

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1802

May 1, 2015

The Honorable Marcy Kaptur
D-Ohio, 9th District
2186 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Rep. Kaptur:

Last night you spoke on the floor in opposition to an amendment to block funding for implementation of new Federal Flood Risk Management Standards. In that statement, you made claims about the causes of the severe flooding that devastated the 9th Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana which I proudly represent. I am writing today to clarify some of the misconceptions you may have about the effects of Hurricane Katrina and to update you on our rebuilding efforts as we approach the 10th anniversary of one of the worst disasters in United States history.

In your statement last night, you inferred that the flooding in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina was caused by nature. However, as I have stated – along with numerous scientists and engineers, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – the terrible flooding was caused by the failures of the flood protection and waterway systems surrounding the city. In fact, today a federal judge ruled that the Army Corps of Engineers' construction and failure to maintain the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet navigation channel intensified the impacts of the storm surge that flooded St. Bernard Parish and the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans. This was a man-made disaster, not a natural one. Had our levees performed as they were originally designed and our infrastructure properly build and maintained, the devastation to our city and its residents would never have occurred.

You also mentioned that we should not have rebuilt the 9th Ward but instead repurpose it to be agricultural land. This type of insensitivity toward the residents of my district is unacceptable. Insinuating that this predominantly African-American and predominantly working-class neighborhood should cease to exist is misguided. We have grown up in the same neighborhoods and houses in which our parents and their parents were raised. The 9th Ward of New Orleans is a historic, integral part of our city and has been for generations. It is this area of our city that has suffered the most, and it is this area of the city that we are focused on rebuilding 10 years after the levees failed.

While we have come a long way in rebuilding New Orleans over the last decade, we still have a lot left to do. According to data reported by the Times-Picayune, 78 percent of New Orleans' total pre-Katrina population has returned. More than half of the city's 72 neighborhoods have recovered 90 percent of their residents. However, the other 36 neighborhoods, including the 9th Ward are still struggling to recover. Post-Katrina housing remains unaffordable with 36 percent of renters in the city paying more than 50 percent of their pre-tax income on rent and utilities. Vacant lots and blighted properties still stand in stark contrast to the new and rebuilt

homes throughout those neighborhoods. These statistics clearly illustrate that eliminating one of the few areas where affordable housing is available to working class citizens is simply not an option.

New Orleans is the heart of a working coastline that fuels our country's economy. From our ports to our energy production, we regularly punch above our weight in economic impact while our culture and our people draw visitors from all over the world. As we approach the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, we need to take pride in our efforts to rebuild the city while we learn from the engineering mistakes that led to the flooding and destruction. We continue to remember our loss and our suffering while we rebuild our levees and our homes.

I hope going forward we can work together to restore those neighborhoods that felt the greatest impact of those flood waters. I welcome the chance to talk with you more about the reasons behind the levee failures, and I look forward to working with you to protect our coast from future disasters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cedric L. Richmond', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Cedric L. Richmond
Member of Congress