What We’ve Been Up To
(thanks to you!)

Four Years
Of
Friends of New Orleans
FONO Congressional Briefing with Louisiana Senators Landrieu and Vitter, John M. Barry, author of *Rising Tide* and *The Great Influenza* and member of Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority East, and Mark S. Davis, Director and Senior Research Fellow, Tulane Law School Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy - Washington, D.C., July 12, 2007

✨ What You Don’t Know About the National Interest, Katrina and the Disappearing Louisiana Coast

Expert panelists discussed the factors that have contributed to land loss in Southern Louisiana, the consequences of inaction, the steps that can be taken now to protect the remaining wetlands and begin to rebuild Southern Louisiana, and what further loss means for the Nation and why it is in our national interest to act now.

- Coastal erosion threatens the unique coastal culture of Southern Louisiana and increases the vulnerability of New Orleans and other inland cities to hurricanes. If left unaddressed, it will affect the entire country.
- The nation’s economy is intimately linked to the Louisiana coast in ways that are not generally understood. At risk are our nation’s seafood and oil industries, as well as easy access to the sea for dozens of inland ports, from Tulsa to Pittsburgh. As the nation’s largest inland port, the Port of New Orleans connects to inland cities all over the country through 14,500 miles of waterways.

Slides used by John Barry at the July 12, 2007 briefing comparing surge barriers in various cities around the world to the system used to protect New Orleans.

✨ Recovery and Citizen Action in New Orleans

Twenty leaders of New Orleans’ neighborhood associations and nonprofit organizations attended a series of events organized by FONO including briefings in Washington D.C. at the Rayburn House of Representatives’ Office Building, and discussions and meetings with various members of Congress and their staff, Chairman Donald E. Powell, Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding, and representatives from the Office of Management and Budget and the White House.

Chairman Donald E. Powell speaks with NOLA neighborhood and nonprofit leaders.
These organizations represent only a cross-section of the many groups working to build a better New Orleans, but their presentations showed the range of initiatives led by everyday citizens to restore their city, as well as their own homes and businesses. These New Orleansians, who have seen little federal assistance and are operating on meager budgets, are the drivers of the city’s rebuilding effort.

“Americans want to help their neighbors, and this group demonstrated that today. We had a positive and candid conversation about the federal government’s responsibility in rebuilding New Orleans and the tremendous efforts individuals and nonprofits have made to rebuild their communities.”
- Chairman Donald E. Powell, the Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding

• Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding Chairman Donald Powell’s briefing involved issues ranging from levees, flood maps, public housing, public assistance, and education, as well as transparency efforts including a web-based tool to illustrate the status and location of federal funding for long-term rebuilding.

• Neighborhood and nonprofit leaders delivered the message to decision makers, thought leaders, and the general public that the citizens of New Orleans are not waiting for a handout but are driving the rebuilding effort in innovative ways.

• A lunch briefing, sponsored by FONO and the Aspen Institute, featured short presentations from various leaders, whose heroic actions since Hurricane Katrina are bringing positive change including:
  o Pam Dashiell from Holy Cross Neighborhood Association discussed efforts to rebuild safely and sustainably, with an emphasis on preserving the historic nature of the neighborhood.
  o Denise Thornton from Beacon of Hope described how in just 18 months, what began as a single resource center in her home for her neighbors has multiplied to eleven beacons providing fourteen neighborhoods with the information necessary to navigate the obstacles facing a resident wanting to rebuild.
  o Timolyynn Sams from the Neighborhoods Partnership Network explained how NPN is connecting people across different neighborhoods to promote information sharing and collaborative action to stimulate community development and citizen engagement.

• Congressional staff also learned about efforts to rebuild the city’s infrastructure.
  o Idea Village is a nonprofit promoting business innovation and supporting local entrepreneurs.
  o New Schools for New Orleans is a nonprofit working to establish a national model for urban education reform beginning with New Orleans.
  o New Orleans Video Access Center is a nonprofit that has responded to the growing film industry in Louisiana with a new workforce development program to train residents for employment in the industry through their Louisiana Film Crew training program.

