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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 ~ 09.22.06

Reports Released:

- One year after Hurricane Rita, the Louisiana Recovery Authority issued a report outlining the storm's impact and recovery efforts. Although Hurricane Rita did not cause a great loss of life, it was more powerful than Hurricane Katrina, causing massive damage to Southwest Louisiana's coastal communities, wetlands, and the area's physical and social infrastructure. The report focuses on Cameron, Vermilion and Calcasieu Parishes which sustained the most wind and flood damage. The topics addressed by the report include the state of physical infrastructure, economic activity, housing, healthcare, education, community and social activity, and the physical environment. The full report "The Rita Report: A summary of the social and economic impact and recovery of Southwest Louisiana one year after Hurricane Rita" by the LRA is available at http://www.nola.com/katrina/pdf/091806_lra_ritareport.pdf.
Source: LRA releases Rita report. Times Picayune. September 18, 2006.
http://www.nola.com/newslogs/breaking/index.ssf/?/mtlogs/nola_localbreakingnews/archives/2006_09_18.html
- The LRA issued a number of resources for the anniversary of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, including data indicators, updates, and fact sheets. These notable resources are available at the LRA's "Louisiana: remembrance & rebirth" page, for more information: <http://lra.louisiana.gov/oneyear.html>

Events:

- The University of Illinois at Urban-Champaign is holding "Katrina: After the Storm- Civic Engagement Through Arts, Humanities and Technology" which will address the issues of social justice and equity, broken connections and the need for community healing. The event runs September 27 to the 30th.
For more information on the event: <http://www.katrinasummit.uiuc.edu/>

Recovery:

- In parts of Mississippi local numbers of medical practitioners are bucking regional trends. For instance, the number of doctors practicing in Lowndes County has increase 12% since 2004. Officials state more practitioners are still needed to fill the gap. Many people site changes in tort law as the main incentive for practitioners to consider Mississippi along with an aggressive recruitment campaign by the state. However, these increases are not being seen in counties directly impacted by Hurricane Katrina. Harrison and Jackson counties, both severely impacted by the storm, have seen dramatic declines in the number of practicing physicians.

Source: Mott Coffey, John. "Doctor shortage" *Commercial Dispatch*. September 18, 2006.
http://www.cdispatch.com/articles/2006/09/18/local_news/local01.txt
- Most of the housing aid that will be flowing into New Orleans in October will go to homeowners with \$7.5 billion being allocated to them by the Louisiana Recovery Authority in contrast to only \$859 million to help landlords. The reason for this disproportionate allocation being that city officials perceive homeownership as paving the way for the city's recovery although pre-Katrina the majority of city residents were renters. Renters express frustration as they are burdened with fewer units to choose from and skyrocketing rents and many feel that accessing residence in N.O. is now "off-limits". Their concerns are not new. The areas of N.O. that had the highest concentrations of rental units pre-Katrina are those that are still struggling to recover. The N.O. rental market pre-Katrina was predominantly operated by small-scale local landlords that currently lack the resources needed to recover their lost units. It is estimated that with the LRA dollars at least 30,000 rental units will be improved.

Source: Saulny, Susan and Rivlin, Gary. "Renewal Money for New Orleans Bypasses Renters." *The New York Times*. September 17, 2006.
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/17/us/nationalspecial/17rent.html?_r=1&oref=slogin
- Currently, there are 21,610 students enrolled in New Orleans public schools which represents one-third of the pre-Katrina student body. This figure is expected to increase in October particularly in the state-run Recovery School District as renovations are ongoing in addition to ongoing enrollment at many of the 53 public schools. Attendance figures are low in the Recovery District with half of enrolled students actually attending. A Recovery District spokeswoman attributed the low attendance to either the fact that Recovery District schools were among the last public schools to open or to a statistical glitch.

Source: "System has 1/3 its pre-storm students. Attendance expected to get better in N.O." *Times-Picayune*. September 21, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1158829637114200.xml&coll=1>

Governments' Responses:

- A compromise between the House and Senate has left troubled FEMA under the jurisdiction of the Department of Homeland Security, but with supposed increased autonomy. The push to remove FEMA from the umbrella department was led by both the Transportation and Infrastructure Committees of the House. The Committees saw the move as an opportunity to allow FEMA to be more responsive to emergencies. The compromise restores emergency-preparedness responsibilities to the agency and gives the head of FEMA direct access to the President in times of emergency.

Source: Losey, Stephen. "Compromise would keep FEMA under Homeland Security, with more autonomy." *The Federal Times*. September 18, 2006.
<http://federaltimes.com/index.php?S=2113056>

