

Hurricane Katrina and the Oil Spill

Following the catastrophic Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005, former Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco appointed Dr. Mackie to the thirty-three member board of the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA), the guiding agency to lead the state's rebuilding efforts. The Authority's focus is on key state issues such as housing, jobs, transportation, health care, education, infrastructure, economic and workforce development, family services, and the environment.

Dr. Mackie's significant appointment was announced by Blanco proclaiming she had, "selected some of the best minds from – or with connections to – Louisiana. They represent the spectrum of Louisiana. They are respected leaders, men and women dedicated to making a new and better Louisiana. They have distinguished themselves as leaders in varied fields. Each has a record of distinction and integrity." Dr. Mackie was a clear choice.

An engineer and educator, Dr. Mackie is uniquely qualified to help lead the state's rebuilding efforts. He was an Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering at Tulane University where he specialized in fluid dynamics, the study of liquids and how they behave under certain conditions. A lifelong New Orleans resident, Dr. Mackie is familiar with the extreme weather conditions affecting the Louisiana coast. In 2004, Dr. Mackie, his wife, and two young sons evacuated the city as Category Five Hurricane Ivan threatened to pummel the state. He wrote about this experience in his memoir *A View from the Roof: Lessons for Life & Business*, released by Acanthus Publishing in January 2005, predicting the devastation that would affect the city if a Category Three or stronger should touch down. A storm that would touch down later that year.

Dr. Mackie's leadership in the LRA led him to be featured in director Spike Lee's film *When the Levees Broke*, the definitive document of the unmitigated disaster that was, and is, Hurricane Katrina. Described by an HBO executive as "one of the most important films HBO has ever made," the film showcases the struggle for New Orleans by focusing on the profound loss, as well as the indomitable spirit, of New Orleanians. *When the Levees Broke* received a 2006 Peabody Award, as well as the 2007 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Television Movie, Mini-Series or Dramatic Special. At the 63rd Venice International Film Festival the film was awarded the Horizons award in the documentary category. The film was also selected as part of the 2008 Whitney Biennial.

Spike Lee returned to the Gulf Coast in his follow up to *Levees* with the documentary *If God is Willing and the Creek Don't Rise*. Dr. Mackie is once again featured, as the film discusses not only the problems the Gulf Coast still faces due to Katrina, but also deals with the British Petroleum oil spill, causing another victimization of the area.

The Oil Spill

In 2010, British Petroleum caused the largest oil spill in U.S. history. The spill lasted for three months, released over 200 million gallons of crude oil, and caused extensive damage to the Gulf Coast and the people who live there, specifically the large African American population. Mackie, a native of the area, is speaking out for his community. Mackie emphasizes the lack of ethics in engineering that ultimately caused the spill saying that, "engineering disasters occur when the technical people take shortcuts." Dr. Mackie is calling for action, telling engineering students, "there are only two places you can make money: either creating disasters or new

innovations, or cleaning them up. And people of color, who are the main victims of those who create the disasters, should be leading the way in terms of cleaning them up.”

While environmentalists are looking into the effects of the massive oil spill on the surroundings and the government is looking at the financial ramifications, African American leaders are coming together to give a voice to those whose daily lives have been impacted most, the black communities living along the Gulf Coast. Two of the groups speaking out are the National Society of Black Engineers, in which Mackie is a member, and the American Association of Blacks in Energy. Both groups are calling for accountability and looking for solutions.