

SECTION 2

ACORN BUILDS FOR THE FUTURE OF NEW ORLEANS

Following Katrina Town Hall Meetings, ACORN members created the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association. With more than 5,500 member families and chapters in 10 cities across the country, the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association serves as the national voice of displaced people, fighting for fair treatment in their host cities, and the right to return and rebuild their communities.



Members of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association rally with Los Angeles ACORN members for emergency housing assistance.

THE ACORN KATRINA SURVIVORS ASSOCIATION

In cities with large numbers of people displaced from New Orleans, ACORN immediately started talking to survivors at shelters, motels and apartment complexes. Survivors overwhelmingly wanted a voice in the rebuilding of their city. They wanted to start by improving their current treatment as displaced residents.

At a Town Hall meeting in Houston on Sept. 9 – less than

two weeks after the storm, hundreds of evacuees gathered in a church where they shared testimonies about the horrors they had experienced and the uncertainty of their current situations. The group voted unanimously to begin organizing fellow survivors and presented their difficulties securing temporary housing to Texas Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee and Houston Mayor Bill White. Both officials

pledged to work with ACORN to address the needs of Katrina survivors. After the meeting, Mayor White announced major local initiatives to address the issues raised by ACORN members. Houston, which hosts the majority of displaced New Orleanians, began offering assistance to families sheltering survivors, and Mayor White stopped the evictions of survivors from local hotels.

At a Houston Town Hall meeting, Texas ACORN President Toni McElroy welcomed Katrina survivors to the community, saying, “We’re here tonight to get information to survivors, hold elected officials accountable, and to help rebuild the New Orleans community. There is strength in numbers. You have a strong organization to depend on and that you can participate in so your voice can be heard.”



In 10 cities around the country, meetings of displaced Louisiana ACORN members, ACORN community leaders and evacuees from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast have led to the formation of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association. While organizing to address urgent local problems, the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association met by phone and drafted a united platform, which they announced to the national press via teleconference, and brought to elected officials in Washington D.C. and around the country.

The ACORN Katrina Survivors Association has used direct action, public pressure and regular negotiations with FEMA throughout the first year after Katrina to ensure that FEMA continued to provide disaster housing assistance to displaced survivors.

- On Sept. 19, ACORN members from New Orleans and Dallas held a press conference at the Dallas Mayor's office to demand that Dallas take advantage of FEMA partnerships to provide more stable housing for Katrina survivors.

- On Nov. 22, in Houston, San Antonio and Dallas, more than 100 Katrina Survivors marched alongside U.S. Representatives Al Green and Sheila Jackson Lee and AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson to stop FEMA from evicting an estimated 50,000 survivors from their temporary shelters in motel and hotel rooms across Texas. Later that afternoon, FEMA extended its hotel housing program in 10 states.

- On Jan. 12, ACORN Katrina Survivors in Houston attended a press conference with Mayor Bill White, calling on FEMA to pay for a full year of housing.

- On Feb. 13, Los Angeles ACORN held a rally to publicize the evictions of Katrina survivors from local hotels. After the rally, ACORN helped secure a number of emergency housing extensions from FEMA. ACORN members also worked with the Mayor's office to direct \$300,000,

ACORN Katrina Survivors Association

The ACORN Katrina Survivors Association is the first nationwide organization of displaced New Orleans residents and other Katrina survivors. We use public pressure, direct action, and dialogue with elected officials and public policy experts to win respect and a voice for survivors, the resources needed for families to survive and a rebuilding plan that builds stronger communities for all.

We are calling for:

- A commitment to our right to return;
- The resources to rebuild our homes, our neighborhoods and our city;
- Levees and a larger flood protection system that will keep us safe;
- A rebuilding plan that focuses on the low-and-moderate income majority of New Orleans, including help rebuilding affordable housing;
- Accountability and fair treatment from agencies charged with emergency response, such as FEMA and the Small Business Administration;
- Temporary housing, like trailers, close to home, so we can move back;
- Repair and reopening of public housing and the reopening of Charity Hospital.

which ACORN discovered had been allocated to help Katrina survivors, toward housing programs in Los Angeles.

- On March 1, members of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association in San Antonio, Texas held a press conference to demand that FEMA extend its hotel assistance program. After the press conference, ACORN members and organizers worked with FEMA representatives to negotiate an extension.

- On May 16, nearly 100 ACORN Katrina Survivors attended a meeting with FEMA representatives in Houston to negotiate housing and utility relief.

The Houston Chronicle, Evacuees in Hotels are Granted More Time

November 23, 2005

"I'm elated," said evacuee Dorothy Stukes, a leader of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association, after FEMA announced the deadline extension. The Houston branch of ACORN, or Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, is a community reform group. "It's just a relief. I'm glad they heard the voice of the people. Now we can have a nice Thanksgiving, without worrying about whether we're going to be put out of our homes," Stukes said."

