

WASHINGTON, DC – Congressman Mike Honda (San Jose, CA) today called the Administration's lack of response to the victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita unconscionable. "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.

Honda, along with other Members of Congress, survivors of the hurricanes, clergy men and women, national leaders and progressive activists have joined forces in a "call to conscience," underscoring the shortcomings of the President and FEMA, protecting residents right to vote in local elections, and urging the Congress to pass comprehensive legislation addressing the needs of the victims of Rita and Katrina.

"We are here today to continue on a very important fight for the relief and recovery for our communities in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and Rita," Honda stated.

"Residents of the Gulf region first had to endure the wrath of these powerful storms, and now they must face the incompetence of this Administration. It's double jeopardy," Honda said. Within days, 7,000 families face eviction from hotels in Louisiana and Mississippi, while FEMA has yet to provide a comprehensive plan for transitional and long-term housing.

Additionally, approximately 300,000 New Orleans residents, many of them forcibly displaced throughout 44 states by the federal government, face likely disenfranchisement in upcoming local elections because there is no federal plan enabling them to vote in the very elections that will help determine their city's future.

Honda also questioned the Administration's top down approach to rebuilding the region. "This Administration endlessly tells us it's your money, and Americans know best how to spend it. But their approach to rebuilding the Gulf Region has been anything but citizen participation -- with big government weighing in at every opportunity," the Congressman stated.

“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 see what Congress needs to do in order 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 the needs of survivors.

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.

“Through media coverage, Americans were shocked by the 100,000 ‘lost citizens’ victimized by the ravages of these storms, and the incompetent response of this Administration,” Honda stated. “Again due to media coverage, we have recently come to understand, the Administration was equally shocked by, or ignorant of, the magnitude of the storm. I don’t know which is worse; ignorance or incompetence. I do know neither is acceptable,” Honda stated.

“So Congress must act, and act we have done so. The Congressional Black Caucus has introduced H.R. 4197, The Hurricane Katrina Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Reunion Act of 2005,” the Congressman said. “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.

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The Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC) is a bicameral and bipartisan caucus of Members of Congress of Asian and Pacific Islander descent and Members who have a strong dedication to promoting the well-being of the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) community. Founded in 1994 by then Congressman Norman Mineta, and currently chaired by Congressman Michael Honda, CAPAC has been addressing the needs of the AAPI community in all areas of American life. For more information on CAPAC, please call (202) 225-2631 or visit <http://www.honda.house.gov/capac> .