

## Disaster Recovery Team Biographies



**Senator Mary Landrieu, Senior Policy Advisor.** For 18 years (1997 – 2015), U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu was a leading advocate for Louisiana and the Gulf Coast. As stated by the *Houston Chronicle*, “[T]he entire Gulf Coast benefits from Landrieu’s ceaseless advocacy. The conservative Democrat has served as senator for three terms, and in that time she has demonstrated bipartisan knack at actually getting things done.”<sup>1</sup> When the Gulf Coast was challenged by the catastrophic Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, she led the bipartisan Congressional effort to secure an unprecedented level of federal funding and cut the red tape needed to rebuild and restore lives. As a result of Senator Landrieu’s performance and the expertise she gained in disaster recovery, her Senate colleagues subsequently created a Disaster Recovery Subcommittee having jurisdiction over FEMA and selected her to serve as its Chair. In this position, Senator Landrieu further expanded her recovery expertise and pursued her desire to make government work by, among other innovations, establishing an independent arbitration panel to immediately resolve funding disputes of nearly \$500 million between FEMA and Louisiana that had been delaying recovery for years. She also found other innovative solutions beyond those covered by traditional federal government responses and/or existing disaster recovery laws, to address Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding, cost share relief or forgiveness, and repair and construction of hurricane protection and flood control projects. Additionally, Senator Landrieu led the passage of legislation to send billions of dollars to the Gulf Coast from oil and gas activity in offshore federal waters and from *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill damages. She also served on the Senate Appropriations Committee and rose to chair the subcommittee that funded FEMA and other recovery activities.



**Congressman Norm Dicks, Senior Policy Advisor.** Former Congressman Norm Dicks serves as Senior Policy Advisor advising clients on a wide-range of public policy, strategic, and regulatory issues, particularly those in the environmental sector. Prior to joining the firm, Norm represented Washington State’s 6th Congressional District from 1977-2013, where he received a rare first-term appointment to the House Appropriations Committee, a committee he served on for his entire tenure in Congress.

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<sup>1</sup> *Houston Chronicle*, 10/30/2014, <http://www.chron.com/opinion/recommendations/article/Landrieu-for-senate-5859496.php>

Norm has unmatched experience and expertise when it comes to understanding and navigating the process of securing disaster recovery funds.



**Richard Agnew, Chairman.** Rick represents a variety of clients before Congress and federal agencies, particularly on matters relating to federal laws and permits governing energy projects, environmental matters, and the uses of natural resources. As Chief Republican Counsel for the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs (now the Committee on Natural Resources) of the U.S. House of Representatives, Rick served as committee counsel and staff supervisor in a wide array of federal issues, involving natural resources, Native Americans, and energy production and use. Today, Rick uses that experience to assist firm clients secure funding or permit authorizations for energy and transportation projects as well as the redevelopment of communities after significant natural disasters or other economic loss.



**Brent Carson, Partner.** Brent provides strategic advice and critical support to clients with large complex land-based and in-water development projects. He has in-depth knowledge of local, state, and federal land use and environmental regulations, and has successfully navigated clients through local rezones comprehensive plan amendments, master plans, shoreline permits, and development agreements; state 401 water quality certifications and NPDES permits, U.S. Army Corps of Engineer Section 10, 404 and 408 permits, and ESA consultations. Brent's litigation practice before local and state administrative tribunals, and in state and federal court, includes defense of development approvals and response to environmental enforcement actions.



**Mike Farber, Partner.** Mike leads internal investigations, provides strategic advice, and conducts compliance reviews for companies in energy and other sectors. Drawing upon his experience both in private practice and at the U.S. Department of Justice, Mike also represents clients in federal and state antitrust investigations, complex litigation, and intricate compliance matters. Prior to joining the firm, Mike served as the Senior Advisor to the Director of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) at the U.S. Department of the Interior, where he spent six years leading a number of initiatives reforming U.S. government oversight of offshore oil and gas operations. Mike played a key role on behalf of DOI in coordinating multi-agency (U.S. Department of Justice, Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Coast Guard) efforts to resolve federal charges following the *Deepwater Horizon* disaster.



