

**Opening Statement of Chairman Rep. Henry Cuellar  
As Prepared**

Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response

Joint Hearing on “Examining the Roles and Responsibilities of HUD and FEMA in  
Responding to the Affordable Housing Needs of Gulf Coast States following  
Emergencies and Natural Disasters”

June 4, 2008

“As I see it, there are two goals we hope to achieve with this hearing. First, we need to get a status report on where we are in addressing the housing crisis along the Gulf Coast.

Nearly three years after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita struck, the people along the Gulf Coast are still coping with their aftermath and struggling to recover.

There is no doubt that our Nation has faced unprecedented challenges in our efforts to effectively and safely house the victims of these disasters. While some progress has been made, I believe our Federal Government has moved entirely too slow.

As of May 23, 2008, there were 23,412 temporary housing units still occupied by disaster victims in the Gulf Coast. That number is too high.

Second, I believe this hearing will give Members the opportunity to examine whether plans are being developed to ensure that our nation will be better prepared to meet the housing needs resulting from future catastrophic disasters.

In order for our nation to truly be resilient, the lessons we have learned from cannot be ignored.

One of the most striking lessons we learned from Katrina and Rita was that this country was ill-prepared to provide emergency housing to victims of a major catastrophe.

To house the number of individuals who lost their homes during Katrina and Rita, FEMA was forced to hastily purchase thousands of travel trailers.

As we all know by now, many of these units were unsafe and we will be dealing with the health ramifications of this for years to come. While we can't turn back the clock to prevent this debacle, we can make certain that this problem will not be encountered during future disasters.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act required FEMA, along with other Federal agencies and non-profit organizations, to develop a National Disaster Housing Strategy.

The National Disaster Housing Strategy was due to Congress by July 2007. While I recognize the fact that the ongoing efforts to resolve the temporary housing issues in the Gulf Coast has delayed the strategy's release, a year delay is too long. I cannot stress how important plans like these are in ensuring that all the key players will be ready to act when the next emergency housing crisis is upon us.”