♦ New Orleans’ Cultural Recovery

Experts and leaders from community groups driving the effort to preserve the distinctive architecture, arts, music and cuisine of Louisiana shared their perspectives on the state of the region’s cultural recovery.

• An exhibit of artwork by students from the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts and work by New Orleans photographer Lee Celano was displayed in the foyer of the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill throughout the day of the briefing.

• A panel discussion was held to highlight the work of the citizen groups and nonprofit organizations that have been driving the rebuilding of the area. Several organizations have focused their efforts on ensuring that the unique cultural and historic traditions of New Orleans and its surrounding parishes are preserved for generations to come.

• Participants of this briefing included:
  o Pamela Bryan (Preservation Resource Center) gave a presentation about the unique architecture of the area and Operation Comeback, a project developed to rebuild and maintain the historic homes in the Holy Cross Neighborhood of the 9th Ward.
  o Bill Taylor (Tipitina’s Foundation) talked about the traditional music that arose from the neighborhoods of New Orleans and influenced artists around the world. He discussed how the Foundation is supporting musicians through its programs and is helping to keep the musical heritage of the city alive.
  o Brian Privor (New Orleans Center for Creative Arts) talked about the exciting programs that NOCCA is undertaking to encourage students in music and the arts. The school has many nationally-recognized graduates, including musicians Harry Connick, Jr. and Wynton Marsalis, and is now undertaking a new culinary program.
  o Chef Jeff Tunks (Acadiana Restaurant and Southern Food and Beverage Museum) discussed the rich local cuisine that restaurants all over the world attempt to replicate.
  o David Freedman (WWOZ-FM) and Gene DeAnna (The Library of Congress) gave a presentation about a joint preservation project undertaken by the radio station and The Library of Congress to digitize rare WWOZ music collections and ensure that these irreplaceable recordings are not threatened in the future.
Saving Louisiana’s Coast

FONO and the Environmental Defense Fund teamed up for a day of activities on Capitol Hill to bring attention to the urgent need to restore Louisiana’s disappearing coastline.

- Louisiana Naturalist and National Geographic photographer and FONO Board Member, C.C. Lockwood, used his photographs to provide an overview of the coastline issue and the current state of the wetlands.

- Paul Harrison of the Environmental Defense Fund discussed current policy opportunities, specifically addressing the need to fix the damage caused by the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO). Since its construction in the 1960s, the MRGO has destroyed more than 27,000 acres of wetlands that served as a natural storm buffer, and during Katrina, created a thoroughfare for storm waters into the heart of New Orleans and St. Bernard Parish. Harrison explained that the Corps of Engineers was doing the right thing by closing the channel, but emphasized that they needed to finish the job by repairing the damaged area. He urged the audience of mostly congressional staff to not only ask the Corps for their plan for a comprehensive restoration effort but to also ensure that the plan receive adequate funding.

- Tab Benoit, 2007 Grammy nominee and founder of the nonprofit organization Voice of the Wetlands, made a plea for urgent action, stressing that Louisiana has given much to the nation – oil, gas, and seafood production – and takes a toll in the process.

“We found out that our delegation cares and knows about the problems of wetland loss. We also found out that no one knows how to get it started…We need to figure out how to teach Congress and the Corps to act faster on how to put valuable sediment to beneficial use.”

- C.C. Lockwood, FONO Board Member and Louisiana Naturalist and award winning photographer
Panelists talked about the:

- misinformation that still exists with most people in the U.S. believing that New Orleans’ destruction was caused by the hurricane as opposed to the failure of the levee system;
- federal government’s inadequate response and how FEMA’s stifling policies have impeded progress;
- setbacks from State and local governments; and
- positive work coming from local organizations that have brought improvements to many areas.

Increased levee protection and coastal restoration was a major topic, and Anne Milling, from Women of the Storm, passed around footballs with the message that Louisiana loses one football field of land every 50 minutes.

