

## DESPITE KATRINA LESSONS, FLOOD PLAN IN LOUISIANA SHOWS GAPS

**BATON ROUGE:** Eleven years ago, Sam Barbera hooked up his boat and headed to New Orleans to ferry people from Hurricane Katrina's floodwaters. Four weeks ago, he found himself in another boat for rescues - this time at home in Baton Rouge, when a massive rainstorm ravaged the area.

It was "night and day," he said. "Katrina was kind of baptism by fire. It was just people showing up, everybody doing their own thing." But during the catastrophic flooding in mid-August, police directed volunteer boats and their owners - nicknamed the "Cajun Navy" - to neighborhoods where water was rising, and social media postings offered guidance on where victims needed help. "You didn't have that in Katrina. Katrina was kind of like you just put your boat in. Katrina was mayhem," Barbera said.

In 2005, the monster storm exposed huge gaps in disaster response plans on local, state and federal levels. More than 1,500 people were killed in Louisiana alone. After the levees failed and inundated New Orleans and surrounding communities, thousands were plucked from rooftops and attics. Response was a fly-by-the-seat-of-your pants effort, with no coordinated strategy for rescues - or what to do with the people saved. First responders were overwhelmed, and many were left to fend for themselves. Lessons learned from Katrina formed the backbone of state and federal reaction as historic flooding ravaged 20 parishes last month. The response in the immediate aftermath was widely praised by officials and storm victims, Republican and Democrat alike. But the slog of the longer-term recovery is starting to show that cracks remain in the disaster safety net - and that wariness lingers about federal help after the troubled response to Katrina.

### Criticisms

Criticisms are emerging about the pace of housing aid, the size of grants from the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the question marks that surround rebuilding and recovery. "I don't feel like y'all are pushing the issue quick enough or fast enough to be able to get people back in their homes," state Rep. Clay Schexnayder, a Republican who represents hard-hit areas, told FEMA at a recent hearing on flood response. Stephan Perkins, 46, was waiting for a FEMA inspector to show up 10 days after he registered with the agency. Perkins had a flood insurance policy that covered the structural damage to his home but not its contents. A neighbor with the same type of flood coverage told Perkins that FEMA offered him less than \$200. "I'm just hearing the horror stories," said Perkins, a father of two.

FEMA defends its response, saying it has approved more than \$575 million in recovery grants for households so far, set up 26 disaster assistance centers and brought more than 2,500 staff to Louisiana. "FEMA has been on the ground in Louisiana since before the first drop of rain hit the ground. We've already provided shelter and support to thousands of families," agency spokesman Rafael Lemaitre said in a statement. Perhaps complaints are inevitable when a disaster displaces so many who desperately want to get back to their homes. Officials estimate more than 110,000 homes are damaged from flooding described as the worst disaster since Superstorm Sandy. But discontent took longer to surface this time, and there's little disagreement about improvements in the federal and state response in the years since Katrina. People weren't left stranded for days without supplies, like at the New Orleans convention center and on interstate overpasses after Katrina. Hospitals and nursing homes weren't left to fend for themselves when threatened with floodwaters, like in 2005. — AP



**HAMMOND, LOUISIANA:** In this Saturday, Aug. 13, 2016 file aerial photo, a boat motors between flooded homes after heavy rains inundating the region. —AP



**WHITE PLAINS, NEW YORK:** Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton arrives to speak to the press at Westchester County Airport September 8, 2016. —AFP

## WITH A NEW PLANE, CLINTON COURTS MEDIA ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL

### 'WELCOME TO OUR BIG PLANE! IT'S SO EXCITING'

**NEW YORK:** When Hillary Clinton arrived at her brand-new campaign plane, she greeted crew members, climbed aboard and then made a surprise move: A beeline to the dozens of journalists seated in the back.

