

For Immediate Release

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Katrina aid at-risk in negotiations over emergency spending

Clergy blast delay in passing federal aid for families to rebuild

New Orleans - Faith-based organizations working to rebuild Louisiana are worried that Congress will cut Gulf Coast housing aid to make room for unrelated spending in final negotiations over emergency funding legislation.

"Congress continues to delay as our city struggles to rebuild. It adds insult to injury to hear that the House is considering cuts that would keep the neediest victims from finding housing," said Rev. Cory Sparks, from All Congregations Together in New Orleans.

With President Bush threatening a veto and House leaders refusing to spend more than \$94.5 billion, Appropriation Committee members are scrambling to cut as much as \$14 billion from the emergency spending legislation. House leaders criticized the Senate for adding earmarks unrelated to Katrina or the War. But clergy from PICO, a national network of 53 faith-based organizations, are now concerned that in the end some of the deepest cuts will come from housing aid promised to New Orleans and the Gulf Coast.

"We've had senators, we've had representatives, Congressmen come in. We've had the President come down 12 times. And I say to myself, what part don't you get? Why aren't you releasing money?" said Fr. Michael Jacques, Pastor, St. Peter Claver Catholic Church in New Orleans.

Last month PICO and Louisiana Interfaiths Together launched a national grassroots campaign by religious congregations across the country asking Congress to keep three Katrina-related housing provisions in the final legislation:

- \$100 million in project-based rental assistance to rebuild and construct 13,500 apartments for lower-income families who lost their homes;
- \$5.2 billion in Community Development Block Grants so that Louisiana can receive the \$4.2 billion it needs to complete its "Road Home" housing plan; and
- \$1.2 billion for Emergency Housing Pilot Programs to provide Katrina Cottages and other flexible alternatives to FEMA travel trailers, which are widely viewed as inadequate for families, unsafe and overly expensive.

The housing funding that is at-risk is directly-related to Katrina, provides aid to the lowest income families and is vital to reviving the region's economy.

PICO clergy from outside Louisiana are pressing members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committee to support assistance for Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. Thousands of congregation-members have sent letters and made phone calls urging their representatives to support federal help to rebuild housing in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region.

PICO is a national network of faith-based community organizations working to strengthen families and improve communities in 150 cities and towns in 18 states. Louisiana Interfaiths Together is a statewide organization of six PICO organizations, including All Congregations Together in New Orleans.

For more information visit www.piconetwork.org.