

Prepared Remarks for Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donovan at the St. Bernard/ Columbia Parc Ribbon Cutting

**New Orleans, Louisiana
Monday, April 12th, 2010**

On my fifth trip to New Orleans since becoming HUD Secretary, I'm incredibly honored to join all of you here today to celebrate New Orleans taking yet another step toward recovery -- and revitalization.

First, let me say that without the leadership of Mayor Nagin today's ribbon cutting wouldn't have been possible.

I've had countless meetings--both in Washington and in New Orleans--working with Mayor Nagin and his team to help transition families out of the Disaster Housing Assistance Program; to secure financing and move development forward at the "Big Four"; and to help stimulate economic development and better coordination between our federal, local, private sector, and non-profit partners.

I want to thank Mayor Nagin for his leadership and partnership -- a strong partnership that I know we'll continue to have with Mayor-Elect Landrieu when he takes office.

When President Obama took office over a year ago, he said bringing real change to New Orleans was a top priority.

Since then, we've worked across the Administration and across sectors to reduce bureaucratic red tape and ensure New Orleans becomes the sustainable, inclusive and prosperous city we all want it to be -- and know it can be.

And at HUD, I've made it one of my top priorities -- viewing New Orleans as a model for smart, sustainable urban planning as part of a long term disaster recovery strategy.

Indeed, no city more deeply demonstrates the need to plan and build our communities--our homes, schools, transportation, and job centers--so that they provide the most opportunities and choices to the people who live there.

So, I'm proud to stand with you today to celebrate real movement from recovery to revitalization -- as we welcome families into their new homes here at Columbia Parc and help usher in a new era of progress and leadership across the city.

Built over a half century ago, Columbia Parc--formerly known as St. Bernard--has been an integral part of the Bayou District for decades.

With age came deterioration and poor living conditions. And with the devastation of Hurricane Katrina came the closure of St. Bernard -- an untimely crisis that left many New Orleans residents displaced with few or no affordable housing options.

But in the last year, along with our local and state partners, we have turned this crisis into an opportunity to transform the former St. Bernard site into a revitalized community, linking residents more closely to the neighborhood surrounding them.

When fully complete, the beautiful Columbia Parc will provide housing to over 1,300 families, with greater access to economic opportunity and new community anchors including health care facilities, a senior center, and a new school.

Indeed, Columbia Parc reminds us that long before Katrina, this great city was burdened with many of the same challenges that plague metropolitan America -- from high concentrations of poverty, to troubled public schools, to a challenged public housing authority.

That's why HUD and HANO have been working closely together to ensure that all HANO residents have access to the services that residents of the redeveloped "Big Four" will have: good schools, affordable childcare, public transportation, and literacy training.

I'm proud to announce that five major community organizations that work citywide recently agreed to provide services to not only "Big Four" residents, but to all HANO residents and Housing Choice Voucher recipients.

I want to thank the United Way of New Orleans, Literacy Alliance, Goodwill Industries, Volunteers of America, and VIA Link for their partnership -- and I look forward to other providers shortly joining in this important effort.

And let me thank David Gilmore, who is leading the team HUD named in October 2009 to stabilize and assess HANO, for helping make this partnership--and progress at HANO--a reality.

Without a doubt, this agreement will result in stronger families and stronger neighborhoods. But it will also help us continue to take our approach of using housing to drive better health, educational, and employment outcomes for neighborhoods -- and bring it to scale across New Orleans, and nationwide.

And in combination with the GO-Zone tax credits--which have helped spur Gulf-wide redevelopment efforts and will hopefully soon be extended--it's what will continue to guide our redevelopment work at not just the "Big Four," but across all of New Orleans public housing.

So collectively, our efforts here at Columbia Parc are symbolic of a new day -- not only for public housing residents, not only for HUD. But for every neighborhood in New Orleans.

That is what this effort is about -- and it is why today is so important.

So thank you. Congratulations. And welcome home.