

EDITORIAL

More damage to a fragile coast

It was easy enough to ride around our area last week and take stock of some of the damage left in Hurricane Isaac's wake.

We could see the missing shingles from people's roofs, the businesses blown apart, the trees toppled.

In other places along the coast — places far less fortunate than we were — there was also the severe water damage to assess.

What is more difficult to see is the damage Isaac brought to our natural defenses.

We suggest

Hurricane Isaac slammed the Louisiana coast, leaving even more damage to our fragile natural protection.

Barrier islands and marshes once gave us Mother Nature's protections against storm surge and rising tides. They didn't stop hurricanes, but they slowed the inundation that they can bring with them.

In the past decades, though, we have seen our natural defenses slowly whittled away by coastal erosion, saltwater intrusion and even the subsidence of our land.

That process, as fast as it has been, is nothing compared to what the major storms that hit us can do.

Each successive storm eats away further at our natural defenses and leaves us even more exposed to the next storm in a horrible spiral of damage and danger.

Isaac, it seems, was no different.

It eroded beach areas and destroyed sand dunes. It also left breaches in Elmer's Island, Timbalier Island and Fouchon.

"That's our first line of defense," said Terrebonne Parish President Michel Claudet.

He is right. That is our first line of defense. Unfortunately, it is a line of defense that gets smaller and weaker with every passing storm season.

And there has been far too little done to help the system repair itself from past storms.

As part of an integrated coastal plan for Louisiana, rebuilding barrier islands must be a priority. The islands that are left off our coast are just shadows of their former selves and offer just a fraction of the protection they once gave us.

While levees are easier to see and the protection they give easier to appreciate, the barrier islands, beaches and marshes that line our coast do their part, too, and actually could make the levees less crucial and less vulnerable.

But they cannot do that when they are assault every hurricane season from every storm that even brushes against our region of the coast.

Isaac was not nearly as brutal as it could have been. While it left certain signs of its presence, it was not the strong storm many feared.

Still, it again reminds us of the huge price our defenses pay with every passing storm.

Let us hope we can see some real progress made on rebuilding these defenses before another storm season passes and we inevitably face the approach of another storm.

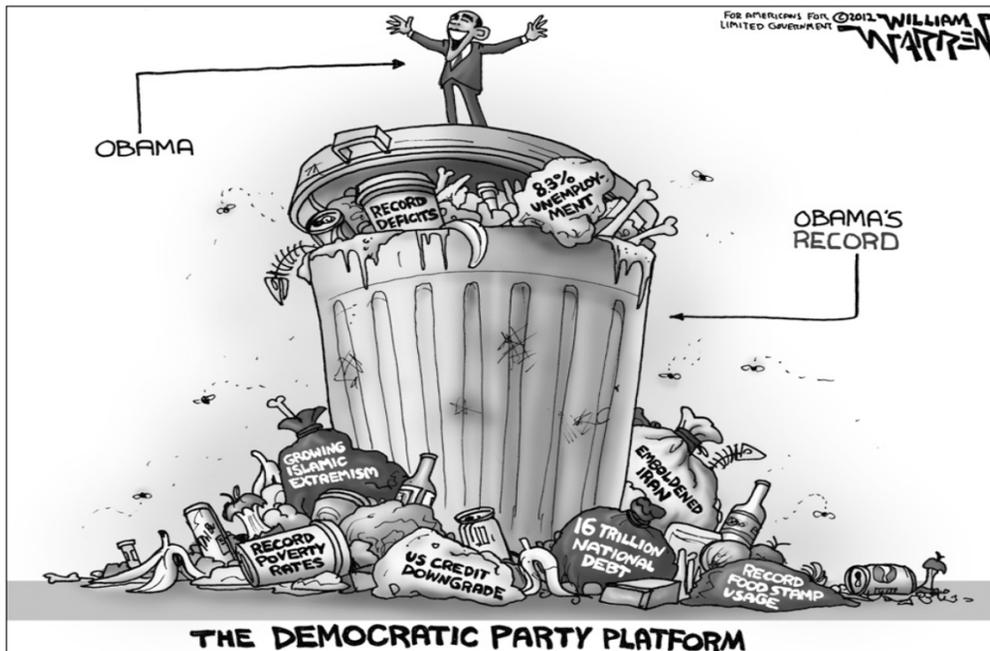
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TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Sunday, Sept. 9, the 253rd day of 2012. There are 113 days left in the year.

On Sept. 9, 1543, Mary Stuart was crowned Queen of Scots at Stirling Castle, nine months after she was born.

OPINION



In Isaac's wake, 4 reasons for gratitude



KEITH MAGILL
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

As Hurricane Isaac stalled over Terrebonne and Lafourche parishes, I checked the latest advisory from the National Hurricane Center to determine the storm's position.

