

IN THE NEWS

[[HTTP://WWW.LSUHOSPITALS.ORG/MEDIA-RELATIONS/IN-THE-NEWS.HTM](http://www.lsuhs.org/media-relations/in-the-news.htm)]

[THURSDAY, AUGUST 28, 2008]

Hurricane Hunters find Gustav packing more punch
The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08 2

Officials may evacuate New Orleans as Gustav nears
The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08 4

Gustav nears Jamaica as New Orleans keeps watch
The Advocate | 08.28.08 6

State, feds still at odds on funds
The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08 12

LSU board says Jindal interfering
The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08 14

Officer elections splinter LSU board
The Advocate | 08.28.08 16

Major companies pulling out of Medicaid Reform
Florida Health News | 08.27.08 18

Katrina victims memorial taking shape
The Advocate | 08.28.08 19

Jindal declares emergency, will activate Guard
New Orleans CityBusiness | 08.27.08 21

Market forces
Baton Rouge Business Report | 08.25.08 22

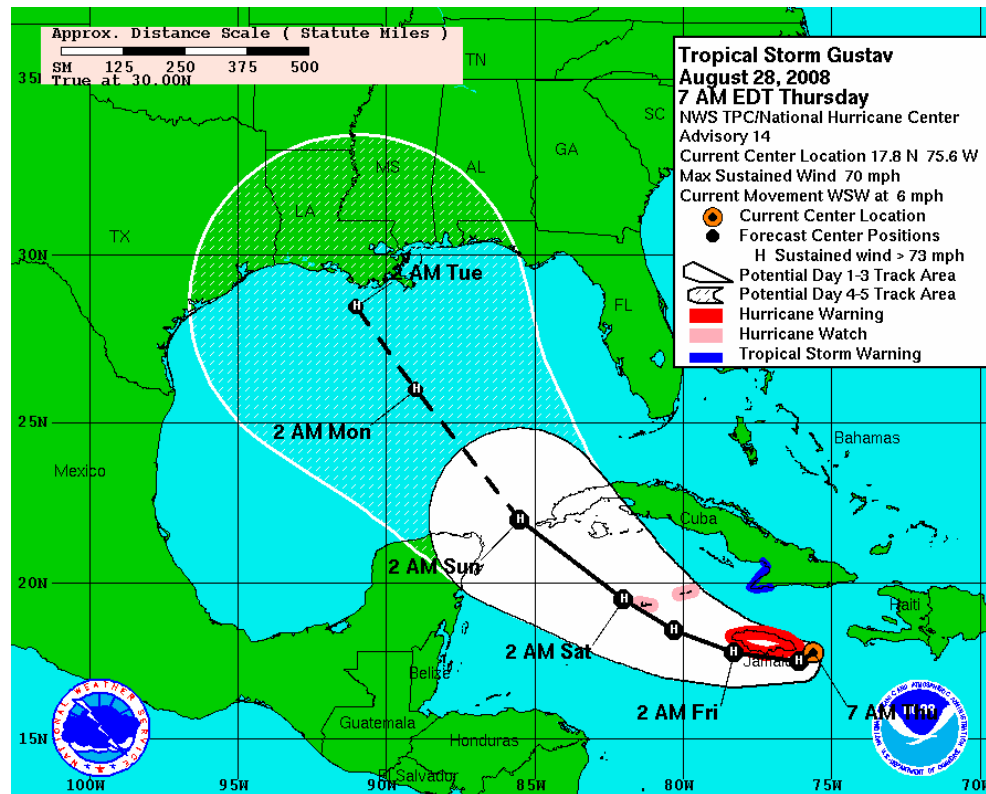
Urgent Care Center for veterans to open in N.O.
New Orleans CityBusiness | 08.26.08 25

Researchers Report Advances in Cell Conversion Technique
The New York Times | 08.28.08 26

Hurricane Hunters find Gustav packing more punch

The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08

by National Hurricane Center



A U.S. Air Force reconnaissance plane returned from a survey of Tropical Storm Gustav and finds the storm has gained more strength.

A tropical storm warning remains in effect for the Cuban province of Granma.

The government of Jamaica has issued a hurricane warning, while a hurricane watch remains in effect for all of the Cayman Islands.

At 6:30 a.m. the center of Tropical Storm Gustav was about 80 miles east of Kingston, Jamaica and about 170 miles south of Guantanamo, Cuba.

Gustav has been moving little during the past couple of hours but is expected to resume a motion toward the west-southwest near 6 mph. A turn toward the west is expected later today and to the west-northwest on Friday. The center of Gustav is expected to pass very close to Jamaica later today.

Maximum sustained winds have increased to near 70 mph with higher gusts. Gustav is expected to become a hurricane later today.

Tropical storm force winds extend outward up to 50 miles from the center. The latest central pressure reported by an air force reserve Reconnaissance plane was 988 mb.

Gustav is expected to produce total rainfall accumulations of 2 to 4 inches over southern Cuba and 6 to 12 inches over Haiti, Jamaica and the Cayman Islands with isolated maximum amounts of up to 25 inches possible. These rains will likely produce life-threatening flash floods and mud slides.

Coastal storm surge flooding of 1 to 2 feet above normal tide levels can be expected in areas of onshore winds in the tropical storm warning area.

http://www.nola.com/hurricane/index.ssf/2008/08/recon_plane_finds_gustav_packi.html

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Officials may evacuate New Orleans as Gustav nears

The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08

By STACEY PLAISANCE

The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — National Guard troops stand ready, batteries and water bottles are selling briskly, and one small-town mayor has spent a sleepless night worrying. The New Orleans area is skittishly watching as a storm marches across the Caribbean on the eve of Hurricane Katrina's third anniversary.

With forecasters warning that a strengthening Gustav could slam into the Gulf Coast as a major hurricane, a New Orleans still recovering from Hurricane Katrina's devastating hit drew up evacuation plans.

"I'm panicking," said Evelyn Fuselier of Chalmette, whose home was submerged in 14 feet of floodwater when Katrina hit. Fuselier said she's been back home only a year and nervously watched as Gustav swirled toward the Gulf of Mexico. "I keep thinking, 'Did the Corps fix the levees?,' 'Is my house going to flood again?' ... 'Am I going to have to go through all this again?'"

Taking no chances, city officials began preliminary planning to evacuate and lock down the city in hopes of avoiding the catastrophe that followed Katrina in 2005.

New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin left the Democratic National Convention in Denver to return home for the preparations. Gov. Bobby Jindal declared a state of emergency to lay the groundwork for federal assistance, and put 3,000 National Guard troops on standby.

