

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF MR. JAN C. OPPER

ASSOCIATE DEPUTY ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR
DISASTER POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT



HEARING BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER RECOVERY
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

UNITED STATES SENATE

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Good afternoon Madam Chair, Ranking Member Stevens and members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the invitation to testify at this Subcommittee hearing on “Planning for Post-Catastrophic Housing Needs.” I am Jan C. Opper, Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Disaster Policy and Management at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

HUD’s Disaster Role

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is typically involved in recovery from major disasters, particularly with respect to long-term recovery since HUD programs span a wide array of housing, community, and economic development activities. Since 1992, HUD has received 22 supplemental appropriations totaling approximately \$26 billion for recovery. From Hurricane Andrew to the Midwest floods in 1993, 1997, and now 2008, HUD has been involved. HUD was also there following the Oklahoma City bombing and the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on New York City, and offers assistance after any major disaster --- whether natural or manmade.

Much of the HUD disaster funding has addressed housing related recovery needs. That is particularly true for two catastrophic disasters for which HUD's Community Development Block Grant program (CDBG) received funding – the Northridge earthquake of 1994 and the Gulf Coast hurricanes of 2005. In fact, following the Northridge earthquake, of the \$505 million appropriated to HUD for the (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships program, more than \$230 million went to restore or replace housing. Of the \$16 billion plus in CDBG funds in the first two appropriations for the Gulf Coast, more than \$11.3 billion is going for housing-related recovery activities. Additional amounts were appropriated for a disaster voucher program.

Most of HUD’s program authorities and resources, received through supplemental appropriations, have focused on recovery rather than response, and the focus of recovery has mostly been long-term. The long-term recovery has covered a broad span of activities – housing, infrastructure, and economic recovery to name a few. The Department’s programs have been an effective resource following catastrophic and other major disasters. However, HUD is almost entirely reliant upon supplemental appropriations for funding, and HUD has only on occasion received funding for staffing, support costs, and IT support.

Catastrophic Housing Planning

Through the years, HUD has occasionally been asked to participate in interagency catastrophic disaster planning efforts. To my knowledge, HUD was not asked to participate in the Hurricane Pam simulation in 2004 that was referred to in your letter of invitation to this hearing.

HUD does not have its own strategy or plan for a catastrophic event per se, nor is it tasked to lead this mission of conducting catastrophic planning. Under the National Response Framework Catastrophic Incident Annex, and under the National Response

Plan Catastrophic Incident Annex before it, the Department of Homeland Security is assigned primary responsibility for housing.

HUD looks to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for guidance regarding a strategy in the event of a catastrophic event, including catastrophic housing as this Agency lacks the expertise to be a first responder. It bears reiterating that HUD does not build housing but instead finances the construction, reconstruction, and rehabilitation of housing primarily through state and local governments. HUD does participate in National Level Exercises, and numerous interagency coordination meetings and task forces. It has operating plans and procedures for its programs that have been used in disaster recovery.

National Disaster Housing Strategy

Another topic that I understand is of interest to this Subcommittee is the *National Disaster Housing Strategy*. The *Strategy* describes how the Nation currently provides housing to those affected by disasters and describes future directions for disaster housing efforts to better meet the needs of disaster victims and communities. It promotes engaging all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector in a national housing effort to meet the needs of disaster victims and enable individuals, households and communities to rebuild their lives following a disaster. The *Strategy* identifies key principles gleaned from past experience – lessons learned -- that should benefit current and future disaster housing efforts.

FEMA consulted regularly with HUD on the *Strategy*, asking us to provide our expertise in interim and permanent housing. The *Strategy* helps further define FEMA's and HUD's roles to improve disaster housing. Under the *Strategy*, FEMA and HUD will partner to provide Federal interim housing assistance, each bringing its expertise and experience to bear. When Federal permanent housing assistance is needed for long-term recovery, the *Strategy* gives HUD the lead responsibility to coordinate with its partners to provide housing and community development resources.

The *Strategy* also calls for a National Disaster Housing Task Force, to be jointly led by FEMA, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the American Red Cross that will help achieve the long-term vision and goals of the *Strategy*.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to testify. This completes my testimony, subject to your questions.