It showed something I hadn't seen in the more 25 years I have covered storms and hurricanes for The Courier and Daily Comet. At 10 a.m. Aug. 29, Isaac's center, the agency said, was zero miles north of Houma.

A direct hit. As it turns out, officials say, a direct hit was better than some of the other possibilities. In short, Isaac's impact on the Houma-Thibodaux area might be summed up this way: It could have been worse.

Hundreds of people suffered wind damage, most described as minor. Only a few dozen homes had reported flood damage in Terrebonne and Lafourche as of last week. Compare that to 2005's Hurricane Rita, which flooded an estimated 10,000 homes in Terrebonne, or Hurricane Ike, which flooded hundreds, and you get the idea.

Isaac did cause some major inconveniences and, in isolated cases, heavy damage. At its peak, 60,000 local homes and businesses lacked power, and in some cases, especially in south Lafourche, it took as long as a week to restore power to everyone.

But considering the massive damage that could have occurred — and the lengthy, arduous recovery it would have required — we have a lot to be grateful for as a community.

At least four things helped make it that way:

Luck: Isaac hit from the east, which put Terrebonne and Lafourche on the hurricane's weaker, drier side. It also allowed local levee officials to use the storm's counterclockwise spin to the area's advantage. As the storm's northeast winds

pushed water out of the bayous, levee workers opened the floodgates that protect the area from the Gulf of Mexico's storm surge. That allowed water to drain out of our community and into the Gulf. And that helped prevent the flooding that could have occurred once Isaac moved northwest and its winds began to blow Gulf water in from the south.

Rain and storm surges were also lower than predicted, and one official said that if Isaac had instead hit from the west, hundreds of homes might have flooded.

More levees: South Lafourche has long benefitted from its hurricane-protection levees, but Terrebonne has languished without much protection at all. Until now. Officials credit the more than \$350 million worth of levees the parish and the Levee District have built since Hurricane Gustav with preventing widespread flooding, particularly in the parish's southern reaches. Tired of waiting for the Army Corps of Engineers' endless studies and exorbitant cost estimates, the Terrebonne Levee District boldly forged ahead a few years ago with an interim Morganza levee system using local and state tax money. That action paid off against Isaac.

Communication and organization: Both parishes did a good job communicating with residents, both directly and through the media. Social media played a greater role than ever, with many residents

using smartphones, Facebook and Twitter to keep in touch with news reports, emergency advisories and each other.

In Terrebonne, the parish's response was far more organized and effective than for the last major hurricanes, Gustav and Ike. I criticized Parish President Michel Claudet's response to those storms. But this time, he deserves credit for being visible to the public, communicating effectively with residents directly and through the media and putting the right people in the right positions. His actions made it clear who was in charge.

Residents' can-do attitude: Nobody has hard numbers, but it was clear that most residents stayed instead of evacuated. That can be dangerous, but it can also pay dividends. Locals are accustomed to doing what it takes to survive, and recover from, a storm. Some housed neighbors who fled lower-lying communities. Cleanup began in earnest. And businesses got back to work.

After Isaac hit, Lake Des Allemands rose and threatened to overwhelm a levee that protects their community. But residents worked with emergency responders and others to prevent catastrophe by using sandbags and inflatable barriers to hold back the water.

"The citizens stepped up and helped us in the spots we needed," Lafourche Director of Emergency Preparedness Chris Boudreaux told The Courier and Daily Comet last week. "They stepped up to the plate and helped us out to save their assets."

That's the attitude I'm talking about.

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Dealers in hope



CAL THOMAS
TRIBUNE MEDIA

Columnist Leonard Pitts wrote a story for the front page of last Sunday's Charlotte Observer indicting both parties for failing to speak up for the poor. He inspired this column.

I could be writing the expected narrative from a conservative at the Democratic National Convention, but have chosen instead to acknowledge that Pitts, though a lefty, is right.

If the Democrats and Republicans aren't talking about the greater goal of helping the poor become un-poor (rather than just sending them a check to sustain them in their poverty), is anyone doing something to help them?

At least one person is — and with-in sight of the Democratic National Convention

Jim Noble is a native North Carolinian and restaurateur. In the business for 30 years, he says his Christian faith led him and his wife to help Charlotte's growing homeless population — which has increased significantly.

According to the U.S. Conference of Mayors, in August 2010, homelessness among families increased 21 percent in Charlotte from the year before.

Noble owns a for-profit restaurant in downtown Charlotte, but the one that is making a difference is a non-profit one called The King's Kitchen (<http://www.kingskitchen.org>).

Standing between a Hooters and a Morton's steak house, Noble donates profits from The King's Kitchen to a ministry he and his wife began to help get people off the streets and back on their feet.

The place has been operational only since 2010 and Noble empha-

sized "it's not a soup kitchen," but more like a restoration center with food. He feeds bodies so he can also feed souls. Noble believes that if a homeless person, drug addict or alcoholic is not changed from within and given hope, he or she is unlikely to see their circumstances improve.

