

# CITY BUSINESS

## PAR: Bureaucracy slowing recovery

September 24, 2007

The amount of post-hurricane federal aid provided to Mississippi and Louisiana is not proportional to the amount of damage each state suffered, according to the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana and the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government.

More than two years after hurricanes Katrina and Rita, sluggish aid distribution is the primary concern of Louisiana and Mississippi officials, the report said.

The report also criticizes the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Public Assistance Program, which requires local governments to begin repairs and seek a reimbursement.

"While more than \$8 billion has been disbursed through these federal recovery programs, the costs for full recovery continue to climb," said PAR President Jim Brandt. "A new level of communication and cooperation will be necessary to speed up the recovery and finish the job of rebuilding this region."

First N.O. rape case prosecuted

with DNA evidence

In a first for the New Orleans area, a national DNA database was used in prosecuting a rape case, according to Orleans Parish District Attorney Eddie Jordan's office.

Jordan said a jury found Rudolph Wade guilty of a rape that took place in February 1996.

The case went unsolved until last year when Jennifer Schroder, the New Orleans Police Department's Combined DNA Index System administrator, found a DNA sample in the database matching samples taken from the victim. A match was found using a DNA sample taken from Wade after his conviction for a carjacking that took place in Maryland.

The state intends to file a multiple bill, in which Wade would face 20 to 80 years in prison, Jordan's office said.

Criminal District Court Judge Frank Marullo Jr. will sentence Wade Nov. 19.

Jeff Council approves Pontiff Park plan

The Jefferson Parish Council plans major renovations for the Willy Pontiff Jr. Playground, an Old Metairie park heavily damaged by Hurricane Katrina.

The \$21.5-million master plan, developed over eight months by a group appointed by the Council and Meyer Engineers, will spruce up the park spanning roughly 200 acres between Airline Highway and Metairie Road.

Jeanne Hezeau, who designed the park plan for Meyer Engineers, said the project will enhance aesthetic appeal, accessibility and functionality while respecting the neighbors. Plans include a new jogging trail, gym, ball field, parking and new trees to replace those toppled by Katrina.

Organizers expect most funding to come from private donations.

Some Road Home recipients may be taxed for grants

While The Road Home program has paid out more than 54,000 grants to help hurricane-affected homeowners, many recipients will pay back as much as 35 percent of their grants as income tax.

Normally, the Internal Revenue Service would treat grants from the federally funded, state-run program as nontaxable gifts. But if a homeowner claimed a casualty loss from the 2005 hurricanes and later receives compensation through The Road Home, the IRS considers the grant a duplication of the 2005 tax break.

Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-New Orleans, and Rep. Bobby Jindal, R-Metairie, have submitted legislation to exempt the grants from taxes, but chances of passage seem slim.

While "very panicked people" are calling Landrieu's office, "it's a challenging thing to get done," Landrieu spokeswoman Stephanie Allen said.