

CONGRESSMAN JOE BACA (*Statement to be filed*)
Financial Services Committee Hearing
Statement on “Federal Housing Response To Hurricane Katrina”
February 6, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the witnesses for joining us today.

It's been one year and a half since Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, yet many people are still struggling to rebuild their lives. Progress is moving along but New Orleans & the surrounding area continue to struggle with the pain of rebuilding.

The American people agree that more work needs to be done to restore the area. Still, we were let down once again when the President failed to even mention Katrina in his recent State of the Union address.

Today, New Orleans has only 30% of its child care centers, about half its public schools, 40 % of its restaurants, and just half of all the public transportation routes it had in place prior to Katrina.

Thousands of people are still living in trailers or with their relatives and families can't move into their neighborhoods because they have no homes to return to. Many evacuees are only just beginning to get their checks in the mail to rebuild their homes- one year after Congress appropriated it!

The recovery is taking too long. Relief must be accelerated.

The Bush Administration must stay on the job and restore the Gulf Coast economy. As a member of this Committee I stand ready and willing to do what it takes to help speed up the restoration. These families and children can't afford to wait any longer. They need our help now. Thank you for convening today's hearing, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to hearing today's testimony.

Committee on Financial Services
Hearing entitled "Federal Housing Response to Hurricane Katrina"
Congressman Joe Baca
Questions

PANEL ONE

TO: The Honorable Charlie Melancon

1. Even though 17 months have gone by many people are still struggling to rebuild their lives and families can't return to their neighborhoods because they have no homes to go back to. The Bush Administration's slow response and FEMA's poor management of its rental assistance program has been a major factor in this slow pace of recovery. A lot of money was spent but with no accountability there has been a lot of mismanagement and fraud. Among the victims caught in the middle are the people that live in your district and in the neighboring Gulf Coast states.

Question: What can Congress do to hold parties accountable for the progress and completion of coastal restoration and hurricane protection projects?

PANEL TWO

TO: David Garratt, Acting Director of Recovery, FEMA

1. Last year, the TriCaucus Chairs (Rep. Napolitano, Honda, and Watt) met in Houston to co-host a townhall on Katrina--where they listened to Katrina victims who had been displaced to Houston. We learned that services were not culturally or linguistically relevant. FEMA had ignored large segments of the Gulf Coast's diverse population by failing to ensure that all individuals have access to culturally- and linguistically- appropriate disaster preparedness and relief services.

QUESTION: Has FEMA done anything to improve its outreach to culturally diverse communities? Has it created a plan to provide disaster relief and outreach services to individuals who speak languages other than English?

TO: David Garratt, Acting Director of Recovery, FEMA (Cont.)

2. Right after the Hurricane hit, House Democrats proposed funding for emergency housing vouchers for 300,000 low-income families displaced by Katrina. Emergency vouchers would have provided rental assistance for evacuees, which is critical for families to be able to relocate to other communities, and ultimately, to return to their home community. However, the Administration did not support this provision.

QUESTION: FEMA's existing Disaster Voucher Program is about to run out this September. What plans does FEMA have to ensure that displaced families endure a smooth transition and are able to find affordable housing? If Congress were to propose to authorize funding for emergency housing vouchers, would the Administrative be supportive?

TO: Honorable Roy Bernardi, Deputy Secretary, HUD

1. Affordable housing has prevented thousands of people and many local businesses from returning back to the Gulf Coast area. Yet HUD has not announced any plans to assist with the reconstruction. And the President didn't even mention Katrina in his 2007 State of the Union address! It appears this Administration has forgotten about Katrina and does not have the interest of these displaced families on its list of priorities. Do you care to comment?

TO: Honorable Roy Bernardi, Deputy Secretary, HUD (cont.)

2. Last Year, Democrats on this Committee proposed an amendment to the GSE Reform bill that would create an affordable housing fund. Most, if not all of the funding available in that fund in the first year of the program (about half a billion dollars) would be available for communities in the Gulf Coast. Yet, the Administration opposed the fund at the time, and the bill died without being taken up in the Senate.

QUESTION: The GSE Affordable Housing Fund is a high priority for Democrats on this Committee. What is the Administration's position this year?