

To: Mayor Nagin

Memo: Hurricane Katrina: A Man-Made Crisis?

From: Rosalie Beauchamp

PA800

Summary: Historically, local, state and federal agencies have been aware of the issue of flooding in the city of New Orleans and have made numerous attempts to remedy the situation without success. For example, the Federal government's attempts at flood management included the Swamps Land Act, the Flood Control Act and the National Flood Insurance Program. Ironically, the most seemingly effective intervention, Coast 2050, a project to restore Louisiana's coastline by "mimicking nature" failed to be implemented due to funding issues. The absence of a flood prevention project such as Coast 2050, intergovernmental leadership and coordination, and the lack of centralized authority have left New Orleans extremely vulnerable to flooding disasters. In 2005, when hurricane Katrina hit the city, local, state and federal governments appeared unaware of the hurricane's tenacity and unprepared to take action resulting in devastation.

Issues: While knowledge of serious flooding potential in New Orleans was widely known, Federal, state and local levels of government did not seriously address the issue nor did they enact effective preventative measures. For example, had Coast 2050 been implemented, the devastation in New Orleans may have been avoided. However, too much attention was brought upon terrorism as being the primary issue of the nation and the threat of disaster in New Orleans appeared to be of low priority. While it is true that the levee may have broken with or without the implementation of the Coast 2050 project, state and local leaders failed to advocate the need for a preventative disaster plan for the city; instead they utilized a crude and underfunded strategy. Decentralized authority was a huge issue in the disaster; blame was cast in many directions, but could be placed on no specific culprit. Although all political stakeholders involved had some responsibility in the poor coordination and leadership regarding the disaster, state and local

leaders held the majority of responsibility. State and local leaders were much more intimately aware and knowledgeable of the issue of flooding in New Orleans and failed to prepare for this disaster on a proactive level. State and local leaders had the responsibility to prepare a plan in advance that would have prevented such a catastrophe and they failed to do so. Additionally, the absence of leadership among intergovernmental agencies triggered the issues of poor coordination and timing during the disaster. Government agencies on all levels were confused as to who was responsible for authoritative action regarding evacuation and emergency procedures causing them to work autonomously, rather than together, as a team.

Recommendations: It is imperative that state and local powers join together with the Federal government to develop a plan to prevent a disaster such as Katrina from happening again in the city of New Orleans. This plan should involve intergovernmental coordination especially including FEMA and DoHS. The plan should contain a centralized, tiered system of authority that will make the executive office clearly accountable for their roles if a disaster were to strike again. State and local leaders must be directly involved in the coordination, decision making and leadership so each agency head knows their responsibility in the plan. Additionally, state and local leaders need to advocate for funds at the federal level in order to create a sustainable solution to flooding and a solid disaster plan in which all citizens can understand and participate in. Moreover, funds must be appropriated to revisit enacting a project such as Coast 2050. It is also recommended that local leaders motivate citizens and community leaders of the state and localities who can help with organizing efforts to assist with disaster prevention, education and outreach. It is recognized that while government's purpose is to create progress within its challenges, this can prove to be a very difficult thing to do (Wilson, 1887). However, all levels of government must be acutely aware of their own roles and responsibilities within disaster

management and hopefully become a model for the nation to prevent this unfortunate event from recurring.