

Group wants Katrina 'atonement' Hastert heads to Gulf Coast; protesters to Batavia

By [Matthew DeFour](#)
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BATAVIA — On the six-month anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, a handful of representatives from a national faith-based coalition stopped by House Speaker Dennis Hastert's district office Wednesday to demand the federal government do more to assist victims and to rebuild New Orleans.

"All of us are pretty outraged by what has not happened," said Greg Galluzzo, executive director of the Gamaliel Foundation, a national network of 1,600 churches, which is part of the recently formed National Alliance to Restore Opportunity to the Gulf Coast and Displaced Persons. "There seems to be unlimited money for the war in Iraq, and no money to rebuild in this country."

Galluzzo and five others delivered a letter to Hastert's office stating that "the federal government must provide immediate and long-term help that will help revitalize these devastated communities for everyone."

Hastert, however, wasn't at his Batavia office Wednesday.

Instead he was preparing for a three-day tour of the devastated Gulf Coast region with a bipartisan congressional delegation which will look at the effectiveness of recovery assistance while ensuring the most resources possible are reaching people directly.

"Hurricane Katrina affected thousands of families and businesses along the Gulf Coast, and this Congress responded, sending billions of dollars in assistance for cleanup and recovery," Hastert said in a statement.

"It is also important for us to get a firsthand look to ensure that federal dollars are being wisely spent and that help is getting to the families, small businesses and organizations that need it."

'Abandoned by government'



heather eidson / Staff Photographer
Greg Galluzzo (right), of the Gamaliel Foundation, talks as Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now members (from left) Denise Diaz, Latrelle Smith, Sam Gonzales and LaShonda Brown, all of Chicago, rally in front of U.S. Rep. Dennis Hastert's Batavia office.

The Batavia event was part of a local kick off to a national six-week prayer program called "A Season of Prayer, Reflection and Action for Justice after Katrina," which the coalition is sponsoring.

In addition to the Gamaliel Foundation, the coalition includes the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and a number of church alliances from across the country.

Galluzzo called Wednesday "a day of atonement for what this country has not done" and referred to the Katrina disaster as being "far greater" than the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in terms of number of people displaced and affected.

"We saw who those people were," Galluzzo said. "They were African Americans, and they were abandoned by the government."

Joining Galluzzo were members of ACORN, which had its New Orleans national headquarters destroyed by the hurricane. Lashonda Brown, an ACORN member from Chicago, delivered a statement criticizing the Bush administration's recent proposal to spend \$4.2 billion on razing houses, rather than rebuilding them.

"I want to let him know," Brown said. "It's been six months, and we can see that Bush is not allocating money to rebuild."

Visiting devastated area

Hastert spokesman Brad Hahn countered that the federal government has allocated more than \$61.3 billion for relief and rebuilding in the Gulf Coast, plus an additional \$645 million in emergency aid for students affected by the disaster.

Every federal agency has taken steps, from delaying the repayment of loans to most recently providing \$11.5 billion in Community Development Block Grant funds to help homeowners rebuild their homes, Hahn said.

"The bottom line is every aspect of the federal government has been working to help those devastated by Katrina and to get the Gulf Coast back on its feet," Hahn said. "This is an unprecedented natural disaster, and Congress has responded in kind — but full recovery does take time."

Hastert and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, a California Democrat, are leading a congressional delegation in a tour of the Gulf Coast beginning today. The three-day visit will include stops in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

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