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50 CENTS 169th year No. 239

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2005

HURRICANE EDITION

DAY 18 DEVELOPMENTS

The official death toll in metropolitan New Orleans: **558**

Congress passes tax-relief bills aimed at helping Katrina victims, See A-2



Blanco disputes criticism by the former FEMA chief that she and her staff ineffectively responded as the disaster unfolded, See A-3

Louisiana officials are asking the feds for emergency financing and fast-track permitting for a \$34 billion hurricane protection and coastal restoration plan, See A-4

Jefferson officials want to start next hurricane season with 'safe houses' for drainage station crews, See A-5

St. Bernard Parish evacuees to return beginning Saturday under a plan for a staggered re-entry, See A-8

Some in poor neighborhoods stay behind to help clean up storm's mess, See Metro

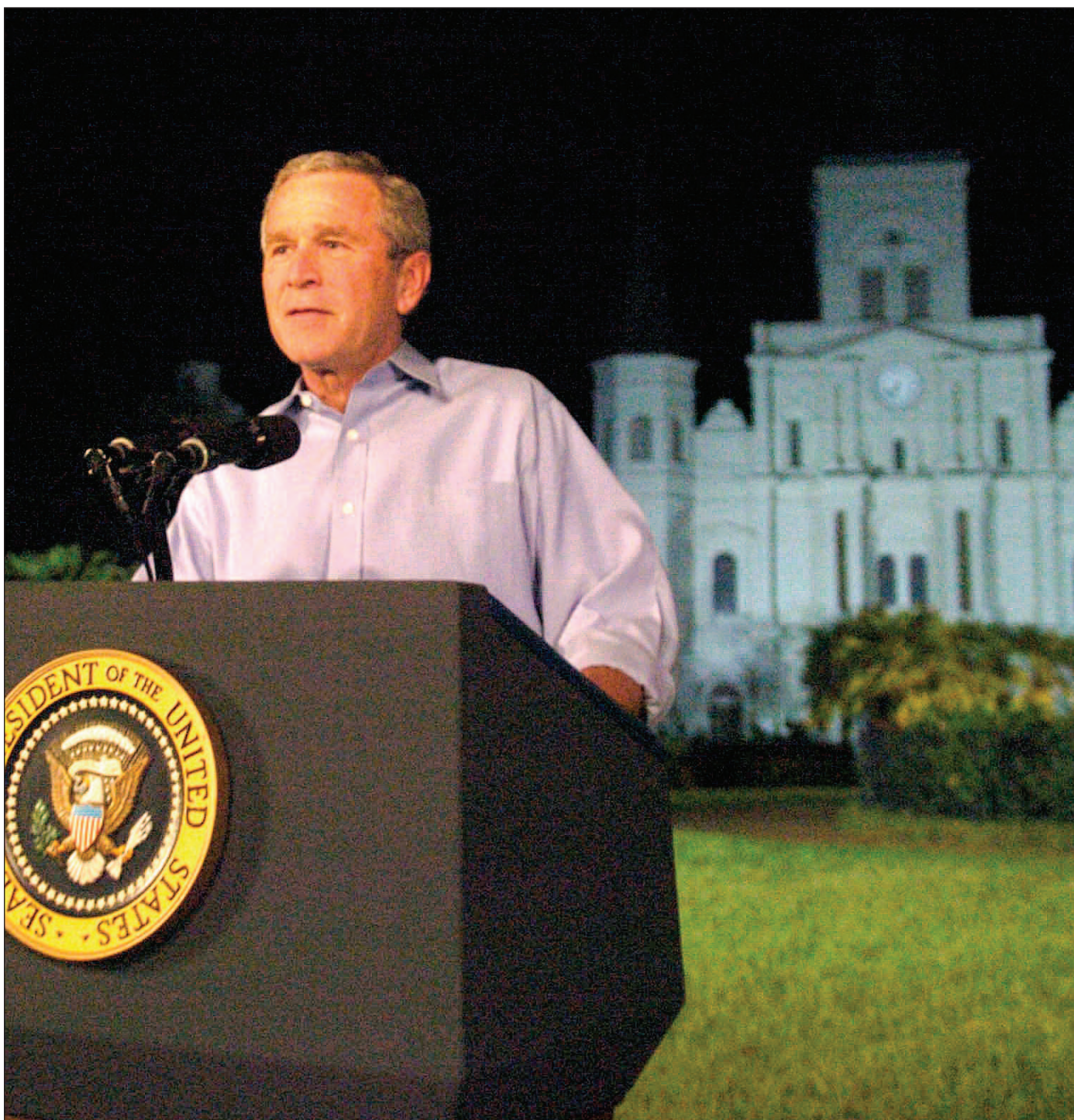
Kenner, Harahan residents return, See Metro

The Orleans Parish School Board members pledge to get the city's schools open quickly, See Metro

Funeral for teen killed in crash disrupted by storm finally set, See Metro

FROM JACKSON SQUARE, BUSH FOCUSES ON REBUILDING

'There is no way to imagine America without New Orleans'



STAFF PHOTO BY DAVID GRUNFELD

Standing alone in front of St. Louis Cathedral, President Bush on Thursday vowed to the state and the nation that the federal government would make a massive commitment to rebuild the Gulf Coast region.

