

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

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**WHITE HOUSE GULF COAST CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS SUCCESS OF
NONPROFITS TO HELP REBUILD GULF COAST EDUCATION**

NEW ORLEANS, LA -- Continuing a two-day Gulf Coast Conference on Disaster Relief and Preparedness, the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives today highlighted promising public-private collaborations following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita to help restore communities and target pressing needs of Americans affected by the disasters. Joined by Mrs. Laura Bush, Louisiana Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu and U.S. Attorney Jim Letten, the conference spotlighted successful ongoing Federal and local partnerships with nonprofits, particularly with efforts to rebuild Gulf Coast education infrastructure and meet needs of America's youth.

"... [F]aith-based and community organizations are the foundation upon which a better and stronger Gulf Coast can be rebuilt," said Mrs. Bush. "While the government can help rebuild brick and mortar, the organizations represented in this room are best equipped to mend hearts and lives. Through your inspired local leadership, we can renew New Orleans and establish the Gulf Coast as a region of hope for all Americans."

To aid more than 1,100 public, private and parochial schools that closed and displaced 370,000 students following Hurricane Katrina, President Bush worked with Congress to provide almost \$2 billion to reopen schools. The state of Louisiana, supported by approximately \$45 million in Federal investment, is working to rebuild and strengthen its education system through unprecedented expansion of charter schools, particularly in the New Orleans area, to ensure families were provided access to quality education options. Critical to this effort is the nonprofit sector, which plays a key role in supporting and operating charter schools and other public and private education efforts. Today, approximately 42% of New Orleans schools are charters – the highest percentage of any U.S. city.

"Following the Gulf Coast storms, faith-based and community groups delivered help and hope by launching new schools and offering sound educational options for families," said OFBCI Director Jay Hein. "As advocates and allies, these compassionate organizations and volunteers are helping turn the tide for disadvantaged young Americans and ensure a more hopeful future."

During the conference, Heisman trophy winner Danny Wuerffell, member of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation and Executive Director of New Orleans-based Desire Street Ministries, touted the President's vision for empowering America's nonprofits and volunteers, particularly those working to rebuild the Gulf Coast. He presented a lifetime President's Volunteer Service Award to Valerie Wright, a

volunteer who moved to the New Orleans this year to offer a helping hand with community reconstruction projects in the 8th and 9th Wards, for her exemplary commitment to serving individuals in need.

Also today, Director Hein joined with students from Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School for Science and Technology in the lower 9th Ward, as well as education leaders from the New Orleans area, during a visit to the Louisiana Children's Museum. Following a tour of the students' "I Have a Dream: The Lower 9th" community planning project designed to strengthen math and analytical skills, Director Hein also engaged with education policy experts to discuss the challenges and successes of faith-based and charter schools following the hurricanes of 2005 and the role of the nonprofit sector to provide sound education options for New Orleans families.

President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiative (FBCI) is built from the conviction that the most effective way to address our communities' great needs is to draw upon the unique strengths of every willing community and faith-based partner. He launched the FBCI upon taking office in January 2001, to strengthen America's nonprofit sector and extend its work in partnership with government. For more information on the OFBCI and the President's compassion agenda, visit: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/government/fbc/>.

To find volunteer opportunities in your community through the USA Freedom Corps Volunteer Network, visit: www.volunteer.gov.

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