

## OUR VIEW

# Emergency is Mismanaged

"People stranded for days on New Orleans' rooftops without food or water. Patients dying for lack of medical supplies. The agency couldn't even get supplies to thousands marooned at the Morial Convention Center — though reporters and even singer Harry Connick Jr. managed to reach the scene."—*USA Today*.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is taking it on the chin for its pitiful response to the devastation Hurricane Katrina caused to the Gulf Coast—and rightfully so. Responsible for "disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery planning," FEMA seemed to do everything but. Various news reports have undressed the agency for its shortcomings in mitigating the impact of one of the worst natural disasters in U.S. history and failing to address problems that effectively neutered its capability to coordinate disaster response.

Perhaps FEMA's most egregious error was in leadership. To say its director, Michael Brown, was ill-suited to lead the agency is like saying a Ku Klux Klansman is ill-fitted to run the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Brown's experience in disaster preparedness/relief? Nearly nonexistent. Prior to landing at FEMA in 2001, as the agency's lawyer, he worked for nine years as a commissioner at an Arabian horse association. Not exactly sterling credentials for the person responsible for U.S. disaster preparedness/relief. In fact, inexperience plagued management.

Even worse: According to *USA Today*, the independent Government Accountability Office reported "that 75 percent of the agency's preparedness grants next year (2006) are targeted to state and local readiness for terrorism — a mismatch to reality. Leaders of the National Emergency Management Association feared the impending result. Five of the group's leaders came to Washington just days before Katrina struck to warn Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff that the shift, including more proposed erosions of FEMA's role, was weakening their readiness for disasters. The warning was prophetic."

And to top it off: Brown said that part of the mission of 1,000 volunteers recruited to support the efforts of rescue workers was to "convey a positive image of disaster operations." Not only incompetent but heartless, too.

FEMA's ineptitude has even stretched to Las Vegas, where local police, rescue and emergency workers were given the greenlight to head to New Orleans to assist in relief efforts, only to be told to hold on—that FEMA would let them know when it was OK to help. As if yo-yoing their emotions would somehow help them do a better job. Eventually, local personnel were allowed to go. FEMA then sent mixed messages about an estimated 500 evacuees who were scheduled to come here. First, they're Vegas-bound. Next, they're not. Now, who knows? It's the same kind of jilted response that's marked FEMA's reaction to the tragedy in the Gulf Coast.

## Show Some Love

Despite FEMA's historic bumbling, we can be sure that hundreds of folks left homeless and city-less by Hurricane Katrina will wind up in Las Vegas. The Clark County School District is preparing to accept an influx of students, as well as trying to locate teachers it can hire to fill vacancies. Some churches have agreed to house families, while other entities are offering shelter, food, hygiene supplies and other necessities.

In opening our homes and wallets, let's not forget to truly open our hearts. As much as the physical and tangible items will help, we should also be generous with warm smiles, gracious hugs and attentive ears. Sometimes, it's what we don't say that speaks volumes. And when the evacuees begin arriving, likely at the Fertitta complex on Las Vegas Boulevard, let us welcome them with open arms, turning this into their Ellis Island, their land of promise.

## He's relaxed, well rested, and about 4 days late. He's our NATURAL DISASTER PRESIDENT



## Will Blacks answer Katrina's call?

By Dora LaGrande  
Sentinel-Voice

During my short stint as an opinion columnist, I have not found an article as hard to write as this one.

My emotions are all over the place.

I'm sympathetic, hurt, angry, doubtful, tearful continuously, suspicious and truly, truly disappointed.

Ten days ago, Hurricane Katrina tore through the Gulf Coast with a vengeance. She left in her wake more than a million people who may have been driven from their homes — many permanently — with hundreds of thousands of evacuees in shelters, hotels and private homes across the country. She left 80 percent of New Orleans under water and ravaged other Gulf Coast communities.

Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster on American soil, has exposed the America only a select few of us have known. The Lord allowed America to be stripped naked for the whole world to see and has caused in New Orleans, Mississippi and Alabama, what is tantamount to a modern-day genocide.

As we have all been glued to CNN and other news accounts of this disaster, you can't help but notice that poor African-Americans have been hit the hardest. The three states that were hit are among the poorest in the country, ranking at the bottom in overall poverty and number of residents who live



## ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

below the poverty line. Additionally, these states have large concentrations of African-Americans — over 60 percent of New Orleans residents are Black.

While, make no mistake about it, our hearts go out to all Americans affected by this tumultuous situation, we as African-Americans feel closer to these victims than we ever felt to anyone since slavery.

When you turn on the TV and radio and constantly hear that they were "warned" and could've/should've evacuated, it makes you sick, and the anger inside you wells up to the point that you may burst. If they were so concerned, why didn't they send a fleet of Greyhound buses in to evacuate the people, beforehand, to some of the closed military bases? If they knew that the Superdome was going to be the holding cell why weren't they prepared with food, water, cots and other necessities? Even before the hurricane, many Blacks in these southern locations were economically disadvantaged. According to the Census Bureau's latest report, they have the lowest median household income in the country.

If they found it extremely

enlaved by their conditions and environment. Their children hadn't eaten in five to eight days; they were living in unsafe, unsanitary conditions with feces and disease all around.

The Lord will often shake you up to wake you up, and if Black America was to ever wake up, the time is now. We have been sent a wake-up call, and what are we going to do about it?

For most of us, that was us down there held hostage by a river of fetid, putrid water with human waste, corpses and garbage and chemicals. That was us holding and trying to comfort the dehydrated, famished, crying children. That was us trying to help the seniors and comfort them as they worried where their next dialysis treatment was coming from or if they will even survive to get it. That was us screaming and crying as the teenager gasped for air when he or she was having an asthma attack.

(See LaGrande, Page 11)

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