



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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

### **“The Role of the Department of Homeland Security in Gulf Coast Rebuilding and Recovery Efforts”**

May 22, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The Role of the Department of Homeland Security in Gulf Coast Rebuilding and Recovery Efforts”:

“We are quickly approaching the two year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina and it has been over a year since Congress authorized the bulk of its rebuilding aid for the region.

The status of the affected Gulf Coast region is not encouraging. More than 350,000 homes were destroyed, and another 140,000 or so sustained major damage, primarily in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. By one estimate, more than a million homes were damaged in Katrina, Rita, and Wilma.

In New Orleans alone, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers executed an average of 360 residential demolitions a month in 2006, but in 2007 to date it still is executing an average of 150 a month. As of July 1, 2006, the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated only about three-quarters of the pre-storm population had been restored to the New Orleans metropolitan region. School enrollment has continued to be far below before-storm levels. Public transportation recovery has been limited, with less than half of all routes open in New Orleans and less than one in five pre-Katrina buses operational. The labor force is only three-quarters of pre-storm levels in the New Orleans metro area. Many problems remain in the region and for that reason there is much work left to be done.

The Federal Government’s response to Katrina varied. The Federal Emergency Management Agency provided housing – in rentals and trailers – to more than 700,000 persons, though only one-fifth of the trailers requested for Orleans Parish were supplied. FEMA also furnished hotel room through February 7, 2006 for some of the newly homeless. In early September of 2005, Congress authorized \$62.3 billion for Katrina and Rita victim assistance.

There have been numerous and bitter criticisms of the Federal response. In one of the most sober ones, the Government Accountability Office said that Federal programs were in some ways flexible, but were sometimes not well-coordinated, and were not well-coordinated with State Governments.

Non-governmental organizations responded promptly to citizens impacted by Katrina.

The American Red Cross, Southern Baptist Association, Salvation Army, Oxfam, Common Ground Collective, and a number of others provided victims with food and water, raising more than \$4 billion in donations from the public.

The Amateur Radio Emergency Services provided emergency communications for all levels of Government officials. Many corporations provided additional donations and direct services. Significantly, the Salvation Army immediately mobilized 178 feeding units and 11 field kitchens to serve more than 5.7 million hot meals and 8.3 million sandwiches and associated snacks and drinks.

The Katrina rebuilding process presents an earnest opportunity to set partisan politics aside and work towards real solutions for the hurricane victims. Nineteen months later, it is high time to provide the attention necessary to Katrina.

This Congress has been working diligently to provide legislative solutions to address the needs of the Gulf Coast residents. Congresswoman Lofgren and I have discussed how a Civilian Conservation Corps is needed for the Gulf Coast at this stage of recovery.

I grew up on a street that was created as a result of the WPA, just like millions of other Americans. The CCC was critical to building our nation during the New Deal. We need something similar for the Gulf Coast region.

I am confident that the Department, through the Office of the Federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding should serve as the lead facilitator for a Civilian Disaster Recovery Corps.

If we continue to develop public-private partnerships and recognize the critical role played by state and local governments, the Gulf Coast will recover. The Gulf Coast will be rebuilt. The Gulf Coast will be revitalized. And Gulf Coast residents will return.”

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