

## EDITORIAL: Backing our case

Monday, September 24, 2007

Any independent observer would agree that Louisianians have not been treated fairly when it comes to how the federal government has distributed recovery dollars for victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. But members of Congress considering Louisiana's request for additional aid don't have to take our word for it. They can read a new report by two independent policy research groups that solidly makes our case. The document, released last week by GulfGov Reports, concluded that the federal aid provided to Louisiana and Mississippi "is not proportional to the amount of damage each state suffered."

GulfGov is a joint project of the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government and the Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana and represents groups in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

The report, using figures from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, concludes that Louisiana had 67 percent of homes with major or severe damage eligible for Community Development Block Grants, yet the state got only 62 percent of block grant money. By contrast, Mississippi had 20 percent of similarly damaged homes, but received a third of CDBG aid.

The discrepancy is far more pronounced if one just considers homes that were destroyed. And, of course, damage in Mississippi was caused only by a natural disaster. In New Orleans, tens of thousands of homes and hundreds of lives were lost because of the failure of federally build levees.

Louisiana officials, as well as this newspaper, have made it clear that no one is suggesting that aid should be taken away from Mississippi. Indeed, the GulfGov report authors ran the document by Mississippi officials, who raised no objections.

Yet some in our neighboring state have taken offense at our plea, reacting as if Louisiana's argument somehow diminishes their tragedy. To the contrary, Louisianians understand what Mississippians suffered painfully well, because we suffered too.

All we're asking is for Congress to treat Louisianians fairly by giving us as generous a share of aid as Mississippians have received.

As the GulfGov researchers put it, communities in both states were turned upside down. The least Congress can do is to recognize this and treat us the same.