

Dear Concerned Citizen,

1. **Next CHAT Meeting: Wed. 6:30 PM: Newcomers are welcome**

Place: Room 179, UNO Milneburg Hall, on Milneburg Rd. (the road where the brand new dorms are, past the stop sign and the University Center and opposite the Fitness Center.

Building #24: [Directions to the Business Bldg are given on the Campus Map for UNO](#)

2. **On Nov. 18, 2008, the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA) Board approved asking Congress to transfer to other purposes Road Home Homeowner Program (RH) grant funds** (as well as Road Home rental program funds) that are supposed to be in excess (see below).

At the same time, many thousands of applicants are in the kind of financial and emotional distress that motivated Road Home applicant Geraldine Narcisse to write her understandably very angry Letter to the Editor that was published by the Times-Picayune and reproduced below.

Despite the RH being extremely important in reconstruction of devastated parts of S. Louisiana, it has been an ordeal for many thousands of applicants and has frankly cheated untold numbers, even according to its own, frequently changing and constricting rules.

It has improperly lavished money on ICF (see my Letter to the Editor below) especially given the outrageously poor job it has done and the many time-consuming items in its contract that it has not done.

In early 2008, I and CHAT Co-chairman Frank Silvestri were told by LRA and OCD Director Paul Rainwater that there just would not be enough money left over from RH to allow them to re-open appeals to those who were unable to have a copy of their file before they appealed or who did not have a chance to appeal because of various problems. You can see below, that is not at all the case.

There should be no more excuses not to give applicants who have been shortchanged, a chance for a fair and independent appeal.

Congress Must Not Allow Gov. Jindal To Divert Money from the Road Home Program For Construction of a New Hospital

(especially when a pre-existing hospital can be renovated for much less money without destruction of part of a renovated Mid-City neighborhood)

Ø Tell Senator Landrieu laverne_saulny@landrieu.senate.gov

Ø members of the State Legislature Audit Committee

abramson@legis.state.la.us; ellingtn@legis.state.la.us; gautreauxn@legis.state.la.us; larep036@legis.state.la.us;

ligit@legis.state.la.us; larep101@legis.state.la.us

Ø and the chairperson of the Municipal Affairs Committee, Sen. Gray grayc@legis.state.la.us

about remaining Road Home shortchanging mistakes and unfairness.

I was told last week by a member of the New Orleans delegation that he thought there were few problems left with Road Home because he has not heard otherwise from his constituents.

I know that there is Road Home fatigue (or exhaustion) for many applicants but please email the above legislators to get help for yourself or for the people who are still contacting us this week in desperation because they are being ignored for any grant, for promised appeal money that has not been forthcoming for a year, or for correction of obvious mistakes in their grant calculations.

“State asks feds to OK funds for N.O. hospital”:

<http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/aggdocs/NewsBank/124924606E649E10/0EEA30604397A028>

The Advocate, (Baton Rouge, LA) - Wednesday, November 19, 2008, ALLEN

M. JOHNSON JR.

- v **Many thousands of applicants have been shortchanged by the Road Home Program**
- v **and so are unable to return to Louisiana,**
- v **to fix their hurricane/flood- devastated home,**
- v **to move out of crowded, unsafe conditions,**
- v **or are in debt because of borrowing money from relatives**
- v **The LRA and Gov. Jindal should do the ethical thing and make sure shortchanging mistakes are corrected**
- v **by re-opening appeals to those shut out of it**
- v **by making appeals fair, independent, and governed by explicit standards**
- v **by telling all applicants who ever disputed their grant amount that they are allowed to get a copy of their file**
- v **by making sure that the full copy (including Jira notes) is really sent to applicants in a timely fashion**
- **so that applicants can find the source of the shortchanging and appeal it under a fair system**

State asks feds to OK funds for N.O. hospital

Advocate, The (Baton Rouge, LA)-November 19, 2008

Author: ALLEN M. JOHNSON JR.

The Louisiana Recovery Authority on Tuesday voted to ask Congress to allow the state to use money left over from the Road Home program for other purposes - such as replacing flood-damaged Charity Hospital in New Orleans.

"We could have \$300 million to \$500 million - unallocated," LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater told authority commissioners.

Rainwater was estimating the unexpended remnants of \$3 billion in tightly targeted housing help allocated by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, after hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

If Congress approves the LRA resolution, the authority would need to craft an "action plan" for spending the money, pending a public comment period, and approval by the Legislature and HUD, authority spokeswoman Cristina Stephens said...

