efforts along the Gulf Coast in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita with an emphasis on displaced populations, inadequacy of government responses, and inequitable development strategies.*

### Weekly Update ~ 07.21.06

#### Reports:

- A joint taskforce, EH-NAHT, was created between the US environmental protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to assess and address environmental health concerns in the Gulf Coast region after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The team was to determine environmental health risks that exist, dictate which agencies are responsible for managing environmental health risks, construct a timeline for implementation of recovery, and specify funding opportunities for said recovery efforts. Conclusions from the report released this week are broad in scope. The diversity and complexity of risks in the region were highlighted as well as the role aged and disabled infrastructures play in hindering progress towards environmental recovery. The recommendations compiled by EH-NAHT are intuitive – all levels of government will need to work together, communicate, engage the communities affected, and keep long term habitability in mind. However, the “how” remains elusive.  
*Source:* Joint Taskforce Centers for Disease Control and Prevention & U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. “Environmental Health Needs and Habitability Assessment.” *US Environmental Protection Agency*. July 17, 2006.  
[http://www.epa.gov/katrina/reports/envneeds\\_hab\\_assessment.html](http://www.epa.gov/katrina/reports/envneeds_hab_assessment.html)
- The Opportunity Agenda releases the first in a series of fact sheets this week emphasizing the perpetuation of unequal opportunity availability along the Gulf Coast and for communities of color more broadly across the country. The first of the fact sheets entitled, “Jobs and Business: The state of opportunity for workers restoring the gulf” focuses on African American and other communities of color; women; immigrants; and poor and low-income families. The piece expounds upon the distance between workers and available jobs, the inequitable proportion of non-white residents without work, and the desperate working conditions laborers face as the rebuilding process progresses. It is a national challenge to restore New Orleans not to its past segregated spaces of unequal opportunities, but to a city in which opportunity is available to all.

Source: The Opportunity Agenda. "Jobs and Business: The state of opportunity for workers restoring the gulf." July 19, 2006. [www.opportunityagenda.org](http://www.opportunityagenda.org).

#### Events:

- The first ever National Truth Commission focusing on poverty in the United States was held in Cleveland, Ohio this week. From July 15-17 over 500 people from across the country and the world convened in the city to participate, hear, share and contribute to the commission. Six testimonial panels focused on; rights to health care, living wage struggles, rights to housing, rights to education, unjust child removal, and rights to water and basic utilities. The panels were heard by commissioners from around the globe who will now meet to compile findings and suggest appropriate responses to the atrocities facing so many people in the United States. Those offering testimony were diverse and included representatives from New Orleans speaking directly about their experiences before, during, and after Katrina. The testimonials and findings are expected to be released as a comprehensive publication later this year.

Source: National Truth Commission (*website*). Accessed July 20, 2006.

[http://www.economichumanrights.org/ntc\\_report1.shtml](http://www.economichumanrights.org/ntc_report1.shtml)

#### Governments' Responses:

- At the time of his inauguration Mayor Nagin promised to release his 100-day recovery plan. Mayor Nagin intends to release his plan at the end of his 100 days in office which falls on the first anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The CityBusiness' series "City on a Shoestring" has highlighted over the last two months how New Orleans is behind on most recovery timetables and has called for the Mayor's leadership as "health care is on life support, garbage pickup is pitiful, city streets are collapsing, many city services have been shelved, the judicial system is in shambles and crime is viciously picking up pace. This recovery is lagging despite the Herculean efforts of many city employees and residents to resuscitate the Crescent City."

Source: "Nagin leadership needed now in N.O." *New Orleans CityBusiness*. July 17, 2006.

- Homeland Security Secretary, Michael Chertoff urges Louisiana State Governor, Kathleen Blanco to report material plans for cooperation with federal evacuation efforts should another hurricane strike the Gulf Coast in the coming season(s). Chertoff detailed the federal government's commitment to evacuation in a nine page letter clearly stating that state and national governments have critical, but independent roles to play during a disaster such as that of Hurricane Katrina last year. Some say the letter is meant to delineate these roles unmistakably and establish a clear path to lay blame should another rescue effort end in debacle. He gave the governor ten days to implement his suggestions.