**Gwendolyn Keyes Fleming, Partner.** Gwen Keyes Fleming has more than twenty years of public sector experience, having served elected and appointed positions at the state, local and federal levels. Prior to her service as the Principal Legal Advisor (General Counsel) for Immigration & Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Gwen was the Regional Administrator for USEPA Region 4 (Southeast) and subsequently became Chief of Staff for the agency. In both roles, she coordinated the environmental response and clean up to natural and man-made disasters. Gwen's focus as a partner at Van Ness Feldman is on environmental policy, litigation, and white collar criminal defense matters, including audits and special investigations, for private as well as municipal clients. She will also provide strategic advice and counsel on national security matters related to incident response and the protection of critical infrastructure from cyber and physical threats. Gwen's strength in building relationships, managing complex matters, and in depth knowledge of the EPA and other branches of the federal government is an asset to clients who need assistance in navigating their post-disaster options.



**Herman "Bubba" Gesser, Policy Advisor.** From 1998 to 2007, Bubba served as chief counsel and projects director to U.S. Senator Mary L. Landrieu, where he researched, drafted, and provided advice and counsel on legislation primarily relating to the environment, public works, and appropriations. For numerous storms while employed by Senator Landrieu, including Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Bubba assisted her in developing and pursuing disaster recovery legislation – particularly relating to infrastructure and appropriations. In advance of approaching storms, he also liaised with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to shore up vulnerabilities in storm defense systems and assisted state and local officials with securing Presidential Emergency Declarations. In the aftermath of the disasters, he communicated with Federal officials (primarily FEMA, Corps, and DOT) on recovery funding and implementation issues. Bubba is a licensed, Louisiana architect and attorney and has practiced construction and government contract law in the private sector for more than 10 years.



**Stuart Hall, Senior Director, Governmental Issues.** Stuart's practice focuses on energy, environment, transportation and infrastructure issues. Stuart joined Van Ness Feldman after working for seven years in the office of U.S. Representative Richard H. Baker (R-LA). As the Legislative Director, Stuart staffed the Congressman on Transportation and Infrastructure Committee issues and handled all appropriation and project requests. As a Senior Legislative Assistant, Stuart assisted with hurricane recovery and response in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and was particularly involved with

communities that hosted evacuees. Stuart assisted the Congressman with negotiations during the House-Senate conference on the Water Resources Development Act of 2007 which authorized key projects after the storms.



**Molly Lawrence, Partner.** Molly has nearly 20 years' experience helping both public and private entities navigate through combined federal, state and local permitting processes to approve numerous medium and large-scale commercial and industrial projects, waterfront mixed use developments, and coastal and riverine restoration projects designed both to reduce flood risk and protect and restore species habitat. Over the last decade, Molly has developed a specialty in the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP), helping clients address changes in the regulations affecting development within floodplains, including changes in floodplain mapping and evolving Endangered Species Act requirements.



**Nancy McNally, Principal.** Nancy Macan McNally, Principal. Nancy has more than 30 years of experience working with clients to design, implement, and manage complex legislative and public policy strategies. She has substantial knowledge and expertise in the areas of legislative strategy, grassroots and media initiatives, direct advocacy, public education, and coordinating comprehensive lobbying efforts among multiple organizations. Nancy has extensive experience working on healthcare policy, appropriations, environmental and natural resource issues before both Congress and federal agencies.



**Tracy Nagelbush, Principal.** Tracy is a native Floridian and has been a forceful advocate for clients in need of effective communications with the federal government on public policy matters in the climate change, clean technology, transportation, alternative energy deployment, energy efficiency, and natural resources development areas. Prior to joining the firm, Tracy spent eight years on Capitol Hill working for U.S. Representatives Jay Inslee (D-WA) and Jim Davis (D-FL). In addition to the regular policy responsibilities of a Senior Legislative Assistant, Tracy handled all communications between federal response and state response officials and agencies before, during, and after Hurricanes Charlie, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne, including with Governor Bush, FEMA, and the counties and cities affected by the storm.



**Michael Pincus, Partner.** Having worked in FERC's Office of the General Counsel, Energy Project Section for five years, Mike Pincus has in-depth knowledge on a wide range of issues under Sections 3, 4,

and 7 of the Natural Gas Act, including pipeline construction certificates, storage facilities, abandonment proceedings, liquefied natural gas authorizations, presidential permits, limited jurisdiction certificates, market-based rate determinations, initial rate formulation, and tariff-related issues. Mike is also experienced with FERC's environmental review process of pipeline projects under the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, and other environmental statutes. He is well versed in assisting clients to navigate energy infrastructure repairs that may have resulted from catastrophic weather events.



