



## **NFPW Member's Book Predicts Lack of Disaster Readiness**

Two years before Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, a husband-and-wife writing team accurately predicted that the United States wasn't prepared for a catastrophic natural disaster.

In the article, "An Ill Wind and American Policy," Rosemary and Walter Brasch warned that critical resources to defend the nation against all forms of disasters were being diverted to Iraq, leaving the nation vulnerable.

"We found that significant equipment and critical National Guard resources, which would normally be used to assist residents in preparation, search, and recovery, were not available," says Rosemary Brasch, at the time a Red Cross national disaster family services specialist. As just one example, she points to the scarcity of plywood.

"People along the East Coast were unable to get plywood to board up their houses since most of the mills had sent their supplies to Iraq, she said. What was left, she adds, was a supply-and-demand situation that saw prices skyrocket.

Walter Brasch, an award-winning journalist and university professor of journalism, for 10 years was an emergency management official.

"After 9/11, there was a tremendous amount of money spent for all kinds of anti-terrorism protection," says the NFPW Pennsylvania affiliate member, "much of which should have been spent on disaster preparation."

He points to innumerable "pork-barrel earmarked funds" for rural areas, while critical preparation against natural disasters "almost became an afterthought."

At the time Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005, Brasch was working on a book about the problem, "but I dropped that to concentrate upon columns that were more immediate."

Those columns – Brasch writes a syndicated social issues column – became the base for '**Unacceptable: The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina**. The book, based upon extensive observation and documentation, focuses not so much upon *what* happened, but *why* it happened.

"What I found is a vast systemic failure at all levels of government," says Brasch, "but the problem was created not only by incompetence of certain personnel, but by

the system that allowed almost two million Americans, most of them underprivileged and from the underclass of society, to be put at risk.”

In ***‘Unacceptable:’ The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina***—President Bush himself had called the response “Unacceptable”—Brasch probes:

- Political policies that disregarded global warming and which resulted in warmer sea levels that facilitated catastrophic hurricanes;
- Policies that permitted oil companies to drill into the wetlands of the Gulf Coast and, thus, reduce protection against hurricanes and floods;
- Policies that substantially reduced funding for natural disaster protection, while hyper-inflating funds for the War in Iraq;
- Policies that downgraded the efficiency and response of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), while pushing new resources into the President’s anti-terrorism campaigns;
- Policies that allowed a willful neglect of certain populations;
- Policies that emphasized the “PR mission” and “photo-ops” over actual command;
- Policies that allowed willful neglect of critical warnings by government scientists and engineers;
- Policies that allowed waste and corruption to infiltrate the nation’s federal response; and
- Policies that allowed the use and exploitation of illegal immigrants to do post-Katrina clean-up, while denying jobs to American citizens.

Brasch also looks at how the media, with few exceptions, failed to investigate and report significant and substantial problems prior to the Katrina devastation and, thus, allowed Americans to be caught in a web of ignorance.

***‘Unacceptable:’ The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina*** is a powerful indictment of bungling at all levels, says Brasch, “but it is also a look at overwhelming excellence by many organizations to respond to the disaster and to help the people.”

He especially singles out the Coast Guard. With an unofficial motto of “Act now, get permission later,” the Coast Guard knew what it had to do and, against great odds, performed remarkably well, says Brasch, noting, “Although it’s under the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard seemed not to be bound by the bureaucratic incompetence of its parent organization.”

***‘Unacceptabl:e: The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina*** is Brasch’s 16th book.

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