Meanwhile, the authority's request to Congress about unallocated Road Home funds - coupled with a first appearance by state health Secretary Alan Levine - added to a drum roll of anticipation over a proposed \$1.2 billion hospital complex in New Orleans.

Katrina's flood waters shuttered state-run Charity Hospital and crippled the federal Veterans Administration hospital...

...

Rainwater added the city of New Orleans has \$75 million in federal funds and has asked the state to act as purchaser of property for the hospital site. The plans call for expropriation of some 200 homes and "cultural assets" in the historic Mid-City neighborhood.

"We're setting the stage for the purchase of property," Rainwater said. "If VA chooses that (downtown) site, we will be ready to go (forward)."

The LRA then will continue to help Levine search for funding for the state's side of the deal - a 364-bed LSU teaching facility, and an additional 60 mental health beds.

LRA commissioner Sean Reilly suggested Levine "might want to stick around" if the authority's resolution to Congress passed.

Levine left before the vote, however.

The secretary later acknowledged \$1.2 billion is a "hefty price tag" for the hospital project, but added there would be no cost overruns. Projections for inflation, unforeseen delays and cost of financing have all been built into the \$1.2 billion figure, he said.

Construction will take three years and the hospital will open in 2013, "assuming everything goes as planned," Levine said.

He reiterated that the state needs the \$492 million replacement costs from FEMA, adding that Jindal's office has been "continuing to press" the issue with the Bush White House.

"Nothing can happen without that money," Levine added, emphatically.

"We only have \$300 million from (state) capital outlay."

Back in the LRA hearing, state Rep. Karen Carter Peterson, also a commissioner, wanted assurances that no effort was spared to spend all of the HUD funds on housing recovery needs.

"There's a huge need with the homeless," Peterson said.

LRA deputy executive director Robin Keegan, referring to millions of unspent recovery dollars allocated to Orleans Parish, said, "We're working aggressively with the city of New Orleans because we all agree they're moving too slowly."

<http://www.katc.com/Global/story.asp?S=8874664>

Report: Charity hospital renovation feasible

BATON ROUGE, La. -- Renovating the flooded public hospital in New Orleans would be cheaper and faster than building a new hospital, a team of architects said Wednesday after studying the shuttered Charity Hospital facility. The hospital, known as Big Charity, has been closed since Hurricane Katrina swamped it with water in 2005. Rather than gut and rebuild the hospital, the state and LSU _ which runs it _ plan to build a replacement facility for the Art Deco landmark.

But a study by RMJM Hillier, a New York-based architecture firm, says the building can be renovated for \$484 million and put back into use as a 446-bed modern research and teaching hospital, compared to its estimates that a new hospital would cost \$620 million.

"There are no significant deficiencies in the structure that prohibit it from being a first-class hospital," said Stephen McDaniel, an architect with the firm who specializes in health care facility design.

McDaniel said a restoration of Big Charity would take three years, compared to five years to build a new hospital. He said the renovation would keep the facade and 20-story shell of the hospital but require a complete gutting and replacement of the interior.

The Jindal administration is recommending a new 424-bed medical center in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, whose hospital also was flooded by the 2005 hurricane. The two would have separate hospitals but share some operating costs.

Administration and LSU officials said they will review the new report in detail. They questioned RMJM Hillier's estimate that a renovation could be done in three years, the price comparisons and the potential for escalating costs of renovating a historic building.

"This is a legitimate option that we're going to consider. Obviously, at first glance, there are some holes in it that we're going to have to probe," said Jerry Jones, director of the governor's Office of Facility Planning and Control, which oversees state construction projects.

LSU released documents that listed a litany of studies done since 1970 that repeatedly recommended a replacement hospital, rather than a renovation of Big Charity.

The RMJM Hillier report feeds into an ongoing debate about the size, shape and cost of replacing the public hospital in New Orleans, which provided most indigent care in the area before Katrina and specialty services for the poor and uninsured throughout south Louisiana.

Whether to renovate Big Charity had rarely been part of the discussion. Sen. Willie Mount, chairwoman of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, said that likely will change now with the new report.

"I think it's going to broaden the debate because we've been focused on replacement," she said.

RMJM Hillier was hired by the Foundation for Historical Louisiana, a preservationist group charged by the state Legislature with evaluating whether Big Charity could be renovated and reused as a hospital.

