

## OUR VIEW

# Looking for a place to start

**B**ill King, the former mayor of Kemah, has been the voice in the wilderness warning of a day of reckoning.

He's had the courage to deliver an unpopular message. He's said that a lot of people in Galveston County are going to die needlessly unless we have a better plan to evacuate them in the face of a hurricane.

He said all that — repeatedly — before hurricane season started.

Hurricane Rita showed that his forecast was on the mark.

King was one of two county residents named to a statewide Task Force on Evacuation Transportation and Logistics.

The other was Dr. Karen Sexton of Galveston, who is in charge of hospitals and clinics at the University of Texas Medical Branch. She's credited with helping the medical center avoid problems that plagued health-care institutions hit by Hurricane Katrina.

As the task force meets this month, we hope it will start with a discussion of the responsibilities of leadership.

The task of coming up with a better plan isn't just a matter of resolving technical details. It's a matter of leading people — convincing them to act in a way that's in the best interests of all.

That involves outlining plans that are sensible and convincing people — maybe even selling them — on some new ideas.

We hope the task force will try to do three things:

- Convince people to get out of the line of the storm surge. That's going to involve getting people all along the coast to look at maps showing the areas that really are at risk.

Getting people who are in danger to leave is going to be tough because many people who did the right thing were caught in horrific traffic jams. They've vowed never to leave again.

These folks are frustrated, angry and exhausted. But they're alive.

When a Category 5 storm does hit Galveston County, the only people who will be safe are those who left.

- Convince people who live further inland and who are not at risk from the storm surge to shelter in place.

That's going to be tough because it's hard to get people to stay put when they're scared. The easy thing is to tell them to run for the hills. But that's not leadership.

Rita showed the madness of trying to get residents of coastal counties to evacuate safely through a statewide traffic jam.

- Convince businesses to provide fuel, food and shelter along evacuation routes. At some distance from the coast, it should be safe for business owners to continue to operate through the evacuation.

Government can't make businesses stay open. But it can help provide safe routes through the traffic to get supplies in. It can help essential employees who stay in high-risk areas get out at the last minute.

These three suggestions don't constitute a better plan. But they might be a good place to start.

• Heber Taylor