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## Bring Home The Davis-Bacon

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### Dear President Bush:

Have you no shame? By suspending the Davis-Bacon laws in the areas devastated by the hurricane you are taking advantage of those already suffering. Davis-Bacon laws require federal contractors to pay laborers and mechanics at least the prevailing-wage rates (and fringe benefits) that other similar workers in the area receive. Once again, wealthy contractors, who are being awarded contracts without competitive bidding that guarantee them a certain profit regardless of how much they spend, will reap millions from this disaster. At the same time, the Americans doing the hard work of restoring these ravaged cities are forced to live without even a basic living wage.

Mr. President, America watched in shock as victims cried for help and bodies floated alongside the survivors. In the gut-wrenching wake of Hurricane Katrina we saw a stark portrait of those left behind. We live in the world's richest country, yet in New Orleans, thousands lost their lives due to a lack of money, transportation, a safe destination or the know-how to get out.

New Orleans is just the most horrific example of what our society has become: a neglectful place, indifferent to Americans with the least income. In the name of freedom, your administration has starved our government of funds for programs that support average Americans and opened the door for death by a thousand little cuts. In New Orleans, cuts eliminated money for shoring up the levees that could have saved the city and thousands of its residents. Nationwide, cuts have strip-mined child care, pre-school and public schools, which undermines our country's future by guaranteeing that another generation will be poor.

While championing tax breaks for the rich, Congress, urged on by you, continues to cut programs that help send poor children to college, provide housing vouchers and support job training programs. Some 45 million Americans are still without health care, including many of the New Orleans evacuees. The basic needs of human beings in America are more and more available only to those who can afford to buy them. Survival, in short, has become a commodity of the rich.

And now, in the cruelest irony, you are saying that in New Orleans—where a quarter of the city is poor, 40 percent of its children live in families below the poverty level and the prevailing wage for construction labor is less than \$10.00 per hour—that working families should have a pay cut as they rebuild their destroyed communities. By suspending Davis-Bacon, you are forcing more people into

the poverty we have so dramatically witnessed in the past week and undercutting the economic recovery of these ravaged areas.

Even before Hurricane Katrina wrought its havoc, the Census Bureau reported the nation's poverty rate rose to 12.7 percent of the population last year, the fourth consecutive annual increase. The official poverty level of \$19,157 for a family of four does not even begin to cover what it really takes for that family to make ends meet. In most parts of the country, about twice as much is needed to simply provide shelter, food, transportation and clothing. It's no wonder that despite strong overall economic growth, the average American income has stagnated—failing to grow for the fifth consecutive year for the first time in our history.

Previously, we might have claimed ignorance of the unacceptable price of grinding poverty. We can no longer make that claim. Destruction on a scale unknown to our nation offers us the rare second chance to get it right this time around.

We can make different choices. We could ensure that every child has adequate preparation to succeed at school and can afford to go on to college, whether or not their parents can pay for it. We could determine that health insurance is the right of every American, not just a special privilege for a wealthy few. We could declare it unacceptable for Americans to work and still live in poverty; or to labor without time off to be with their families; or to retire without adequate security.

Instead, you have chosen to dishonor the poor, the survivors and those who have put their faith in you. Shame on you.