



Legislation Text

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**File #:** Res 1150-2005, **Version:** \*

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Res. No. 1150

Resolution denouncing the grossly inadequate and extremely delayed response to the Hurricane Katrina crisis, and calling upon the President of the United States and the United States Congress to provide for a comprehensive, fully funded and effective national response effort, which includes the efficient coordination of aid and adequate support for the rebuilding of the area and lives of the people affected by this tragic event.

By Council Members Martinez, Barron, Clarke, Comrie, Fidler, Foster, Gerson, James, Liu, Palma, Quinn, Sanders Jr., Sears, Stewart, Vann, Weprin and Jackson

Whereas, On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina barreled through the Gulf Coast states of the United States with devastating force, destroying both lives and property in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama; and

Whereas, Levees surrounding the City of New Orleans were so weakened by the hurricane that they gave way, flooding that historic city with the waters of Lake Pontchartrain, causing widespread death, destruction and human suffering; and

Whereas, The City of New York has great empathy for the devastated Gulf Coast region, having endured its own tragic disaster on September 11, 2001, when terrorist attacks destroyed the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, killing thousands of people; and

Whereas, The loss of lives and enormous devastation that was caused by Hurricane Katrina makes this hurricane “the most significant natural disaster to hit” the United States, according to Federal Emergency Management Agency (“FEMA”) official Bill Lokey, as reported in the August, 31, 2005 edition of the New York Post; and

Whereas, Louisiana Senator David Vitter has said that 10,000 people might have died in Louisiana alone, as of September 5, 2005; and

Whereas, Hundreds of thousands of people, including the population of the City of New Orleans, have been displaced from their homes; and

Whereas, The images of devastation from the Gulf Coast have profoundly shocked people across the country and the world; and

Whereas, Representative Maxine Waters of California stated that New Orleans “looks like an underdeveloped country,” and at “(n)o time did I think in America we would see this kind of homelessness, this kind of displacement...(t)his is the worst thing I have ever seen;” and

Whereas, Coverage of Hurricane Katrina indicated that the federal government failed to adequately respond in the first days of the disaster; and

Whereas, According to various news reports, the federal government, particularly FEMA, waited hours after Hurricane Katrina struck before seeking approval from Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to send 1,000 federal relief workers into the region; and

Whereas, In another example of the tragic delay in providing appropriate help, news reports also indicate that the federal government waited over one week before accepting assistance in the form of medical supplies, cleanup equipment and personnel from foreign countries such as Canada; and

Whereas, Much suffering occurred in the days following the breach of the levies, including people who died or became very ill as a result of the flooding or the lack of food, water or needed medications, families who were separated in the turmoil, and crime which took place due to inadequate protection of the people of New Orleans; and

Whereas, New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin captured the sentiments of many when he stated in broadcasts that “(t)oo many people died because of lack of action,” and conveyed his belief that coordination failures and bureaucratic obstacles are no justification for the failure of the federal government to respond in a timely fashion, and that it was inexcusable for federal authorities to effectively stand by and allow the breakdown of civil society in New Orleans; and

Whereas, An early internal memorandum from the head of FEMA reflected no urgency in language in responding to the disaster, and placed emphasis on conveying “a positive image of disaster operations,” “maintain(ing) positive working relationships with disaster affected communities,” and “collect(ing) and disseminat(ing) information to make referrals for appropriate assistance;” and

Whereas, FEMA conducted disaster relief exercises in 2004, responding to a mock hurricane that would spill over New Orleans’ levees, destroying buildings and trapping residents, yet, apparently, such exercises failed to reveal problems that plagued the response to Hurricane Katrina, such as the inability to repair levee breaches rapidly, the inadequacy of the New Orleans Superdome as an emergency hosting site for evacuees and the breakdown of communications infrastructure; and

Whereas, The September 9, 2005 edition The Washington Post notes that the incorporation of FEMA into the Department of Homeland Security and the appointment of leaders without backgrounds in emergency management has severely limited emergency preparedness at that agency, thus also leaving the bulk of disaster mitigation work in the hands of state and local jurisdictions who may not have the resources to respond to disasters effectively; and

Whereas, The Washington Post also reported on September 9, 2005, that 5 of 8 top FEMA officials came to their posts with virtually no experience in handling disasters, and now lead an agency whose ranks of seasoned crisis managers have thinned dramatically; and

Whereas, Public statements by certain government leaders and images of the crisis offered by the media carelessly exacerbated a sense of alienation and fear among many people; and

Whereas, For example, in response to reports of looting, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco made inflammatory statements, such as Arkansas National Guard troops under her command are “battle-tested,” “have M-16’s and they are locked and loaded,” and “(t)hese troops know how to shoot and kill... and I expect they will;” and

Whereas, Additionally, the media described images of some African Americans taking food from a

deserted store as looting without regard to the desperate conditions and the stark choices faced by survivors of this crisis; and

Whereas, Race and class played a role in the impact of Hurricane Katrina's devastation; and

Whereas, Dr. Beverly Wright of the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice notes that the population of New Orleans is 67 percent African-American, and that 50 percent of this figure lives below poverty; and

Whereas, Many of those who failed to evacuate the affected areas were unable to do so because they did not have a car or the financial means to leave; and

Whereas, The Bush Administration's failure to address the growing poverty and fragility of families in the United States contributed to the inability of tens of thousands of people to evacuate in response to the Hurricane warnings; and

Whereas, The Bush Administration has reduced or called for the reduction of many of the domestic safety nets needed to adequately support our readiness to respond to such national tragedies and support the well-being of the people of the United States; and

Whereas, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist notes that initial relief and recovery operations could cost between \$100 billion and \$200 billion; and

Whereas, The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina raises a broad range of issues that the nation must address swiftly, including the need for housing, schooling and jobs for the many who were displaced, the unique problems faced by immigrants, economic and emotional support for the families and communities that were devastated, and a firm commitment to the physical cleanup and reconstruction of property that was destroyed; and

Whereas, As a city which found itself the recipient of national and international support and expressions of the spirit of humanity as a result of its own enormous tragedy that took place on September 11, 2001, an event that also caused great loss of life and destruction, the City of New York finds the federal government's

response to the Hurricane Katrina victims wholly inadequate; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York denounces the grossly inadequate and extremely delayed response to the Hurricane Katrina crisis, and calls upon the President of the United States and the United States Congress to provide for a comprehensive, fully funded and effective national response effort, which includes the efficient coordination of aid and adequate support for the rebuilding of the lives of the people affected by this tragic event.

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BK/db  
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