The panel addressed the issue of “Katrina fatigue” and left the audience with the key message that New Orleans is more than just a local issue; Southern Louisiana is critically important to the nation.
FONO Kick-Off Reception with Senator John Breaux and DC New Orleans’ Friends
Washington, DC, September 7, 2006


Aspen CO Benefit Dinners & Panel Discussions at the Aspen Institute
Summers of 2006, 2007 and 2009

The Road to Recovery – Aspen, CO, August 14, 2006
The evening started with a special screening of “All the Kings Men” at the Aspen Institute that was followed by a discussion up on stage about the making of the film and relevant issues of coastal restoration with FONO board members James Carville of CNN, Mike Medavoy of Phoenix Pictures, CC Lockwood - La. Naturalist and Wetlands Advocate, and Walter Isaacson - President/CEO of the Aspen Institute. This was followed by a VIP reception at the home of Alex Kaufman with more discussion on New Orleans’ recovery with Sidney Coffee of the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority and Pamela Bryan of Women of the Storm.

This event examined how universities, local businesses, and cutting-edge nonprofits are working together in innovative and creative ways to rebuild the city. The panel discussed the levee system, coastal erosion and the importance of restoration, the educational revolution that is taking place within the city’s public schools, the role of the city’s universities in the recovery the role of arts and culture in the city’s rebirth, and the need to rebuild New Orleans in an environmentally sustainable manner.

“We’ve lost a chunk of land the size of Delaware to coastal erosion over just the last few decades.”
- King Milling, president of Whitney National Bank and Chair, America’s Wetland Campaign
The panel “described plans for wetlands restoration, environmentally sensitive construction of new homes and the new charter schools that are vitalizing New Orleans’ education system.”

The benefit dinner and discussion attendees included corporate CEOs, heads of foundations, and government leaders, such as former Secretary of State Madeline Albright.

Moderated by Walter Isaacson, president of the Aspen Institute, this event included a panel discussion with Rev. Kevin Wm. Wildes, S.J. (President, Loyola University), King Milling (President, Whiney National Bank and Chair, America’s Wetland Campaign), Elizabeth Galante (Director, Global Green), Sally Perry (New Orleans Center for Creative Arts Institute), Matt Peterson (President and CEO, Global Green USA), Anne Milling (Founder, Women of the Storm), and Phyllis Taylor (Taylor Energy).

New Orleans “has become a testing ground for revitalization and rebuilding of communities after a disaster.”
- Phyllis Taylor, Chairman and CEO of Taylor Energy

“This has been a citizen recovery. The higher education community and its students are participating in a unique experience, that is, they are part of something larger than themselves because they are helping other rebuild their lives.”
- Rev. Kevin Wildes, president of Loyola University and Friends of New Orleans board member

Housing, Education and Health in New Orleans Today
Aspen, CO, August 12, 2009
Panelists included Harry Shearer - Comedian and Actor (The Simpsons, Spinal Tap), Dr. Benjamin Sachs -Dean of Tulane University Medical School, Dr. Albert Ruesga - President and CEO of the Greater New Orleans Foundation, Kristin Gisleson Palmer - Executive Director of Rebuilding Together New Orleans, Karen Gadbois – Housing Activist and Watchdog Blogger, Tony Recasner – Chairman of New Schools New Orleans, Allison Plyer of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center and Janet Woodka – Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding. The presentation at the Aspen Institute began with the recently released New Orleans Index report which states that the city’s unemployment rate is at now at 7.3 percent (up from 5 %) and, although 90% of pre-Katrina residents have moved back to their homes, rental housing prices have jumped 40% due to the lack of affordable housing stock. Tony Recasner explained how local public school reform is part of the “silver lining of the Katrina cloud” with 60% of the city’s children now attending independently operated public charter schools that have shown improved test scores all across the board. Dr. Benjamin Sachs stated that pre-Katrina New Orleans had one of the worst and most expensive health care systems in the US, with some of the worst outcomes. Now nonprofits and institutions such as Tulane University are creating a higher quality, less expensive and more effective local health care system by operating community health care clinics out of previously abandoned buildings.
Pacer’s New Orleans Rebirth 5K Run/Walk

