



Missouri legislature supports national initiative to aid Gulf Coast

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Missouri state legislatures are the latest to back a national effort to aid post-Katrina recovery efforts, supporting an initiative to employ affected residents. The Gulf Coast Civic Works Project hopes to create jobs for 100,000 Gulf Coast residents, similar to Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, part of the Depression-era New Deal.

The resolution passed in the Missouri House endorses the Civic Works Project and urges Congress to change its approach to Katrina recovery given the thousands of people still without permanent housing.

Scott Myers-Lipton, professor of Sociology at San Jose State University, was an early proponent of the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project. Myers-Lipton hosted a San Jose poverty-awareness event, where he showed Spike Lee's "The Day the Levees Broke" to students. The film initiated a discussion about the poor situation of the region months after Katrina.

"[The Civic Works Project] came out of a nationwide dialogue about the Gulf Coast, about the suffering of the Gulf Coast," Myers-Lipton said. "So many people still haven't recovered. We have a particular focus on making 100,000 jobs to rebuild the coast. We know inherently that these people aren't refugees. They are American citizens."

Missouri State Rep. Jeanette Mott Oxford (D.-St. Louis City) was the lead sponsor of the Missouri resolution.

"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."

Oxford said she first learned of the national initiative to help the Gulf Coast through a civic works project in an e-mail she received. She was intrigued by the effort to pressure Congress to change and decided to back the resolution. Even though the resolution was passed with good intentions, it will not be felt in New Orleans for some time.

"Any piece of state legislation can take several years to go into effect," Oxford said. Missouri has an emergency method to expedite putting bills into practice, according to Oxford. She hopes Congress will use a similar emergency response tactic in responding to the Gulf Coast Crisis.

"I'd say that, surely if the political will existed, we could see something changing in about a year," Oxford said.

California is considering passing similar legislation, and, nationally, U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson (D. –Miss.) said a civic works project to rebuild the Gulf Coast region is one of his three major goals as chair of the House Committee for Homeland Security. Myers-Lipton isn't waiting for Congress to take action. The initiative has created a petition, gathering 100,000 signatures for 100,000 jobs. Since Congress has not written a bill in support of the Civic Works Project, Myers-Lipton and his colleagues have begun to write it for them.

"We've been told by political people 12 to 18 months to get it passed," Myers-Lipton said. "We want it now. We want it yesterday. Why can't helping the Gulf Coast be on the agenda for Pelosi's 100 days?"

The initiative will gain force in April, when college campuses across the country take part in the National Post-Katrina College Summit addressing Gulf Coast recovery issues. So far, 20 campuses, including Tulane, have committed, but Myers-Lipton expects upward of 40 to enroll by the actual summit date.

For more information, see [www.solvingpoverty.com](http://www.solvingpoverty.com).