

###FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE###

**"Why weren't we invited?"
Public housing residents and advocates excluded from HUD Secretary's itinerary;
Press conference to coincide with the Secretary's visit.**

Thursday, March 5, 2009: 9am at HANO, 4100 Touro
Call 504-319-3300

The new Housing and Urban Development Secretary, Shaun Donovan, is touring the Gulf Coast to confer with local leaders about our region's ongoing recovery problems. He is reportedly already in New Orleans meeting with officials and developers even though previous press reports dated his visit for the 5th and 6th. A grassroots coalition of public housing residents and renters has been unable to contact the secretary or gain information on when and where his meetings will be and who he will meet with.

"We want an opportunity to explain to Sec. Donovan the issues facing regular folks down here, especially public housing residents, Section 8 renters, and those using DHAP vouchers," explained Sam Jackson, Executive Director of May Day New Orleans. "We have some policy proposals he and the Obama administration can immediately use to help us all weather this economic storm. We just want a chance to meet the new Secretary, but his visit seems to have been kept under wraps. Why?"

Jackson and other grassroots housing advocates have tried unsuccessfully to contact Sec. Donovan by email and telephone since they first heard about his visit several weeks ago. "President Obama said his administration would be more transparent and accountable," says Darwin BondGraham, a staff member of May Day New Orleans, "but we're having a hard time getting through. Today we hear that he's already in town, but we can't track him down. He seems to be meeting with a very select crowd of insiders. This worries us."

Kawana Jasper, a May Day Board Member and former resident of the St. Bernard Housing Development questions who Donovan is going to be meeting with and what sort of advice he'll receive. "Not everyone down here agrees about what needs to be done to create quality affordable housing. In fact, most officials in the local HUD and HANO office, as well as the Mayor and City Council, they have opposed the most important things we've worked for. They created this mess by demolishing public housing and expecting the private market to take care of things. Sec. Donovan needs to hear from more voices than the local housing authority officials or the Mayor because unfortunately they don't represent everyone." Sam Jackson added that, "if Donovan is touring New Orleans and only talking with City Hall and the real estate developers, he's not going to get the information he needs to set federal policy. City Hall and the big developers have caused more problems than the hurricane did."

Jackson, Jasper and other leaders of public housing in New Orleans have several policy items ready to go for the Obama administration:

1. 1-for-1 replacement of all public housing units demolished in the wake of hurricane Katrina, ~5500.
2. An executive order by the president blocking the evictions of the Lafitte development's remaining residents plus remediation and rental of empty units in that complex.

3. An executive order to extend the DHAP program until one of two goals is reached: (1) the achievement of 1-for-1 replacement, or (2) the reduction of median rental prices in the New Orleans to pre-Katrina levels.
4. Reform of the family obligations rules concerning public housing to prevent unjust evictions and tenant harassment.
5. Withholding federal funds from the proposed LSU hospital in Mid-City (which would demolish an entire neighborhood of affordable homes) in favor of renovating and reopening Charity Hospital per the RMJM Hillier plan.

"We hope to get through to the Obama administration, Sec. Donovan, and other leaders in Washington," says a hopeful Sam Jackson. "We're a little concerned that Sec. Donovan's visit has been so secretive. We understand that he doesn't have time to meet with everyone, but he's got to reach beyond the usual suspects and talk to those of us who've been fighting for fair housing down here in the trenches."