

Meeks eyes support for evacuees



Rep unveils plan to pay full rent for 30 Hurricane Katrina families

BY HOWARD KOPLOWITZ

U.S. Rep. Gregory Meeks (D- St. Albans) laid out a detailed plan to support 30 families displaced by Hurricane Katrina during an emergency meeting Friday with other elected officials from southeast Queens, clergy and area residents. The congressman said the plan would help support the families for six months, which includes full rent payments and utilities up to \$1,500 a month for those displaced by the storm. The fund-raising goal for the plan would be \$270,000. He said there would be no administrative costs attached to the effort.

"Every dime, every dime would go to these 30 families," Meeks said. He said a special fund, called NOAH's Families, or New Yorkers Organized to Assist Hurricane Families, was created to help storm victims. Louis Rainey, a longtime resident of Louisiana who now lives in Dallas, works with Katrina victims who are in Dallas shelters or hotels to help them transition into a more stable life in the area. Meeks said Rainey, who is the plan's contact, is critical to the effort and will make sure the money raised through NOAH's Families go to the right people. "It's important to have Mr. Rainey on the ground because you have people trying to take advantage of the situation," Meeks said, noting that there are "slumlords offering (housing) prices at ridiculous rates thinking someone at FEMA will pay for it."

The congressman said some victims were taken to the New York metropolitan area by the Red Cross and he also wanted to help them out. "I think we need some coordination and to find the special needs of the individuals that are here," he said.

Other ways to help out the victims were addressed at the meeting. Fred Lewis, a Rockaway resident and an assistant to Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields, said he wanted to hold a concert to benefit hurricane victims. While Lewis said gospel singers CeCe Winans and Yolanda Adams "are on board" for a potential event called "Gospel Aid," he is searching for a facility that will hold at least 200 people to put on a show. "All we need is a site and we'll do everything else," Lewis said.

State Assemblywoman Barbara Clark (D-Queens Village) said she spoke to the executive of Kenner, La., a city 11 mile from New Orleans with a population (71,000, who told her of one useful item that is needed which may not have been on the radar of those looking to help victims. "What they need now desperately is cleaning materials," Clark said, noting that she has contacted Rosemary O'Keefe the assistant secretary of state disaster services for the New York Office of State Emergency Management. The assemblywoman said O'Keefe is going to start looking into getting manufacturers to send such supplies.

Meeks said the outpouring of support from the community was encouraging. "It is difficult to help everyone and yet everyone wanted to make a significant impact to someone," he said.

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