A day after stalling off Haiti's coast, Gustav was centered about 80 miles east of Kingston, Jamaica, and moving slowly toward the west-southwest near 6 mph at 8 a.m. EDT Thursday. The storm was expected to pass very close to Jamaica later in the day, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

Gaining strength over warm Caribbean waters, Gustav was expected to again become a hurricane later Thursday, according to the National Hurricane Center. It said maximum sustained winds rose from about 50 mph to near 70 mph overnight.

Meanwhile, a new tropical depression formed farther east in the Atlantic with winds near 35 mph.

Forecasters said Wednesday that Gustav could strengthen to a Category 3 hurricane with winds of 111 mph or higher in coming days before hitting somewhere between the Florida Panhandle and Texas.

If a Category 3 or stronger hurricane comes within 60 hours of the city, New Orleans plans to institute a mandatory evacuation order. Unlike Katrina, there will be no massive shelter at the Superdome, a plan designed to encourage residents to leave. Instead, the state has arranged for buses and trains to take people to safety.

It was unclear what would happen to stragglers. Jerry Sneed, the city's emergency preparedness director, said officials are ready to move about 30,000 people. Nearly 8,000 people had signed up for transportation help by late Wednesday.

Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans on Aug. 29, 2005, its storm surge blasting through the levees that protect the city. Eighty percent of the city was flooded. After the destruction, many people never returned, and the city's population, around 310,000 people, is roughly two-thirds what it was before the storm, though estimates vary wildly.

The Army Corps of Engineers has since spent billions of dollars to improve the levee system, but because of two quiet hurricane seasons, the flood walls have never been tested. Floodgates have been installed on drainage canals to stop any storm surge from entering the city, and levees have been raised and strengthened with concrete in many places.

Robert Turner Jr., the regional levee director, said the levee system can handle a storm with the likelihood of occurring every 30 years, what the corps calls a 30-year storm. By comparison, Katrina was a 396-year storm.

Gustav formed Monday and roared ashore Tuesday as a Category 1 hurricane near the southern Haitian city of Jacmel with top winds near 90 mph, toppling palm trees and flooding the city's Victorian buildings.

The storm triggered flooding and landslides that killed 23 people in the Caribbean. It weakened into a tropical storm and appeared headed for Jamaica, though it has begun to grow stronger again by drawing energy from warm, open water.

Scientists cautioned that the storm's track and intensity were difficult to predict days in advance.

But in southern Louisiana, there was little else to do except prepare as if it were Katrina.

In Grand Isle, tractor loads of dirt and mud were being hauled in to fill portions of the levee system damaged by Katrina, said Grand Isle Mayor David Camardelle. The coastal community south of New Orleans historically is one of the first to evacuate when tropical weather threatens.

"I couldn't sleep last night," Camardelle said. "We just came back from so much." Emergency preparations also were under way along Mississippi's coast. The eye of Hurricane Katrina pushed ashore near the small towns of Waveland and Bay St. Louis, Miss., and along the 70-mile coastline, roughly 65,000 homes were destroyed and thousands of businesses and casino barges were wiped out.

Meanwhile, Alabama Gov. Bob Riley said state agencies were keeping a close watch on Gustav as he urged his state's Gulf coast residents to review personal emergency plans and enter storm-preparation mode.

<http://www.nola.com/newsflash/index.ssf?/base/news-41/1219926543166110.xml&storylist=louisiana>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Gustav nears Jamaica as New Orleans keeps watch

The Advocate | 08.28.08

By JONATHAN M. KATZ

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) -- Tropical Storm Gustav was heading toward Jamaica early Thursday while many miles away, residents in the New Orleans area watched it with a nervous eye.

Meanwhile, a new tropical depression formed farther east in the Atlantic.

A day after stalling off Haiti's coast, Gustav was centered about 80 miles (130 kilometers) east of Kingston, Jamaica, and moving toward the west-southwest near 8 mph (13 kph) at 5 a.m. EDT.

The storm was expected to pass very close to Jamaica later in the day, according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami. Its maximum sustained winds were near 50 mph (85 kph). The tropical storm was forecast to regain strength and the hurricane center said it could become a hurricane again by Friday.

The new tropical depression had maximum sustained winds near 35 mph (55 kph). The depression was centered about 355 miles (575 kilometers) east-northeast of the northern Leeward Islands and moving toward the west-northwest near 5 mph (8 kph).

The depression had the potential to become a tropical storm later Thursday or on Friday, the hurricane center said.

Gustav poured more misery Wednesday onto Haiti after landslides and flooding killed 23 people. Elsewhere, oil workers began leaving their rigs and New Orleans drew up evacuation plans as forecasters warned the storm could plow into the U.S. Gulf coast as a major hurricane.

Gustav killed 15 people on Haiti's deforested southern peninsula, where it dumped 12 inches (30 centimeters) or more of rain. A landslide buried eight people, including a mother and six of her children, in the neighboring Dominican Republic.

Cuba replaced its hurricane warning for Granma province with a tropical storm warning Thursday. All other hurricane watches and warnings were discontinued.

A tropical storm warning and hurricane watch were in effect for Jamaica and a hurricane watch was in effect for the Cayman Islands.

Gustav's expected track pointed directly at the Cayman Islands, an offshore banking center where residents boarded up homes and stocked up on emergency supplies.

By Labor Day, Gustav could make landfall anywhere from south Texas to the Florida panhandle, and hurricane experts said everyone in between should be concerned.

"We know it's going to head into the Gulf. After that, we're not sure," said meteorologist Rebecca Waddington at the National Hurricane Center. "For that reason, everyone in the Gulf needs to be monitoring the storm."

New Orleans began planning a possible mandatory evacuation, hoping to prevent the chaos it saw after Hurricane Katrina struck three years ago Friday. Mayor Ray Nagin left the Democratic National Convention in Denver to help the city prepare.

Oil prices spiked more than US\$2 to close above US\$118 a barrel, rising for a third day on fears that Gustav - like Katrina and Rita - could damage the Gulf Coast energy infrastructure, home to 15 percent of the nation's natural gas output, a quarter of its oil production and nearly half its refining capacity.

Royal Dutch Shell PLC said it was evacuating 300 people from rigs Wednesday, and other producers were doing the same. Transocean Inc., the world's largest offshore drilling contractor, said all 11 of its Gulf rigs were pulling up and securing drill pipe and other underwater equipment as a precaution.

Any damage to the oil infrastructure could send U.S. pump prices spiking, possibly before the busy Labor Day weekend.

"A bad storm churning in the Gulf could be a nightmare scenario," said Phil Flynn, an analyst at Alaron Trading Corp. in Chicago. "We might see oil prices spike US\$5 to US\$8 if it really rips into platforms."

