



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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For Immediate Release

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Grassley works to help hurricane victims restart their lives as quickly as possible

WASHINGTON — Sen. Chuck Grassley said today that he will seek to retool an existing federal resettlement program for displaced individuals from other countries to help Americans who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

“This proven program could be used on behalf of our fellow citizens, just as it’s been used so successfully to help citizens of other countries who look for a fresh start in the United States,” Grassley said.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement within the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services gives grants to charities and religious organizations to provide cash assistance, help pay for medical expenses, and to assist in hands-on ways to resettle individuals and families entering the United States from other countries. Grassley’s proposal would allow the program’s resources and infrastructure to be used to help those affected by Hurricane Katrina. He said that tapping this kind of federal resource would help alleviate the financial burden on states who have taken in displaced Gulf Coast residents.

“It’s not right to expect our fellow citizens to wait in a sports stadium or armory for months on end waiting for reconstruction or new construction,” Grassley said. “By making slight modifications to this federal resettlement program, we can try to help people get back to their lives and get started again much sooner. Individuals could resettle in the Gulf Region or elsewhere on either a temporary or permanent basis, at their own discretion.”

In a letter sent today to President George W. Bush, Grassley asked for input from the administration on changes that could make the resettlement program work for U.S. citizens. Grassley is Chairman of the Senate Committee on Finance. The text of his letter follows here.

September 6, 2005

President George W. Bush
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

I write to you regarding the recent tragedy of Hurricane Katrina that has brought

devastation to so many in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

The Congress will soon be sending you legislation that will provide additional relief to the victims of Hurricane Katrina beyond the funds provided last week. As Chairman of the Finance Committee, I will be considering legislation within the Committee's jurisdiction that can provide effective help to families, businesses and government.

My particular purpose for writing is to receive the benefit of the administration's views on legislation I am considering that will allow displaced citizens from Hurricane Katrina to benefit from the effective federal government infrastructure already in place that provides assistance to refugees who enter this country. The federal government currently provides cash payments, covers medical costs and perhaps most importantly assistance through grants to charities and religious organizations to help refugees resettle in this country.

Sadly, many of our fellow citizens who have been displaced are similarly situated to the refugees we assist for resettlement in this country – they are without jobs, homes, clothing, money and other basic necessities.

For families who suffered from Hurricane Katrina, the humane solution cannot be to stay in a sports stadium or armory for months waiting for reconstruction or new construction. Many families understandably will want a new start now, not months from now. Many families will need help with that new start, be it in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama or elsewhere in the nation.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) located at the Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services has been highly successful under both Republican and Democrat administrations at giving foreign refugees a new start in this country – continuing to this day. Many Americans can remember well their church or synagogue sponsoring a refugee family from Southeast Asia during the 1970s and 1980s. With federal support, the church would help people locate an apartment, get a job, buy a car, and buy groceries to help with a new start.

ORR has used the strength of our nation – its religious organizations and non-religious charities – as the critical force in successfully resettling well over a million families over the last thirty years. We all know the success of this resettlement effort.

Mr. President, we both know that the American people are already providing a great deal help to the families from Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. I have heard from many, including my own minister and such religious leaders as Franklin Graham that the churches and charities need to do more to help the evacuees.

My first thoughts would be that similar to the refugee program, the federal government would provide cash and medical assistance to those in need. The federal government would pay all costs for cash and medical assistance, thus limiting the burden on states that have generously received displaced citizens. In addition, as with the refugee program, funds would be provided to charities that would assist the families in a new beginning both in the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina where possible as well as throughout the country.

I appreciate the response of your administration to this proposal.

Cordially yours,
Charles E. Grassley
Chairman of the Committee on Finance

cc: Alabama Congressional Delegation
Louisiana Congressional Delegation
Mississippi Congressional Delegation