

**Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu**

**City Year Conference, New York**

**June 16, 2006**

## **Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu City Year Address in New York**

I'm here today to deliver a message from Louisiana. In the wake of the worst natural disaster in American history, we are rebuilding. From day one, we have rolled up our sleeves to help ourselves and each other.

And no matter how strong Mother Nature is, she could not destroy what we call the Soul of America. Our culture – our music, our food, our joie de vivre - it's rooted in the heritage of our people, and it is passed down from one generation to another. With this great foundation of culture and people, we are rebuilding a place that will finally exceed its potential.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita brought us to our knees. They were tragedies of epic proportions that raised the angels and the demons and a little bit in between.

The nation watched in horror as our friends and neighbors suffered at the Superdome and the Convention Center. This country had to look itself in the mirror and focus on a picture that we have long tried to ignore. Today, over 37 million Americans live in poverty.

Now, we in South Louisiana have an opportunity to put away the twin cousins of race and poverty and replace them with the siblings of opportunity and responsibility. All of us together can share the sacrifices for realizing the common good. That is what we have been missing.

And I know it's possible because after the storms, I bore witness to the great American spirit of service. Let me tell you what I saw on the ground.

I saw neighbor helping neighbor. I saw young African American men bringing elderly white women to safety. I saw white men carrying young African American children from rooftops. We understood that we were all in the same boat.

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I saw our first responders and the Louisiana Coast Guard work back-to-back-to-back shifts for 15 days straight – risking their lives to save others. I saw wild life and fisheries agents and everyday citizens put their boats in the water and steer directly into harms' way to save their fellow citizens.

In all more than 6,000 people were rescued from the floodwaters.

I saw volunteers manning emergency shelters. I saw citizens feeding the hungry. I saw people opening their homes. I saw church groups handing out homemade sandwiches to evacuees, waiting in traffic on the highway.

A volunteer was told to be careful – the people that were being bussed in from New Orleans had been trapped in deplorable conditions. With a possibility of disease, she was instructed to wear rubber gloves. She was told not to shake hands. And this woman said without batting an eye – we don't shake hands in Louisiana, we hug. And she proceeded to hug each of her fellow citizens that got off that bus.

And now, we have been asked – why rebuild Louisiana? Chris Matthews asked me, "Why should a guy driving a taxi in Detroit care?"

There are two simple reasons.

One, rebuilding New Orleans is in the nation's best interest.

There is a reason why Thomas Jefferson purchased this piece of property in 1803. And that was because of the mighty Mississippi River.

New Orleans is the busiest port in the U.S. – with 20% of all U.S. exports, and 60% of our grain exports, passing through the port. We are the gateway for the

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nation's goods - that are shipped down the Mississippi to the world and moved up the river into the heartland.

The nation benefits from the oil and gas of South Louisiana's energy coast. Louisiana's offshore oil and gas supplies 20% of domestic oil production. We fuel this nation's economy.

Simply put - the cost to rebuild New Orleans is dwarfed by the cost to the nation's economy if we were to lose Louisiana's port and energy.

But beyond economics and statistics, there is a second – even greater reason – to rebuild New Orleans.

The alternative is to let a major American city die. What would this say about our country? Our character? And our values?

In this country, we take care of our own. In this country, we build back better than before. Consider this great city. After September 11th, New York was cradled by the nation and New Yorkers rose to the challenge.

And so, Louisiana's rebirth will be moved along by those who occupy what Harry Truman called the highest office in a democracy — and that is citizen. Citizen service will drive our recovery.

To help make this happen, we've launched [volunteerlouisiana.gov](http://volunteerlouisiana.gov). This website and call center will serve as a clearinghouse for service opportunities in Louisiana. This is a team effort – made possible by my office, the governor's office, the points of light foundation and hundreds of national and statewide organizations.

We have a Summer of Service Initiative. We are calling on young people and college students to spend their summer rebuilding Louisiana. Based on the

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number of students that spent their spring breaks giving back to our state, we expect this initiative to contribute significantly to our rebirth.

My Office has also put together what we call a Design Lab. We are bringing together the brightest minds in service from across the nation. The team is developing a master plan for volunteers to assist in the rebuilding of homes for our hospitality workforce.

Last year, we awarded City Year a start up grant to establish headquarters in Louisiana. This accelerated their ability to respond to the storms. Later, President Clinton's Hurricane Katrina Fund granted CityYear Louisiana \$1 million. I'd like to thank President Clinton for his commitment to our recovery.

Today, City Year has recruited 50 full time members. This service program is providing tutoring and mentoring to evacuee students. Many schools are overwhelmed with evacuees, and our youngest are struggling with new environments and the uncertainty of being displaced. City Year is providing an invaluable service to these youngsters.

The Louisiana Serve Commission, which I oversee, has increased their funding by \$11 million over the next three years. As a result, the Commission will go from having approximately 250 AmeriCorps members per year to having over 700 per year.

With great need and great capacity, volunteerism is alive and well in Louisiana. As of the end of April, over 90,000 have volunteered in our state.

I think Americorps founder Eli Segal would be proud of what's happening in Louisiana. No one embodied the spirit of service and volunteerism more than him.

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Earlier this winter, when Eli passed away, it was a cause of great sadness and grief. But this spring, in an act of faith and gratitude and optimism, President Clinton and I joined City Year Louisiana volunteers to plant a tree in honor of Mr. Segal.

We planted that tree at Scotlandville Middle School in Baton Rouge, where City Year volunteers mentor young evacuees. At the ceremony, I thought of the Americorps pledge, which was read at Mr. Segal's funeral. It says:

I will get things done for America - to make our people safer, smarter and healthier.

I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.

Faced with apathy, I will take action.

Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.

Faced with adversity, I will persevere.

I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond.

I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.

This is the spirit of service that has rekindled hope in Louisiana - the spirit of service that will fuel our recovery and allow a piece of American soil to stand itself up.

Ladies and Gentlemen, this is what the spirit of service looks like in Louisiana. It is an honor to introduce to you the young people of City Year Louisiana.