A renovation of the hospital would preserve the landmark constructed in 1938, while also keeping in tact the historic neighborhood that preservationists want to protect and that is slated to be torn down to make way for a new hospital. The costs of either a renovation or a new facility will be greater than either estimate in the RMJM Hillier report, which doesn't take into account new parking construction and support facilities, like laundry and labs. The Jindal administration plans _ including the parking and auxiliary buildings _ have a total price tag of \$1.2 billion.

The architects said they looked solely at the costs of constructing a new hospital versus a renovated one.

Without land acquisition, support buildings and contingency fees, LSU estimates a new hospital would cost \$345 million, said Fred Cerise, LSU vice chancellor for health affairs and medical education. He said that's comparable to the RMJM estimate of \$338 million to renovate Big Charity, before contingency and design fees are included.

To pay for either a new or renovated hospital, LSU and the state continue to haggle with FEMA to determine how much federal rebuilding aid the university will receive for Big Charity. The rest of the construction would require state funds and borrowing, financed through a bond sale to investors.
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Excerpts of Draft Minutes, LRA Board Meeting Nov. 18, 2008

Monthly Budget Presentation

Mr. Paul Rainwater said we had asked HUD for an Action Plan Amendment to eliminate the \$150,000 cap on the Road Home program. We are not sure how much will be spent on elevations, but \$650 million has been drawn down in individual mitigation funds. It is not known how much LLT will spend on demolitions and slab removals, but it could range between \$300 and \$450 million. Adjustments are being made to the Small Rental program, but there could be between \$300 and \$500 million in unallocated funds. We do not want to return these funds to the Treasury because we want homeowners to have this funding.

Mr. Sean Reilly asked if these are just Road Home figures.

Mr. Rainwater explained that the figures encompass all recovery programs. If we are allowed some flexibility by Congress, then we may be able to help Charity Hospital, the New Orleans Sewerage and Water Board and others in need.

Mr. Reilly offered a motion to approve a resolution to petition Congress for reallocation of the appropriations to cover other obligations. The motion was seconded by Ms. Pat LeBlanc

Final Approval of the Resolution to Petition Congress for Reallocation of the Appropriations to Cover Other Obligations.

RESOLVED, that the Board hereby accepts and approves the resolution to petition Congress for reallocation of the appropriations to cover other obligations.

Voting: Carter-Peterson, Dupre, Gill, Lasseigne, LeBlanc, Leger, Martin, Murray, Reilly, and Smith.

4. (Also From LRA Bd. Minutes, Draft)

Extension of Deadline for Homeowners Who Sold Their Homes Resolution

Ms. Robin Keegan presented the resolution for the approval of Action Plan Amendment No. 31, which grants eligibility to the Road Home program to homeowners who sold their homes prior to August 29, 2007. She said the extension would apply to those who sold their homes at a loss. Many homeowners were forced to sell due to finances and the slowness of the Road Home program. Eligible homeowners must have applied to the Road Home program. Approximately 700 homeowners will benefit from this extension.

Mr. Walter Leger mentioned that some groups had requested that the Road Home program be reopened so some of these homeowners could re-apply, but Congress would not allow this.

Mr. Sean Reilly offered a motion to give final approval to the resolution to approve Action Plan Amendment No. 31 which grants eligibility to the Road Home program to homeowners who sold their homes prior to August 29, 2007. The motion was seconded by Mr. John Smith.

Final Approval of the Resolution to Approve Action Plan Amendment No. 31 Which Grants Eligibility to the Road Home Program to Homeowners Who Sold Their Homes Prior to August 29, 2007.

LRA has told me that this Action Plan Amendment is pending with HUD who has been asked to expedite it.

5. Dec. CHAT Meeting on COX10

Our Dec. 10 CHAT meeting is being televised by Cox 10

Ø We thank George Blow and COX10 for their dedication to getting the facts about Road Home to applicants!

Ø The 2-hour CHAT meeting on Dec. 10, 2008 about Road Home Contradictions has been/will be shown on: Tues., Dec. 16, 4 PM; Wed., Dec. 17, noon; Thurs., Dec. 18, 8 AM; Tues., Dec. 23, noon; Thurs., Dec. 25, noon; Fri., Dec. 26, 8 AM; Sat., Dec. 27, 4:30 PM; Sun., Dec. 28, 1 PM; Mon., Dec. 29, noon; Wed., Dec. 31, 2 PM; Thurs., Jan. 1, 1 PM; Fri., Jan. 2, 8 AM & 6 PM; Sat., Jan. 3, 3 PM; Mon., Jan. 5, 1:30 PM; Tues., Jan. 6, 3 PM; Wed., Jan. 7, noon; Thurs, Jan. 8, 4 PM; Fri., Jan. 9, 1:30 PM; Sat., Jan., 10, 3 PM.

