



## 2008 Democratic Presidential Primary Endorsement Guide



### *New Orleans*

"In New Orleans, it's so condensed and easy to see, but these same forces of destroying public housing, destroying public health care, destroying public education -- those things are happening in every community...What is happening in New Orleans is coming to your community." Bill Quigley, lawyer-activist (The Nation, 9/18/06)

#### **QUESTION**

What role should the federal government play in the restoration of New Orleans to ensure that all of its people benefit?

#### **BACKGROUND**

The same interests that had long willfully neglected New Orleans and brought calamity to the city in August, 2005 are driving its reconstruction today. Some telling facts:

- Only about 60% of the city's destroyed houses and apartments have been restored or replaced, leaving a shortfall estimated at 70,000. More than half of these housing units are rentals, whose prices have increased 40 - 70%, due to rising property insurance rates. (1) The proposed reconstruction plan for the city entails razing poor black neighborhoods to convert them to a greenbelt for flood protection. This has led to a "Stop the Bulldozers" movement that pits ACORN and other community groups against the city's power structure. (2)
- Only half of the city's 117 schools opened by September, 2006 after takeover by the State of Louisiana, and most have been restructured as charter schools. No hospitals or public libraries were reopened in that period. (3) The city laid off 3,000 municipal employees and 7,500 teachers after the storm, despite the need for jobs and restoration of public services. (4)
- The Bush Administration scuttled a bipartisan Senate bill that sought to save New Orleans small businesses through emergency bridge loans from the Small Business Administration (SBA). (5) Meanwhile, FEMA paid the Shaw Group, a corporate ally of the Bush Administration, \$175 per 100 square feet to install donated tarps on roofs, when the installers themselves earned as little as \$2 for the work. (6)
- ACORN went to court to ensure that New Orleans refugees would be given access to out-of-state polling places for the April, 2006 municipal election. A federal judge rejected the demand, with the result that half of the population was effectively disenfranchised. (7)

## BIDEN

Record	Platform/Statements
<p>Proposed adding \$1 billion to the FY '06 Commerce, Justice and Science Appropriations Bill for filling officer positions, upgrading state/local agencies' communications networks, searching for missing children, and assisting victims of domestic violence/abuse. (8)</p> <p>Supported "Women of the Storm," a citizens group lobbying Congress for Katrina reconstruction. (8a)</p>	<p>No comprehensive recovery plan.</p> <p>Believes that the problem with recovery is not a lack of federal funding, but bureaucracy. (9)</p>

## CLINTON

Record	Platform/Statements
<p>Introduced S.1622 to establish an independent commission to investigate the federal response to Katrina (10)</p>	<p>Proposes a Presidential Gulf Coast Recovery Agenda, a comprehensive 10-point program for rebuilding New Orleans. The plan proposes solutions that are geared to rebuilding the common infrastructure (schools, hospitals, first responders, levees, wetlands protection, public housing, and police). She also proposes measures to reduce the bureaucratic obstacles to reconstruction, including convening a state-local-federal summit, and the creation of a Gulf Coast Corps to hire the labor force required for reconstruction. (11)</p>

## DODD

Record	Platform/Statements
<p>Co-introduced the Hurricane Election Relief Act of 2005 authorizing \$50M in grants to help restore elections infrastructure. The legislation also permits funds to be used to ensure the full electoral participation of displaced individuals. (12)</p> <p>April, 2007: Convened a hearing on property insurance in the Gulf Coast. (12)</p>	<p>Focuses almost exclusively on insurance premiums. Proposes tax deductions for insurance premiums, increased funding for disaster mitigation programs, increasing National Flood Insurance program, and establishing a commission to explore long-term solutions. (13) Extensive knowledge of this issue, but little attention to other aspects of the problem.</p>

## EDWARDS

Record	Platform/Statements
<p>Announced his campaign from the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, and has personally volunteered in rebuilding efforts in the city.</p> <p>In the spring of 2006, brought 700 college students to Louisiana to help with rebuilding efforts. (14)</p>	<p>Proposes a comprehensive program for recovery that focuses on infrastructure (health care, preservation and construction of affordable housing), jobs (using local residents in rebuilding, protecting workers from exploitation), and safety (levees, wetlands restoration, and policing). Specific proposals include locating Veterans Administration's new regional medical center in downtown New Orleans, hiring 50,000 local residents in public works projects, and changing HUD policy to stop demolishing public housing projects until new units are available. (15)</p>

## GRAVEL

Record	Platform/Statements
No data.	No comprehensive plan. Supports federal law guaranteeing right of return to refugees. "...if we weren't squandering our treasure on this terrible war that we didn't have to start, we would have 4 million housing units available, and a good portion of them could go to Katrina residents. (16)

