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## **Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson**

### **“FEMA Housing: An Examination of Current Problems and Innovative Solutions”**

July 8, 2009 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “FEMA Housing: An Examination of Current Problems and Innovative Solutions”:

“Today’s hearing will examine FEMA’s ability to provide interim housing after a catastrophic event. While we intend this hearing to look toward the future, we must first recall the past.

Almost four years ago, the most destructive series of hurricanes this nation has seen struck the Gulf Coast. One after another—Katrina, Rita and Wilma dealt devastating blows to a region of this country that I call home.

Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Texas all buckled under the force of these storms.

Hurricane Katrina destroyed an estimated 300,000 homes, displaced 700,000 people and resulted in the deaths of more than 1,300 individuals.

In the aftermath of the rains, the winds and the broken levees, the people of this region had to begin the process of rebuilding their lives.

And that is when they looked to FEMA. In response, FEMA purchased: over 27,000 travel trailers “off the lot”, 25,000 mobile homes at a cost of \$852 million, and over 1700 modular homes at a cost of \$52 million.

Unfortunately, prior to these purchases, FEMA did not have a plan for how these homes would be used.

Some of them remain on lots in Hope, Arkansas; Texarkana, Texas; Purvis, Mississippi and Baton Rouge, Louisiana. We have a picture of the lot at Hope, Arkansas.

While FEMA’s failure to plan is disturbing, far more disturbing is the Office of Inspector General’s report that prior to Hurricane Katrina, FEMA was not fully prepared to provide sheltering or transitional housing to victims of a catastrophic disaster.

As a result of FEMA’s failure to plan, the last four years have been a series of missteps, missed opportunities and misspent money.

We have seen the Federal government resort to all forms of housing—cruise ships, converted military barracks, apartments, hotels and trailer parks.

We have even seen the Federal government pay over \$100,000 for mobile homes.

Yet we have not seen a comprehensive plan to address the continued dislocation of the families along the Gulf.

On January 16, 2009—in the last week of the Bush Administration, FEMA released a Housing Strategy.

That Strategy called for developing an operational plan and building disaster housing capabilities". In essence, it is a plan to make a plan. I think that leaves us without at plan.

Administrator Fugate, under your leadership, I want FEMA to develop a comprehensive housing plan. This plan can neither ignore the people who remain homeless after Katrina nor continue to rely on the same old solution.

I hope this hearing today will begin a dialogue to create innovative, cost-effective and more than temporary housing. Housing gives people a sense of security after a disaster. Knowing you have a home is truly the beginning of recovery. "

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Dena Graziano or Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515  
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499  
<http://homeland.house.gov>