Since 2006, the New Orleans Rebirth 5K has been organized annually in Alexandria, VA by Pacer’s, a local running store chain, to help raise funds for Friends of New Orleans and to put a spotlight on the recovery needs in New Orleans. In 2007, the race honored 20 New Orleans leaders from neighborhood associations and nonprofits for their efforts in working to advance the city. As part of their visit to the Washington, DC area for the race, FONO arranged congressional briefings and opportunities for the local leaders to meet potential donors and decision makers. Groups that sent representatives to the events include: Beacon of Hope; Broadmoor Civic Improvement Association; Family Services of Greater New Orleans; Gentilly Civic Improvement Assoc.; Idea Village; Holy Cross Neighborhood Assoc.; Lakeview Civic Improvement Assoc.; Leveees.org; Mary Queen of Viet Nam; Mid-City Neighborhood Assoc.; Neighborhoods Partnership Network; New Schools for New Orleans; New Orleans Video Access Ctr; NorthWest Carrollton; Priestly School; Total Community Action; and United Nonprofits of New Orleans.

- Rebirth Festival – During the 2007 race, a festival was held giving the opportunity to New Orleans leaders from neighborhood associations and nonprofits to set-up tables with displays and literature to inform the public about their work to rebuild the city.
- Rebirth Reception – A reception was given at the home of James Carville and Mary Matalin to honor local leaders from New Orleans. James Carville, a FONO Board member, helped to organize the 5K after Katrina to raise funds and bring awareness to the rebuilding of New Orleans and its surrounding parishes.

FONO/Blue Moon Foundation Dinner
Washington, DC, September 14, 2007

The Blue Moon Foundation in collaboration with Friends of New Orleans, hosted a dinner in Washington DC to honor all the New Orleans neighborhood and nonprofit leaders who participated in congressional briefings and the New Orleans Rebirth 5K Run/Walk.
Outside the entrance door to the party, the New Orleans’ groups manned tables with their organizations’ information.

**FONO Bayou Bash Concert and Crawfish Boil**

*June 17, 2008 – Washington, D.C.*

FONO organized The Capitol Hill Bayou Bash and Crawfish Boil following a day of congressional briefings to advocate for the rebuilding of the southern Louisiana wetlands. Grammy nominee and founder of Voice of the Wetlands, Tab Benoit, entertained the crowd with his band and urged everyone to support efforts to preserve and restore the state’s wetlands. Over 100 young congressional staffers, university area students and Environmental Defense Fund followers enjoyed plates of boiled crawfish in addition to great Zydeco music.

**FONO New Orleans All-Star Jam-Balaya Events at the National Democratic and Republican Party Conventions**

*Denver, CO (DNC), August 24, 2008*

*Minneapolis, MN (RNC), September 1, 2008*

In 2008, Friends of New Orleans hosted receptions and concerts at both party conventions, called “New Orleans All-Star Jam-Balaya Events.” With these events, FONO was able to seize a rare opportunity to reach hundreds of the nation’s key government leaders and decision makers, and the many corporate and individual donors and journalists that cover these events with messages about the importance of the region and the state of the recovery since hurricane Katrina.

The events celebrated the best of the region’s food and music, while also telling the stories of the many ‘heroes’ working tirelessly to rebuild their communities. Because both conventions coincided with the third anniversary of hurricane Katrina, FONO was able to attract a significant amount of national media attention on the major news networks (CNN, CSPAN, etc.) to the message that New Orleans is coming back better than ever. The events also gave tremendous exposure to the efforts of the nonprofit heroes working to rebuild New Orleans. An incredible array of musicians from New Orleans, who traveled to play at both events, took the opportunity to talk to the press about the need for coastal restoration.
• During both conventions, in Denver and Minneapolis, FONO asked the nation’s political and corporate leaders to commit to a long-term recovery plan that includes:
  o Category 5 food protection;
  o Restoration of Louisiana’s Coastal Wetlands;
  o A federal czar who reports directly to the President with authority and resources needed to get the job done;
  o Reform of the Stafford Act – the law governing our nation’s response to disasters in the U.S.; and
  o Funding of the gap between the recovery funds provided to date and what it will take to rebuild to 21st century standards.

Heroes of the Storm Program

Over an eight month period, prior to the two national convention events, FONO named several “Heroes of the Storm” to recognize those who are playing key roles in the rebuilding effort. All these “heroes” were given an award and were flown to the national conventions, all expenses paid, by FONO.