Gustav is particularly worrisome because there are few surrounding wind currents capable of shearing off the top of the storm and diminishing its power, the hurricane center said. "Combined with the deep warm waters, rapid intensification could occur in a couple of days."

Nearly 30,000 people were evacuated from low-lying areas in eastern Cuba, and state television showed muddy, waist-high water damaging homes. The Cayman Islands ordered citizens to secure loose materials in their yards to prevent them from becoming missiles in high winds, and told them to stock up on food, medicine and fuel for generators.

In the Dominican Republic, a mother's screams and the roar of falling earth jolted a Santo Domingo shantytown from its sleep Tuesday. Marcelina Feliz and six of her seven children - ranging in age from 11 months to 15 years - were killed when a landslide crushed their tin-roofed house.

Feliz, 32, was found hugging the body of her smallest child, rescue officials said. A neighbor was also killed.

"I don't know how I can live now, because none of my family is left," said Marino Borges, Feliz's husband and father of several of her children.

Gov. Bobby Jindal declared a state of emergency Wednesday in anticipation that Gustav, now a tropical storm, might slam into the Louisiana coast as a Category 2 hurricane.

More than three days out, it's difficult to forecast where the system may go, according to a forecast released by the National Hurricane Center; however, preliminary tracks for the storm show it has the potential to impact Louisiana sometime Monday evening.

At 10 p.m. Wednesday, the hurricane center said Gustav was near 18.8 degrees North and 75.4 degrees West, moving west-southwest at 8 mph. Maximum sustained winds were at 45 mph. It's estimated that Gustav might strengthen to a Category 2 hurricane.

Jindal, at Wednesday's news conference, said 3,000 Louisiana National Guard members have been activated and will begin deployment today to help with various missions, including security at shelters across the state.

In addition, the governor said, state contracts with bus providers have been activated for as many as 700 buses to evacuate 35,000 people, as have the contracts for railroad and airplane transportation, and contracts for trucks to transport pets.

The state has also asked the federal government to provide up to 300 ambulances in case patients need help evacuating to shelters, he said.

Jindal said there are 10,000 spaces in the state shelters for those with special needs, with a possibility of more spaces if needed. Those special-needs shelters have been ordered to start opening today.

In addition, food and water have been placed in key areas so they'll be readily available after the storm passes, he said.

If the storm continues on a path to Louisiana, general-population shelters in the state will likely open Friday followed by a possible contraflow order on Saturday.

Contraflow directs traffic in southeast Louisiana to the north and west and makes certain parts of the highway system available only for one-way travel to help get more people out of the urban areas in and around New Orleans.

Contraflow is enacted 30 hours before tropical force winds hit the coast, said Brendon Rush, a spokesman for state Department of Transportation and Development.

The contraflow system begins in New Orleans and ends to the north in locations in Mississippi or to the west at Sorrento, a community in Ascension Parish.

Rush cautioned that people should choose their routes carefully based on where they want to end up because once a route is chosen, drivers are locked into that route.

Contraflow maps are available online at <http://www.dotd.state.la.us/maps/HurricaneGuideSE.pdf>.

Unlike during hurricanes Katrina and Rita, East Baton Rouge Parish will not be a stopping place for most people if south Louisiana evacuations are called for Gustav, officials said Wednesday.

Other than a special-needs and medical shelter to be housed at LSU, there will be no general shelters open in the parish unless needed for parish residents because of power outages, said Walter Monsour, the mayor's chief administrative officer.

During a hurricane briefing Wednesday morning, Monsour said that if an evacuation is called for as Gustav enters the Gulf of Mexico, evacuees will be directed or bused north.

"The (Baton Rouge) River Center will not be used as a shelter," he said.

In addition, hotels and motels in the area aren't available at this time, said Paul Arrigo, president and CEO of the Baton Rouge Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

"We've been getting phone calls," Arrigo said. The experience during and after Hurricane Katrina three years ago resulted in some changes in the way hotels in the Baton Rouge area operate during this kind of situation, he said.

During Hurricane Katrina, hotel rooms that had been booked for three days were then extended longer as the damage in southeast Louisiana meant many people didn't have a home to return to, he said. Then, as contract workers from across the state and country came to Baton Rouge to help in the recovery, there was nowhere for these workers to stay, he said.

Now, most hotels in the Baton Rouge area have blocked out rooms for contractors and are pretty much booked from Saturday through most of next week, Arrigo said.

"It is not easy for an individual in New Orleans or Gulf Coast to get a room (right now)," he said. "They're all blocked off."

Mayor-President Kip Holden emphasized the need for East Baton Rouge residents to start preparing now for the storm so they can stay off the roads this weekend if evacuations of south Louisiana parishes are enacted.

"Government cannot do this job alone," he said during the briefing.

Monsour, meanwhile, noted that this is a holiday weekend and about 90,000 people will be going to Tiger Stadium on Saturday for the LSU-Appalachian State game at 4 p.m. in the first game of the season.

In other storm preparations:

* The national American Red Cross is sending 30 emergency response vehicles to the Gulf Coast, and the Louisiana Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross is organizing local volunteers and supplies, said Kendall Hebert, spokeswoman for the local Red Cross.

* Baton Rouge Police Chief Jeff LeDuff said 20 new cadets who were to be sworn in at a graduation ceremony Tuesday will now be sworn in earlier, on Friday. "They'll be out there and ready to go," LeDuff said.

* Lafayette city-parish officials are making sure all main drainage ditches are clear of debris. Assuming the hurricane doesn't hit southwest Louisiana, the biggest impact could be traffic from evacuations elsewhere. "We may not feel direct effects, but we could feel traffic effects and effects at the grocery store," Lafayette City-Parish Chief Administrative Officer Dee Stanley said.

At the Baton Rouge briefing, Jay Grymes, meteorologist for WAFB-TV and former state climatologist, said much uncertainty remains on when and where Gustav will make landfall.

The storm is forecast to start moving a lot faster once it leaves the shores of Cuba, he said. Instead of the expected three days to cross the Gulf of Mexico, Gustav may make the trip in about two days.

"Everything, from my perspective, suggests it's going to be a long weekend," Grymes said.

Advocate staff writer Richard Burgess contributed to this report.

2:00 p.m.

AMY WOLD

Advocate staff writer

Mayor-President Kip Holden today emphasized the need for East Baton Rouge Parish residents to start preparing early for the possible effects of Tropical Storm Gustav.

This storm, which fell to tropical storm status this morning, is expected to gain in strength during the next couple of days and possibly reach Category 3 hurricane status or stronger, he said.

Holden urged residents to get prepared early enough so that if evacuations of other south Louisiana parishes are called for this weekend, local residents can free up the roads by staying home.

