

## **Time to Renew Our Commitment to the Gulf Coast Region, By Senators Landrieu and Vitter and Representatives Alexander, Cao and Cassidy - April 2009**

*Nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, national attention on the region has dwindled even though poverty resulting from the storm's effects persists. In partnership with [Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity](#), the Equity and Inclusion Campaign will present a series of commentaries on the need to renew our national focus on the region's recovery, with a focus on low-income and vulnerable communities.*

*Senator Landrieu, Senator Vitter, Representative Melancon, Representative Alexander, Representative Cao, and Representative Cassidy introduce the series with a call to extend the federal Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding an additional two years and strengthen its authority.*

We applaud President Obama's decision to extend the tenure of the Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding through September 30th. As an important next step in our continuing commitment to rebuild the Gulf Coast region, we believe this office should be extended for at least another two years and that it should have its powers expanded so that it can wield more effective authority over reconstruction and recovery efforts.

Although Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast more than three years ago, the situation in the region remains delicate, and successful recovery will depend on the federal government's continued participation. Approximately 17,000 Louisiana families rely on rental assistance from the Disaster Housing Assistance Program, while another 4,422 live in temporary FEMA housing. Of the 125,000 Louisiana small businesses impacted by the hurricanes, many are still closed or slow to open.

We need to make critical infrastructure investments in the region, not only to jumpstart the regional economy, but also to protect the Gulf Coast from future dangerous storms.

Unfortunately, delays have hampered many of these vital projects. For example, the closure of the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet, a channel directly linking New Orleans's inner harbor to the Gulf of Mexico, only received final approval this past December.

While the entire nation now faces serious concerns over basic needs, such as a good job, adequate housing, and affordable healthcare, these worries are especially critical in a region still reeling from the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

By extending the Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding and sending Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan to tour the Gulf Coast, President Obama has made a strong initial commitment to the Gulf Region.

We now see an opportunity for the President to step up his efforts to rebuild a robust Gulf Coast region. This includes investing in essential infrastructure, creating jobs, and providing services to those who need them most.

With so much work left to be done, we believe a key first step is for the President to extend the Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding for at least two years.

The next step is to strengthen and refocus the Office's role and authority. With the wide range of issues implicated in the recovery effort, the Office must be able to coordinate operations between a wide range of federal agencies, including FEMA, HUD, the Army Corps of Engineers, SBA, the Department of Transportation, and others.

Without a focused, centrally coordinated federal effort, it will be difficult to usher the region through what is still a critical phase in its recovery. The President's support can ensure these conditions are met.

President Obama's decision to extend the tenure of the Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding is a necessary and welcome commitment to a recovery critical to those living on the Gulf Coast and to America as a whole.

Yet more must be done to ensure that the federal government takes the lead in what will be a long and delicate rebuilding effort. We look forward to working with the President to return the Gulf Coast region to prosperity.

*Mary Landrieu is the senior United States Senator from Louisiana. David Vitter is the junior United States Senator from Louisiana. Charlie Melancon represents Louisiana's 3rd District in the United States House of Representatives. Rodney Alexander represents Louisiana's 5th District in the United States House of Representatives. Joseph Cao represents Louisiana's 2nd District in the United States House of Representatives. Bill Cassidy represents Louisiana's 6th District in the United States House of Representatives.*