

TO REBUILD AFTER SANDY

## Unleash the Army Corps of Engineers!

by Marcia Merry Baker

Dec. 3—The first week of December is Week Five of the effects of Superstorm Sandy. The scale of the damage, the inaction and toleration of continued suffering, make the point that we must force a nation-saving policy shift right now, to end the power of the trans-Atlantic regime—the City of London/Wall Street empire—which is perpetrating vulnerability to disaster, and blocking the means to rebuild. It's a matter of national sovereignty and economic existence.

First, we must restore sound banking, through reinstating the Glass-Steagall law, which will separate commercial from speculative banking. Secondly, extend massive credits for sound, nation-building activity, including immediate aid to localities and states

for essential functioning. Thirdly, launch the rebuilding of the Northeastern United States; do this in conjunction with launching NAWAPA XXI, the long-delayed North American Water and Power Alliance.

In line with this outlook, after the reality shock from Superstorm Sandy, Congressional delegations from the Northeast—witnesses at a Senate hearing Nov. 29—gave non-partisan presentations on what happened to their districts, striking the common theme that the Army Corps of Engineers must be unleashed in the region. To do this, requires exactly the three measures cited above, and vaporizes such mind-control formulations as the “fiscal cliff.”

New Jersey Sen. Robert Menendez (D) said that we



Courtesy of Sen. Robert Menendez



Courtesy of Sen. Robert Menendez

*These photos of Surf City, N.J., taken before (left) and after (right) Superstorm Sandy, following beach engineering by the Army Corps in 2007: The dunes held, and damage to communities behind the project was manageable.*



Courtesy of Sen. Robert Menendez



Courtesy of Sen. Robert Menendez

*These before (left) and after (right) photos show a section of Long Beach Island, that was left unprotected during the storm. The surge washed away the dune, and flooded homes along the beach, pushing tons of sand across the entire area.*

“desperately need funding for the Army Corps of Engineers.” He showed “before and after” photos from the Jersey Shore, on how the Army Corps-engineered stretches of coastline fared far better than non-protected seashores.

Meanwhile, the Obama Administration and certain other celebrity-flunkies in both parties, continue on their London-steered course of budgeteering palaver, all about cuts, debts, and taxes, which is a see-through cover story for measures to destroy people, beginning with the disaster zones. Wall Street crook Timothy Geithner, the Treasury Secretary, is leading the charge. The same day as the Senate hearing on Sandy, Geithner was on Capitol Hill, issuing his terms for Congress on austerity and finances.

In the next few days, Obama is supposed to make a request to Congress for supplemental aid for the Hurricane Sandy states, but it can be known in advance that this will be a pretense. Take just the example of FEMA. Before the November election, Obama appeared with FEMA director Craig Fugate, who said fatuously, “We have plenty of money.” Now, FEMA is out of money, and their job is just beginning.

The total of Federal aid requested so far from the combined proposals from worst-hit states is \$85 billion, enough to bust up the “fiscal cliff” scenario, even though it is nothing like what is truly needed. The breakdown is: New York—\$42 billion requested; New Jersey—\$37 billion; Connecticut—\$4 billion. Today, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo is in Washington, D.C. to stress what his state needs.

Well and good, if the \$85 to \$100 billion—by a mir-

acle—came to be approved and issued overnight. But it’s *the system that must be changed*, to restore government and economic function for a sovereign nation. In reality, the physical means don’t exist at present across the United States, to provide all the repair, replacement, and new inputs for rebuilding.

Look at an instance that “worked,” and think about what is involved in scaling it up: the new flood- and storm-surge-protection system for New Orleans.

A \$14 billion storm-defenses system of new and upgraded levees, pumps, gates, and a huge new seawall (Lake Bourgne Storm Surge) were accomplished for New Orleans in record time, from 2009 to 2011, under the direction of the Army Corps of Engineers. The funding came from the Katrina-chagrined Bush Administration, and then the so-called stimulus law, under the new Obama Administration. On Aug. 29, 2012, the new flood/surge defense system was fully activated, and completely protected New Orleans from Hurricane Isaac.