"Hey guys!" Clinton told members of the media as they awaited takeoff. "Welcome to our big plane! It's so exciting." The Democratic presidential nominee promised she'd be back later to take questions, adding she was "so happy to have all of you with me. I've been just waiting for this moment."

For months, Clinton broke with campaign tradition and flew separately from the reporters who follow her around the country, drawing criticism along the way for a roughly nine-month streak of avoiding any kind of formal news conference. Since the Monday arrival of her new blue-and-white Boeing 737 plane - dubbed "Hill Force One" - Clinton has ventured from her seat up front to the back four times, twice taking questions from reporters during trips to Ohio, Illinois and Florida. Then, yesterday morning, she gave a full-fledged press conference on the tarmac, her new plane serving as a backdrop as she fielded seven questions on topics ranging from foreign policy and the positions of her GOP rival, Republican Donald Trump.

### Campaign disputes

Clinton's campaign disputes the suggestion she had been dodging the media, arguing the former secretary of state has conducted more than 300 interviews this year. But her past reluctance to take questions from a free-wheeling pack of traveling journalists - commonplace in presidential politics - has fueled criticism about her reliability and provided ammunition to

Republicans and Trump, who have accused her of hiding to avoid scrutiny.

For most of the campaign, Clinton has largely kept her traveling press corps at a distance, choosing instead to sit for one-on-one interviews with local and national broadcasters, to call into cable TV shows, appear on podcasts and talk with new media websites. Clinton, for example, plans to make a repeat appearance on the popular daytime TV talk show "Ellen" next week during a fundraising trip to California.

"The public should expect to see and hear from her very often, but the national press corps may be disappointed in how much they're involved in that communication," said Jamal Simmons, a Democratic strategist and veteran of the presidential campaigns of Bill Clinton and Al Gore. "One could argue that Barack Obama talks to more voters when he's on the Jimmy Fallon show than he does when he talks to CNN."

Clinton's campaign had signaled that she would make herself more available to reporters as the November election approaches, and her decision to "gaggle" - as the onboard Q&As are known on the trail - allows her to quickly respond to Trump from 30,000 feet.

"It's her opportunity to continue to frame the message, to own the conversation," said Maria Cardona, a Democratic strategist and former Clinton campaign aide. "As opposed to letting it all happen on his timeframe and his playing field." It comes after a late summer period in which Clinton largely stayed out of public view, raising money to bankroll her fall campaign. It also follows a more disciplined stretch from Trump, who has commanded extensive cable TV coverage of his campaign. Trump also travels apart from

reporters, although he invited some onboard Monday for a gaggle and short flight, and said he may do so again. On Wednesday, he also lifted the ban on reporters from some outlets covering his events.

Kicking off the Labor Day holiday, Clinton greeted the journalists covering her on Monday and Tuesday before departure and then returned for gaggles that covered about 20 to 25 minutes apiece. The questions from reporters have ranged from the FBI's inquiry into her use of a private email server, the Clinton Foundation, Russia's role in the election, Clinton's health, the future of Syria and Obama's recent trip to Asia.

Asked about a coughing fit in Cleveland, Clinton said she suffered from seasonal allergies and had increased her dosage of antihistamines. When a reporter asked what she thought of Trump campaign manager Kellyanne Conway's comment that Clinton was "allergic to the media," Clinton said of Trump, "I'm allergic to him." Yet some of the exchanges got complicated. On Tuesday night, as Clinton traveled from Florida to suburban New York, reporters tried to invite her into another pastime of the campaign plane: rolling an orange down the aisle with a question written on it.

In black ink, the question asked Clinton if she would rather have dinner with Trump or Putin. After the orange reached the front cabin, Clinton's traveling press secretary, Nick Merrill, rolled it back to the press with the word "Putin" circled. But the answer wasn't so simple. Merrill later clarified that Clinton had not put the circle on the orange, he had. And he said it only meant that Clinton had dined with Putin in the past, not that she preferred a meal with Putin over Trump. —AP