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Congressman Tancredo: Block Katrina Aid to Louisiana Politicians

U.S.

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WASHINGTON, DC. - Congressman Tom Tancredo (R-CO) wrote a letter to Speaker Hastert, urging him to direct federal hurricane relief aid through channels other than Louisiana public officials. Citing incompetence and a history of corruption, Tancredo said a bipartisan select committee of the House should administer the aid and provide accountability for the \$52 billion requested. The letter is reprinted below:

Dear Mr. Speaker,

Given the abysmal failure of state and local officials in Louisiana to plan adequately for or respond to the effects of Hurricane Katrina on the city of New Orleans, and given the long history of public corruption in Louisiana, I hope the House will refrain from directly appropriating any funds from the public treasury to either the state of Louisiana or the city of New Orleans. Instead, reconstruction and relief funds dedicated to the people of New Orleans should be administered by a private organization or a select committee similar to the historic Truman Commission.

Public corruption is a well known problem in Louisiana. The head of the FBI in New Orleans just this past year described the state's public corruption as "epidemic, endemic, and entrenched. No branch of government is exempt." Over the last thirty years, a long list of Louisiana politicians have been convicted of crimes; the list includes a governor, an attorney general, an elections commissioner, an agriculture commissioner, three successive insurance commissioners, a congressman, a federal judge, a State Senate president, six other state legislators, and a host of appointed officials, local sheriffs, city councilmen, and parish police jurors. Given the documented public corruption in the state, I am not confident that Louisiana officials can be trusted to administer federal relief aid.

Clearly the federal response from FEMA in the aftermath of the hurricane was hampered by bureaucratic ineptitude. Making matters worse, the Mayor of New Orleans and the Governor of Louisiana have demonstrated mind-boggling incompetence in their lack of planning for and response to this disaster. According to one recent media report, *"A year ago, as Hurricane Ivan approached, New Orleans ordered an evacuation but did not use city or school buses to help people evacuate. As a result many of the poorest citizens were unable to evacuate. Fortunately, the hurricane changed course and did not hit New Orleans, but both Gov. Blanco and Mayor Nagin acknowledged the need for a better evacuation plan...[but] did not take corrective actions. In 1998, during a threat by Hurricane George, 14,000 people were sent to the Superdome and theft and vandalism were rampant due to inadequate security. Again, these problems were not corrected."*

The city of New York, by comparison, had no advance warning of 9/11. Yet Mayor Giuliani and Governor Pataki displayed tremendous leadership in managing a chaotic situation in the city. Their leadership inspired confidence in their ability to manage the emergency and coordinate federal aid. In contrast, despite knowing days in advance about the coming hurricane, Governor Blanco and Mayor Nagin seem to have done little beyond encouraging residents to leave the city or gather at the Superdome. City school and transit buses could have carried 12,000 persons per run out of the city, yet they sat idle in parking lots under water - while both the Mayor and Governor criticized the federal response.

In the coming days, tens of billions of dollars will likely flood Louisiana to address the costs of rescue, clean up, and rebuilding. The question is not whether Congress should provide for those in need, but whether state and local officials who have been derelict in their duty should be trusted with that money. Their record during Hurricane Katrina and the long history of public corruption in Louisiana convinces me that that they should not.

Sincerely,

Tom Tancredo, MC.