



**United States Senate**  
**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**  
Senator Joseph I. Lieberman

**“Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Outstanding Need, Slow Progress”**  
**HSGAC Field Hearing in New Orleans**  
**Chairman Joe Lieberman**  
**January 29, 2007**

**AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY**

In January of 1815, we fought and won the Battle of New Orleans and saved a crucial American city from occupation by the British.

New Orleans is an important part of the commerce and culture, the past, present and future of America. That is why we have come here today. A year and a half after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it's time to redouble our efforts to win the new Battle for New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. I hope today's testimony will help us understand what is still needed to get this great American city and region – and most importantly its people - back to where they should be.

One of the leaders in this Battle for New Orleans has been my friend and colleague Sen. Mary Landrieu. Her unyielding concern for the people of her state and region, coupled with for her unrelenting work to keep our government in Washington focused on the challenges and obstacles this area faces, moved me to call this hearing. As the new Chairman of this Committee, I have created a new subcommittee on Disaster Recovery and asked Mary Landrieu to chair it. This new subcommittee will have authority to examine a variety of issues and concerns related to how our government helps communities recover from disasters, especially ones of great magnitude - whether it is Hurricanes Katrina and Rita or manmade or terrorist disasters in the future.

We are calling this hearing, “Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: Outstanding Need, Slow Progress.” Nearly a year ago this committee visited New Orleans. We were stunned by the lack of progress from what we had seen on our visit two weeks or so after Katrina. And while some progress has been made since that hearing, we clearly still have a long way to go before your city returns to some sense of normalcy, and your country can feel it has fulfilled its responsibility to you.

Congress has provided over \$100 billion dollars to the Gulf Coast region since Katrina and Rita. Much of this money was intended to provide housing for the tens of thousands of displaced residents. This was an unprecedented amount but these were unprecedented disasters.

Yet for all of the funding Congress approved, the reality seems to be that the money is not arriving fast enough or is sitting idle while the people of New Orleans and the Gulf states continue to suffer and struggle. I hope that today's hearing will shed some light on the reasons why and on the way to break this bureaucratic logjam that blocks the humanitarian relief we all want.

One major – and I should say startling – example of the funds having been made available, but not reaching the people who desperately need them, is the painfully slow distribution of Louisiana's \$7.5 billion in Community Development Block Grants (CBDG) through the state of Louisiana's “Road Home Program,” which was designed to help individual homeowners rebuild.

Nearly 99,000 homeowners have applied for assistance under the program but only 177 homeowners have received funding as of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. How could this be so?

(more)

We must find a way to streamline this process to eliminate this extraordinary disconnect and I look forward to hearing from state officials on how we can improve this.

In Louisiana, 31,688 storm victims are still receiving rental assistance, and 64,697 victims are still in FEMA trailers and mobile homes. Until we can rebuild their homes, we need to make sure all those displaced – homeowners and renters – have a roof over their heads.

On Friday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, FEMA extended its housing aid program for victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita by at least six months. That's good news. But since it did not raise the \$26,200 cap on housing assistance, many families may still suddenly find themselves homeless.

I want to hear from Gil Jamieson, who is FEMA's Deputy Director for Gulf Coast Recovery, and Pamela Patenaude, HUD's Assistant Secretary for Housing Community Planning and Development, how we will make sure these people don't end up homeless again.

We are on our way to the second anniversary of the storms and the challenges before us are still immense. While I have seen inspiring resolve on the faces of the people who are working to rebuild in New Orleans and across the Gulf Coast, I know they can't do it alone. The federal government must continue to help in timely and meaningful ways and, in doing so, do what a great and good nation does when its citizens are struck by disaster, but it must also recover the trust and confidence of all Americans who saw their government compound the problems while New Orleans and the Gulf Coast literally drowned.