

## **BACKGROUND ON GULF COAST HURRICANE RECOVERY AND NATIONWIDE DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE EFFORTS**

Since taking office in January 2009, the Obama Administration has cut bureaucratic red tape to provide residents of the Gulf Coast with the tools that they need to recover from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. In total, the President, Vice President, Cabinet-level officials, and other key agency heads (FEMA, SBA, Navy, CNCS, NOAA) have visited the Gulf Coast more than 155 times. In addition, President Obama also has worked to improve overall disaster preparedness, response, and recovery, so that the Gulf Coast and all of the country will be more resilient and better able to handle future disasters.

### **Gulf Coast Recovery: Improving Life in Gulf Communities**

- **Shaking the Money Loose for Projects by Cutting through Red Tape.** This administration has cut through red tape and expedited gridlocked projects by implementing new processes to streamline and resolve disputes. These efforts have already freed up more than \$2.25 billion in FEMA public assistance dollars for Louisiana and more than \$170 million for Mississippi.
- **Moving Residents toward Long-Term Housing.** When President Obama entered office, tens of thousands of Katrina/Rita survivors were still unable to find permanent housing options. This Administration has taken important steps to move these survivors toward long-term housing solutions, including helping more than 12,300 low-income families in disaster rental housing to secure more permanent housing and providing \$85 million in new HUD housing vouchers. These efforts helped 1,450 additional families transition more permanent housing. In an effort to transition the remaining 3,194 families from temporary housing, the Administration implemented a new policy that lowered each applicant's barrier to purchase their temporary housing unit. As a result, more than 70 percent of those remaining households have found longer-term solutions.
- **Improving Storm Protection.** To date, more than 220 miles of levees and floodwalls have been repaired and restored to pre-Katrina levels of protection. The Army Corps of Engineers and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) continue to restore barrier islands and conduct coastal restoration along the Gulf Coast.
- **Bolstering Criminal Justice.** The Department of Justice has provided more than \$130 million in grants to renew damaged and displaced local criminal justice systems ravaged by Hurricane Katrina and is working, at the request of New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, with the New Orleans Police Department to improve local criminal justice efforts.
- **Making Additional Investments in Infrastructure.** The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been working closely with Mayor Landrieu and the State of Louisiana to assess the progress and speed the expenditure of the New Orleans' unspent \$411 million in federal Community Development Block Grants.
- **Strengthening Health Care.** To address the shortage of medical professionals after the storm, the Centers of Medicare & Medicaid Services has provided \$40 million in grants to bring 944 medical professionals to New Orleans. In addition, \$7 million is funding community health centers in New Orleans serving more than 50,000 people. To replace a Veterans' hospital destroyed by the storm, VA Secretary Eric Shinseki and local officials broke ground in June 2010 on a new 1.5 million-square-foot VA Medical Center in downtown New Orleans.
- **Making Gulf School Systems Whole and Improving Education for the Future.** The State of Louisiana dedicated \$247.5 million of its Federal Community Development Block Grant disaster recovery allocation to provide school districts with funding for repairs and improvements.

### **Improving Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Nationwide**

- **Strengthening FEMA.** FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate has more than 30 years of emergency management experience at the state and local level, having led Florida's Division of Emergency Management. FEMA continues to strengthen partnerships with federal, state, and local government agencies, as well as the private and volunteer sectors, to identify new approaches and bolster preparedness for all potential hazards.

- **Improving Assistance to Small Businesses Hurt by Disaster.** Since the storm, SBA has expanded its capacity to serve and provide loans to businesses and individuals impacted by disaster by adding an on-call disaster reserve of more than 2,000 workers. SBA has also taken steps to speed its disaster loan processing and improve response time.
- **Improving Temporary Disaster Housing and Sheltering.** FEMA's Joint Housing Solutions Group – an interagency collaborative effort – is in its second year of pilot testing various housing units at the National Emergency Training Center. FEMA continues to improve its National Shelter System, a coordinated nationwide database of emergency shelter information to provide emergency management professionals with real time information on potential shelter resources. HUD has developed, and continues to improve, its National Housing Locator System – a database of apartments available nationally to families displaced by disasters. Additionally, HUD and FEMA have reached an agreement to engage Public Housing Authorities nationwide to serve families displaced by large-scale and catastrophic disasters through the Disaster Housing Assistance Program.
- **Improving Hurricane Forecasts.** In order to provide residents with more advance notice of potential hurricanes, NOAA has taken steps to upgrade its hurricane forecasts with the goal of improving forecast accuracy by 50 percent during the next ten years.
- **Getting All Hands on Deck for Preparedness.** Just as local, state and Federal governments respond to disasters, it is every citizen's responsibility to be prepared – not just for hurricanes, but for any emergency. The President continues to encourage every American to get prepared by visiting [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

### **Directing Recovery Act Funds to the Gulf Coast**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is providing significant resources to the Gulf Coast states:

- **Louisiana** – nearly \$5.1 billion in obligated Recovery funds, with more than \$2.7 billion paid out to date;
- **Mississippi** – nearly \$3.5 billion in obligated Recovery funds, with more than \$2.1 billion paid out to date;
- **Alabama** – more than \$4.8 billion in obligated Recovery funds, with more than \$2.8 billion paid out to date; and,
- **Texas** – more than \$24.5 billion in obligated Recovery funds, with more than \$15.5 billion paid out to date.

Recovery Act funds are providing support to communities and individuals, while also supporting the region's infrastructure and supporting jobs in education, law enforcement and other critical areas. Examples include:

- The greater New Orleans community was one of 15 communities to receive a grant from the Beacon Community Program. Through this grant, the Louisiana Public Health Institute is receiving \$13.5 million to reduce racial health disparities and improve control of diabetes and smoking cessation rates by linking technically isolated health systems, providers, and hospitals. Patients will be empowered through increased access to personal health records.

NOAA is providing \$7 million to restore vulnerable marsh habitat along the Louisiana coastline in Myrtle Grove, Grand Isle, and St. Bernard Marsh.

New Orleans secured \$45 million through the Department of Transportation's competitive TIGER grant program for a new streetcar loop running through the central business district along Loyola Avenue from the Union Passenger Terminal to Canal Street.

Louisiana received \$26.6 million through HUD's new Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program. Mississippi received nearly \$14.4 million through the same program, which helps to stabilize families at risk of becoming homeless and quickly provides housing to those who are currently homeless. In addition, through the Recovery Act, USDA Rural Development's single-family housing programs have provided more than \$708 million in home loans or guarantees for very-low, low- and moderate-income households in rural areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.