

September 21, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

If there is but one clear lesson in the wake of the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina, it is that the federal government has a critical role in taking action prior to storms to prevent -- or at least mitigate -- the threat to human lives, damage to public infrastructure and private property, and the economic disruption that result from major storms. If Washington fails to take effective action before hurricanes hit populated areas of the country, taxpayers have to pay far more for clean-up and repair than would have been required had protective action been taken before the event.

For nearly a century, scientists have known that the most effective way to reduce storm surge risk to people and property along America's coasts is to establish a system of healthy sandy beaches with dunes. Starting in the 1930's, the federal government led the way in establishing a program to reduce such damages by renourishing eroded beaches. By the 1970's, this program had evolved into a model of federal-state-local partnership in which the federal government provided the planning and construction expertise of the Army Corps of Engineers while the states and their localities shared the costs of renourishing eroded beaches.

Given the recent lessons learned from Katrina about risk avoidance and the favorable results gained from several decades of experience with the federal shore protection program, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association is baffled by your administration's steadfast opposition to supporting funds for the periodic renourishment of America's beaches. Your opposition is needlessly putting human lives and livelihoods at risk.

The beach restoration projects your administration opposes are those that have been approved by Congress after years of study by the federal government. They have met every engineering, economic, and environmental standard that Congress, the Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies, as well as state agencies have imposed. The states and communities requesting these projects have entered into contracts with the federal government (known as "project cooperation agreements") in which they committed to levy the fees and taxes needed to keep their end of the bargain to pay their share of the costs of keeping the beaches healthy for at least 50 years. Yet

your administration has taken the position that the funding commitments made by the federal government through legislation and contractual agreements are meaningless.

As we understand your position, it is based on the contention that the costs of periodic renourishment should be borne by localities because they – and not the federal government -- allegedly reap the benefits of healthy beaches. Frankly, that position defies scientific fact and rational observation. A study commissioned by your own Office of Management and Budget in 2001 came to a contrary conclusion. The lion's share of benefits accrues to the federal government in significant tax revenue and avoided disaster recovery costs. In the aftermath of Katrina and the series of other strong hurricanes that preceded it, your administration has taken the position that risk avoidance and minimization are the best way to prepare for the devastation caused by natural disasters. We applaud that common-sense approach.

Nevertheless, there are communities along our nation's coastline which are vulnerable at this very moment to just the kind of devastation your administration is committed to avoid. Some of these are communities that relied on the word of the federal government 20 or more years ago. Their elected officials and business people rallied community support and dug into their pockets to come up with the money not only for a one-time "shot of sand," but for a beach built with the finest coastal science in the world, that would be kept periodically renourished over a period of at least 50 years.

In Fiscal 2007, when Congress turned over the decision of which water resources projects would receive funding to your administration, the Corps of Engineers requested funds for at least three periodic renourishment projects where the risk level was high. Your administration denied that request. A year later, those communities (and now others) remain at risk.

Your staff is already at work preparing the budget recommendations you will make to Congress next February. The directives you have issued to the Corps of Engineers once again make it clear that you will not recommend funds for periodic beach renourishment. This is clearly bad public policy based on the misplaced desire of some within the Office of Management and Budget to only reduce spending. The studies for these projects – which were all approved by OMB – show that they actually provide taxpayers an average 400 percent return for every taxpayer dollar invested in beach renourishment. Surely that level of return on investment is one which all of us concerned about fiscal responsibility can support.

There is still ample time left to reverse your administration's position for Fiscal 2009 and signal to the 55 percent of the American people who live within 50 miles of the coast, as well as the tens of millions of others who visit the coast each year, that you place a very high priority on their lives and livelihoods.

Sincerely,



Mayor Harry Simmons
President