

Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu
Speech given at the Louisiana Recovery and Rebuilding Conference presented by
The American Institute of Architects

Thank you to Dick for the introduction, and for all you are doing. Last week, Dick and I testified before a congressional hearing about the importance of historic preservation and the need for historic tax credits.

We took that opportunity to assure Congress that historic tax credits are more than a tool to save our past. We urged them to consider them as a foundation from which we build our future because in the real world it means investment in community redevelopment, jobs, and opportunities for new and smarter planning.

I also want to thank the American Institute of Architects. You were one of the first to arrive. Your presence here today confirms your commitment.

Before I start my presentation, I want to take a moment to acknowledge and thank our governor, our state officials, our congressional delegation, our legislators and the many business and community leaders around the state who have made rescue, relief, recovery and now rebuild their priority for the past 74 days.

I also want to recognize the Mayors and parish leaders that were directly impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

These leaders have been on the front line of the worst natural disasters we have experienced in America. Each of them is working under the most difficult circumstances and they are all doing as good a job as anyone could do.

The communities they represent make up the foundation of Louisiana's economic and cultural strength.

South Louisiana's heritage, from Lake Charles to Lafayette to Baton Rouge to Houma to New Orleans, is a gumbo of Native Americans and exiles from Acadie in Canada, French expatriates and French Creoles,

Creoles of Color, Freed People of Color, European Americans and African Americans.

Tradition, family, food, music and *joie de vivre* are fundamentals of life in South Louisiana. Sprinkled across South Louisiana are bayous, sugar cane and rice fields, crawfish ponds, lakes, marshes, and rivers, creating a unique landscape you can't find anywhere else in the world. Now, everything about the culture that we have shared with the nation and the world for so long comes from our people and is at risk.

These thirteen parishes were home to one million, seven hundred sixteen thousand, nine hundred thirty-one Louisiana citizens. 81,000 businesses have been severely impacted. This number represents roughly 41% of all Louisiana's businesses, of which 90% are small businesses.

And beyond the statistics is New Orleans – my home, the only place my Grandmother and Grandfather, my Mother and Father, my children have known, the place that holds the history of my family and so many other families now displaced across Louisiana and America.

Louisiana - America's greatest cultural destination – the soul of America. A place that could be foreign to Americans and American to foreigners – a place that captured rich and diverse cultures in language, food, architecture, politics, art, music, and so much more and blended it all together like a great gumbo – no real recipe, no exact formula, no rhyme and no reason – like jazz to the untrained ear it rarely made sense, but when everything came together it worked just right.

It sounded just right, it tasted just right, it felt just right but even then it worked, and for so many years it was the place that we loved to live in and the place that we were always ready to share with the world.

For the past 74 days I have had the opportunity to speak about Louisiana's challenge in a number of places – I have testified before

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Congress, the legislature, the New Orleans City Council and many other organizations. I have delivered speeches and done countless media interviews. Part of the job of Lieutenant Governor is to be the ambassador for the state to the nation and the world, so as the world has watched I have tried to deliver a clear, concise, realistic and hopeful message on behalf of Louisiana.

To every group I appear before, my message is consistent: This was an American tragedy that requires an American response.

The enormity of this tragedy is not something Louisiana state and local officials or Louisiana business and community leaders have the capacity or responsibility to handle on our own. The level of support needed is going to require Americans around the country – and more importantly in Congress – to realize that we need assistance just like New York needed after 9/11, or San Francisco and Southern California need after an earthquake or the Midwest after a flood.

On September 15, 2005, President Bush stood on Louisiana soil in front of the St. Louis Cathedral, looked America in the eye and said “And tonight I also offer this pledge of the American people: Throughout the area hit by the hurricane, we will do what it takes, we will stay as long as it takes, to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives. And all who question the future of the Crescent City need to know there is no way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again.”

We trust the people of this country will support the President in honoring his word.

However, the only way we are going to get the help we need is if we begin to help ourselves. This means developing and cultivating a feasible and flexible plan that clearly defines short and long-term goals for the state and includes every region of the state.

Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu
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This also means showing the nation that we have all come together to find higher common ground where we put aside our differences and agree to work toward a higher purpose and unified goal.

The tragedy we suffered has many acts. The first was rescue. The second was recovery.

