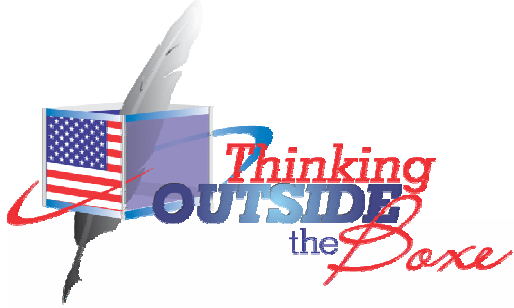


## The Blame Game

The devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina on the Gulf Coast is tragic. More tragic, however, is the incompetence of Louisiana officials in preparations for the hurricane and the blame game that has ensued following the flooding of New Orleans and the rescue efforts.

Living along the coast of South Carolina (Myrtle Beach and Charleston), we have survived numerous hurricanes of varying strength over the years. From our experiences, local and state officials are the first line of defense when planning for a hurricane, executing comprehensive emergency plans, and coordinating the recovery and cleanup. For example, just before Hurricane Ophelia threatened our area earlier this week, Myrtle Beach's very limited public transportation was available to take residents from numerous pick-up points to local emergency shelters. For those who were unable to make it to the pick-up points due to lack of transportation, public service numbers were available to call in order to make arrangements to be picked up and taken to a shelter. Our emergency command center was activated to oversee preparations in advance. Following Hurricane Hugo in 1989, FEMA was involved in a smooth and well-organized recovery effort that had been closely coordinated between state and local officials. The National Guard (under state control) was quickly deployed to devastated areas to oversee the recovery and to maintain law and order. There was no mention at any time that the President of the United States should be responsible for managing the recovery in the aftermath of an act of nature.

From this, it should be clear that the state and local officials in Louisiana failed the people of New Orleans. The mandatory evacuation from New Orleans was issued by Mayor Nagin a day before Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast. This should have been more than enough time to evacuate the nearly 100,000 residents of the city that did not have personal transportation by using the over 550 municipal buses and hundreds of school buses at their disposal. Furthermore, there was ample time for Governor Blanco to activate the state's National Guard to assist in the evacuation of the New Orleans. Doing so and following the city's comprehensive emergency plan may have avoided the debacle that followed. In this case, the federal government had to save the day, because the elected officials in Louisiana and in New Orleans were inept from the outset.



The response of governors in response to the number of hurricanes that have hit Florida and the Carolinas in the last year alone and Rudy Giuliani's leadership following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 provide excellent examples of how efficiently and effectively the planning and recovery processes should work to the benefit of those affected. There can be little doubt that mistakes were made by many parties in this instance, which only compounded the suffering of those left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The blame game that has ensued has served only to deflect attention from the Louisiana officials' own inadequacies and leadership failures. (Pointing the finger at someone else is natural for people to do when something happens over which they have no control.) Hopefully, local, state, and federal officials throughout the country will learn valuable lessons from the experiences of New Orleans so that adequate action may be taken to avoid inefficiencies in the aftermath of such a tragedy in the future.