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## Season of Prayer: Weekly Research Update

*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 ~ 09.15.06**

### Reports Released:

- According to the Bureau of Governmental Research\* (BGR), the Louisiana Recovery Authority's Road Home rental program focuses too heavily on subsidized housing for poor people rather than rebuilding rental units damaged by Katrina and Rita. The conclusions are controversial given the fact that the vast majority of redevelopment funds are not devoted to rental and low income housing. While several billion in federal aid for repairing housing will be spent on owner-occupied units, the LRA allocated \$869 million in Community Development Block Grants to repair rental units owned by landlords with a few properties and \$594 million in CDBGs will go to low-income housing tax credits to create or rebuild larger rental developments. \*The Bureau of Governmental Research's "The Road Home Rental Housing Program: Consequences for New Orleans" report was issued September 8 ([http://www.bgr.org/Road\\_Home\\_-\\_Consequences.pdf](http://www.bgr.org/Road_Home_-_Consequences.pdf)). In the report, the BGR states that the proposed LRA rental program would "create new problems and exacerbate existing weaknesses in the city." Among the problems the BGR foresees are: the promotion of high concentrations of poverty, disproportionately in Orleans Parish; hurting the tax base; risk leaving storm-ravaged areas blighted due to focus on large-scale projects. Source: Maggi, Laura. "LRA's rental program criticized; It's too focused on low incomes, bureau says." *Times-Picayune*. September 9, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-4/1157785267149630.xml&coll=1>
- State officials announced September 8 that a draft of the Louisiana Comprehensive Coastal Protection Master Plan is on schedule to be released on November 20. The plan offers two alternative combinations of higher levees and gates, and wetland and barrier island restoration projects intended to protect the coastline from major hurricanes. In February the state plan will be presented to the Army Corps of Engineers and then submitted in December 2007 as part of the federal Coastal Protection and Restoration Plan.

Source: Schleifstein, Mark. "Plan for rebuilding coast to be ready in November." *Times-Picayune*. September 9, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-4/1157786109149630.xml&coll=1>

- The Center for American Progress issued a report August 25, 2006 which offers suggestions to ensure better preparedness and recovery capacity for natural disasters or attacks. The report urges the federal government to take a number of steps including the implementation of an emergency public health response system; investing more in disaster and climate change preparedness and planning; redoubling the commitment to build and protect critical infrastructure; creating a rapid response housing voucher program; and creating an independent Federal Disaster Graft Protection Commission, among other suggestions. These recommendations are an attempt to get government "to create a solution for getting disaster victims necessary help now."

*\*Center for American Progress Report:*

Halpin, John. "Katrina and the Common Good. Progressive Actions for National Preparedness and Renewal on the Gulf Coast." *Center for American Progress*. August 25, 2006.

[http://www.americanprogress.org/atf/cf/{E9245FE4-9A2B-43C7-A521-5D6FF2E06E03}/KATRINA\\_AND\\_COMMON\\_GOOD.PDF](http://www.americanprogress.org/atf/cf/{E9245FE4-9A2B-43C7-A521-5D6FF2E06E03}/KATRINA_AND_COMMON_GOOD.PDF)

Accordingly, the Center for American Progress found that housing is a particularly pressing issue which needs a stronger federal commitment. During an emergency, the Center believes that this need can be better met via HUD's emergency Section 8 vouchers than FEMA.

Source: Center for American Progress. "Katrina Victims Are Still Waiting." September 11, 2006.

<http://www.americanprogress.org/site/pp.asp?c=biJRJ8OVF&b=2058847>

- On September 14<sup>th</sup> a community briefing was held on the rebuilding of Vietnamese-American communities throughout the Gulf Coast. In a collaboration between community organizations, CAPAC Housing Task Force, and NCVA, a report was released on housing needs of Vietnamese-American residents in the region. A goal of the press briefing was to highlight the commitment of Vietnamese-American communities to the Gulf region and to their importance in the region's vitality. For additional information please visit: [www.ncvaonline.org](http://www.ncvaonline.org).

Source: E media wire. "Community Briefing on Post-Katrina Rebuilding and the Vietnamese-American Community." *EMediawire.com*. September 12, 2006.

<http://www.emediawire.com/releases/2006/9/emw435852.htm>

#### Displaced Peoples:

- According to a Rice University survey's findings issued September 8, approximately 70% of Katrina evacuees that fled to Houston - of whom many are poor, Black, and have low levels of education - plan to make the city their permanent home. 1,083 of the estimated 120,000 evacuees still living in Houston were surveyed. Professor Wilson who led the study noted, "what's there to go back to? At least here you have some certainty." Among the issues evacuees face in Houston are: difficulty with transportation and navigation of the city, employment discrimination, skills that do not match with those demanded by local employers, and lack of healthcare coverage.

"Katrina evacuees in Houston: One year out" <http://www.brl.rice.edu/katrina/>

Source: Madkour, Rasha. "Most Katrina evacuees staying in Houston, report says." *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. September 9, 2006.

