

NEWS RELEASE



Missouri Urban Progressive Caucus



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Missouri Legislators Call for Gulf Coast Civic Works Project As President Bush Tours Katrina Recovery Effort in New Orleans

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. -- As President George W. Bush tours New Orleans to observe the recovery effort from Hurricane Katrina, Missouri House members called for a hearing on House Concurrent Resolution 34 to establish a Gulf Coast Civic Works Project. Stating that "the federal government's response to this unprecedented disaster has been ineffective and weak" and "emphasizes disparities of race and income," the resolution calls for hiring 100,000 Gulf Coast residents to rebuild their homes and their lives.

Nineteen months after Hurricane Katrina hit, more than 200,000 Gulf Coast residents are still living in FEMA trailers. People wait desperately for their homes, schools, and hospitals to be rebuilt. Unfortunately, the pace of recovery has been painfully slow. In Louisiana, 101,000 residents have applied for assistance to rebuild their homes, but only a few hundred have received checks.

Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford, D-St. Louis and lead sponsor of HCR 34, said she and several House colleagues are frustrated and pained by the ongoing suffering of Katrina survivors. "Our nation has given more attention and funding to rebuilding Afghanistan and Iraq than helping our neighbors on the Gulf Coast," Oxford said. "We believe a civic works project offers a viable way for Gulf Coast residents to participate in securing the future of their communities."

Scott Myers-Lipton, professor of Sociology at San José State University, and one of the early proponents of the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project concept, said "the Gulf Coast is in crisis."

"There is an urgent need to jump-start the rebuilding process," Myers-Lipton said. "What is needed is a rebuilding surge in New Orleans and in southern Mississippi."

Myers-Lipton said he hopes other state legislatures will join Missouri in calling for the creation of a Gulf Coast Civic Works Project. The idea already has some state and national support. Sally Lieber, the Speaker Pro Tempore of the California State Assembly, is considering similar legislation. Congressman Bennie Thompson, in one of his first speeches as chair of the House Committee on Homeland Security, highlighted that a civic works project to rebuild the Gulf is one of his three major goals for the committee.

Missouri representatives say their proposal is not a Republican or Democratic solution, but an American one. Oxford said, "Indeed my own parents taught me that their lives were saved during the Depression by FDR's Works Project Administration. Surely our Gulf Coast neighbors deserve a similar opportunity to find employment while rebuilding the local infrastructure."