

petence in the face of catastrophe, a demonstration of how government ought to work. It was a feat of historic proportions.

But just as the last of the New Orleanians left the Dome, Hurricane Rita rumbled west across the Florida Keys, headed straight for Houston.

This would be another exodus for the record books, one that Eckels vowed would not be remembered for snipers and looters and the bodies of infants floating in rancid floodwater.

**It's three days** before Rita is projected to make landfall, and Mayor White has called an emergency meeting with the county's flood experts on how to prepare Houston for the Big One. White is a former CEO and a Democrat. Despite some differences, the judge and mayor work harmoniously and exhibit immense respect for each other in public. "There's a time for politics and there's a time for action," says the judge, who, since being elected to the state house of representatives at age twenty-six, has won praise for his independence. "In Houston, the mayor works like the throttle on a train. He can either run the entire government off the tracks or speed up the process. This mayor has done the latter. He's been an exceptional pleasure to work with."

Mayor White and his staff are waiting in a conference room at the convention center when the judge arrives. Maps cover a nearby table, and color-coded charts of storm-surge zones are propped on two easels. The mayor looks tired, and the combined stress in the room is stifling. Rita has just become a category-five storm, the third most powerful hurricane on record. Landfall is expected late Friday night, less than seventy-two hours away.

"I want to be able to tell people in plain English what to do," says the mayor, staring up at the judge. "If this storm continues, what do we tell people about mandatory evacuation?"

"Mandatory is tonight or tomorrow morning," Eckels says.

"Whatever you say," says White. "But the sooner the better."

"We're talking about pulling the trigger on one million people," Eckels says. "We understand that, right?"

**The judge doesn't sleep** that night. At 3:00 A.M., he's awakened by a call from White. "Can we help with this traffic problem?" the mayor asks, and Eckels makes some calls before driving to Transtar.

The command center is a flickering room filled with weather charts and giant monitors linked to traffic cameras. One screen shows Rita barreling toward Houston like an angry fist; another shows what everyone had feared: cars running out of fuel and clogging traffic lanes, turning I-10 into a sweltering parking lot.

Something unanticipated has happened. One million people were asked to evacuate. Three million answered the call. And they all left at the same time. "The evacuations were supposed to dovetail," Eckels says. "This is not part of the plan."

**But then, late Thursday** afternoon, Rita takes a turn toward Beaumont. The shift means Houston may be spared a direct hit, but high winds could ravage the thousands still trapped on the highways.

In order to ease the traffic problem, the judge devises a new message: If you don't live in an area that floods and you haven't yet left home, it's too late now. Stay where you are. Eckels announces the plan to the press, then retreats to a quiet back office. He calls his wife, whom he sent to Austin before the storm, and tells her about his decision. [continued on page 254]



## SEVEN WAYS TO FIX THE OIL CRISIS

By Amy Myers Jaffe

A rarity among energy-policy experts, Amy Myers Jaffe is a voice of honest, nonpartisan reason. The director of the Energy Forum at the James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy in Houston, Jaffe, forty-seven, has spent the past twenty years studying oil geopolitics and energy strategy and now advises everyone from the Pentagon to Wall Street firms to big oil companies. Below, Jaffe's strategy for a sensible U.S. oil policy.

**1) Build a safety net.** Hurricane Katrina exposed the folly of allowing refiners to operate like Dell computer with just-in-time inventories. We should mandate that every oil company keep 5 to 10 percent of its average sales of gasoline, heating oil, and natural gas on reserve for use in an emergency, as is done in Europe.

**2) Double fuel efficiency.** American cars should be targeted by law and incentives to achieve an increase from twenty-one miles per gallon today to fifty miles per gallon in ten years.

**3) Tax gas—by dollars not cents.** More than half of the five to seven dollars per gallon Europeans spend on gas goes to taxes. Not only has the gas tax kept European demand stable for more than a decade, it's prompted marked advances in efficiency. We should do the same.

**4) Work with China.** An energy rivalry with Beijing only plays into the hands of OPEC. Instead, we should work with the Chinese government to develop energy-efficient technology, stockpile emergency resources, and, most important, put pressure on oil suppliers to lower prices and increase supplies.

**5) Drill more. Regulate more.** More than three quarters of our proven oil reserves (17 billion barrels) and enough natural

gas to meet our demand for a decade (450 trillion cubic feet) exist off the coasts of Florida, Alaska, Maine, and the Carolinas and in many sections of Rocky Mountain outback—but they remain off-limits to drilling. We need to open up these areas while ensuring that the EPA has greater authority to regulate them adequately. This means much larger investigative and inspection staffs and substantially higher fines for firms that violate regulations.

**6) Open foreign energy markets.** State energy monopolies should not be tolerated to the detriment of the two billion people on the planet lacking modern energy services. Through the World Trade Organization and other agencies, we need to remove barriers to investment in energy resources and industries in countries such as Russia, Mexico, and Venezuela and in the Middle East. These are the real culprits of soaring energy costs, not depleted reserves.

**7) Commit to solar energy.** It should be our top R&D priority. Solar power is the only alternative energy source with virtually no waste stream—no carbon to sequester, no radioactive waste to be stored. We should commit \$1 billion a year to finding ways to reduce solar-energy costs from the current twenty to thirty cents per kilowatt-hour to the three cents per kilowatt-hour needed to make it competitive.