



Denny Hastert: How Not to Walk in the Katrina Political Minefield...

Posted by [Prof. Goose](#) on September 1, 2005 - 3:54pm

Topic: [Policy/Politics](#)

[House Speaker: Rebuilding N.O. doesn't make sense](#) (about half way down the NOLA page, permalink is broken...snippets under the fold) (Note: also make sure to note the articles telling teachers to get jobs elsewhere, than the Saints and Hornets are looking for new facilities to play their games, and many other things in the NOLA article list this links to.)

WASHINGTON - House Speaker Dennis Hastert dropped a bombshell on flood-ravaged New Orleans on Thursday by suggesting that it isn't sensible to rebuild the city.

"It doesn't make sense to me," Hastert told the Daily Herald in suburban Chicago in editions published today. "And it's a question that certainly we should ask."

Hastert's comments came as Congress cut short its summer recess and raced back to Washington to take up an emergency aid package expected to be \$10 billion or more. Details of the legislation are still emerging, but it is expected to target critical items such as buses to evacuate the city, reinforcing existing flood protection and providing food and shelter for a growing population of refugees.

The Illinois Republican's comments drew an immediate rebuke from Louisiana officials.

"That's like saying we should shut down Los Angeles because it's built in an earthquake zone," former Sen. John Breaux, D-La., said. "Or like saying that after the Great Chicago fire of 1871, the U.S. government should have just abandoned the city."

Hastert said that he supports an emergency bailout, but raised questions about a long-term rebuilding effort. As the most powerful voice in the Republican-controlled House, Hastert is in a position to block any legislation that he opposes.

"We help replace, we help relieve disaster," Hastert said. "But I think federal insurance and everything that goes along with it... we ought to take a second look at that."

The speaker's comments were in stark contrast to those delivered by President Bush during an appearance this morning on ABC's "Good Morning America."

"I want the people of New Orleans to know that after rescuing them and stabilizing the situation, there will be plans in place to help this great city get back on its feet," Bush said. "There is no doubt in my mind that New Orleans is going to rise up again as a great city."

Insurance industry executives estimated that claims from the storm could range up to

\$19 billion. Rebuilding the city, which is more than 80 percent submerged, could cost tens of billions of dollars more, experts projected.

Hastert questioned the wisdom of rebuilding a city below sea level that will continue to be in the path of powerful hurricanes.

"You know we build Los Angeles and San Francisco on top of earthquake issues and they rebuild, too. Stubbornness," he said.

Hastert wasn't the only one questioning the rebuilding of New Orleans. The Waterbury, Conn., Republican-American newspaper wrote an editorial Wednesday entitled, "Is New Orleans worth reclaiming?"

"Americans' hearts go out to the people in Katrina's path," it said. "But if the people of New Orleans and other low-lying areas insist on living in harm's way, they ought to accept responsibility for what happens to them and their property."

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