



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Reporters and Editors
FR: Jill Kozeny, for Chairman Grassley, 202/224-1308
RE: GAO Report on Disaster Preparedness, Nursing Home Residents
DA: Thursday, July 20, 2006

Sen. Chuck Grassley commented on a report released today by the Government Accountability Office. The report is titled: Disaster Preparedness – Limitations in Federal Evacuation Assistance for Health Facilities Should be Addressed. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, the Government Accountability Office examined the challenges faced by hospital and nursing homes related to hurricanes, limitations of the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS), and federal requirements for hospital and nursing home disaster planning and evacuations.

The Government Accountability Office found, among other things, that the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS), identified in the National Response Plan to assist state and local governments with evacuations, is not configured to evacuate persons not in need of hospital care, such as nursing home residents. The evacuation of nursing home residents is not addressed elsewhere in the National Response Plan. Another limitation of the NDMS is that it is designed to evacuate persons from a designated mobilization center, such as an airport, which leaves nursing homes and hospitals to make their own arrangements for moving residents and patients from the hospital or nursing home to the NDMS mobilization center. GAO recommended that Department of Homeland Security, NDMS, and others clearly delineate how they will meet the needs of nursing home residents during evacuations and how the federal government will assist state and local governments with transporting residents and patients from nursing homes and hospitals to NDMS mobilization centers.

Statement of Sen. Grassley:

“Government officials at all levels need to heed the lessons and experiences of Gulf Coast residents in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The Finance Committee is charged with overseeing the Medicare and Medicaid programs, so I’m especially concerned about our ability to assist frail and vulnerable nursing home residents and hospital patients. This report outlines gaps in our disaster response system which may have contributed to some of the unconscionable situations during Katrina in which nursing home residents and hospital patients were not evacuated. These residents and patients relied on others for their care, safety and security. That is why, at all levels, local, state, and federal, we must be prepared to respond effectively in the aftermath of a natural or man-made disaster. As with the Katrina response, we can’t let confusion and gaps in responsibility get in the way of the effectiveness of the response. The

federal government needs to be prepared to respond. I urge the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies that are involved to plug the gaps in our evacuation system to ensure that some of the most frail and vulnerable among us are not left behind.”