

REBUILD NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY

Military-Scale Mobe Needed; Obama Offers Haiti Model

by Marcia Merry Baker

Nov. 9 (EIRNS)—The Greater New York-New Jersey region will never be rebuilt as long as the evil Troika of President Obama, Governor Christie, and Mayor Bloomberg are in charge. Each day of the post-Superstorm suffering in the Northeast, shows that the actual damage is caused by tolerating the continuation of that imperial Troika, and the lack of a commitment to revive the sinking U.S. economy.

Most outrageous is their refusal to deploy full-strength military aid to the region. What's there is superb—7,200 National Guard, 500 Army Corps of Engineers staff, and other services—but it's far from enough, and not activated for a top-down mission to minimize immediate suffering, and to set the stage for full-scale rebuilding. The absence of this is manifest across all aspects of means of existence—inadequate gasoline supplies, electricity provision, sanitation, shelter, food provision, etc.

First, look at the housing debacle. As of Nov. 8, there are at least 15,000 units of public housing in the Rockaways, Coney Island, and Red Hook, with no heat, electricity, or hot water, according to Steven Banks of the Legal Aid Society. “We’re into the second week of this, and there is no real urgency to get it fixed. . . . No can-do New York attitude here,” he told the *New York Times*.

The *Times* reported Nov. 9:

“Mr. Bloomberg said Thursday that 70 percent of

these [public housing] buildings now have heat and hot water and 82 percent have electricity. But that leaves 120 buildings and the people who live in them without heat or hot water and 72 buildings and their residents without electricity.

“Whatever the precise numbers, by any accounting, life for these people is grim. On Wednesday afternoon, in the Far Rockaways, hundreds lined up for as much as three hours in the cold to get hot food promised by a makeshift delegation of volunteers. The multiple government agencies promising help were nowhere to be seen.”

An individual complex, such as Red Hook Houses, has over 3,000 persons now consigned to Hell.

Housing Is a Disaster

What was required right from the start, was, in principle, the same as what should have happened in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, right after the 2010 earthquake: 1) make a rapid assay of numbers and locations of displaced persons, then 2) get them to safety, en masse. In New York-New Jersey, this means setting up camps—in the style of mobile military basing, or in the Catskills resort areas (mess hall cafeterias, private quarters, etc.) where needed. The new Barclays sports center, for example, has the space and utilities to accommodate thousands new left to suffer in the Rockaways. Otherwise, identify buildings for dormitory use, and



FEMA/Liz Roll

The beach resort town of Seaside Heights, N.J., as seen in this photo, was particularly hard-struck by the storm. Many towns along the coast had been built up as part of the speculative real-estate boom of the mid-2000s. They are now wiped out.

take a county-by-county inventory of vacant rental space.

For Haiti, building camps on high ground was turned down flat by the White House. Now for New York-New Jersey, the same “get lost” policy reaction is underway, with only a sham of dealing with housing. The disaster response on housing, is itself a disaster.

The assay stage would have involved simply doing a rough-and-ready head count of those in unfit dwellings—whether multi-family, or single unit. For example, the two most glaring categories of such dependent people, known within the first 24 hours of the storm, are those in the shoreline public housing complexes run by the New York City Housing Authority (there are a total of 400,000 New York residents in public housing); and secondly, those in the coastal communities, especially the barrier islands (Rockaway, Queens, and all along the Jersey Shore), whether in individual houses, or apartment buildings, all now uninhabitable. Those in the coastal communities tend to have more means, but not for long. Many are still in the New Jersey shelters, which had about 5,000 persons mid-week.

Instead, it’s fend-for-yourself. About 317,000 people throughout the multi-state region have registered for financial aid with FEMA, since the storm. According to Associated Press, more than 101,000 people

have been deemed eligible for temporary housing programs. A subset of 56,000 have been deemed eligible for FEMA’s program to receive grants for renting new housing, or for repairs to existing homes. The maximum rental grant is for 13 months. Then what? Some Long Island displaced residents have had to go 150 miles north, as far away as Albany.

This week FEMA started bringing in trailers from its out-of-state centers. Its total stockpile is only in the “hundreds.” FEMA director Craig Fugate said Nov. 9 that the mobile homes will go to New York and New Jersey towns. “We’re working on which sites they are going to go to.”

But for dozens of thousands of people, the question is: Where do I go? What will happen to me? All this adds up to one clear message—the order from the top is: the Haiti treatment.

Aged Utilities Fractured by Storms;

As the millions of residents in New York, New Jersey, and other Northeast states began to assess the profound losses from Superstorm Sandy, they were hit with Storm Shock II, Nor’easter Athena Nov. 7. Shock III is realizing that Obama, Christie, and Bloomberg’s message to them is: “Drop dead.”