### **Disaster Relief, by Sector**

Instead of a rush to build up every aspect of infrastructure in the Northeast, on the principle demonstrated in the New Orleans project for storm defenses—*build it all, and build it fast*—there is lip-service and inaction. This is evident, in a snapshot of the situation, by a few sectors of essential infrastructure.

**Housing.** Interim lodgings are not being provided on the required scale and timetable. An estimated 300,000 individual or duplex homes are damaged or destroyed, as are thousands more apartments. Locali-

ties are pleading with FEMA to bring in trailers and make other arrangements for thousands of displaced people.

**Local government.** Bergen County, N.J., had two towns wiped out. There is no more Menachie Police Department. New London, Conn., for example, has barely any firemen or police staffing left. Localities in all the states are so financially distressed, they absolutely cannot pay the standard 25:75 funding ratio of local-to-Federal cost-sharing for rebuilding anything.

The current demands are far beyond pre-storm levels. For example, the New York City Fire Department reports a 37% increase in fire incidents in November, compared to last year at the same time. This reflects electrical malfunctions, improper use of candles and generators during power outages, etc.

**Transportation.** The storm damage to the rail and subway systems of New York/New Jersey is the largest transit disaster in U.S. history. The New Jersey Transit Rail line suffered unprecedented damage. More than a third of its locomotives and 23% of its rail cars were damaged. Track, bridges, and controls were damaged and destroyed. E.g., New Jersey Transit's Morgan draw bridge, in South Amboy, had boats and debris washed up on it. The Hoboken PATH train station is closed.

## Call in the Cavalry

On Nov. 29, the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, chaired by Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.), took statements from Federal lawmakers from the Superstorm Sandy states, who gave particulars of the devastation. Across all their reports was the necessity to deploy the Army Corps of Engineers. Many said that their states are right now wide open for terrible harm from just an "ordinary" Nor'easter coming through.

Rhode Island Senators Jack Reed (D) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D) each described how the state capital, Providence, was protected from the storm by a seawall and gates. Connecticut lawmakers said the same about the storm-surge barrier in place to protect Stamford. Both installations were built by the Corps in the 1960s. Sen. Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) added that the Stamford system has been long overdue to get its pump operations updated, for merely \$500 million. The pumps had to be operated manually during Hurricane Sandy, which worked, but must be improved. He wants all this fixed, and other projects, too, especially anti-flood work on the Housatonic River.

Seaside lawmakers all called for the Army Corps to provide beach protection. Although the national priority is large-scale structural protection—involving seawalls, gates, and such—nevertheless, even local structural intervention by the Corps proves the point of principle. Stockton College, in New Jersey, has just released a report, giving documentation of the before-and-after proof of how the Army Corps beach protection worked.

Rep. Christopher Smith (R-N.J.) stressed that the Army Corps beach projects were "extremely worthwhile"; Congress must provide the Corps with funding. He gave specifics from Ocean County, of how the Corps' high berms and wide beaches mitigated damage, in stark contrast to coastal strips without protection.

Rep. Andy Harris (R-Md.) pointed out that "Army Corps engineering protected Ocean City from major damage," but other coastal sites lacking the Corps' work, such as Crisfield, were badly damaged,

Rep. Michael Grimm (R-N.Y.), from hard-hit Staten Island, said that the Army Corps must be deployed "to fortify our coastline."

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) showed a map indicating seven ready-to-go coastal defense projects designed by the Corps, for Long Island and Staten Island. He said that these must start right away, and called it point one of his three-point program: "accelerate, study and streamline," to accelerate all ready-to-go projects.

## Storm Surge Barriers

Schumer's second point, which he calls "study," is to start the preliminary work right away, of determining the longer term, big structural protection systems for New York City/New Jersey. He specified, to begin with, the "Dutch-like system" of sea-surge barriers. His third point was to streamline and reform anything that gets in the way of implementing these projects. He singled out the Federal Flood Protection regulations, which are "broken," he said.

Schumer made a point of saying that he will collaborate on this with Louisiana Sen. David R. Vitter, who had the successful experience of working with the Army Corps in his state.

In 2009, the Corps of Engineers participated in a seminar, hosted by the American Society of Civil Engineers, to review four sea-surge protection system proposals.

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