"Government cannot do this job alone," he said.

Holden also outlined how the city-parish plans to once again house south Louisiana parish governments in case of evacuation and how those preparations are already being made.

Walter Monsour, chief administrative officer for Holden, said although there is still uncertainty of where and when the storm will make landfall, it's serious enough to start making plans.

"There's a current forecast of it entering the Gulf as a Category 3. I will remind you this is more significant (in category size) than Katrina three years ago," he said.

Monsour added to the mayor's request for local residents to get ready early by reminding people that this is a holiday weekend and that about 90,000 people will be going to Tiger Stadium Saturday for the LSU-Appalachian State game.

Today's city-parish news conference on Gustav followed one Tuesday by Gov. Bobby Jindal and state and local officials.

10:23 a.m.

Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) -- Hurricane Gustav triggered flooding and landslides that killed at least 11 people before weakening to a tropical storm, but forecasters said Wednesday it's still a major threat to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

Forecasts suggested it could head toward the U.S. Gulf Coast as a dangerous Category 3 hurricane next week. The tentative forecast track pointed toward Louisiana, but forecasters said it might hit anywhere from south Texas to the Florida panhandle if it continues to develop.

That could mean higher gasoline prices for drivers in many countries. Global oil prices rose by US\$1.40 early Wednesday to above US\$117 a barrel on concerns the storm could disrupt output in the Gulf of Mexico, home to a quarter of U.S. crude production.

Royal Dutch Shell PLC said it could begin evacuating workers as soon as Wednesday.

Gustav's maximum sustained winds were near 60 mph (95 kph) Wednesday morning, with higher gusts. The storm was centered about 90 miles (150 kilometers) west of Port-au-Prince and was moving toward the northwest at 5 mph (7 kph). It was expected to continue moving toward the west-northwest.

A hurricane warning was in effect for parts of Cuba. In the U.S. military base at Guantanamo Bay, troops were enjoying a breezy day after Gustav slowed and was downgraded into a tropical storm.

"It's not raining. There are light breezes. Basically were all in standby," base spokesman Bruce Lloyd said by phone Wednesday morning. "But my instinct is it will be a really wet night."

Authorities said eight people died Wednesday in the Dominican Republic in a landslide triggered by Gustav.

"They were all members of a family who had taken shelter since Tropical Storm Fay and left to go home because they thought the danger had passed," said civil defense agency director Luis Luna Paulino. The dead included a 2-year-old and a 7-month-old.

Gustav also dumped torrential rains on southern Haiti, which is prone to devastating floods because its mountainous terrain has been stripped of trees for farming and charcoal.

At least three people have been confirmed dead in Haiti, including a young girl swept off a bridge by flood waters and a man killed in a landslide, said civil protection director Marie Alta Jean-Baptiste. Details of the third death were not immediately available.

Authorities said thousands were evacuated or fled their homes in the Dominican Republic and hundreds did so in Haiti.

Flooding also was reported near the southern Haitian city of Jacmel, where Gustav roared ashore Tuesday afternoon with top sustained winds near 90 mph (145 kph). Rising waters surrounded palm trees that had been toppled by the storm and reached the city's trademark Victorian-style wooden buildings.

Flooding was also reported in coastal Les Cayes, where demonstrators ignored government warnings to seek shelter and threw rocks on Tuesday to protest the high cost of living in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country. Witnesses said U.N. peacekeepers used tear gas to disperse the crowd.

Haiti has been hit hard by the global spike in food prices, sparking deadly riots in April. It was not yet possible to ascertain the extent of damage from the hurricane to the nation's crops on because of the country's poor infrastructure and communications.

Forecasters said Gustav could become a Category 2 hurricane with winds topping 96 mph (154 kph) Thursday as it moves between Cuba and Jamaica. The long-term forecast projected winds of 120 mph (190 kph) by the weekend.

Thunderstorms associated with Gustav were already bringing downpours to some parts of eastern Cuba, prompting officials in Holguin province to evacuate people from some low-lying areas. Fidel Castro issued an essay that mentioned the hurricane, saying Cuba's government "guarantees no one will be forgotten.

The price of light, sweet crude for October delivery rose Tuesday to US\$1.16, settling at US\$116.27 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

If the storm continues on its path, it could drive up U.S. gasoline prices by 10 cents a gallon ahead of Labor Day weekend, predicted James Cordier, president of Tampa, Florida-based Liberty Trading Group and OptionSellers.com.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/27425959.html>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

State, feds still at odds on funds**The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08**

By Jan Moller
Capital bureau

BATON ROUGE -- Three years after sustaining heavy wind and flood damage from Hurricane Katrina, Charity Hospital remains shuttered as state and federal authorities continue to disagree about the scope and cost of the damage to the historic building.

Numerous studies have failed to produce consensus on how much the state should be reimbursed under the Stafford Act, which governs the federal response to disasters. Instead, the two sides remain more than \$400 million apart.

The state's case is complicated by the fact that the Charity Hospital building was in poor condition before the storm, to the point where a national accrediting body had recommended that a new hospital be built.

Paul Rainwater, the executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority, said the state had hoped to have the matter resolved in time for President Bush's Aug. 20 visit to Louisiana. But the two sides could not agree on a figure, and instead have decided to convene a "technical working group" that will try reach a settlement in the weeks ahead.

The group held its first meeting Wednesday.

As the stalemate enters its fourth year, it is threatening to derail Louisiana's efforts to build a replacement teaching hospital. State officials have been hoping for a large federal reimbursement to help finance the \$1.2 billion project.

"Nobody thought we would be arguing with FEMA for three years over the damage to that hospital," state facilities manager Jerry Jones said.

The state cites three studies it has commissioned, each of which showed that the hospital was more than 50 percent damaged by the storm and subsequent flooding from Katrina. That would require the federal government to pay the "replacement cost" of a new hospital, which the state puts at \$492 million.

A fourth study, conducted by the architectural firm RMJM Hillier on behalf of a preservation group, estimates that it would cost \$484 million to rehabilitate the Art Deco building on Tulane Avenue into a state-of-the-art teaching hospital.

"We're going to push for a resolution on this, but we feel strongly about this number," Rainwater said, referring to the state's \$492 million estimate of the replacement cost.

FEMA counters with its own engineering studies, completed in December 2005, that says the hospital only sustained \$23 million in damage.

Jim Stark, the head of FEMA's Louisiana recovery office, said the federal government is only obligated to pay for damage resulting from the storm, and that much of the repair work identified by the state's engineering reports either pre-dated the hurricane or occurred in the aftermath of the storm.