Look at the need for restoring natural gas mains and hook-ups, as well as getting electricity back on, plus water and sewerage service. These are non-existent contingencies for the Trio, who speak in terms of “people helping people,” and “always being there for you,” which translates in reality as, “Drop dead.”

In the meantime, Christie and Bloomberg carp and blame the utility companies. But they—and most importantly, Obama—are not doing the emergency measures required, much less committing to in-depth reconstruction.

Athena brought record snowfall Nov. 7-8—for volume of snow this early in the season, throughout the region already reeling from Superstorm Sandy. A foot of heavy, wet snow fell in central New Jersey, re-

sulting in more than 120,000 additional electricity outages as of Nov. 8, in the region served by FirstEnergy/Jersey Central Power and Light Co., which already had 149,000 customers still cut off from 12 days ago.

Natural Gas, Utilities

The devastation to the natural gas system of the affected region is indicative. Here, as throughout the nation, the system of mains and delivery pipes is decrepit; then came the storms. True, in some less-battered and less-flooded storm areas, the gas has remained on, and in fact, the danger comes from people huddled around gas ovens and stovetops for warmth in the cold, including in big apartment buildings, since they lack electricity and heat. In the seafront towns, in the first 24 hours of the storm, utility workers dashed from street to street, trying to cut off hissing gas lines and put out fires.

Overall, many miles of gas mains and laterals—the distribution lines to end-users—are shattered. Thousands of hook-ups are being “retired,” because they go to condemned structures, or damaged furnaces, boilers, and appliances. No “switch” can turn this all back on.

Making it all worse, the natural gas distribution system was already aged and leaky. Ironically, New Jersey Natural Gas Co. just got state approval in October to replace or install linings in 276 miles of mains—about half its total system; and also to upgrade 20,000 smaller connections. The company announced a rehab plan of \$130 million for the next four years. The New Jersey director of the Board of Public Utilities told NJ.com, “This [the go-ahead to the gas company] is an example of an infrastructure program that is targeting a known problem, and that is the leakiness of bar steel and cast iron.” Now, those leaky pipes are outright cracked and broken.

What’s going on at present, is simply the “assessment phase” of the damage. Last night, for example, New Jersey Natural Gas Co. issued a statement, on the status of its service restoration plans for Monmouth County, the easternmost part of the state, jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean. A completely new gas main must be installed near Mantoloking Bridge, where the ocean breached the barrier island. This will take months, provided the inputs are available.

Moreover, this all raises the true challenge posed by the storm: how to rebuild the storm states properly—utilities, towns, work and recreation zones, protected

from sea and inland flooding, with a top-down approach to deliberately create a productive region, not a real-estate rip-off. Protecting all this is the mission of the Army Corps of Engineers civil works division.

Certain residential and commercial parts of New Jersey, such as the barrier island communities, were hit by life-threatening weather, because they were part of the home mortgage/real-estate boom of the last few decades of de-structuring of proper urban and rural landscapes. The same kinds of barrier islands in several other counties and states on the East Coast, are off-limits for residences and utilities, precisely because they are low-lying and exposed to the ocean. But in New Jersey, as its agro-industrial economy was taken down, the oceanfront boom went wild. Now, it’s under water, in the dark, and freezing.

Firsthand Report, N.J. Barrier Islands

A firsthand storm report to *EIR* from Seaside Heights, N.J. (the beach town, incorporated 1913, today, best known for TV’s “Jersey Shore” “reality” soap opera), included these accounts:

- “Devastation of the New Jersey barrier island town of Seaside Heights is fairly complete. Gas mains rupture in Seaside Heights. Natural gas fires in houses start. Fireman cannot access house fires, because streets are blocked by sand, so the fires burn uncontrolled. A housefire does not necessarily spread to an adjacent house, since blown sand dunes from the beach separate the houses...” (Oct. 29)

- “Many Seaside Heights refugees have not found housing, and are living in their cars...” (Nov. 3)

- “Seaside Heights residents who have obtained a pass, visit their homes under police escort... [They] become hysterical at the sight of their ruined homes, and the planned visit to the homes breaks down into hysterical pandemonium. Police escort Seaside Heights residents back off... Visits to the island are banned for the near future.” (Nov. 5)

- The future? “Planning for the hopeful recovery of Seaside Heights includes the bulldozing of the entire city, and the laying of new gas mains in the eight month timeframe...”

Superstorm Sandy is the writing on the wall: Either there will be a recovery of the region, as part of a national renewal program: revival of Glass-Steagall; return to a national credit system; and implementation of the great water-and-power project NAWAPA XXI; or we will all rapidly descend into Hell.