

Galveston Housing Authority Issues

Presentation to City Council, September 24, 2009

Linda J. Burton

Mayor Thomas and members of City Council, my name is Linda Burton, 13817 Cutlass Lane and I am before you today because I am a concerned citizen and property taxpayer who cares deeply about Galveston Island's recovery and revitalization.

I retired and moved to Galveston 9 years ago. I'm an Islander by Choice and was lucky enough to retire in my early 50s because of a degree of business acumen and a lifetime of living beneath my means. Since moving to Galveston I've continued to do selective business consulting primarily on the East Coast but for the past two years have devoted most of my time to community service.

As an executive level employee of a Fortune 100 company's management team, my typical responsibilities included cost/benefit analysis, process review, strategic planning, and end to end operations analysis. And those skills still serve me well especially in areas of research and analysis.

Which brings me to the Galveston Housing Authority. I, like many Galvestonians, was disturbed when the GHA ran a series of ads in the GCDN to solicit Section 8 housing applications for Katrina and Rita victims. **Surely, this was a mistake, I thought.** Those hurricanes were 4 years ago—they must be talking about Ike victims. So I started digging and to my shock and surprise I discovered it was by design.

You see, the Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2009 allocates \$80 million dollars of funds to Texas for—you guessed it—Katrina and Rita evacuees who relocated to Texas. The funds go to a little over 3,000 Section 8 housing vouchers. Almost 10% of all of the funds or 303 vouchers go to Galveston Housing Authority. Houston, by contrast, is only allocated 500. **So Galveston Housing Authority must find 303 evacuees to spend those vouchers. Thus the ads. A classic case of find a need or loose the funds.**

What's more—recent Texas Open Records requests to the GHA by concerned Galvestonians resulted in stonewalling by the GHA. GHA even hired outside counsel to review the requests which were simple in nature---Board transcripts and housing waiting lists.

I think most reasonable people believe in giving folks a hand up and providing housing assistance to those in temporary need. But now the GHA is the biggest developer in Galveston and an active partner with the City. It is your responsibility Council, as public servants to be good stewards of the public funds. We, the people, aren't asking you to

perform due diligence, we are demanding it. The fact that this body blindly and without debate earmarked over \$25 million to the GHA, a poorly run receptacle for government funds is more than disturbing to me. Galveston deserves better.

Reference links: [Texas gets 3,111 Section 8 vouchers for hurricane survivors « Texas housers](#)