

Louisiana Death Toll Passes 400

Slow recovery of bodies upsets governor

(AP) - Hurricane Katrina's death toll in Louisiana climbed to 423 Tuesday, up from 279 a day before, the state Health Department said.

The jump came as recovery workers turned more and more of their attention to gathering up and counting the corpses in a city all but emptied out of the living.

How high the death toll might go is unclear.

Mayor Ray Nagin said earlier this month that New Orleans could have 10,000 dead. But a street-by-street sweep of the city last week yielded far fewer bodies than feared.

Up until the past few days, authorities were slow to release numbers, saying they were concentrating on rescuing the living first.

As of Monday at least 236 people were reported dead elsewhere along the Gulf Coast, most of them in Mississippi.



Neighborhoods are flooded with oil and water two weeks after Hurricane Katrina went through New Orleans. (AP photo)

The updated Louisiana numbers were released as the Gov. Kathleen Blanco lashed out at the federal government, accusing it of moving too slowly in recovering the bodies. The dead "deserve more respect than they have received," she said.

However, Federal Emergency Management Agency spokesman David Passey said the state asked to take over body recovery last week. Passey said he did not understand the governor's remarks.

"The collection of bodies is not normally a FEMA responsi-

bility," he said.

Blanco said FEMA has slowed down the process by failing to sign a contract with the company hired to handle the removal of the bodies, Houston-based Kenyon International Emergency Services.

"No one, even those at the highest level, seems to be able to break through the bureaucracy to get this important mission done," Blanco said. "The failure to execute a contract for the recovery of our citizens has hurt the speed of recovery efforts. I am angry and outraged."

New Seasons Donates to Hurricane Relief

In an effort to help those affected by Hurricane Katrina, New Seasons Market is donating \$10,000 to Portland-based relief agency Mercy Corps.

In addition, customers are able

to help Mercy Corps' relief effort by making a donation at any New Seasons Market location through Oct. 7.

The store will match customer and staff contributions up to

\$10,000.

Cashiers will process the donations and no store purchase is required. Register receipts will show the donation and can be used as tax receipts.

Benefit Cuts Move Ahead

(AP) - Republicans are going ahead with long-standing plans to trim Medicaid, food stamps and other benefits, even though party moderates are balking at cutting programs that aid the poor while hundreds of thousands are homeless from Hurricane Katrina.

The amount of savings - no more than \$35 billion spread

over five years - is modest at best, but it is the first time in eight years that Congress has shown any seriousness about reining in the automatic growth of such benefit programs.

Republican leaders have decided to delay the budget-cutting effort for at least a few weeks following widespread complaints that the government reacted too

slowly in coming to the aid of Katrina's victims.

Cuts are planned for the Medicaid program for the poor and disabled, student loan subsidies for banks, farm subsidies and food stamps, among others.

Democratic leaders say it is folly to cut the very programs that help hurricane and flood victims.

St. John's Bridge Celebrates Renovations

Instead of cars, the historic St. John's Bridge will be filled with people gracing its pavement on Sunday, Sept. 18.

The Oregon Department of Transportation and the community of St. Johns will be commemorating the completion of a 2 1/2 year, \$42 million project to rehabilitate the bridge, which included the replacement of the concrete bridge deck

and sidewalks, repainting, upgraded lighting and ramp improvement.

A celebration will begin with a street fair in downtown St. Johns from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., with a ribbon cutting at the Our Daily Bread parking lot and a bridge stroll from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. The bridge will be closed to vehicle traffic from 1 to 4 p.m.

The bridge, built in 1931, replaced the last ferry linking the communities of Linnton and St. Johns. Designed by internationally renowned engineer David B. Steinman, the St. Johns Bridge is the only major highway suspension bridge in the Willamette Valley and one of only three major highway suspension bridges in Oregon.



Soldiers of the Louisiana National Guard arrive home Friday from a tour of duty in Iraq. (AP photo)

Deployment Hurt Hurricane Response

(AP) - The deployment of thousands of National Guard troops from Mississippi and Louisiana in Iraq when Hurricane Katrina struck hindered those states' initial storm response, military and civilian officials said.

Lt. Gen. Steven Blum, chief of the National Guard Bureau, said that "arguably" a day or so of response time was lost due to the absence of the Mississippi National Guard's

155th Infantry Brigade and Louisiana's 256th Infantry Brigade, each with thousands of troops in Iraq.

Blum said that to replace those units' command and control equipment, he dispatched personnel from Guard division headquarters from Kansas and Minnesota shortly after the storm struck.

Rep. Gene Taylor, D-Miss., whose waterfront home here was

washed away in the storm, told reporters that the absence of the deployed Mississippi Guard units made it harder for local officials to coordinate their initial response.

Blum said that overall, the Iraq mission for Guard units across the nation is not limiting the military's ability to expand and continue the rescue and recovery operations in storm-battered states.

Black Caucus Meeting Rejected

Supreme Court Chief Justice Nominee John Roberts has denied an invitation to meet the Congressional Black Caucus.

Members of the caucus had hoped that by speaking with Roberts, they could see where he stands on important issues of the African American community, including affirmative action.



John Roberts

to limit the effectiveness of the Voting Rights Act when the act was last renewed," said U.S. Rep. Melvin L. Watt, chairman of the CBC.

Watt noted that while the caucus wants to assess Roberts' nomination fairly, "we will certainly have to consider his refusal to meet with representatives of our important constituency a substantial mark against him in our evaluation."

from him firsthand about the stance he has taken on affirmative action and about his efforts

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