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District Counsel Returns to New Orleans

According to AILA attorney Katherine Gasparian, Stan Weber will be returning to New Orleans as Deputy Chief Counsel for DHS. His office will be at Canal Place as of January 3, 2006 and he will be handling the New Orleans docket as of that date. Mr. Weber's contact information is: DHS/ ICE, One Canal Place, 365 Canal Street, Suite 2735, New Orleans, LA 70130; telephone: 504-589-2176. Since mail service in downtown New Orleans is sporadic and always delayed, it is important to use a delivery service.

FEMA Assures Storm Victims Regarding Acceptance of Aid

Some Hurricane Katrina and Rita victims are concerned that receiving federal or state hurricane relief aid will add to their income, resulting in the loss of Medicaid, welfare assistance or food stamps. Hurricane victims also fear that acceptance of hurricane aid will result in the loss of social security benefits, higher taxes and the loss of income-based programs.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (LOHSEP) assure storm victims that a state or federal grant does not add to taxable income and will not affect federal/state benefits.

FEMA and LOHSEP encourage all disaster victims to apply for assistance and complete the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) loan application, if it is sent to them. If SBA is unable to approve a loan, the applicant may be referred to Other Needs Assistance (ONA) which covers items such as personal property loss, medical care, and transportation. Call SBA at 1-800-659-2955 or visit www.sba.gov disaster for additional information.

Disaster victims can call FEMA to find out more about housing grants and other programs at 1-800-621-FEMA (3362) or TTY 1-800-462-7585 for the speech or hearing impaired. Lines are open 24 hours a day seven days a week until further notice. Victims may also register online at www.fema.gov or register at any Disaster Recovery Center (DRC).

For elderly issues, contact Eldercare Locators at 1-800-677-1116.

[Source: <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=21558>] Dec. 17, 2005

Senate Approves \$29 Billion in Funds

On Dec. 21st, Reuters reported that the U.S. Senate approved \$29 billion in funds for rebuilding levees, schools and other structures in Gulf Coast states hit by Hurricane Katrina.

The money was attached to an end-of-year defense spending bill that the Senate approved by a vote of 93-0. Two days before the Senate vote, the U.S. House of Representatives approved the hurricane relief money. However, since the defense spending bill passed by the Senate is different from the House-passed version, the House must again approve the legislation.

Some of the \$29 billion would come from previously approved, but unspent, emergency funds for Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and other Gulf Coast areas hit by Hurricane Katrina and two subsequent storms. Another portion of the money would be offset by a 1 percent across-the-board spending cut for all government programs except veterans' benefits.

Besides rebuilding levees, the money would be spent on providing seed money for economic development. Funds also would be used for rebuilding schools and other buildings destroyed by the storms.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit in August, Congress approved about \$62 billion in emergency funds and about half of the money has not yet been spent. Congress had to "reprogram" some of the emergency and rescue money so it could be used for rebuilding efforts by several U.S. agencies.

Congressional aides have not said how long this latest batch of funds will last, but additional funds are expected to be needed next year.

Justice for New Orleans Website Launched

The Loyola Law Clinic in New Orleans has developed a new website devoted to social justice in the re-building of New Orleans.

On the site, you will find:

- * Feature Articles from Correspondents in New Orleans
- * The Latest News About Rebuilding New Orleans from Around the Web
- * Announcements About Upcoming Events
- * Updated Links and Phone Numbers for Finding Help
- * Forums Dedicated to Readers' Ideas
- * Opportunities to Submit Your Own Articles and Opinions

Visit justiceforneworleans.org.