## KUCINICH

Record	Platform/Statements
June 25, 2007: held a hearing on the adequacy of labor law enforcement in Katrina reconstruction. Exposed abuse of workers resulting from suspension & non-enforcement of labor laws. (17)	Re-introduced the Rebuilding America's Infrastructure Act of 2007, which he had originally introduced in 2005. While not limited to New Orleans, would raise federal funds for long-term restoration efforts here as well. Originally proposed more than 2 years ago, this bill would create a Federal Bank for Infrastructure Modernization (FBIM) that would provide \$500B over the next 10 years, through zero interest mortgage loans for states and local governments to use to fund specific projects. This would create a long-term funding source for infrastructure modernization. While excellent on the infrastructure piece, this is not a truly comprehensive plan. (18)

## OBAMA

Record	Platform/Statement
Introduced S.1630 to establish a national database of missing persons, and introduced/co-sponsored S.1685 to require explicit inclusion of at-risk persons (low-income, elderly, non-English speakers, etc.) in emergency preparedness/evacuation plans. Introduced S.1638 to establish a national health care professional volunteer corp and database. Co-sponsored S.1700 to establish contract oversight during rebuilding process via a Chief Financial Officer, and S.1622 to establish an independent commission to investigate federal response to Katrina. (19)	Proposes a comprehensive reconstruction plan that includes appointing a chief coordinating officer and a chief financial officer to cut through bureaucratic obstacles and minimize waste; a "COPS for Katrina" program, which would allow communities affected by the storm to hire more police officers and prosecutors; forgiving college loans for students in the affected area; increasing housing assistance for home owners and renters. Pledges to close the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, a navigation channel that scientists say contributed to damage from the storm. Also supports the Veterans Administration locating its new hospital in downtown New Orleans.(20)

## RICHARDSON

Record	Platform/Statements
As Governor of NM, acted within days to dispatch National Guard troops and emergency medical teams with fuel and water. Also eased entry of Katrina refugee schoolchildren/college students into New Mexico schools and colleges and facilitated construction of temporary housing for refugees. (21)	Proposal focuses on emergency response structure that includes an independent FEMA reporting directly to the President; elimination of bureaucracy; right of return; first priority to local residents in jobs, training, and contracting; and ending predatory lending practices. Not a truly comprehensive plan. (22)

## FURTHER READING

Nathan Empsall, Katrina activist and blogger (<http://waywardepiscopalian.blogspot.com/search/label/2008>)  
The Nation, "Who is killing New Orleans" 4/10/06 (<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20060410/davis>)

## NOTES

- (1) Urban Institute, Affordable Housing in Healthy Communities: Rebuilding after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, May 2007, p. 6-7 ([http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411514\\_affordable\\_rental\\_housing.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411514_affordable_rental_housing.pdf))
- (2) The Nation, Sept 18, 2006, p. 23
- (3) Ibid
- (4) The Nation, Sept 18, 2006, p. 28
- (5) The Nation, April 10, 2006, p. 12
- (6) Ibid
- (7) The Nation, April 10, 2006, p. 20
- (8) <http://biden.senate.gov/newsroom/details.cfm?id=245442>
- (8a) [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4200/is\\_20060925/ai\\_n16743942](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4200/is_20060925/ai_n16743942)
- (9) Nathan Empsall, Katrina activist and blogger, based on conversation with Biden in NH. (<http://waywardepiscopalian.blogspot.com/search/label/2008>)
- (10) [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4200/is\\_20060925/ai\\_n16743942](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4200/is_20060925/ai_n16743942)
- (11) <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/feature/katrina/>
- (12) <http://dodd.senate.gov/index.php?q=node/3367>
- (13) <http://dodd.senate.gov/index.php?q=node/3825>
- (14) <http://johnedwards.com/news/press-releases/20070715-new-orleans-plan/>
- (15) John Edwards response to DC for Democracy candidate questionnaire
- (16) [http://www.ontheissues.org/2008/Mike\\_Gravel\\_Environment.htm](http://www.ontheissues.org/2008/Mike_Gravel_Environment.htm)
- (17) <http://domesticpolicy.oversight.house.gov/story.asp?ID=1394>
- (18) <http://kucinich.house.gov/Issues/Issue/?IssueID=1554>
- (19) <http://origin.barackobama.com/issues/fightingpoverty/>
- (20) <http://www.barackobama.com/pdf/KatrinaFactSheetFinal.pdf>
- (21) [http://www.democrats.org/a/2005/09/new\\_mexico\\_gove\\_1.php](http://www.democrats.org/a/2005/09/new_mexico_gove_1.php)
- (22) <http://www.richardsonforpresident.com/newsroom/pressreleases?id=0246>