Source: Walsh, Bill. "Chertoff cites gaps in storm preparation." *The Times-Picayune*. July 18, 2006.

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/115320480461930.xml&coll=1>

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has stated that those displaced by future hurricanes will not receive the \$2,000 initial government compensation which was afforded to Hurricane Katrina and Rita victims. Details of the changes will be presented in letters from FEMA head Michael Chertoff to Governors of the 12 coastal states.

Source: "FEMA May Change Its Post-Hurricane Payouts." *Los Angeles Times Wire Reports*. July 17, 2006. <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-briefs17.2jul17,1,7801323.story>

- Senator Landrieu introduced two bills on July 14 to the Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship. The Small Business Disaster Recovery Assistance Improvements Act of 2006

(S. 3664) would better prepare the Small Business Administration (SBA) for future disasters. The Small Business International Trade Enhancements Act of 2006 (S. 3663) would help businesses impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita with export financing. Both bills are intended to assist with economic recovery of the Gulf Coast.

Source: "Landrieu Legislation Improves SBA Disaster Preparedness, Promotes Export Opportunities for Small Businesses." *U.S. Newswire*. July 17, 2006.

- Discussions continue as a UN review committee considers an official US state report on the national government's response to Hurricane Katrina along with a shadow report outlining alleged human rights violations during the process. In response to these allegations, the Bush administration has denied charges of governmental racism and claims it handled the situation in the Gulf Coast prior to, during, and after Hurricane Katrina by promoting fairness and equal opportunity in housing, education, and employment. Also, the administration suggested that the failure to ensure the safety of residents who lacked transportation was the fault of local and state governments, not the national government. Both administrators and New Orleans community members have addressed the committee this week. Monique Harden, who works with Advocates for Environmental Human Rights, stated that "Nearly one year after Hurricane Katrina, our predominately African-American and poor neighborhoods look like the hurricane passed yesterday." The UN committee's final report is expected to be released at the end of July. Source: Alpert, Bruce. "Bush administration denies racism in Katrina response." *The Times-Picayune*. July 18, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/washington/index.ssf?base/news-1/115320555361930.xml&coll=1>
- Coastal wetland renovation efforts along Louisiana's Gulf Coast make for strange bedfellows. Oil drilling directly contributes to coastal erosion and wetland degradation as channels are constantly widened to accommodate mobility of drilling rigs and other equipment in and out of the Gulf. Strangely enough, Louisiana State Governor, Kathleen Blanco is playing "hard ball" with congressional lawmakers in an attempt to secure royalties from off shore oil drilling endeavors. Her intentions are to funnel these dollars into wildlife habitat, wetland, and barrier island restoration. Oil drilling, which accelerates coastal erosion has become a perceived solution to erosion. Source: Henderson, Peter. "Repair of post-Katrina wetlands may hinge on oil." *Rueters* (online). July 17, 2006. [http://today.reuters.com/investing/financeArticle.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-07-17T211243Z\\_01\\_N17318608\\_RTRIDST\\_0\\_WEATHER-HURRICANES-WETLANDS.XML&pageNumber=0&imageid=&cap=&sz=13&WTModLoc=InvArt-C1-ArticlePage2](http://today.reuters.com/investing/financeArticle.aspx?type=bondsNews&storyID=2006-07-17T211243Z_01_N17318608_RTRIDST_0_WEATHER-HURRICANES-WETLANDS.XML&pageNumber=0&imageid=&cap=&sz=13&WTModLoc=InvArt-C1-ArticlePage2)

#### Living Conditions:

- Yet another reminder of the dire state that New Orleans public education was in prior to Hurricane Katrina - more than 200,000 south Louisiana students were dispersed among 49 states in the aftermath of Katrina. Many students resumed their education within their receiving community, where they became aware of educational opportunities and quality of facilities and education resources they never knew, spawning many to graduate. The rebuilding of New Orleans has led many educators and officials to consider carefully how to reverse the decades of decline of the education system through redevelopment.

