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A Rebuilding Surge in New Orleans: 'Louisiana Winter' Students Call for 100,000 Civic Works Jobs

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NEW ORLEANS, LA /PRNewswire/ --Today, over 100 students participating in Louisiana Winter—a college initiative reminiscent of the human right's campaign of Mississippi Summer in the 1960s—called for a rebuilding surge in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast through the development of 100,000 civic work jobs.

Students met with community members from Uptown, Gentilly, and Pontchartrain Park, and they were greeted with strong enthusiasm for the idea of a housing and job surge. John Pecoul of Uptown, stated, "As a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, we have a region that has a depressed economy, and it runs from the Alabama-Mississippi border to the Texas-Louisiana border. We had a storm surge, but what we need is a building surge."

As the student's bus drove by 1000s of destroyed homes, Darcie Kiyon of San José State University commented, "It is criminal to keep the people of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast waiting while spending billions in Iraq. They have waited long enough—it's time for action." She noted that the Gulf Coast Civic Works Project, which is the idea for 100,000 public work jobs, needed to be developed immediately by Congress in order to replace the 200,000 homes destroyed by Katrina.

When the students drove into Gentilly, their bus was met by Nikki Najiola, a community resident, who gave the students a tour of her neighborhood. When asked about the need for a rebuilding surge, she stated, "I think a Civic Works Project is an excellent idea. In fact, that is exactly how our city park was built here in Gentilly in the 1930's. The Work Projects Administration brought in thousands of people and built our park. It just makes sense to do the same thing now."

As the students ate lunch at Cafe Roma, which had reopened only eight days ago, Trinity Smith, a New Orleans resident, and security officer for the students, suggested that, "We need to literally work it out--- 100,000 jobs would surely and indeed spark a growth in the economic stability of New Orleans."

In Pontchartrain Park, students were led through the almost abandoned community of Norma Hedrick, who has lived there for three years. Picking up on the need to develop parks, Hedrick stated, "I see a Civic Works Project rebuilding our parks, which were completely destroyed. They could also rebuild Mary Coghill and Parkview Schools, as well as the Joe Bartholomew Golf Course—which was named after the first black golf course designer." She wants New Orleans to "green it up", since she believes that green space is connected to lower crime rates. She concluded: "I think a Civic Works Project is a great idea. We really need this right now. And what happens here has national implications because the issues in New Orleans are the same ones as Baltimore, Oakland, and Detroit."

As the bus left Pontchartrain Park and headed back to Xavier University, where the students are staying, Amelia Thompson, a recent Vassar College alum, reflected: “Flooded, drained, and abandoned. Entire communities are being forced to desert their homes, their histories, and their vision of returning. The Gulf Coast Civic Works Project provides the opportunity for our national government to honor the rights of the displaced members of our national community.”

Phone numbers of community members and students:

Norma Hedrick 504-481-7817

Nikki Najiola 504-458-5708

John Pecoul: 504-400-2895

Trinity Smith: 504-504-3845

Darcie Kiyon: 408-204-6635

For more information, please visit <http://www.solvingpoverty.com>

The Gulf Coast Civic Works Project is the national effort by students to develop federal legislation to create 100,000 jobs to rebuild the region using Gulf Coast residents.
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