"It's clear that Charity was hurting prior to the storm," Stark said. "But FEMA is not in a position, consistent with the Stafford Act, to repair those kinds of decrepit conditions that existed prior to the storm."

Stark said he doesn't expect FEMA to agree with the state's contention that the building was more than 50 percent damaged by the storm. He said much of the damage to the building identified in the state's engineering reports is the result of deterioration that's occurred since the storm, which he blames on the state's failure to make basic repairs to the roof and windows.

"If the state had initiated repair work immediately, or a month or two after the storm, I think it's safe to say the repairs would have been effective," Stark said.

But Jones said the vast majority of the post-Katrina damage was due to mold that occurred in the storm's early aftermath. Moreover, he said the federal government did not produce a "project worksheet" -- which is necessary for reimbursement -- to fix the building's roof until earlier this summer.

Rainwater said the Charity reimbursement was one of the "top priorities" that Gov. Bobby Jindal asked him to address when he consolidated authority over the state's hurricane recovery in the Recovery Authority shortly after taking office in January.

He said communication between the state and federal government has improved in recent months after becoming strained in the final months of Gov. Kathleen Blanco's administration. "It was obvious that the relationships with FEMA had broken down to a point where it was very unproductive," Rainwater said.

But Jones said his three years of dealing with federal officials has created an atmosphere of mistrust that still persists. "It's like they don't trust us, that we're trying to beat the system and we're really aren't," Jones said. "Pretty much throughout this disaster that's how FEMA's treated us."

<http://www.nola.com/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1219902055300440.xml&coll=1>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

LSU board says Jindal interfering

The Times-Picayune | 08.28.08

By Jan Moller
Capital bureau

BATON ROUGE -- Three members of the LSU Board of Supervisors said Wednesday that Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration is interfering with their efforts to elect a chairman.

Board members had been expected to elect Jim Roy of Lafayette chairman at today's meeting. Alvin Kimble of Baton Rouge was expected to be tapped as chairman-elect, which would put him in line to take over the board in 2009.

But those plans are in flux after the Jindal administration threw its weight behind the candidacy of John George of Shreveport to be chairman-elect.

Roy said the administration's involvement is "deeply disturbing" and called it "the most flagrant attempt at intimidation and influence" by a governor since at least the 1930s.

Board member Anthony "Tony" Falterman of Napoleonville said board members are expected to serve independently of the governors who appointed them, and said several members felt undue pressure to vote the way Jindal wanted.

"You now have the administration stepping in and saying, 'This is who we want. If you don't vote this way you're not going to get reappointed,'" Falterman said.

Timmy Teepell, Jindal's chief of staff, in a statement sent by e-mail by Jindal's press secretary, Melissa Sellers, acknowledged making phone calls to board members on George's behalf. "I think John George would do a good job as chairman of the LSU Board of Supervisors, and I have called friends on the board to let them know that as well," Teepell said.

He did not return a telephone call seeking more information.

--- Independent board ---

The 16-member board oversees the flagship university in Baton Rouge; four other academic campuses, including the University of New Orleans; two medical schools; a law school; agriculture center; and the state's Charity Hospital System.

Board members are appointed to staggered six-year terms by the governor and confirmed by the state Senate. Once appointed to the board, however, members are expected to act independently of the administration.

Kimble said that before Teepell's involvement he had lined up at least 14 members of the board in support of his candidacy. But this week, upon returning from an out-of-town trip, he was informed that "a coup" was afoot, he said.

Kimble said he spoke to several members of the board, who told him they were switching their support to George because of pressure from the governor's office, and that they feared not getting reappointed if they did not vote according to Jindal's wishes.

Late Wednesday, Kimble said the board was evenly divided between himself and George. "This is not about me. This is about maintaining the independence of the board," Kimble said.

--- Teaching hospital cited ---

The administration's motivations for getting involved in the board's internal politics are unclear, but several LSU sources who wished to remain anonymous said they believe it's related to friction between the university and the governor's office over a proposed new teaching hospital in downtown New Orleans.

Roy said LSU has been in negotiations with the Jindal administration and the federal Department of Health and Human Services on the governing structure that would oversee the \$1.2 billion project.

Plans call for the hospital to be run by a new nonprofit entity that would be separate from LSU but have board members appointed by the university.

State officials had hoped to announce the new governing structure this month, but negotiations broke down recently when LSU officials could not agree with the administration on what role Tulane University would play in the new organization and how much input would be given to the Legislature.

"We want to make sure the Legislature knows what's going on and that we don't give a competitor academic institution (Tulane) veto power" over the new hospital, Roy said.

<http://nola.live.advance.net/news/t-p/capital/index.ssf?/base/news-6/1219901683300440.xml&coll=1>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Officer elections splinter LSU board

The Advocate | 08.28.08

By JORDAN BLUM

The LSU Board of Supervisors is being splintered over officer elections and late lobbying efforts from the Governor's Office, in what some are calling an attempted "coup."

Board leaders had long expected Alvin Kimble, a Baton Rouge business owner, to assume the chairman-elect position without serious opposition.

But in the past few days Gov. Bobby Jindal's top aide has been seeking votes for Dr. John George, of Shreveport.

"The board is going to be destroyed by this," said board member Tony Falterman, of Napoleonville, complaining about politics taking over the board. "There's going to be bitterness."

Board member Jim Roy, of Lafayette, is automatically in line to become the new chairman. The controversy concerns today's election of the chairman-elect, who will take over in fall 2009.

The LSU System board has 16 members who oversee policies and spending for the LSU campuses and public hospitals across the state.

Some board members speculated that the chairman-elect debate started after disagreements between LSU officials and the Jindal administration concerning the future of health care in New Orleans.

Jindal's Chief of Staff Timmy Teepell helped George drum up last-minute votes.

Falterman said Teepell told board member Ben Mount, of Lake Charles, he would not be reappointed by Jindal if he did not support George.

Mount did not return two phone messages Wednesday.

When asked for an interview Wednesday, Teepell requested delaying questions until after Jindal's afternoon news conference on Hurricane Gustav. Teepell then left during the news conference.

Teepell then issued a prepared statement: "I think John George would do a good job as chairman of the LSU Board of Supervisors, and I have called friends on the board to let them know that as well."

Jindal press secretary Melissa Sellers, said the governor would not answer questions on the topic for now.

Kimble called the matter "dirty, dirty politics" and an attempted "coup" from the governor's office.

"It's either lack of oversight (by Jindal) or he's participating in something this underhanded," Kimble said.

George, a business owner and former hospital owner, said he decided to run recently after being encouraged by the Jindal administration.

"That's what made it interesting and intriguing," George said, noting that his medical expertise makes him a good candidate because most of the LSU System budget is dedicated to health care.

