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### Gulf Watch: Katrina and Rita recovery challenges still remain

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A [report](#) released this month by the [Public Affairs Research Council of Louisiana](#) examines some of the recovery misconceptions state and local officials along the Gulf Coast continue to combat more than three years after hurricanes Katrina and Rita washed ashore.

The report, "[GulfGov Reports: Three Years after Katrina and Rita, Challenges Remain](#)," presents a frustrating picture of Louisiana officials combating something labeled as "Katrina Fatigue" in Washington, D.C., and across the nation.

According to the report, with the recovery work expected to last a decade, state and local officials in the affected communities will have to spend considerable time and resources countering misconceptions as they work to rebuild. Some of the continuing misconceptions outlined in the report include:

- There is a misconception that the allocation of recovery money equals distribution of recovery money. In reality, there is a delay between the time federal recovery money is allocated and the time it is disbursed to the local governments.
- There is a misconception that the federal government has a mechanism in place to rationally and equitably distribute long-term recovery money. In reality, the federal government has several programs in place from which it can distribute disaster aid money, but none of them is geared specifically toward catastrophic disasters. In addition, Congress created a program designed to help boost economic development recovery efforts in areas affected by Katrina and Rita, but it does not apply to other communities that have suffered disasters, and it is scheduled to end in 2010.
- There is a misconception that Louisiana's homeowner grant assistance program - known as the Road Home Program - has been a failure, while Mississippi's program - known as the Homeowner Assistance Program - has succeeded in addressing that state's recovery housing needs. In reality, **neither program has succeeded in resolving the acute housing shortage both states face** as a result of Katrina and Rita, nor has either program produced a template that could be used to address housing issues created by future disasters.

- There is a misconception that the Mississippi Gulf Coast has completely recovered, but in reality certain segments of the Mississippi Gulf Coast have recovered, but more recovery work remains to be done.

The report also details problems in communication:

At the heart of these misconceptions lies the problem of communication - communication between different levels of government, between government and people, and between government and the media. As has been well-documented in numerous reports, the almost complete breakdown of communications in the days after Katrina struck exacerbated what was already a disaster unlike any this country had faced before. With little to no communication happening, much of the relief work was delayed and rumors exploded.

As relief efforts finally gave way to long-term rebuilding work, the communication problems continued, as state and local officials struggled with the federal government's one-size-fits-all recovery process. Efforts to convince federal officials of the need to view each community as a unique entity when it comes to disaster recovery have, for the most part, fallen on deaf ears, and frustrated officials and residents alike. Nor have state and local officials been able to effectively dispel the myths and misconceptions that continue to plague the recovery work. That, in turn, has made it much more difficult for them to convince Congress that the recovery will take many years and require more assistance from the federal government.

"While it is now three years since Katrina and Rita, the issues raised by this report remain as timely and relevant as ever," PAR President Jim Brandt said in the press release. "If anything, they have become even more important as officials in communities devastated by hurricanes Gustav and Ike come face to face with many of the same bureaucratic obstacles, challenges, and frustrations Louisiana and Mississippi officials have encountered since Katrina and Rita."