Source: "Katrina's Lessons; An unexpected upside to the hurricane is emerging for some displaced families: Children are discovering education opportunities they never imagined." *Times-Picayune*. July 16, 2006.

- Efforts to improve the education system in New Orleans received praise from three senators recently. Senators Mary Landrieu (D-La.), Richard Burr (R-N.C.), and Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) made the supportive statements at a special hearing on the education reform taking place in the city. One significant aspect of the reform is that families will have the opportunity to choose between charter, state-run, or district schools. Sen. Alexander stated that "The idea of giving free market choice to families of New Orleans primarily benefits low-income people because people with money often (only) have those choices." However, one major point of contention that continues to persist is over the number of selective admissions schools that will remain. The Recovery School District has made the decision to have open admissions for the schools it will operate and charter.  
Source: Ritea, Steve. "Senators see hope in retooled N.O. schools." *Times-Picayune*. July 15, 2006. [http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_07\\_15.html#161497](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_15.html#161497)
- The lower ninth Ward still lacks full electrical and gas services and for some households drinking water is non-existent, but one feature of normalcy was restored today as mail delivery began once more. Fewer than 1,000 residents have returned to the ward which once was home to more than 20,000 people. Today, the mail carrier saw more National Guard troops in the neighborhood than residents.  
Source: Konigsmark, Anne Rochelle. "Lower 9<sup>th</sup> finally gets mail delivery." *USA Today*. July 17, 2006. [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-07-17-mail-ninth-ward\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-07-17-mail-ninth-ward_x.htm)
- Construction in the 9<sup>th</sup> Ward of the Musicians' Village is underway. The redevelopment vision was that of musicians Branford Marsalis and Harry Connick Jr. The New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity has been assisting with the effort to redevelop this once vacant lot. Resentment among longtime residents of the neighborhood is mounting "if we're talking about bettering New Orleans, why put those there?" The first 75 homes will be available by mid-August. While the program is open to people in any profession however the publicity campaign has been encouraging musicians to move in.  
Sources: Millhollon, M. "Governors visit Habitat construction site in 9<sup>th</sup> Ward. Musicians' Village will hold 300-350 houses." *The Baton Rouge Advocate*. July 16, 2006.  
"Southern governors tour N.O. devastation; Musicians' Village is bright spot of day." *Times-Picayune*. July 16, 2006.  
Simpson, D. "Housing program aims to keep displaced musicians, others in the Big Easy." *Associated Press*. July 15, 2006.
- The dry weather of summer has stressed the water system in the New Orleans area, especially in St. Charles Parish. The city has experienced water shortages since Hurricane Katrina hit, and the summer weather has only worsened the circumstances. In order to alleviate the situation, officials have suggested a water project aimed at connecting treatment plants in the east and west bank of the parish. The proposed plan will cost around \$1.2 million.  
Source: Scallan, Matt. "St. Charles' water system strained by dry summer." July 14, 2006. [http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_07\\_14.html#161159](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_14.html#161159)

- The Army Corps of Engineers was busy late last week cutting trees in an effort to reduce the likelihood of levee failures in the future. By the end of the week, they had cut about 75% of the trees on the East Jefferson lakefront that had been marked for removal. The Corps' actions have upset community leaders and elected officials who stated that tree-cutting plan was not explained to them before it started. Both engineers and levees experts claim large trees that were uprooted during Hurricane Katrina contributed to levee failures. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the Corps of Engineers actually planted and encouraged the planting of trees to "hold the soil" and make the lakefront look nicer.

Source: Grissett, Sheila. "Corps works quickly to fell trees." *Times-Picayune*. July 14, 2006.

