

THE ADVOCATE

Letter to the Editor: Disaster law cripples Louisiana's people

Your story in the April 5 edition of The Advocate titled "Federal law hampers hurricane recovery" was very informative and shined a bright light on one of the major barriers to recovery in Louisiana. I applaud your efforts in bringing this issue to the forefront.

However, while the article correctly identifies many of the problems caused by the Stafford Act, you neglected to mention the crippling effect this legislation has had on the people of Louisiana. In addition to the roadblocks put forth in rebuilding our state's infrastructure, the Stafford Act has caused serious delays in providing individual assistance and human services to our people.

As mentioned in the article, the Stafford Act was not meant to handle major catastrophic events. In fact, because of bureaucratic barriers and other restrictions, the Stafford Act has proved to be much more of a hindrance to effective recovery than an asset.

The Louisiana Family Recovery Corps recently released its 2009 state and federal legislative agenda. One of the major prongs of our federal legislative agenda is to work to modify the Stafford Act in a way in which it works for people.

The act's cost reimbursement protocols, excessive delays associated with reimbursement and lack of upfront resources are prohibitive, making it impossible for local organizations such as the Recovery Corps to deliver large-scale recovery services in the wake of a catastrophic disaster.

Additionally, as you mention, the Stafford Act aims at only funding construction projects back to pre-disaster conditions. This is also the case as it relates to our citizens, as the Stafford Act aims at only rehabilitating disaster survivors back to pre-disaster conditions, even if resources are available to provide further assistance.

Finally, the Stafford Act is shrouded in bureaucratic red tape. There are inconsistencies related to chain of command, leading to confusion and chaos. And the inconsistencies associated with the delivery of services often result in those who most need assistance becoming disillusioned, leading them to withdraw from the system completely.

This is not just an economic issue. It is also a humanitarian issue. Louisiana is its people. And if Louisiana's people are unable to recover, the state will never truly live up to its "Union, Justice and Confidence" motto.

The Recovery Corps will continue to work with our federal partners, elected officials, and the various federal committees looking into the role the current version of the Stafford Act plays post-disaster. We pledge to continue to provide support to those advocating for meaningful change to the legislation. That is what our people need. That is what our people deserve.

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