"Obviously, the people I've talked to think they need some more help," George said, discussing the future of hospitals in New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

George said he is still a strong supporter of LSU System President John Lombardi.

As for his last-minute candidacy, George said there's no time limit. "There's nothing wrong with two guys running for the same position."

Incoming Chairman Roy said LSU officials disagree with the Jindal administration about some of the plans for the next New Orleans teaching hospital to replace the so-called Big Charity.

While they agree on “99 percent,” Roy said LSU will not relent on ceding administrative veto authority to the Tulane Medical Center. Also, LSU insists that the Legislature should be involved in the planning, Roy said.

Coincidentally, when George and Kimble were both appointed to the LSU board by former Gov. Kathleen Blanco two years ago, the board members they replaced – Stewart Slack and Ronald Anderson – accused Blanco of trying to undermine LSU.

Without mentioning Kimble by name, board member Hank Gowen, of Shreveport, who supports George, said the issue only blew up because the other candidate tried to “con” his way into the position.

Kimble said he was asked in January to run for chairman-elect by Roy, outgoing Chairman Jerry Shea, of New Iberia, and past Chairman Rod West, of New Orleans. Kimble said he reluctantly accepted when there was no serious opposition and that he has been more heavily involved in LSU affairs ever since.

Roy said his problem is not with George but that the Jindal administration’s intervention “flies in the face” of the “constitutional independence” of the board.

“It simply cannot be allowed or tolerated,” Roy said.

Regardless of today’s vote — and it will be close — the LSU board must again prove it is being ruled independently and not being “muscled” by whichever governor is in office, Roy said.

<http://www.2theadvocate.com/news/27580854.html>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Major companies pulling out of Medicaid Reform

Florida Health News | 08.27.08

By Carol Gentry and Christine Jordan Sexton

Three companies that together cover 60 percent of the enrollees in "Medicaid Reform" plans have notified the state that they are pulling out of all or most of the project as of Dec. 1 and have asked to be assigned no more members. The actions appear related to a 5 percent reduction in Medicaid payments to the Reform plans scheduled to take effect on Sept. 1.

The termination letters were submitted by Amerigroup Florida; UnitedHealthcare of Florida; and WellCare Health Plans Inc. on behalf of its two Florida Medicaid plans, HealthEase of Florida Inc. and WellCare of Florida Inc., dba Staywell Health Plan.

While the letters didn't refer to the reason for the pullout, Amerigroup spokesman Kent Jenkins said it was the rate cut, brought on by the continuing economic slowdown that has slashed tax revenues. "We understand Florida has budget issues," Jenkins said. "We want to work with them. But the hard fact is, it will lower our revenues at a time when health-care costs are going up across the board."

The pullout took some patient-advocacy groups by surprise. "It would appear that the stockholders weren't getting a big enough return on their investment by participating in Reform," said Laura Goodhue, executive director of Florida CHAIN. "Medicaid consumers, evaluators and advocates have been saying all along that the program isn't living up to its promise, and now it appears that the private market is agreeing."

WellCare, by far the largest Medicaid provider in the state, submitted its Reform resignation letter on Aug. 15. It was signed by Robert Diaz, vice president of regulatory affairs and government relations.

WellCare would like to continue coverage for one group in Broward County -- those on Social Security disability support, whose monthly premium payments from the state are far higher than those for mothers and children. But if the Agency for Health Care Administration won't allow WellCare to keep the disabled without the others, Diaz wrote, "the Companies will have no choice but to withdraw from providing services for this population."

Under their contract with the state, the companies had to give AHCA 90 days' written notice of the pullout; affected enrollees must be given 60 days' notice. AHCA spokesman Fernando Senra said the agency will provide a list of the remaining Medicaid Reform participants on Thursday.

"We are working with the plans across Florida to ensure a quality Medicaid system for our beneficiaries, and we will work to make sure beneficiaries continue to get access to quality health care and have a meaningful choice of plans," Senra said.

The Reform plan, a pet project of former Gov. Jeb Bush, requires that most non-institutionalized Medicaid recipients be enrolled in a private plan that takes financial risk for providing their care -- either an HMO or a hospital-and-doctor network. Currently, the Reform counties are Broward, Duval, Baker, Clay and Nassau.

AHCA launched the project in Broward and Duval in September 2006, and added the rural counties in September 2007. The premise is to improve health services by giving managed-care plans flexibility to meet patients' specific needs and to promote competition among the plans.

<http://www.floridahealthnews.org/index.cfm/go/public.articleView/article/8795>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Katrina victims memorial taking shape

The Advocate | 08.28.08

By JOHN MORENO GONZALES

NEW ORLEANS (AP) -- Six mausoleums for the unclaimed dead of Hurricane Katrina stand on what was vacant land just five weeks ago, as New Orleans - in what could be a testament to its determination - scrambles to complete a memorial by Friday's third anniversary of the storm.

Many believed the fatigued city would have no place to inter the 85 bodies. The city coroner, already grappling with one of the nation's worst murder rates, was placed in charge of the \$1.2 million effort last year and progress was slow. The inactivity was seen as another example of the sluggish climate that has characterized the city's rebuilding from the 2005 storm that killed 1,600 people.

Now Coroner Frank Minyard says at least seven of the dead will be marched to the site during a traditional New Orleans jazz funeral. The memorial itself, bucolic and shaped like the eye of a hurricane, may or may not be fully complete when they arrive.

"We're playing everything by ear. We'll sit down with a big sigh of relief, whenever and however it's completed," said Minyard. He said obstacles as slight as a day of rain could cause the deadline to be missed.

Mayor Ray Nagin allotted \$1 million in federal aid money to the effort during second-anniversary ceremonies, and although about \$200,000 in private donations also came in, the project was largely forgotten.

But in the past several weeks, construction permits have been issued and topsoil cleared. Human bone fragments have been recovered and meticulously documented, according to state regulations, from the old Charity Hospital site that formerly was a paupers' graveyard.

New Orleans jazz trumpeter Irvin Mayfield Jr., whose father drowned in the storm, said the city's decision to honor the forgotten victims of Katrina shows its spirit.

"These folks get to be mourned, get to be remembered, and get to be honored," he said. "It speaks volumes."

Fifty-four of the 85 bodies have been identified. Some have gone unclaimed because family members have been lost in the massive relocation Katrina triggered. Or they have decided to leave burial to the coroner because they were either too poor, or were too estranged from the deceased, to do so themselves.

Plaques with the names of the storm victims were supposed to be part of the memorial. But Minyard is unsure if that will still be built. Defining a Katrina-related fatality carries legal ramifications, affects life insurance policies and public aid. Some drowned, some died from exposure, and others died weeks later from apparent physical stress during the evacuation.

