



## Should New Orleans be rebuilt?

Washington

September 2, 2005 - 2:25PM

ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Even before the evacuation of flooded New Orleans has been completed, hurricane scientists, disaster experts and reconstruction officials are raising the question of whether the city should be rebuilt at all.

President Bush has promised to help the city get back on its feet, and few people can imagine an America without New Orleans. I can tell you that someday there will be people playing jazz in the riverfront, said Hassan Mashriqui, a Louisiana State University engineer who used a supercomputer to model flooding from Hurricane Katrina.

But others say the idea of rebuilding a below-sea-level city next to a large lake in a hurricane-prone area makes little sense, especially with the prospect of taxpayers having to foot repeated bills for aid and reconstruction.

Moving the city is clearly going to be an option, said John Copenhaver, a former southeast regional director for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. It would be an unbelievably expensive and difficult proposition, but it has to be on the table.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Commanding Gen. Carl A. Strock on Thursday agreed that a discussion will have to take place, and House of Representatives Speaker Dennis Hastert, R.-Ill., told a suburban Chicago newspaper: There are some real tough questions to ask about how you go about rebuilding this city. ... I think federal insurance and everything goes along with it, and we ought to take a second look at it.

Can the country afford to rebuild in this high-risk area, where there is no means of mitigating the losses? asked Eric Tolbert, who until February was FEMA's disaster response chief. We could finish rebuilding, put the levee back where it was and five years from now we could be facing the identical scenario.

Federal officials have relocated disaster-prone towns before, but never on the scale of New Orleans, one of the country's oldest urban areas, home to a half-million people, a major transportation hub and a tourist mecca.

After a killer 1993 flood on the Mississippi River devastated the Illinois town of Valmeyer, 35 miles south of St. Louis, the federal government agreed to move the town 1.5 miles to land that was 400 feet higher and out of the flood plain.

But Valmeyer had a population of only 900 people, nearly all of whom agreed to the move.

But relocating a city the size of New Orleans has never been attempted, and an attempt would be not only expensive little Valmeyer cost \$65 million to move, New Orleans, at the same rate, would be well over \$50 billion but also have even higher political costs. What, for example, would be done with New Orleans many historic buildings?

Were talking about New Orleans. There's never been a successful relocation of a large city, said Kathleen Tierney, director of the Natural Hazards Research and Applications Information Center at the University of Colorado.

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