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Former mayors promote political unity on flood-control

NEW ORLEANS Three former New Orleans Mayors, worried that the city's recovery from Hurricane Katrina might be derailed by long-standing political divides, joined together today in an effort to promote unity on the one matter they said trumps all others: flood protection.

Former Mayor Sidney Barthelemy, who came up with the idea for the meeting at a special meeting of the City Council, sat between Maurice "Moon" Landrieu and Marc Morial. The three were flanked by the presidents from Jefferson, St. Bernard, St. Tammany, Plaquemines and St. Charles Parishes, as well as current Mayor Ray Nagin. Also attending was U-S Rep. William Jefferson, and many in the room called the gathering of so many regional leaders from various levels of government an historic occasion. The three former mayors all touched on various points they want New Orleans-area leaders to pound home in their lobbying efforts before Congress, which so far has agreed to spend about 2-point-9 (B) billion dollars on rebuilding the metro area's 350 miles of hurricane protection levees. Morial says that's a step in the right direction, but it's not enough. He says Congress needs to be urged to help the area not just improve levees, but restore coastal wetlands and barrier islands and upgrade pumping systems.

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