

Honda Joins Rally for Hurricane Survivors

Written by Mike Honda

Tuesday, 14 March 2006 19:00

At a press conference attended by Katrina Survivors, numerous Members of Congress, clergy and national activists, including the Reverend Jesse Jackson (Rainbow PUSH Coalition), Representative Honda also urged the President to protect the 300,000 displaced New Orleans residents, now scattered throughout 44 states, from being disenfranchised in the April local elections.

“It has been six months since these hurricanes devastated the Gulf States and still we have seen nothing but ineptitude and callousness on the part of this Administration,” Honda said.

“Our communities were left out of the discussion during the disaster relief needs assessment process. They’ve been left out during the decision making process. And they continue to be left out in the recovery and rebuilding effort,” Honda stated.

“We stand here today with survivors and advocates from our communities to call on the President to stop the evictions; order the Attorney General to postpone the elections; and implore the Congress to enact legislation to ensure our communities are left out no longer; that they no longer remain in a blind spot to this Administration,” the Congressman said.

Last October, Honda traveled to Houston, Texas, Biloxi, Mississippi and Bayou La Batre, Louisiana to personally meet with survivors, assessing the damage, and listening to their needs.

While there, Honda discovered, in addition to FEMA being completely overwhelmed by the magnitude of the needs for the local population, they especially lacked the skills and resources to understand the needs of special populations – those of immigrant descent, or with limited English proficiency.

Instead of the widely publicized Astrodome calamity, Asian and Pacific Islander American evacuees were forced to find other means to access relief and recovery services.

As many as 15,000 Vietnamese ended up at the Hong Kong City Mall in Houston, Texas. It was there they were assisted by community-based organizations that they were able to provide translation services and cultural and linguistic competent care.

“It seems cultural insensitivity added an additional cataract to this Administration’s blind spot,” Honda said.

Honda urged his fellow Members of Congress to adopt H.R. 4197, The Hurricane Katrina Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Reunion Act of 2005. “It is not a panacea for the victims, but it is the most comprehensive relief package for survivors with a plan to restore housing, education, healthcare, voting rights, small business loans and more. I’m proud to be a cosponsor of this effort,” Honda said.

“It is with the strength of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, Congressional

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Black Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus...together known as the Congressional Tri-Caucus, and all of us working here together today – victims, activists, clergy, and other national leaders – that we can work for real progress, and better the well-being of all of our citizens ensuring that none of our communities remain in any blind spot to either the American conscience or this Administration’s agenda,” Honda concluded.

Honda noted he also intends to introduce legislation in the near future ensuring the linguistic and cultural competency needs are included in future disaster relief efforts.