Ted George, a New Orleans lawyer who has worked pro bono on the project, said he is confident plaques will come after project coordinators look more closely at records. George said whether the memorial is completed Friday, or later, Minyard and others should be given credit for getting this far.

Not only were there the physical barriers to construction, but the city had to prove to Louisiana State University, which owned and donated the grounds, there would be perpetual care at the site. About \$250,000 was placed in an investment fund for the care, George said. The project also has about \$150,000 in reserves should unexpected construction costs, or added features to the design surface later.

He said New Orleans has honored its fallen well over the years.

"There's no doubt we have a real sense of history and depth," he said. "What's been really satisfying is so many people believe in this project. They will push it through."

<http://www.theadvocate.com/news/27532654.html>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Jindal declares emergency, will activate Guard
New Orleans CityBusiness | 08.27.08
by The Associated Press

BATON ROUGE - Gov. Bobby Jindal declared a state of emergency and activated 3,000 National Guard troops on Wednesday as Tropical Storm Gustav moved toward the Gulf of Mexico and threatened to hit Louisiana's coastline.

Jindal said the Guard troops would report Thursday to prepare for the storm, which has the potential to hit Louisiana on Monday as a dangerous Category 3 hurricane. Another 1,500 state troopers were on alert, and preliminary plans could call up another 2,000 guardsmen if Gustav's course continued in Louisiana's direction. He said he also activated contracts with 700 transportation companies that will provide buses if the state needs to evacuate as many as 35,000 people along the coast.

"Our state is better prepared than it has been before to respond to a major disaster," he said.

He said he has also asked for a federal emergency declaration in case the storm makes landfall.

Forecasters said Gustav could move into the Gulf on Friday, the three-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina's landfall.

Jindal urged people to make plans for themselves rather than relying on government transport or other help. He said they should stock up on water, food and batteries and finalize evacuation plans, particularly for children, the elderly and pets.

"I want to emphasize to our people that they also have personal responsibility," Jindal said at a news conference at the state emergency center.

The state's hurricane evacuation-themed Web site — getagameplan.org — has information about evacuation plans and routes and advice for buying supplies.

Jindal laid out a preliminary plan for what would happen in the coming days:

— Get buses in Louisiana for possible evacuations on Thursday and open state shelters for those with "special needs" who don't have cars.

— Open shelters for the general population and pets on Friday and transport inmates out of jails in coastal parishes on Friday. Parishes would also begin their evacuations, beginning with those along the coast.

— The one-way, inland-only traffic pattern on interstate highways, known as "contraflow," would begin Saturday.

— The state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries would stage its search-and-rescue teams on Sunday.

"This is certainly a very preliminary timetable. That is all subject to change," Jindal said.

<http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/print.cfm?recid=19441>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Market forces

Baton Rouge Business Report | 08.25.08



LEADING THE CHARGE: Alan Levine, the secretary of the Department of Health of Hospitals, previously oversaw reform in Florida as Medicaid adviser to former Gov. Jeb Bush. Levine is convinced Louisiana's reform effort will succeed in part because of how it will differ from Florida's.

Gov. Bobby Jindal's administration wants to move fast to secure a federal waiver to implement Medicaid reform in Louisiana, the idea being to improve the delivery of health services to low-income families and the disabled, resulting in a healthier population, more accountability and significant savings.

Guiding the effort is Alan Levine, Jindal's secretary of Health and Hospitals, who oversaw a similar experiment in Florida as Medicaid adviser to former Gov. Jeb Bush. Levine says the Florida pilot projects have been mostly successful. Several critics have come to the opposite conclusion, although Levine says such criticisms have not been based on reliable data.

And though the details aren't even close to being worked out, Levine is convinced Louisiana's reform effort will succeed in part because of how it will differ from Florida's.

Levine's mandate to retool Medicaid comes from the Louisiana Medicaid Reform Act of 2007. Getting the federal waiver necessary to do so sooner rather than later is important because once a new administration lands in Washington, D.C., it could really slow things down, he says.

Florida Medicaid reform is performing admirably or not, depending on whose study you believe. A July report from the Community Health Action Information Network, a patient advocacy group, says the Florida Agency for Health Care Administration vastly inflated the savings created by reform. A survey of doctors by the Health Policy Institute at Georgetown University seems to point to a decline in physician participation since reform.

Joan Alker, lead investigator in the study, says the survey—to which only 8% of the physicians queried responded—indicated a decline in provider participation, particularly among specialists. Another survey is being conducted now, she says.

"What we did find is that the main issue providers cited was that payment was not getting better and some said it was getting worse," Alker says.

Levine dismisses the Georgetown study, arguing that it wasn't based on scientific data. Studies that are based on empirical data show an increase in provider participation, he says.

Florida's Medicaid reform pilots started in 2006 in Broward and Duval counties, and in 2007 was expanded to three more counties. A report by former AHCA Inspector General Linda Keen found problems with the pilots, however, and Medicaid reform was not expanded to other counties. Keen has

since stepped down, and AHCA has a new secretary, Holly Benson, who is expected to push ahead with expanding reform.

In response to criticism, Levine cites a report by the James Madison Institute, a free-market think tank, that argues previous studies on reform are flawed and that competition in the pilot counties has been spurred and significant cost savings realized. The James Madison study conducted an analysis by medical specialty showing that more physicians—not fewer—were seeing Medicaid patients since reform, Levine says. The number of orthopedists doubled, for example, he says, while 97% of primary care doctors remained in Medicaid as opposed to fleeing.

“Believe me, I want it to work,” Levine says. “I’m humble enough to know that when you’re changing a marketplace you’ve got to be willing to accept criticism and if somebody points out that something’s not working. But they have to base that on data. When you look at the data, there are elements of it working so remarkably well it’s a crime if we don’t employ those tactics.”

Levine says Louisiana’s transformation of Medicaid will look like Florida in the general sense of bringing the marketplace to bear in solving problems. In the pilot programs, residents eligible for Medicaid could choose among HMOs or other health networks called Provider Service Networks. A hospital, for example, could set up a PSN. Even LSU will probably set up a PSN and is shopping around for a managed care partner, Levine says.

In Florida, the PSNs and HMOs compete against each other, with the marketing advantage going perhaps to the HMOs, which have been ensconced in the Florida Medicaid market for years. In Louisiana, individual PSNs will be managed by HMOs and compete against other PSN/HMO teams.

“I do not believe in opening the floodgates to HMOs,” Levine says. “I believe in having partnerships where you use the expertise of HMOs to do the things they do well, but you have other systems in place that hold them accountable.”

