



MEDIA RELEASE

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WANTED: MAYOR WITH SOLID ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES

NEW ORLEANS – All candidates for the office of mayor of New Orleans should have a comprehensive environmental strategy that details how to rebuild safer and greener after Hurricane Katrina and to protect against damages that can occur from hurricanes in the future, says the Sierra Club.

“Even in normal times, mayoral candidates should have sound, environmental policies, but in special times like the one in which we are now living, solid environmental strategies are even more important,” explains Casey Roberts, chair of the Sierra Club’s New Orleans Group which represents 1,800 voters in the city. “Voters are entitled to know how candidates plan to protect the environment in which they live.”

Roberts says one issue that candidates need to address is how they will structure the Mayor’s Office of Environmental Affairs. “This office is essential to ensuring that New Orleans rebuilds sustainably, with an emphasis on healthy neighborhoods, flood safety, energy efficiency, and economic development. Given the unique environmental challenges we face in rebuilding, this office needs to have a much higher profile within the administration,” she says.

Roberts says the next mayor will face many environmental issues in the rebuilding of New Orleans, but should be especially mindful of eight issues.

1. Mississippi River Gulf Outlet – “The mayor must demand that the MRGO be closed permanently and immediately,” says Roberts. “The public is unanimous in its conclusion that this little-used waterway caused tremendous flooding and irreparable loss of life and property. The mayor should support the movement of businesses from the MRGO to new locations on the Mississippi River.”
2. Oversight of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – “In view of the corps’ poor performance in protecting the city and the environment, I think the mayor needs to keep close tabs on this agency as it rebuilds our levees,” says Roberts.
3. Affordable, Sustainable Housing – The mayor must create mandates and incentives within the neighborhood planning process and any buy-out programs to ensure that redeveloped homes and businesses be affordable, durable and utilize energy efficient building materials and technology.
4. Debris management – “The next mayor must have a safe and effective plan for disposing of the enormous amount of debris left behind by a hurricane,” says Roberts. “Instead of burning waste, re-opening old poorly-lined landfills, or hastily creating new disposal areas, such as in New Orleans East, the mayor must have a disposal plan that is uniformly applied and consistent with protecting our viable communities and natural resources.”
5. Commitment to Restoring Wetlands – “Our best defense against hurricanes is a combination of wetland preservation and enhanced levees,” says Roberts. “The mayor must be the leader in advocating for the restoration of our coast and marshes – the front lines protecting the city.”

6. Restore the New Orleans Energy Efficient Program – “Now more than ever, New Orleans citizens need to have resources to build in an energy efficient manner, particularly in the poorer neighborhoods,” says Roberts. “Studier homes and lower utility bills are a win-win situation for us all.”
7. Recycling – “The time to resume recycling in New Orleans is now. The mayor must act quickly to reinstate this valuable program,” says Roberts.
8. Global Warming – According to the U.N. International Panel on Climate Change, New Orleans is North America’s most vulnerable city. As sea levels rise and the intensity and frequency of Category 4 and category 5 hurricanes increases due to warmer oceans, our very existence as a city, region, and culture is threatened. The mayor must be among the nation’s leaders in promoting technologies and policies that can reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

“All of these issues and numerous others must be handled by a strong, well-staffed Office of Environmental Affairs,” says Roberts. “It is our strongest hope that the next mayor makes a commitment to this office.”

The New Orleans group of the Sierra Club has sent a questionnaire to many of the mayoral candidates about their environmental positions.

Roberts also offers the help of the Sierra Club. “We have many ties to scientists, lawyers, policy specialists, business persons and community leaders. We will be honored to work with the mayor to rebuild the city and to achieve our environmental goals.”

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The Sierra Club's 700,000 members work together to protect communities and the planet. The Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Delta (Louisiana) chapter of the Sierra Club has more than 3,500

members and has been active in local conservation projects for more than 30 years. For more information, contact the organization's website: www.louisiana.sierraclub.org.