ACORN KATRINA SURVIVORS TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON, D.C.



ACORN Rally for Return and Rebuilding, Washington, D.C., February 8th - 9th

• Tanya Harris, an ACORN member from New Orleans, was in Washington D.C. lobbying for an elevated response to Hurricane Katrina, when Hurricane Rita hit. (Tanya Harris is now the Head Organizer for New Orleans' Lower 9th Ward.)

• Harris met with dozens of members of Congress, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, and Louisiana Senators Mary Landrieu and David Vitter, on obstacles to returning home and the need for rebuilding resources.

• Harris spoke at the Congressional Black Caucus' Annual Legislative Conference on the need to include all voices in the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast.

• On October 24-25th, a delegation of ACORN Katrina Survivors from several cities traveled to Washington, D.C. ACORN members from Washington, D.C. and Maryland joined them to rally outside of FEMA's offices, winning a meeting with FEMA officials to discuss survivors' issues

on the spot and follow-up meetings in others cities around the country.

• The ACORN delegation held a press conference with House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid to denounce a Republican attempt to use Katrina relief as a pretext to cut \$35 to \$50 billion from community programs, in order to fund special-interest tax breaks.

• ACORN's Katrina Survivors delegation and Senators Edward Kennedy, Byron Dorgan and Tom Harkin, announced the introduction of Kennedy's **Rebuild with Respect Act**. ACORN helped write the bill. It proposed hiring local residents for reconstruction projects, the restoration of affirmative action, health and safety protections, and Davis-Bacon wage rules, which President Bush had removed in Katrina disaster areas. Around the same time as the D.C. rally, 1000 people gathered on the steps of the Louisiana State Capitol for the **Rally to Rebuild Louisiana** to

fight to restore Davis-Bacon. On the day of the D.C. Rally, Bush restored the Davis-Bacon rules, requiring federal contractors to pay at least the local prevailing wage.

• On Feb. 8, more than 400 members of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association traveled by bus to Washington, D.C. to rally for more federal rebuilding assistance for Louisiana in **The Rally for Return and Rebuilding**.

ACORN Katrina Survivors marched through Washington, D.C. to the Capitol and picketed the White House, carrying pictures of their flood-damaged homes. The group rallied for additional federal rebuilding assistance alongside Democratic leaders, including Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, Senator Hillary Clinton, Senator Mary Landrieu, AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and many others. They fanned out in groups and lobbied scores of members of Congress on their platform for return and rebuilding.



ACORN Rally for Return and Rebuilding, Washington, D.C., February 8th - 9th Photo by Thomas Dooley

Members of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association also testified before a panel of U.S. Representatives on the need for rebuilding funds and the difficulties Katrina Survivors face working their way through federal disaster assistance programs. A smaller group of ACORN Katrina Survivors members met with R. David Paulison, acting director of FEMA, to share concerns over the implementation of FEMA's disaster housing programs.

The Rally for Return and Rebuilding renewed the spirits of Katrina survivors and brought the lasting devastation of the storm back into the national spotlight during a time when the phrase "Katrina fatigue" began appearing in the media. On Feb. 9, ACORN's march appeared on the front page of *The Washington Post* and received extensive print and broadcast coverage around the country.

One week after **The Rally for Return and Rebuilding**, President Bush requested that Congress appropriate an additional \$4.2 billion to repair flood-damaged homes in Louisiana. On the following day, he requested another \$19.8 billion to repair flood and hurricane protection systems along the Gulf Coast.



Members of the ACORN Katrina Survivors Association rally outside FEMA's Washington, D.C. office, demanding meetings with FEMA in Baton Rouge, Houston and Dallas.

The Washington Post

Hurricane Victims Demand More Help

Federal Government Not Doing Enough to Aid Rebuilding, Survivors Say

Thursday, February 9, 2006

"The group marched up Independence Avenue, chanting 'Where is the money?' and singing 'This little neighborhood of mine, I'm gonna let it shine,' parting the lunchtime crowd of Capitol Hill staffers. One man in a trench coat stepped aside and asked another, 'Who are these people?' When a woman told him, 'We're from New Orleans, sir,' the man nodded his head and quietly began to clap for the procession."



ACORN Partners with the Clinton Foundation to Provide Tax Benefits to Katrina Survivors

On Feb. 3, ACORN announced a partnership with the William J. Clinton Foundation to conduct special outreach on the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) targeting Katrina survivors in 10 cities: Birmingham, Ala.; Little Rock, Ark.; Atlanta, Ga.; Baton Rouge, Lake Charles, and New Orleans, Louisiana; Jackson, Miss.; Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, Texas. The ACORN Katrina Benefits Access Program provides on-the-spot tax preparation and helps direct displaced residents to much-needed federal and state benefits programs for Katrina survivors.