Levine’s agency will require HMOs to partner with a provider, which he says creates a “natural, market-based filter.” DHH will do an actuarial analysis to decide how many HMO/PSNs a given market requires. DHH will decide which HMOs get in based on metrics such as history of patient satisfaction, promptness of payment, etc. The HMOs that make the cut will compete against each other in that market. That way, the state is out of the business of setting Medicaid rates. The HMOs do it instead—which is probably not going to be music to most doctors’ ears.

“You will never find a physician who’s happy with managed care,” Levine says. “If you go talk to 10 doctors today, I guarantee every one of them will tell you they’re not paid enough.”

PSNs aren’t the essence of reform, just a piece of it, Levine says.

“We’re all for expanding access,” he says. “We’re not for spending more money in a system that’s broken. Everybody’s already acknowledged the system’s broken. That’s why the Legislature changed the law.”

Alker, the Georgetown critic of Florida reform, also complains that the Florida waiver was done behind closed doors, with too little stakeholder participation, and that the result was too much power in the hands of HMOs.

Levine says he took it upon himself to put together an advisory committee, though it wasn’t required by Louisiana’s Medicaid reform law, but did so to catch potential problems or weaknesses early on. The advisory committee includes representatives from physician groups, hospitals, public health, LSU, HMOs and others.

Fred Whitson, director of Medical Economics and Managed Care for the Florida Medical Society, says the various studies on reform—pro and con—haven’t answered a basic question.

“We’re waiting to see does it really save money,” Whitson says. “Is it cheaper than the way it’s operating now? To be perfectly honest, we don’t know yet.”

If reform through managed care is not more economical than old fashioned fee-for-service, it'll be a hard sell taking the concept statewide. Studies are under way that everyone hopes will answer that question. Doctors in the pilot counties, meanwhile, are divided on reform depending on how much bargaining power they have with HMOs or PSNs to get higher rates of reimbursement from Medicaid. Scarce specialists are likely to have more bargaining power. Primary care doctors, who aren't as scarce, are likely to have less.

"It's a mixed bag," Whitson says.

Levine isn't buying the negative reviews of the Florida Medicaid reform experiment he was instrumental in orchestrating, and says his feelings won't be hurt when people criticize his plans for Louisiana.

"I'm putting my plan on the table," he says. "It's easy to shoot down someone's plan, but my question is always going to be what's your alternative? Because so far there isn't one."

Dr. Steven Spedale is a Baton Rouge pediatrician and member of Levine's advisory committee, representing the Louisiana chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Spedale says it's too early to know how well Florida's Medicaid reform will work, since only three years have passed in what was designed as a five-year demonstration project.

"It's hard to hold it out as the model to use because no one has the final numbers," he says.

Spedale is concerned about moving too fast with Louisiana Medicaid reform, saying numerous questions remain unanswered. He sees the aggressive timeline as "a big challenge"—notwithstanding Levine's point that rushing to get the waiver before power changes hands in Washington isn't the same as rushing through the details of implementation.

Another issue that concerns Spedale is directly tied to how much doctors and other health-care providers will get reimbursed by Medicaid once reform takes hold. Convincing providers who don't take Medicaid patients that they should participate has been the biggest issue in every state that has attempted reform, and it's usually related to low reimbursements, he says.

"It's not an unwillingness to provide care," Spedale says, "but you have to be able to pay your bills."

<http://www.businessreport.com/news/2008/aug/25/market-forces-hlcr1/>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

**Urgent Care Center for veterans to open in N.O.
New Orleans CityBusiness | 08.26.08**

NEW ORLEANS - The Department Of Veterans Affairs said the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Health Care System is opening an Urgent Care Center in New Orleans at 1601 Perdido St. on Tuesday.

The center will accept veteran patients. No appointments are necessary.

The center will offer care for illnesses that are not life-threatening. Services include diagnosis and treatment of mild to moderate illnesses and minor injuries. Mental health staff and a social worker will also be available to assist with evaluations, treatment and referral of urgent mental health needs.

Ambulances will not be accepted at the center.

“Until now, our veterans were referred to emergency rooms for conditions that were urgent but not life-threatening,” said SLVHCS Director Julie Catellier. “The Urgent Care Center will provide veterans with an additional level of service that we have not been able to offer since the hurricane. Now veterans can receive VA care from VA providers which will also help to reduce the wait in community emergency rooms.”

The main entrance to the center is on Gravier Street. Patient parking is available, and a parking attendant and VA police will be on the site.

The center will have access for walk-in patients from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.

<http://www.neworleanscitybusiness.com/uptotheminute.cfm?recid=19412>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)

Researchers Report Advances in Cell Conversion Technique

The New York Times | 08.28.08

By NICHOLAS WADE

Biologists at Harvard have converted cells from a mouse's pancreas into the insulin-producing cells that are destroyed in diabetes, suggesting that the natural barriers between the body's cell types may not be as immutable as supposed.

This and other recent experiments raise the possibility that a patient's healthy cells might be transformed into the type lost to a disease far more simply and cheaply than in the cumbersome proposals involving stem cells.

The new field depends on capturing master proteins called transcription factors that control which sets of genes are active in a cell and thus what properties the cell will possess. Each type of cell is thought to have a special set of transcription factors.

Last year a Japanese biologist, Shinya Yamanaka, showed that by inserting four transcription factors into an adult cell he could return it to its embryonic state.

In a variation of this technique, a team led by Qiao Zhou and Douglas A. Melton at Harvard has now identified three transcription factors active in the insulin-producing beta cells of the pancreas.

They hitched the genes for these three factors onto a virus that infects another type of pancreatic cell, known as an exocrine cell. In mice made diabetic by a drug that kills beta cells, the transformed exocrine cells generated insulin, allowing the mice to enjoy "a significant and long-lasting improvement" in their diabetic state, the researchers are reporting Thursday in the journal *Nature*.

Many steps remain before the technique could be considered for human use.

Besides producing insulin, the transformed exocrine cells looked like beta cells and ceased making proteins typical of exocrine cells. But they did not organize themselves into the pancreatic structures known as islets where beta cells usually cluster. The researchers claim only to have made "cells that closely resemble beta cells."

Even so, Robert Blelloch, a cell biologist at the University of California, San Francisco, said, the Harvard experiment was "a very nice story — it's pretty impressive that you can make such a switch just by adding three factors to a quite different cell type."

Last month Patrick Seale and Bruce Spiegelman of the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston showed how with a single transcription factor they could make white fat cells generate brown fat cells, a very different type of cell.

The Harvard work "is not occurring in a vacuum, but it's a very important piece of work," Dr. Blelloch said.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/28/science/28cell.html?ref=science>

[\[BACK TO TOP\]](#)