**Michael Platner, Senior Tax Counsel.** Michael has thirty years of experience providing strategic counsel on legal, legislative and regulatory issues, including tax, energy, and international trade. Not only is Michael able to assist clients with designing and navigating temporary Federal tax relief packages for companies to rebuild and restore their facilities following a disaster, he is also able to help them evaluate and craft internal relief efforts for employees and their families while attempting to avoid any tax implications. Michael has a refined understanding of the political landscape, supported by technical knowledge and a wealth of experience drafting issue papers, advising on legislative and regulatory matters, and building and advocating winning legislative strategies for participants in energy and related markets.



**Tom Roberts, Partner.** Tom Roberts helps clients manage the potential impact of federal and state energy, environmental, and natural resource policies and actions on their commercial and industrial interests. He specializes in legal, strategic and government relations advice to clients developing oil and natural gas pipelines, LNG terminals, and electric transmission projects. He has a deep understanding of the applicable laws and regulations as well as the official and unofficial processes by which government decisions are made. Tom has been involved at the highest levels of Congress and the Executive Branch in the development of virtually every major federal energy and environmental statute and policy over the last thirty years.



**Bob Szabo, Partner.** Bob Szabo has practiced federal public policy law for forty years. Bob came from Louisiana to Washington, DC in 1975 to serve as Senior Legislative Assistant to Senator J. Bennett Johnston (D-LA). Bob has focused his career on counseling, advocating for, and resolving federal policy issues for clients on issues in the areas of energy, the environment, natural resources and transportation. He has extensive experience working with both Congress and the Executive Branch of the federal government. With regard to disaster relief, Bob has experience in drafting Golf

Opportunity Zone (GO ZONE) bonds that were used for the rebuilding of the Gulf Coast after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.



**Sean Taylor, Senior Director, Governmental Issues.** Sean is a native Floridian and has over a decade of experience representing municipalities and local governments on water infrastructure, federal regulations, public lands issues, and a variety of appropriations matters. Sean began his career in the U.S. Senate working for Senator Connie Mack (R-FL) and Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), before serving as a Natural Resources Policy Analyst to Governor Jeb Bush. As Governor Bush's lead staffer in Washington, D.C., Sean gained considerable experience developing regional and national coalitions to help mold national energy legislation, influence ocean policy, and expand aquatic ecosystem restoration, and land & water conservation programs for the state.



**Jordan Smith, Senior Director, Governmental Issues.** Jordan has over 15 years of experience providing public policy advice and representation on federal legislative and regulatory issues, with special emphasis on energy, environmental, natural resource, and healthcare matters. Jordan has extensive experience building and managing issue-based coalitions to achieve federal policy goals on behalf of clients. He currently leads a broad-based coalition of member organizations that promotes effective and balanced legislative and regulatory improvements to the Endangered Species Act. Additionally, Jordan represents constituencies with interests in water policy, including water agencies and irrigation districts, with a specific focus on local and regional water quality and management. Jordan also advocates for increased support for federal programs to improve prediction of extreme weather events, which has the potential to benefit many communities challenged by variable precipitation conditions.



**Ben Billings, Principal, Sentinel Strategies, LLC.** Ben Billings is a Principal with Sentinel Strategies LLC, a public affairs and business development consulting firm based in New Orleans that specializes in federal and state government relations. Billings worked for 10 years in the U.S. Senate as Staff Director of the Disaster Recovery Subcommittee and Senior Policy Advisor to Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), where he helped author and enact legislation for various programs at FEMA and HUD following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Superstorm Sandy, the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, and other disasters. Those legislative accomplishments included Stafford Act reforms in the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act, a \$3 billion CDBG appropriation to Louisiana's Road

Home Program, legislation authorizing a \$1.8 billion settlement for schools and \$2 billion settlement for road and sewer repairs, establishment of an arbitration panel to resolve Public Assistance disputes, revision of FEMA loan forgiveness criteria resulting in \$1 billion of municipal debt relief to Gulf Coast communities, and the RESTORE Act which directed penalties from the *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill toward coastal restoration along the Gulf Coast. Prior to forming Sentinel, Billings served the maritime and energy sector as President & CEO of the Offshore Marine Service Association.