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Hearing before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

United States Senate



“A New Way Home: Findings from the Disaster Recovery Subcommittee
Special Report and Working with the New Administration on a Way
Forward”

March 18, 2009

Thank you Senator Landrieu and members of the committee for hearing my testimony here today. My name is Nelson R. Bregon and I am the General Deputy Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development at HUD. It is an honor to come before you today to discuss the Committee's Special Report, *Far From Home: Deficiencies in Federal Disaster Housing Assistance After Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and Recommendations for Improvement*.

First of all, I would like to commend you Senator Landrieu, your committee, your membership, including previous members of this committee, and your entire staff for putting together this report. With new leadership in the White House and new Secretaries and their staff in place across the Administration, we are re-evaluating and re-examining the role that federal agencies play in federal disaster housing assistance. A new Administration always ushers the opportunity to take a fresh look at the way government does business, and in regards to federal disaster preparedness, it is an opportunity that we must not waste.

Under the leadership of the new HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, we welcome the opportunity to fully consider and discuss with our Federal partners the Special Report and the *National Disaster Housing Strategy*, which was issued in the 11th hour of the previous Administration. It is clear that the report highlights interagency issues to address and legislative proposals to consider. We look forward to working with our partners on both Capitol Hill and in other federal agencies, particularly FEMA, to resolve these issues and become effective leaders, as well as partners, in disaster recovery.

At the direction of the President and in coordination with the Committee, Secretary Donovan joined with DHS Secretary Napolitano to recently visit the communities in Louisiana and throughout the Gulf Coast. This visit was both enlightening and confirmative. The Secretary, through discussions with local leaders and housing advocates, learned that while some progress has been made still more must be done. He noted several times during his visit and since returning that he is personally committed to HUD's learning from and improving on its experience from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

It is in that spirit that I would now like to briefly discuss some of the issues from the Special Report that HUD is focusing on in our reviewing. HUD is considering a broad range of policy issues, from its role in recovery to strategic partnerships in providing long-term housing. Overall, the issues raised in the Special Report are consistent with our internal examination of agency-wide policies and practices that is being instituted by Secretary Donovan.

HUD will be a center of governmental reform and renewal in this Administration. As Secretary Donovan has been stating publicly, we will invest at an unprecedented level in research and evaluation and we will hold ourselves accountable to the highest standards. We strive to be results-oriented, so we can quickly learn from any missed opportunities and change. We will revitalize our policy development and research organization, and we will form broad

partnerships with foundations, universities, stakeholders, and state and local agencies on the ground.

Lastly, I would like to say that change takes time, and at the present, HUD is fully committed and engaged in reviewing the issues detailed in of the Special Report.

I again just want to thank you Senator Landrieu and the committee for your time today and I'm happy to take any questions that you may have. Thank you.