

Challenges in Gulf Coast Area Remain, but Spirits are High -- March 2006

By: Congressman Mike Castle

During my time at the Gulf Coast, I saw a great deal of physical storm damage to buildings, trees, and cars, but none of that compared to the overwhelming positive spirit of the people that I witnessed over and over again. After everything that the residents of the Gulf States have gone through, it is clear that their determination is taking them in only a forward direction.

The goal of my trip was to gain a better understanding of the impact that Hurricanes Rita and Katrina have had on the schools in the region. I was joined by Congressmen Charles Boustany, Bobby Jindal and Bobby Scott, all fellow members of the Education and Workforce Committee, who are dedicated to seeing changes progress in education in that area of the country in the aftermath of the hurricanes.

Looking back on my visit, I was most encouraged by the fact that educators in Louisiana realize that they are facing a real chance for reform. It is my opinion, and the opinion of many other education professionals that Louisiana was one of the most poorly run education systems in the country long before Katrina hit the coast. Therefore, the drive is there to not only return to pre-hurricane status, but rather to also raise standards while improving the school systems for all children in the State. I commend this effort along with my colleagues in Congress, and we have pledged our unwavering support to see that this reform happens.

The day after I returned from my trip, I visited a 12th grade High School English class at the Charter School of Wilmington, many of whom helped me with my Katrina food drive back in September. After I shared pictures and stories from my trip, there were questions from the students. One student insightfully asked, "What can we do to help these students?" I think this was a valuable question because it points to the fact that all of us can still be working to make sure that we volunteer in our local area to see that they are getting the supplies they need, write to the students in Louisiana and Mississippi and let them know we are thinking of them, and write to our local and federal representatives to ensure they are doing everything they can to help the efforts down south.

There is still a god bit of work that needs to be done in that area and I am fully committed to making sure that the people of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama receive the assistance they need to continue to improve and work towards a fully functioning education system. I believe this is a national problem, not limited to the states which were affected by the storm, and as I told the students at the Charter School of Wilmington, we should all be thinking of ways to help. We must try to spread that positive spirit which they exhibit so well down there.