

Tulane-Backed Effort Becomes Law

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A program inspired by Hurricane Katrina and pushed by Tulane University is among the provisions contained in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act that President George W. Bush signed on Thursday (Aug. 14).



A bipartisan effort by the Louisiana congressional delegation makes possible a new Education Disaster and Emergency Relief Program. Tulane and Loyola universities, as well as the University of New Orleans, backed the initiative.

Officially known as the Education Disaster and Emergency Relief Loan Program, the provision will make low-interest loans available to universities that have suffered from any major disaster or emergency declared by the president of the United States. The funds may be used for construction, replacement and renovation of university facilities or to pay for a school's operational costs.

“We learned from Katrina that the most immediate need for educational institutions after a major disaster is the cash to restart operations and rebuild,” Tulane University President Scott Cowen said. “This program will get money quickly to help universities, a critical component of the economy in most communities, get up and running.”

To qualify for the loans, universities must submit documentation of their losses resulting from a major disaster and show they had appropriate insurance policies prior to the disaster and filed claims appropriately. The institution also must demonstrate that it has attempted to minimize the cost of any losses by pursuing compensation from FEMA.

Loans are available only for major disasters or emergencies that occur after the date of the enactment of the legislation. However, loans may be provided to an institution affected by a Gulf hurricane under the Hurricane Relief Act of 2005.

Sharon Courtney, vice president of government affairs at Tulane, said establishment of the program could enable the colleges to get low-cost financing included in the stimulus/disaster package that likely will be taken up by Congress in September.

“Passage of this legislation comes after a two-year, bipartisan effort by our Louisiana congressional delegation. This is really legacy legislation. The Katrina experience Tulane and our fellow institutions went through made us ideal advocates of this,” said Courtney, whose office, along with the University of New Orleans and Loyola University, lobbied to include creation of the loan program in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act.

Originally enacted in 1965 as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society, the Higher Education Act sought to strengthen the nation's colleges and universities and provide financial assistance for students.

The Higher Education Act of 1965 was reauthorized in 1968, 1972, 1976, 1980, 1986, 1992 and 1998. Current authorization for the programs in the Higher Education Act expired at the end of December 2006. Before each reauthorization, Congress adds new programs, changes the language and policies of existing programs or makes other changes.