We gather here today as we move into the third act of this tragedy – planning our rebirth. The stakes are high; the margin for error is thin.

History will tell the story and future generations will learn that we were united, and worked to revive and rebuild a great state– and people will study how Louisiana became a test lab for some of the nation’s most pressing socio-economic issues of the time.

OR

History will record the story of how the federal government, state government, local governments, AND business and community leaders couldn’t come together, allowing political agendas, personalities, egos and the enormous challenge of the day to paralyze them – and because of that one of the most culturally rich places in America died.

Now much has been said and written about the number of commissions, boards, and committees that exist. The Governor has one, the Mayor, the New Orleans City Council.

I, too, have a national advisory board guiding me in our tourism and cultural economy rebirth plan.

One of the things that I am going to insist on is that my board be available and inclusive of the Governor's commission, the Mayor's commission and any other commission.

Frankly, I believe that the time has come for the Mayor and the Governor to merge their commissions into one. I am happy to do the same with my advisory board. **We all are in this together, and it is time for us to start acting like it.**

America will respond to our needs if we present them with our vision and show them we are united. As General Honore' said "One Team. One Fight."

So, as we begin our collective deliberations, one simple idea should drive our actions. We can create a New South capable of competing internationally in education, healthcare, commerce and culture. A place that is safe, clean, smart, fast and culturally diverse.

The New South we seek exemplifies a place of community where our differences, much like threads of fine fabric unite us – where educational opportunities abound. The New South is a place that understands that knowledge is the currency of a strong economy.

In this New South, our diversity is a strength, not a weakness - where different philosophies, political views, religious beliefs and ethnicities are not only viewed as good but necessary to the formation of the tapestry of our rich and beautiful culture. In this New South, we interpret the Latin term *E Pluribus Unum* on the seal of the country and on the steps of the Louisiana State Capitol, literally, “out of many, one.”

This New South values faith, strong families, cultural roots and the heritage of our ancestors while at the same time, looks forward in a progressive way, excited about the possibility of what can be. In the South, we are people of faith, family and country.

Our New South can and must lead, not follow.

Today, we begin the long journey of rebuilding systems in education, healthcare, and economic development that were broken long before the storm.

As we begin to set a vision for our future, we must understand the context of the new world we live in. We also must know what kind of world we hope to create.

There are some basic outcomes that should guide all of us -- elected, community, business leaders and anybody else with an interest in rebuilding Louisiana back better than it was before.

1. We can no longer turn a blind eye on the poorest communities in our cities and states.
2. We cannot be isolated or separated in our discussions or planning.
3. We cannot be limited by our past.
4. We cannot expect help from others without doing everything we can to help ourselves.
5. We must find higher common ground where we put aside our differences and agree to work toward higher purpose and unified goal.

AND

6. We must remember who it is that we are working for.

Let's start with the basics.

Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu
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1. A levee system that can withstand category 5 Hurricanes.
2. Coastal wetland restoration outlined by Coast 2050.
3. An energy grid that is operable.
4. A sewerage and water system that works.

These basic needs (and there are others) are like the four walls of a house. But in Louisiana we like to say that a house is not a home. It is what is inside of the house that really matters. What is inside Louisiana's house is its people and our culture.

The culture we seek to preserve in Louisiana is rooted in our people and our neighborhoods. If we are going to recapture the deep character of our state we must restore and renew the social capital of the world we lived in.

As the architects of the future, we have to understand, appreciate, respect and honor our past.

As the stewards of the effort to rebuild our special home, we have to understand that most at risk is the uniqueness that we loved – We can't forget the black social aid and pleasure clubs, the Mardi Gras Indian tribes, and the churches and community organizations of New Orleans that organized a cultural structure in our neighborhoods and created the music, food, dialects, and art that emanated from the streets and became the cultural product we shared with the world.

Many of these clubs founded out of a need to take care of the people in their communities during an era when there was nobody else who would. They formed the basis of everything we now are working to rebuild.

Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu
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If the president, the governor, the mayor and others are serious in their pledge that locals will design the new New Orleans, than we cannot complete a plan without including them at all levels of the dialogue. That would be like leaving the okra out of your gumbo – it won't taste right.

The city and state we conceive is only going to prosper if we address education, health care, poverty, housing, economic opportunity, and regionalism in a coordinated and strategic way that includes everybody's perspective and needs.

