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Students Pushing for Plan

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GULFPORT - College students are pushing for a Franklin D. Roosevelt-like solution to the lack of both affordable housing and jobs in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

The group is seeking legislation that would create about 100,000 jobs intended to bring those displaced by Hurricane Katrina back to South Mississippi and Louisiana. They would be hired by a government agency run by citizens. They would rebuild homes, among other jobs, for around \$15 an hour.

The project follows the model of the Works Progress Administration created as part of the New Deal during the Great Depression by Roosevelt to help stimulate the economy by creating well-paying jobs that in turn allowed the workers to put money back into the economy.

"We are trying to get the Coast back to Aug. 28," said LeeAnn Gunn-Rasmussen, a faculty member at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College's Jefferson Davis Campus. She is helping with the project.

James Skinner, a student at MGCCC, said what has happened after the storm is a "human rights disaster." He said the elderly who lost their homes are facing particularly long odds of getting out of a FEMA trailer, but the plan is a possible solution.

"Nobody is going to give the elderly a 30-year loan," Skinner said.

The grassroots effort began in December. Roughly 15 students gathered on Thursday night to plan, and organizers there said the idea is getting some interest from Congress. U.S. Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., has offered his support to the plan, Gunn-Rasmussen said.

At the meeting, James Crowell, head of the Biloxi branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said the NAACP would push for the legislation both locally and in Washington.

"The people that live here will rebuild their own cities and be paid for that," Crowell said. "We feel this is one way we can bring the labor force."