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‘Louisiana Winter’ Comes to a Close: Students Vow to Continue to Advocate for Civic Works Legislation

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NEW ORLEANS, LA /PRNewswire/ --On the last day of the Louisiana Winter campaign—students rallied in front of the Iberville Housing Development, gained key support from local leaders at the third Community Congress meeting of the Unified New Orleans Plan, and then held a BBC World Service Radio interview in the front of a destroyed house in the Lower Ninth Ward.

As the Louisiana Winter students exited the bus in front of the Housing Development, they noticed a crime scene less than 100 yards away. When they asked what had happened, a community resident told them that a young person had been murdered twenty minutes earlier, and another resident stated, “just another day in New Orleans.” At the rally, the students highlighted how 100,000 Civic Works jobs will provide a pathway out of violence and the ability to rebuild their own communities.

Scott Myers-Lipton, Associate Professor of Sociology at San José State University, met with Dr. Edward Blakely, Executive Director for Recovery Management, at the third Community Congress meeting. Dr. Blakely expressed enthusiasm and support for the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project. Paul Waidhas, Vice President of Burk-Kleinpeter, one of the organizations developing the New Orleans redevelopment plan, also provided initial support for the Civic Works Project and proposed a solution to the issue of where to house the “civic workers” returning to rebuild their communities. Mr. Waidhas recommended that the workers live in the 1000s of units of housing currently unoccupied, but that could be repaired relatively quickly by the workers themselves.

Louisiana Winter students did not want to leave New Orleans without meeting Ms. Linda Jackson, who is a Lower Ninth Ward resident and who is active in the rebuilding of her community. Her story of courage and determination to remain in the Lower Ninth Ward inspired the students. Ms. Jackson stated that the Mayor’s Office has not included her community in the redevelopment plans. When she went to meet the Mayor’s staff, she noted that the staff could not even produce a map of the Lower Ninth Ward. Ms. Jackson commented, “Basically, we are not on the map...it’s like we don’t even exist.” BBC World Service Radio was there to record the meeting between Ms. Jackson and the students.

The following four points are a summation of the testimonies voiced by hundreds of Gulf Coast residents:

- A living wage should be no lower than \$12, but \$15 is more appropriate
- Rebuilding the 260,000 homes destroyed is one of the top priorities. Other top priorities include building schools, hospitals, parks, community centers, and roads
- Training is imperative. Paid apprenticeships should be provided to learn the skills of construction, plumbing, electrical work, and brick building
- The government response has been inadequate and ineffective

The students believe that the government must include these principles when drafting federal legislation based on the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project.

As Louisiana Winter concluded, students vowed to return to their communities to continue advocating for civic works legislation. Students agreed to form coalitions on their respective campuses. Students from Xavier University and Tulane University are considering a national call of action to their fellow students for this coming spring. In addition, the faculty involved in Louisiana Winter has proposed to form a national coalition of human rights organizations and anti-poverty groups to ensure passage of this legislation.

The Gulf Coast Civic Works Project is the national effort to develop federal legislation to create 100,000 jobs to rebuild the region using Gulf Coast residents. Louisiana Winter brought together 130 students from 25 colleges to the Gulf Coast for a week-long campaign to make this vision a reality.

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