Like it or not, the time has come for Americans to look at ourselves in the mirror and focus on a picture that we have long tried to ignore.

Today, over 37 million of our Americans live in poverty. Katrina made the nation come face-to-face with the stark reality that regardless of race, financial means divide us as a country in a way that prevents us from truly recognizing the needs of our neighbors at some of the most vital times of life.

Here particularly, we have found higher common ground. Voices from the left and the right have taken note and roared. Senator Rick Santorum, R-Penn had this to say at the *First International Conservative Conference on Social Justice* last month:

"Too many of my colleagues act as if poverty doesn't exist. Then came Katrina. Our collective blinders were shredded not by wind or rain but by our television sets. We will always remember the pictures of New Orleans, the poor and sick who were forced into the light of day and into our consciousness by the waters of a horrible flood. Theologically, there is this idea of an age of accountability...Katrina brought Americans to the age of

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accountability when it comes to caring for the poor. No one, no one can deny the persistent and noxious poverty that still plagues this country.”

Katrina taught the nation a valuable lesson. We must not let the social disaster of poverty continue. Race was not the only underlying factor in who got left behind. What we really saw was the impact of poverty on an entire nation, and we saw it here in the United States.

Race and poverty are not issues that are unique to New Orleans or the South. But it is our time in the South to lead. Inside the policies we enact and the decisions we make are solutions, it is our job to seek them out, provide the necessary resources and work to enact them.

It starts with education.

Imagine the opportunity we have to rebuild a public education system that was failing our students, our teachers, our economy, and all those who lived and worked within the community.

Think about the possibility of what can be if we use this opportunity to make our schools technological and cultural centers within our communities.

Why can't we design and build modern learning centers that enhance teaching and learning and that also function as playgrounds and neighborhood parks, community theatre centers, art galleries and health centers?

Why can't we coordinate with the city or parish libraries to put libraries in schools that serve their communities?

Why can't schools be designed to provide cultural, artistic, recreation and other opportunities for our families?

As we rebuild neighborhoods, we need to remember we are in the business of rebuilding lives.

Bureaucrats like to talk about zones and districts – economic zones, empowerment zones, taxing districts – I want us to talk about creating new communities -- communities that are functional and conducive to healthier living – socially, economically, regionally, and culturally.

The education system we dream of is directly related to our success in building a new economy for this region that is diverse and knowledge based.

It is time for us to set the highest standards and strive to surpass them. It is our time to raise the southern average, not seek it.

The number of homes, neighborhoods and lives that have to be rebuilt is staggering, but the cornerstones of New Orleans and Louisiana survived; our rich heritage and cultural advantages will serve as our guides to the rebirth.

As we begin the daunting task of rebuilding all of the rural south (below I-10 from Texas to Louisiana to Alabama and many small towns and cities in between each unique and precious in their own right, including Lake Charles, Lafayette, Baton Rouge, Houma, New Orleans we have to take advantage of our natural assets and we have to look to diversify our economy at the same time.

We have taken aggressive steps to stand up the tourism, hospitality and cultural industries as soon as possible. Before Katrina, tourism accounted for over 126,000 jobs and almost 10 billion dollars annually to the state's revenue.

Our cultural industries were the fastest growing sector of the state's economy, accounting for over 144,000 jobs.

Since Katrina, we have brought everyone together and created our Louisiana Rebirth Plan for these industries. We have united with one voice to go to Congress with a consolidated relief package.

We are also taking steps to help ourselves. The hotel and lodging association and the restaurant association are working around the clock to open hotel rooms and restaurants in the affected areas.

This industry will stand up after the first of the year. We will begin to generate revenue and we will be the first industry that shows the nation that while we may have been knocked down in Louisiana, we weren't knocked out.

We also acknowledge that prior to Katrina there was a lot that was wrong with our current state of affairs. We recognize that the structure of state and local government sometimes fostered turf mentality, parochialism and excluded rather than included.

We know that if we are to turn our vision into a reality that we must address the organizational and performance deficiencies in Louisiana's government and business sectors.

If Sir Peter Hall, a noted historian of urban centers, is to be taken seriously, then New Orleans is capable of being a center of urban creativity. Great cities like Paris or Athens or Florence or Berlin were both capitalist cities as well as great trading cities fueled by their artistic and innovative networks.