"We are dealers in hope; we give people hope," he says.

The King's Kitchen may be unique among restaurants. It earned non-profit status from the IRS because of its focus on job development and training.

"We give them a job and they get paid and then we have Bible discipleship and church in the restaurant on Sundays," Noble explains. "They have to attend and we give them leadership classes and teach social skills and restaurant skills. They go through a one-year program and then they can either get out and get a job, or stay on with us."

Noble says to overcome homelessness and poverty, those he serves must develop a new outlook on themselves and on life: "If you can change the way a person sees himself, you can change his whole life. If they can just reconnect with the dreams they had when they were young, build their faith and trust God to get out of

the ditch, they can transform their lives."

Jesse Spann is a cook at The King's Kitchen.

Spann says he's been homeless, unemployed and survived at one time by "digging in dumpsters."

Spann is now married with children and his wife is a minister.

He says he loves going back into the streets and ministering to the homeless.

He can identify.

Noble says there are enough churches in Charlotte that if each one helped just one poor or homeless person, the problem would be effectively solved.

There are many good works performed by church and independent groups around the country, but The King's Kitchen shows the power of one couple and the vision they had for caring for what Scripture calls "the least of these."

A footnote: Jim Noble says he is a political conservative, but "socially liberal" in the sense he believes in spreading his own wealth around to help the needy.

The difference between his "liberalism" and that of the Democratic National Convention that was meeting a few blocks away is that he is liberal with the money he makes and he holds accountable those on the receiving end.

There is another difference: His program has a far better success rate than the government's, which does not and cannot change human hearts with the transforming message Noble not only preaches and teaches, but lives.

And the Southern-style cooking is excellent.

Readers may email Cal Thomas at tmseditor@tribune.com.

Forgotten war

Green on blue — it sounds quaint, like it might be a trend in interior design or a popular fall fashion. Instead, it's the euphemism used to describe the epidemic of murders committed by members of the Afghan army and police against coalition — mostly American — military personnel.

As Americans mark the 11th anniversary of 9/11 and, soon after, 11 years of war in Afghanistan, our troops are dealing with a new and disturbing problem. The people they are helping and training to defend their own country are increasingly turning their guns on them.

According to figures released by NATO's International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, 114 coalition troops have been killed in 76 incidents since the first acknowledged green-on-blue attack in 2007.

Thirty-five of those incidents have taken place this year alone, claiming the lives of 45 coalition troops. At least 12 of the 38 Americans who lost their lives in Afghanistan in August were killed by their purported Afghan allies.

In counterinsurgency operations, which require moving among civilians and earning their confidence, differentiating friend from foe is already inherently difficult.

As the Army's counterinsurgency manual co-authored by Gen. David Petraeus notes, troops must be "ready to be greeted with either a handshake or a hand grenade."

The green-on-blue attacks are something else — cold-blooded murders by colleagues, often in uniform, that sow suspicion and sever essential bonds of trust.

American and NATO leaders initially downplayed the green-on-blue attacks as isolated incidents that resulted from personal grievances.

Marine Gen. John Allen, commander of NATO troops in Afghanistan, suggested that heat and the strain of fasting during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan might have been contributing factors — as if those are new elements in the country. In recent weeks, however, there's been a growing acknowledgment that the rising number of insider attacks is something more than an anomaly.

NATO announced toughened screening procedures for Afghans entering the security services as well as "cultural awareness training." The Afghan government fired or detained hundreds of soldiers for suspected ties to militant groups. The United States halted its training of some police recruits.

Nearly 2,000 Americans have lost their lives in Afghanistan; more than 17,500 have been wounded in action.

Compounding the tragedy of these numbers is the fact that so few Americans seem to care, beyond those in the military community who actually bear the burdens of war. President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden at least managed to acknowledge, in passing, Afghanistan last week in Charlotte.

Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan disturbingly failed to mention the war in their acceptance speeches in Tampa.

A recent Associated Press-GfK Poll found that 66 percent of Americans believe the United States should no longer be involved in Afghanistan — though their opposition isn't strong enough to compel them to take to the streets or make the war a campaign issue.

There's just enough apathy about Afghanistan to make one think that the massive protests against the war in Iraq were driven by cynical partisanship. The greatest victims of the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan are still Afghan soldiers, police and civilians.

Last month, insurgents attacked a party in a village in southern Afghanistan and beheaded 17 men and women, presumably because the celebration included music and dancing.

Last week, a suicide bomber killed 30 mourners at a funeral in the eastern part of the country.

No one wants to see Afghanistan revert to a place where the butchers who commit such crimes are once again in control. But after 11 years, should we be sending Americans to a conflict in which one-third of the casualties are taking bullets in the back from our supposed friends?

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