



## 'Forgotten' in Louisiana

### SJSU STUDENTS VISIT KATRINA VICTIMS, PUSH FOR JOBS PROGRAM

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Lilly Perez and Victoria Chavez, both members of the San Jose Chapter... (Thu Hoang Ly/Mercury News)

Julian Rosenberg was startled to see so few people in New Orleans. Pamela Germany wondered where all of the children were in that city's Ninth Ward. Danny Boyd said he hadn't realized what hope was until he saw so many people without it.

A group of San Jose State University students shared their reactions to a January visit to the Gulf Coast at a public hearing in San Jose on Friday - asking California legislators to help support their call to make sure much more is done for the Hurricane Katrina-ravaged region.

"All of the people we spoke with said the country has forgotten them and cast them aside," said Victoria Chavez, a sophomore, who is part of the San Jose State chapter of the Gulf Coast Public Works Project and plans to return to New Orleans at the end of May.

The project originated at San Jose State, quickly grew to include chapters at 14 other universities and now is backed by 19 schools, including Stanford, University of California-Berkeley and New York University.

Their goal is to convince Congress to pass a public works law that would provide jobs for 100,000 residents in Louisiana and Mississippi so residents there can help rebuild the area themselves - and get paid what residents call "a living wage" of \$15 an hour.

"When people say it's not possible, I'd like to turn to Iraq," said Scott Myers-Lipton, associate professor of sociology at San Jose State who has helped shape the project and traveled to New Orleans with the students.

"The U.S. has 40,000 public works jobs for the citizens of Iraq," and there is no reason it can't provide 100,000 civic works jobs for its own people, he said.

Assemblywoman Sally J. Lieber, D-Mountain View, co-sponsored the hearing at San Jose's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library and served as moderator.

The students and Myers-Lipton said they want state legislators to pass a resolution in support of the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, which would help put pressure on Congress to pass the bill. Lieber said the response from Silicon Valley legislators has been very favorable.

"I think we will have our whole legislative delegation wanting to be on the resolution that deals with this," she said. "I think it's pretty significant the federal government has abandoned urban policy, state government abandoned urban policy, but the students are taking this on."

Lipton-Myers and Lieber said the issue is important to California because of the known threat of another major earthquake here.

"California could well be in the same position ourselves," Lieber said. "If a major earthquake in the Bay Area impacted the Hetch Hetchy water system, we could be without water for up to 60 days or more."

The students said it was hard to believe that so many people in the New Orleans area are still without water and some without housing.

"I can't believe they've been waiting this long," said Tasha Easton, a senior in sociology and member of the project. "They're fellow Americans and they haven't seen the funding they've been promised."

January's trip to New Orleans, called "Louisiana Winter," was inspired by Mississippi Summer, the 1964 voter registration drive that brought hundreds of students from colleges around the country to Mississippi. They conducted town meetings to ask residents what needed to be done.

Members of the project hope to have 100,000 people sign a petition calling on Congress to create legislation that would authorize the 100,000 jobs to rebuild the Gulf Coast.

"There's been such a decrease in student activism," Chavez said. "This is a re-emergence. There are a lot of things to be corrected."

For more information, the project has a Web site: **[www.solvingpoverty.com](http://www.solvingpoverty.com)**.

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