<http://www.dfw.com/ml/dfw/news/state/15474734.htm>

Recovery:

- On Tuesday Mayor Nagin briefed the City of New Orleans on the progress of the first 100 days of his second term in office. Nagin assured listeners at the briefing that the city was surely making progress citing increased regularity in refuse pickup, water pressure levels at pre-Katrina levels and the cities capacity to deal with crime as signs of success. However, the briefing was devoid of many details. Nagin alluded to the creation of a “redevelopment department,” a new lead for the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority, executive orders on contractor requirements and public buy out of the troubled electricity provider Entergy. Advisors to the Governor connected the slow pace of recovery to federal government red tape and process of fund dispersal. Although FEMA will foot the bill for 90% of city redevelopment costs, the city must have upfront cash to begin projects before applying for reimbursement. This disbursement structure may lead the city to utilize lines of credit offered by private banks for development purposes.  
*Source:* Russell, Gordon. “Nagin says city making progress; Mayor cites trash pickup, water pressure, crime fighting.” *The Times Picayune*. September 13, 2006.
- During a forum in Central City, Mayor Nagin said he will push to keep rates paid by Entergy New Orleans’ customers at or below pre-Katrina levels if the bankrupt company is allocated all or part of the \$592 million it has requested in state aid. The reason for this push is that the Mayor believes high utility rates would cripple recovery efforts. Other issues that arose during the question-and-answer session were: safety concerns, the city’s future viability, and the mayor’s decision to allow the city’s “footprint” to be market-driven.  
*Source:* Russell, Gordon. “Nagin wants Entergy price freeze; Without aid, utility may double rates.” *Times-Picayune*. September 10, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/metro/index.ssf?/base/news-16/1157868562246760.xml&coll=1>
- An Atlanta based journalist asserts that ongoing coverage of Hurricane Katrina and rebuilding efforts are vital for survivors. Regional media outlets have done a good job in continuing coverage, but more can still be done. Specifically mentioning displaced populations in Atlanta the author reiterates the importance of continued critical journalism since recovery is still deeply punctuated with disparity.  
*Source:* Tuck, Angela. “Ongoing Katrina coverage vital for survivors.” *The Atlanta-Journalism Consortium.com*. September 9, 2006.  
<http://www.ajc.com/opinion/content/opinion/tuck/stories/2006/09/08/0909edinside.html>
- Qatar will provide \$40 million in grants for educational, health and housing projects hurt by Katrina. This sum is in addition to the \$60 million that the country distributed in May. Qatar is one of 130 countries that offered aid, including cash contributions to the government, charities, hospitals and schools; and equipment and expert teams to help in the aftermath of Katrina. According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the largest donors to Gulf Coast recovery are Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.  
*Source:* Asthana, Anushka. “From a Land Far Away, Help for Katrina Victims; Qatar Is Among Many Nations to Send Cash or Other Aid.” *The Washington Post*. September 8, 2006.  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/07/AR2006090701341.html>
- The state of Louisiana has joined a federal lawsuit filed by residents of New Orleans and St. Bernard that seeks to shutdown the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet which is blamed for amplifying Hurricane Katrina’s tidal surge. The suit asks the court to appoint an independent “panel of

experts” to come up with a remedy for “the continuing dangerous conditions of the MR-GO.” The appointed panel would also formulate a plan to restore coastal wetlands destroyed since the shipping channel’s construction in the 1960s.

Source: Brown, Matthew. “State gets behind lawsuit to shut MR-GO.” *Times-Picayune*. September 9, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-4/1157785363149630.xml&coll=1>

- Due to the shortage of construction workers and a shortage of worker housing, contractors are having a difficult time meeting the overwhelming demand for builders, plumbers, electricians and other skilled laborers. While the problem is acute at the present time, it is estimated to get worse in the coming months as Mississippi and Louisiana homeowners receive money for their rebuilding efforts. With price gouging and contractor scams are rampant, many homeowners are taking a “do-it-yourself” approach. The private and public sectors are collaborating to alleviate the labor shortage. The U.S. Department of Labor has set aside \$10 million in grants for courses in basic construction skills to be offered free of charge at local community colleges. The Business Roundtable has committed \$5 million to help recruit and train up to 20,000 new construction workers by the end of 2009. Additionally, the Louisiana Legislature intends to allocate \$15 million for training. The article references a study by researchers at Tulane University and the University of California at Berkeley which found that one-quarter of workers in New Orleans after Katrina are undocumented Latinos. The study also mentions that the federal government has waived certain immigration laws thus allowing employers to hire undocumented workers. \*Report: “Rebuilding After Katrina: A Population-Based Study of Labor and Human Rights in New Orleans.” *International Human Rights Law Clinic, University of California, Berkeley; Human Rights Center, University of California, Berkeley; Payson Center for International Development and Technology Transfer, Tulane University*. June 2006.