- HUD approved spending this week for key Louisiana development plans. Among the plans submitted to, and approved by HUD were; \$300 million for city and parish government building and infrastructure repairs, \$200 million to repair or rebuild hurricane damaged schools, \$171 million for economic development plans, and \$38 million to start job training programs in southern parishes most damaged by Katrina and Hurricane Rita. Additionally, \$10.4 billion in Community Development Block Grants are earmarked for housing initiatives.
Source: AP Wire. "HUD approves La. plans to spend \$709 million in recovery cash." The Times-Picayune. September 18, 2006.
- The Louisiana Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget signed off on September 19 on a revised version of the state's \$1.5 billion plan to revitalize rental housing in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Additionally, the legislative committee agreed to set aside \$28.5 million in Community Development Block Grant dollars to help boost university research in hurricane-affected parishes. The plans still need approval from the full Legislature and then final approval from HUD. In order to qualify for rebuilding grants landlords must agree to keep rents low. According to Rep. Steve Scalise, too much of the rental assistance is being funneled to low-income housing. Scalise among other critics believe that as a result this will not bring back middle-class workers that do not qualify for subsidized housing. However, to quell this concern, these middle-class workers were more likely to be homeowners than renters.
Source: Moller, Jan and Scott, Robert Travis. "Committee approves revised rental subsidies; Action sends issue to full Legislature." Times-Picayune. September 20, 2006.
- A portion of laborers working in New Orleans came to work on reconstruction efforts through H2-B Visas. Workers using these visas are predominantly from Bolivia, Peru and the Dominican Republic. The visas legally bind each worker to the specific employer identified in the document leaving many unable to look for additional employment even after promises of full time work and just compensation have fallen to the wayside. The US Department of Laborer's Wage and Hour Division has investigated nearly 300 complaints against employers in the region. One hundred of these complaints have been resolved with \$1.5 million in back wages paid out.
Source: Morales, Isabel. "Foreign workers say Big Easy has given them a hard lesson" Al Dias - WFFA.com. September 18, 2006.
http://www.wfaa.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/texassouthwest/stories/DN-workers_18tex.ART.State.Edition1.2eaf374.html
- The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has approved \$28.5 million for the Louisiana Tourism Recovery Program which state officials see as a victory for economic recovery. Lt. Governor Landrieu and the Secretary of the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism lobbied September 12 and 13 in Washington D.C. on behalf of the tourism industry which is the state's second largest industry, providing revenue and tourism-related jobs. In the aftermath of hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the state experiences a significant loss in tourism which a study by Louisiana State University's Department of Economic quantified as 1,409 travel and hospitality businesses shutting down and a loss of 33,000 jobs. The allocated Community Development Block Grant funds will be distributed to tourism entities severely impacted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The recovery of tourism in these ravaged parishes is part of a larger statewide effort and new marketing campaign "Come Fall in Love with Louisiana All over Again." According to Lt. Governor Landrieu, "time will not be wasted getting these dollars into the hands of local tourism entities."

Source: "Gov. Blanco, Lt. Gov. Landrieu, Sen. Landrieu, Sen. Vitter and LRA Announce \$28.5 Million for Tourism Recovery." September 19, 2006.
<http://www.lra.louisiana.gov/pr091906tourism.html>

- The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced the release of the grant guidance and application kit for the Alternative Housing Pilot Program. This program is intended to address the ongoing housing challenges faced by Gulf Coast states in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The \$400 million available for the grant program was appropriated by Congress in the 2006 Emergency Appropriations Act. The pilot program is designed to identify, develop, and evaluate new options for housing disaster victims. Eligible states include: Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. They have until October 20, 2006 to develop their alternative housing proposals and submit them to FEMA. FEMA intends to use the Gulf Coast pilot at the national level in considering new ways of housing people rapidly and efficiently in the event of future disasters.

Source: "FEMA Asks Gulf States To Help Develop Alternative Housing Pilot For Disaster." FEMA. September 15, 2006. <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=29940>

- Fifteen agencies came together September 20th for a massive search and rescue simulation on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain dubbed "Operation Lily Pad". This effort was a show of post-Katrina coordination between local, state and federal rescue workers. The disaster scenario was modeled after Hurricane Katrina and included over 200 people that played the roles of victims. In a "real" emergency requiring water rescues, first responders will use "lily pads" or patches of dry ground, as a staging area until they can be transported to secondary shelters such as the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center. The director of homeland security in New Orleans believes that this type of exercise will strengthen communication among the various agencies by creating a common command and control center. In addition to increasing inter-agency communication another attempt to coordinate efforts is making sure that all agencies use a universal map.
Source: Lee, Trymaine. "Disaster practice takes to the water. First responders aim to iron out problems." *Times-Picayune*. September 21, 2006.

Coastal Restoration:

- While the Army Corps of Engineers in the New Orleans district dredges on average 70 million cubic yards of sediment to keep maritime navigation flowing, only approximately 15 million cubic yards is used to rebuild coastal marshes and wetlands that are disappearing at a rate of 24 square miles per year. The rest of the dredged material is wasted to the disappointment of those that believe that the material should go to rebuilding coastal wetlands. The reason the Corps disposes of the mud is that it is a cheaper solution at least for now. However, this practice is likely to be changed under the federal-state coastal restoration plan as part of the Water Resources Development Act which would provide \$100 million over a 10-year period to increase the amount of dredged sediment used for restoration of coastal wetlands.
Source: Brown, Matthew. "Muddy Waters Mud Flap. The Army Corps dredges up tons of mud each year that could help beat back the state's coastal erosion. But most of it goes to waste." *Times Picayune*. September 20, 2006. <http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/frontpage/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1158732497184690.xml&coll=1>
- The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and growing fears of global climate change have led officials to reconsider undoing the elaborate levee system in Louisiana. A number of scientist and federal and state agencies have called for the Mississippi to be diverted so that sediment can flow into

marshes and protect the coastal areas. The idea of a diversion plan was brought up in a meeting in April and will be re-discussed in a meeting this fall which will “plan how the project should be planned”. No specific plan has been drawn and various unknowns remain including how this project will impact shipping and the navigation industry, the impact on land and land rights, and how communities to the south of the proposed diversion will be impacted.

Source: Dean, Cornelia. “Time to Move the Mississippi, Experts Say.” *The New York Times*. September 19, 2006. <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/09/19/science/19rive.html>