[http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_07\\_14.html#161164](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_14.html#161164)

#### Health and Health Care:

- A charter signing ceremony was held on July 14 bringing together Louisiana Governor Kathleen B. Blanco, U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu, Mayor Ray Nagin and members of the Louisiana Healthcare Redesign Collaborative. The event was an opportunity to exhibit the commitment of elected officials to the process of redesigning Louisiana's health care system. Part of the blueprint for redesign includes a proposal to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for a Medicaid waiver and Medicare demonstration program. The redesign effort was supported by HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt given that "None of us here will ever again have such an opportunity. As the charter recognizes, this is an opportunity to design and implement fundamental change in the financing and delivery of health care in Louisiana that could serve as a model for the nation." The intended outcome of the redesign should be a health care system with high-quality, accessible, and patient-centered care.

Source: "Louisiana Health Care System Focus of Redesign." *Press Release. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*. July 17, 2006.

<http://www.hhs.gov/http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/?ID=288>

<http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/offices/?ID=288>

- According to the HHS the redesigned Louisiana health care system should utilize an electronic health information sharing database. Health care providers need to store patient data in an electronic format so as to avoid the medical problems encountered by Hurricane Katrina evacuees.
- Source: Simpson, D. "Federal health chief urges adoption of new patient data system." *Associated Press*. July 17, 2006.
- The federal government intends to help finance Louisiana's patient-friendly health care system in the New Orleans area. However to receive funds the old system must be overhauled thus rebuilding hospitals and medical infrastructure to be efficient and flexible. The state has until October 20<sup>th</sup> to come up with a proposal to rebuild the system.
- Source: Anderson, E. "Feds to help redo health care system." *The Times-Picayune*. July 18, 2006.
- As the anniversary of Katrina approaches, the National Mental Health Information Center issued a report predicting a mental-health storm as survivors remember the traumatic event that altered their lives. This "anniversary reaction" is coupled with a return of restlessness and fear on the part of the survivors.

Source: Kern, E. "Mental-health storm approaches. Agencies brace for "anniversary reaction" among Katrina victims. *The Baton Rouge Advocate*. July 15, 2006.

- According to a report released by the National Council on Disability, there was widespread discrimination against mentally ill evacuees during Hurricane Katrina. Specifically, people with psychiatric disabilities were segregated, isolated, and even institutionalized, all of which can be particularly harmful to those suffering from mental illness. The report, which is especially critical of the Red Cross, cited that the conditions in shelters were wholly inadequate for those people with a mental disability. The director of the Council, Jeff Rosen, described Red Cross shelters as "'crowded, noisy, confusing, and sometimes violent,'" and stated that Red Cross lacked coordination and oversight on a national level to address the violations and discrimination that occurred in local chapters.

Source: Freking, Kevin. "Mentally disabled faced bias post-Katrina." *Associated Press*. July 14, 2006. [http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola\\_topnews/archives/2006\\_07\\_14.html#161352](http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_07_14.html#161352)

#### Insurance:

- In an ongoing trial regarding hurricane insurance coverage, an agent working for Nationwide Insurance denied ever telling policyholders that they should not buy hurricane insurance. The lawsuit is the first of hundreds to go to trial filed by homeowners against insurers regarding property damage caused by Hurricane Katrina. The main dispute is about whether damage was caused by high-power winds or rising water and the decision could set the precedent for future trials of the same kind. In this case, Nationwide Insurance claims that under their "storm surge" language, the property damage inflicted on Gulf Coast homes is not covered because it falls under the category of flood exclusions.
- Property owners on the Alabama Gulf Coast have experienced an astronomical increase in the cost of their annual insurance premiums. This increase is attributed to consecutive years of hurricane damage in the area, hits taken by the insurance industry in multiple states, and the subsequent withdrawal of traditional insurers from coastal areas. This withdrawal left only unregulated re-insurers as well as state-sponsored insurers which needed to find a way to make back large sums of money quickly. As a result, annual premiums have increased in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Source: "Insurance rates soar on Alabama's coast." *Associated Press*. July 17, 2006. [http://www.sunherald.com/mld/sunherald/news/local/15054981.htm?source=rss&channel=sunherald\\_local](http://www.sunherald.com/mld/sunherald/news/local/15054981.htm?source=rss&channel=sunherald_local)