[http://www.hrcberkeley.org/download/report\\_katrina.pdf](http://www.hrcberkeley.org/download/report_katrina.pdf)

Source: Kunzelman, Michael. “A year after Katrina, worker shortage expected to hamper rebuilding.” *The Associated Press State & Local Wire*. September 13, 2006.

[http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/09/13/business/NA\\_FIN\\_US\\_Katrina\\_Contractors.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2006/09/13/business/NA_FIN_US_Katrina_Contractors.php)

#### Living Conditions:

- Squatters were named as the cause of an abandoned building fire in New Orleans this week. Police Chief Caraway emphasized the importance of residents reporting squatters attempting to live in vacant structures throughout the city because they are exposed to and pose a safety risk. The Chief also made clear that anyone found squatting would be arrested, as have multiple individuals already. Among those arrested were a group of redevelopment construction workers who had been living in a vacant motel. The article does not connect the issue of squatting to the broader conversations on housing in post-Katrina New Orleans. It fails to address the lack of affordable housing in the region that may push individuals and families to seek informal housing no matter how unsuitable.

Source: Swerczek, Mary. “Kenner fire is blamed on squatters; 'It's a tremendous concern,' cops say.” *The Time- Picayune*. September 13, 2006.

- FEMA trailers have gone from temporary to permanent housing. A year after Katrina, 44 Alabama families have decided to buy their trailers. Prices range from \$1 to \$6,000 depending on financial need. FEMA is offering the program as permanent housing for people who have no nearby alternative. Despite flood plain rules, a number of the trailers are located in flood-prone areas. Additionally, according to the rules, travel trailers located in V-zones must be “road-

ready", however FEMA trailers are not licensed and are anchored in place.

Source: Myers, Steve. "Katrina victims buying their FEMA trailers." *The Press-Register*. September 10, 2006.

<http://www.al.com/news/mobileregister/index.ssf?/base/news/1157880564260780.xml&coll=3>

- State Farm, Louisiana's largest residential insurer, is making changes to its underwriting guidelines that will result in higher deductibles and less coverage for those taking out new policies in the New Orleans area. There will be no changes made to existing policyholders. Clearly, consumers will see an increase in their costs but not their coverage. According to Bob Hartwig, Chief Economist at the Insurance Information Institute, the fact that State Farm is taking on new customers is a good sign in that "while the homeowners insurance market in places like coastal Louisiana and Mississippi are very difficult, they're not on life support." Homebuyers have had few choices in insurance beyond the state-sponsored insurer of last resort, Louisiana Citizens Property Insurance Corp.

Source: Mowbray, Rebecca. "Storm-hit insurers to raise deductibles; Consumers to carry more of the burden, clients have bitter pill to swallow." *Times-Picayune*. September 9, 2006.

- Since hurricanes Katrina and Rita, thousands of illegal immigrants have gone to the coast for the first time to work. Many of these immigrants speak no English and often hold precarious jobs. New Orleans' reconstruction economy is cash-based and it is common for workers to not be properly compensated. In August 2006, the National Immigration Law Center filed suit on behalf of 82 guest workers from Bolivia, Peru and the Dominican Republic against Decatur Hotels, a downtown New Orleans chain. Another suit was filed by the Southern Poverty Law Center of Montgomery Alabama against contractors Belfor USA and LVI Environmental Services, which were awarded government reconstruction contracts.

Source: "Many of Katrina's Migrant Workers Go Unpaid." *Los Angeles Times*. September 11, 2006.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-contractors11sep11,1,7635917.story?coll=la-headlines-nation&track=crosspromo>

#### Governments' responses:

- President Bush has called for increased authority of National Guard troop deployment. States question if this is a step to reduce state rights held by the U.S. Constitution. The administration cited slow action on the part of the State of Louisiana to deploy troops in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina as rational for the shift in authority. The request raises concerns as to the possible uses of unilateral deployment and the potential for uses not only in relation to national "natural" disasters.

Source: Browder, Cullen. "National Guard Caught In Middle Of Political Power Struggle." *WRAL.com*. September 12, 2006. <http://www.wral.com/news/9827822/detail.html>

- Blanco suggests allocating some of the expected \$600 million surplus state dollars to pay down the debt of a state run insurance agency. Blanco acknowledged that any such plan would only provide temporary relief. These dollars have stipulations for use dictated by the state constitution and may not be eligible for the aforementioned use. Should the funds not be made available premiums may increase dramatically.

Source: Anderson, Ed. "State-run insurer may get bailout; Strapped agency has huge storm payouts." *The Times-Picayune*. September 13, 2006.

- A New Orleans' proposal to restore seven miles of wetlands looks most likely to be funded by this year's federal Breaux Act. The Act, initiated in 1990 will fund four projects this year. The New Orleans proposal will restore wetlands surrounding the land bridge between Lake Borgne and Lake Pontchartrain which was badly eroded by Hurricane Katrina's storm surge.  
*Source:* Schleifstein, Mark. "Coast projects up for funding; Lake Borgne wetlands restoration likely to get backing." *The Times-Picayune*. September 13, 2006.