By John McQuaid
Staff writer

President Bush fixed his gaze on the future of New Orleans Thursday night in a prime-time speech to the nation from the city's high ground in Jackson Square, saying that the federal government would "do what it takes ... stay as long as it takes" to rebuild the city and the storm-shattered Gulf region.

"All who question the future of the Crescent City need to know: There is no

way to imagine America without New Orleans, and this great city will rise again," Bush said, standing with the St. Louis Cathedral and the statue of Andrew Jackson as a backdrop.

Visiting the city for the third time since Hurricane Katrina struck Aug. 29, Bush is seeking to find his voice and political footing in the midst of heavy criticism about the government's post-storm recovery efforts. The confused and halting federal response in the aftermath of the hurricane as anarchy erupted in the flood-

ed city has helped drive his popularity to the lowest levels of his presidency.

Bush acknowledged the disaster response problems, but focused mainly on the enormous tasks ahead: cleaning up, rebuilding and resettling the region and planning better to deal with future catastrophes.

The White House and Congress have loosened the purse strings in the aftermath of Katrina, already approving \$62.3 billion in federal funds for the post-disaster cleanup and rebuilding. Before it's

done, the figure is expected to exceed \$200 billion, far above the federal price tag of any disaster in the nation's history.

Some critics have questioned if the government knows what it is doing dispensing so much money so quickly - and especially whether the small and beleaguered Federal Emergency Management Agency, which will administer much of the aid and reconstruction contracts, has the resources to handle so much cash.

See BUSH, page A-14

Nagin maps out return to N.O.

Some businesses can come back Saturday

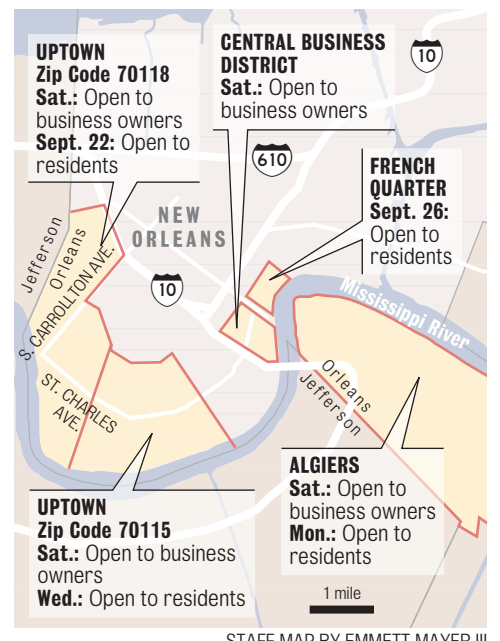
By Gordon Russell
Staff writer

New Orleans businesses and residents can begin returning to four unflooded parts of the city on a staggered schedule that begins this weekend for some, Mayor Ray Nagin announced Thursday.

"It's a good day in New Orleans," Nagin said at a morning news conference. "The sun is shining. We're bringing New Orleans back and this is our first step. This city will start to breathe again."

The announcement followed the release Wednesday of tests by the Environmental Protection Agency that found air quality satisfactory in the city, but high concentrations of pollutants in lingering floodwaters and the mud left behind after they recede.

See NAGIN, page A-12



STAFF MAP BY FMMFTT MAVER III

Floods not included in most policies

By Jeffrey Meitrodt
Staff writer

BATON ROUGE — In an attempt to force insurance companies to cover billions of dollars in hurricane damage instead of foisting it on the federal government, a group of 15 families from the New Orleans area filed suit Thursday asking a state judge to rule that any flooding from Katrina should be covered by homeowners policies.

The class-action lawsuit, which does not seek any monetary damages, came amid a chorus of complaints from state lawmakers

See INSURANCE, page A-15

HANO relocates to Houston to place La. residents

By Laura Maggi
and Robert Travis Scott
Capital bureau

BATON ROUGE — As the federal government begins moving 200,000 mobile housing units into Louisiana for Hurricane Katrina evacuees, the Housing Authority

of New Orleans has relocated temporarily to Houston and is placing thousands of former city residents who receive public housing assistance into homes throughout Texas.

The events highlight the social and economic challenges of returning families and workers to New Orleans, as local and federal

authorities struggle to meet the immediate housing needs of displaced citizens while hoping as many as possible can move back to the city in the long term.

At least 5,000 former Orleans Parish residents who fled to Houston are getting housing assistance, either in public housing developments or from so-called

Section 8 vouchers that help people pay for housing in private homes or apartments, said Adonis Expose, director of communications for HANO.

The housing assistance is a federal benefit that people can take with them when they move, and Expose said HANO is having success finding housing for those

people in a number of Texas cities.

"The reality is, if they're doing better where they are, they're probably not coming back," Expose said.

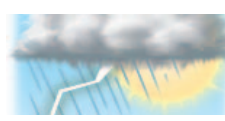
That potential outcome chills some local politicians. State Sen.

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Expanded edition of The Times-Picayune at www.nola.com

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EVENING STORMS
HIGH 90 | LOW 76