I, too, believe in New Orleans' potential. Music, food, culture, art, architecture, historic preservation – these are our strengths and our future.

What do we want New Orleans to look like in 50 or 100 years? In order for this region to experience its own rebirth, it must recreate itself as both a cultural incubator and technological innovator. New Orleans must balance the needs of the entrepreneur and the artist. Through this urban creativity, New Orleans will become a center for the New South region.

Why can't New Orleans be home to creators of the next digital information superhighway or the masterminds of the video gaming industry? Why not both? In order to become a smart city, New Orleans should become the first fully wireless city in America. And, then we must commit to use this city as a case study to bridge the technology divide that exists between the have and the have-nots. In the future, technology will be the great equalizer in the global market.

Across our state – in places like Shreveport and Baton Rouge – some of the greatest minds in the world are working in the field of Biotechnology and Medical research. Brains, diet, cancer are just some of the areas of focus of our wet labs and research facilities. If our universities and the leaders in this field from New Orleans to Shreveport and throughout the state come together and present a united front our state can lead in this industry – which means quality jobs and plenty of them.

Imagine the cure for cancer being found in Louisiana. Why shouldn't it happen here?

I know that some have questioned the wisdom of a regional hub of commerce, trade, culture, tourism, music and so much more in a place so vulnerable to a natural disaster like we have just experienced. But, I have always thought that New Orleans is strategically located to be so much greater than we have ever been in Southeast Louisiana.

While celebrating our traditions, New Orleans can seek innovation that will allow Louisiana to globally compete with the best and brightest. If we are going to ask Congress to rebuild the levees and the coast to

protect us from the next storm, certainly we must give them something valuable to protect. That something is what we call the soul of America. It comes from our people and it manifests itself through our culture.

What is culture? The great Wynton Marsalis says,

"Culture is the metamorphosis of a community's personality into a way of life. It unites us and distinguishes us. It gives us confidence and provides the barometer of who we are. It includes solutions to problems of living in a specific time and place distilled through generations to develop and maintain a unique vision of a civilized way of life... Our culture is the greatest thing we can share with others."

For too long we have let parochial agendas dictate the progress of our port, our airport and many other industries – and as a result our economy has stalled. If we consider our strategic location at the mouth of the greatest waterway in the world, and as the axis between North, Central, and South America then we actually look like the center of the universe – and the New South looks like the place where America's economy is going to explode.

Let's start talking about our port, our airport, our interstate system as part of an intermodal cargo and transportation hub that if you add a corridor of rail across the south – linking Houston, New Orleans, Atlanta, Memphis, Jackson and other cities you begin to see an economic corridor that can compete with the Northeast region of Boston, Philadelphia, New York and Washington DC.

Through this tragedy, we have the opportunity to set an example for the nation about the power to change when we lean forward, rather than blink.

To me, that power to make the political process work is anchored in a set of guiding principles that can set the tone for the type of region we build and position us as the leader of the New South.

We believe that we can transform ourselves from victims to victors, from losers to winners, from followers to leaders if we follow five guiding principles:

- Consider our diversity a strength, not a weakness;
- Seek to expand and diversify our economy;
- Think regionally so that we can compete globally;
- Add value to our raw talent and raw materials; and
- Set the highest standards of excellence for all that we do.

Finally, we have to remember who we are working for. I received this short video from a constituent the other day, and it says it better than any words I can think of:

(SHOW VIDEO)

We, southerners are a strong people. We are grateful for the way the country welcomed us in the aftermath of Katrina. This was an American tragedy that requires a full-hearted American response.

Now we must rebuild.

We know it is possible – history tells us so. Communities can be built back. And they can be built back better than they were before.

On American soil, the federal government has stepped up before and provided financial support. New York City declared bankruptcy in 1976 and was rescued by Congress; then sustained the brunt of 9/11 and was cradled by the nation, again. By showing true American character, New York has risen to the challenge of becoming again another great American city; built back better than it was before.

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The first time visitors from the Southern Hemisphere see the flag of the United States is when they reach the mouth of the Mississippi River. Of course, right below it, they see the words “union, justice, and confidence” on the flag of our great state. Louisiana is their first taste of America. Therefore, Louisiana must be the beacon that gives illumination to all that is great and all that is expected in this great nation at the dawning of the 21st Century.

Thank you.