• The ‘Heroes,’ who were honored at both conventions include: The Tipitina’s Foundation, Women of the Storm, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, Broadmoor Improvement Association, Holy Cross neighborhood Association, Beacon of Hope, Citizens for 1 Greater New Orleans, St. Bernard Project, New Schools for New Orleans, Idea Village, and Reconcile New Orleans.

• ‘Heroes’ were selected based on their contribution to post-Katrina recovery in a variety of categories including: education; community capacity building; arts and culture; social services; youth development; and environmental leadership.
FONO activity has generated substantial media coverage and kept the spotlight on New Orleans’ recovery and rebuilding efforts. Examples of articles, blogs and videos generated due to FONO activity:

August 2009, Christina Bergmann, Washington DC correspondent of the most important radio station in Germany (Deutsche Welle Radio), ran 3 major stories on 4th Anniversary of Katrina in New Orleans based on FONO local partner interviews:

Article #1: [http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4607813,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4607813,00.html)

Article #2: [http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4607945,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4607945,00.html)
Audio: [http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4602356,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4602356,00.html)

Article #3: [http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4652179,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4652179,00.html)
Audio: [http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4655924,00.html](http://www.dw-world.de/dw/article/0,,4655924,00.html)

August 12, 2009 Aspen Institute FONO Panel Discussion filmed by Grassroots TV:
[http://vod.grassrootstv.org/vodcontent/8362-1.wmv](http://vod.grassrootstv.org/vodcontent/8362-1.wmv)

Aspen Daily News – Curtis Wackerle - Aug 13, 2009
[http://www.aspendailynews.com/section/home/136071](http://www.aspendailynews.com/section/home/136071)

FONO participates in Janet Napolitano talk at the Aspen Institute in Washington DC on June 3, 2009:
[http://lacoastpost.com/blog/?p=8887](http://lacoastpost.com/blog/?p=8887)

_Jam-balaya: Louisiana Musicians Unite to Save the Coastal Wetlands at the Best RNC Party of the Week_ by Karl Bremer, The Minnesota Independent, September 3, 2008


C-SPAN Library – New Orleans All-Star Jam-balaya, September 1, 2008
[http://www.c-spanarchives.org/program/280838-1](http://www.c-spanarchives.org/program/280838-1)

_New Orleans Party Scaled Back_ by Mark Preston, CNNPolitics.com, August 31, 2008

[http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/08/31/st_paul_party_will_become_gulf.html](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/08/31/st_paul_party_will_become_gulf.html)

_Louisiana takes its agenda to Denver_ by Stephanie Grace, The Times-Picayune, August 26, 2008


Louisiana Musicians Make Their Point Loud and Clear by Keith Spera, The Times Picayune, August 25, 2008


Getting Down to Clean Up New Orleans by Jason Blevins, The Denver Post, August 24, 2008
http://www.denverpost.com/politics/ci_10282934

Two Winners for New Orleans: Terence Blanchard and James Carville by Ariana R Hall, NOLA.com WWOZ blog, August 24, 2008

Part-time New Orleanian Harry Shearer will co-host pre-convention Jam-balaya by Maria C. Montoya, The Times Picayune, August 24, 2008
http://blog.nola.com/davewalker/2008/08/parttime_new_orleanian_harry_s.html

Coming to Colorado, leaving with a little Louisiana: New Orleans Traveling Road Show hits Aspen on Wednesday by Stewart Oksenhorn, The Aspen Times, August 24, 2008
http://www.aspentimes.com/article/20080827/AE/808269966&parentprofile=-1

WWOZ Blogs from the Democratic National Convention by Ariana R Hall, NOLA.com WWOZ blog, August 22, 2008


Jam-Balaya to bring a bit of New Orleans to Denver by Penny Parker, Mountain News, August 14, 2008

Friends of New Orleans Host Benefit Events at National Party Conventions, Reuters, August 5, 2008

Big Easy Goes Mile High by Keith Spera, The Times Picayune, July 1, 2008

N.O. to be Theme of Demos’ Big Bash: Convention Party to Focus on Recovery by Bruce Alpert, The Times Picayune, June 6, 2008


Our Coast to Fix or Lose by John M. Barry, Washingtonpost.com, May 12, 2007
http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/05/11/AR2007051101985.html