

The LRHA Policy Corner

- Special Notice -

**LRHA and the La. Primary Care Association will be hosting a
Legislative Reception on April 5, 2006 @ 6:00pm.
This reception will take place in the Livingston Room of the Sheraton Hotel,
102 France Street, Baton Rouge, La.**

LEGISLATIVE AGENDA:

- ❖ In preparation for the upcoming session of the La. State legislature, over seventeen hundred (1700) bills have been pre-filed in the State House and Senate in hopes of consideration.
 - The deadline for pre filed legislation was March 17th and a member may introduce no more than five (5) bills which have not been pre-filed.
 - These bills must be introduced no later than 6:00pm on Tuesday, April 18th.
- Currently, LRHA is putting together its' legislative agenda for the upcoming session and after having reviewed all of the pre-filed materials, has established a list of around fifty (50) pieces of proposed legislation that will be either supported, opposed or tracked by the Association.
- As we move forward with this endeavor, if there are any specific pieces of legislation that you feel LRHA should consider, please forward further information on this measure(s) to Calabro@lrha.org.

STATE & LOCAL ACTION:

- The next session of the La. State Legislature will convene on March 27th and continue until June 19, 2006.

****DHH Preparing For Hurricanes***

The Department of Health and Hospitals is changing the rules for who must go and who is allowed to stay in New Orleans during a hurricane – these changes are meant to take the guesswork out of emergency evacuations.

- West Jefferson Medical Center has been organizing radios to help the staff communicate with each other in the event of another storm - while the new radios may help inside the hospital, communications on the outside are an entirely different story.
- During Hurricane Katrina, satellites and cell phones failed, and the storm took out land lines as well - communication was one crucial part of the struggle to survive.

- The hospital's power, fuel and water systems were located on the ground floor of the hospital, which is about 4 feet above sea level and the elevation was enough to save the equipment that time, but the hospital isn't taking any chances in the future.
- Hospital administrators made the decision to move those essential services to a building 20 feet above sea level.
- Workers are trying to finish the new facility by the start of hurricane season, installing many miles of cables meant to keep their facilities operating in the case of another destructive hurricane.
- Once the project is finished, the hospital will be self-sufficient for seven days.
 - ✓ State Medical Director Jimmy Guidry said hospitals that didn't shut down during Katrina, like West Jefferson, probably won't have to evacuate in the future - those hospitals that flooded or are at risk for flooding, though, must transport their patients to safety.
 - ✓ One factor to help determine which hospitals must evacuate, is whether its essential equipment is in the basement.
 - ✓ Charity Hospital, for example, lost power when the basement flooded because its generator was on that lower level - in case hospitals also need improved emergency plans, the Department of Health and Hospitals is also bringing in consultant who can review the evacuation plans.

ON THE FEDERAL FRONT:

- The U.S. Congress will be back in session for the week of March 27, 2006.
 - The Senate is set to reconvene at 1:00 p.m. on Monday and resumes consideration of S. 2349, the Lobbying Reform bill.
 - The House is set to reconvene at 2:00pm on Tuesday and will be considering new legislative business.

****U.S. Senators Tour Hurricane Damage - Landrieu, Biden Push National Insurance Fund***

U.S. Sen. Mary Landrieu on Thursday, March 23rd, brought an out-of-state colleague for a look at Hurricane Rita damage in Cameron Parish and a visit with the people who are trying to put the parish back together.

- U.S. Sen. Joe Biden, D-Del., flew over the parish with Landrieu and made a stop at the Cameron Parish Courthouse to hear what local officials are dealing with and make a few suggestions as to how they might get better help from the federal government and Congress.
- Landrieu and Biden spoke about the possible need for creation of a national catastrophic insurance fund and potential strategies for making meaningful changes in the way the Federal Emergency Management Agency operates.
- Clifton Hebert, chief of the parish Emergency Operations Center, said the parish is not in a state of recovery, but still in a moderate state of emergency.
 - He told Landrieu and Biden about the parish's ongoing problems with what to do with the debris contractors have been clearing throughout lower Cameron Parish and

discussed that the expense of shipping the debris out of collection sites doesn't make a lot of sense, but land-filling it in the parish is problematic because Cameron Parish has a shallow water table.

- The parish can't dig deeply in the ground to make room for debris, which means the debris sites would take up more surface space and need more dirt to cover the debris.
- The parish also seems to be contending with contradictory FEMA rules, such as one that covers the costs for people to have their homes moved out of the flood zone, but only if the houses are substantially damaged.
 - Both Biden and Landrieu agreed that FEMA's rules, as currently constructed, simply won't help the wide expanse of devastated areas in Louisiana and that the regulations on the books do not work in a catastrophic situation such as this.
- The largest issue was that of how insurers have had a way out of paying on policies, because, in the case of structures swept away or substantially damaged, adjustors can't evaluate what damage was done by water and what was done by wind.
 - In turn, Landrieu suggested the possibility of general catastrophe insurance as a better answer for the kinds of problems Louisiana is dealing with.
 - She said that no legislation is in the works, but she and other members of Congress have begun discussing the creation of insurance that would be a better fit for widespread catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes and out-of-control fires - insurance could be made mandatory, at least in many areas, and costs for property owners would be kept down so the pool of insured owners would be large.
- For the nearer term, Landrieu recently introduced proposed legislation in the U.S. Senate that she calls a "Rita parity" bill.
 - The bill would extend all the benefits Congress had passed for Katrina victims and those who helped them — benefits such as tax breaks — to Rita's victims and those who helped them.

**The mission of the Louisiana Rural Health Association is to serve as a unified voice for the promotion of rural health care through advocacy, education, and leadership. The information above was provided in part by the National Rural Health Association and gathered from various publicly released documents of news related sources.*