Ø Featured on the filmed CHAT meeting (see Cox 10 schedule above) is a former ICF and Quadel housing advisor

His descriptions match those of numerous applicants

v about Kafka-esque treatment

v sometimes even when the housing advisors were as helpful as they were allowed to be

6. Completely Understandable Anger At Road Home for injustices like ICF appeals increasing grants for one obvious mistake after countless protests from the applicant and then wiping out the increase by other unjustified decreases in the calculated grant

Nonetheless, we know of instances when top state officials in the last Administration and in this one stepped in to help individual Road Home applicants in desperate situations.

However, this is dwarfed by very large numbers of serious grant shortchanging complaints and examples of applicants being ignored for months on end or well over a year.

We at CHAT have heard and read far too many examples of emotionally wrenching, and illness-inducing anger from applicants who have been treated incredibly unfairly, victimized by the program that was supposed to help victims of the worst natural disaster in our country's history.

It is a little like gambling: many applicants were lucky and got a fair grant so that they did not lose a livable home while many others with similar circumstances did not, through no fault of their own.

Moreover, some applicants have independently told us that they were "punished" for complaining.

http://blog.nola.com/letterstotheeditor/2009/01/road_home_a_blatant_betrayal.html#more

Road Home a blatant betrayal

Posted by [Letters to the Editor](#) January 03, 2009 1:39AM

In addition to other donations, Congress has provided compensation grant targeted for recovery of Louisiana's disaster victims. "Victims" include citizens inundated by the breached federal levees in New Orleans. However, to date, for many of the victims, recovery is only a pipe dream.

Considering the amount of money that has been poured into the state for disaster recovery, I cannot understand why so many victims have been shunned and are still in dire need.

Perhaps the LRA fairy and its Road Home program can provide reasonable answers. In my opinion, the Road Home program should be listed among the most blatant betrayals of citizens' rights and lives ever witnessed in these United States.

This is my fourth holiday season of dismay. During this most holy season, I pray that the Lord will have mercy on the souls of those responsible for this outrageous abuse.

I would ask that former Gov. Kathleen Blanco, author of the program; Sudhakar Kesavan, CEO of ICF International; and LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater stand up and be recognized for their outstanding contribution to man's inhumanity to man.

Geraldine V. Narcisse

New Orleans

7. With So Much ICF-Induced Misery, Extraordinarily Error-Prone Work by ICF, and Many Of The Original Contract Tasks Not Performed by ICF, ICF Internl. Got The \$156 Million Increase In Their Contract Amount Anyway

http://blog.nola.com/letterstotheeditor/2008/12/did_icf_inflate_road_home_appl.html#more

Did ICF inflate Road Home applicant numbers?

Posted by Letters to the Editor, Times Picayune December 29, 2008 5:35PM

Re: "Missing the point, " Our Opinions, Dec. 14. The Times-Picayune editorial is correct about problems with the state inspector general's report, which found justification for the \$156 million increase in the ICF contract ceiling for the Road Home program.

There are also other serious problems with the report. It includes a letter dated Nov. 16, 2007, in which Frank Abramcheck, local head of ICF, says, "Currently we could provide grants to as many as 160,000 recipients." During conference calls in the summer of 2007, I questioned ICF and Office of Community Development officials about the high numbers of applicants they reported.

I gave the example of my own duplicate application. I explained that I, like others, applied by mail and then was advised to apply again online. However, like those of many others, my duplicate application wasn't eliminated. It seems that ICF wanted to keep the numbers misleadingly high.

Also troubling is the people who were interviewed for the report. Almost all were involved in the approval of the extra allocation (in the Blanco administration) or the payment of much of this additional money to ICF long before the report was finished (in the Jindal administration).

In addition, "lobbyists employed by ICF" were interviewed for the report, but no one who represented the applicants was interviewed.

For the very many hurricane/flood victims who are still being shortchanged on their grants while ICF reaps huge financial rewards, I ask, whose Road Home Program is this?

Is the Road Home for ICF, for the governors and state agencies, or is it, possibly, for the applicants?

Melanie Ehrlich
Co-Chairman
Citizens' Road Home Action Team
New Orleans

<http://chatushome.com> (for information and for access to our survey to make updates on your progress)