

Cong. Garrett Statement for Katrina Hearing (2-6-07)

I would like to thank our panel(s) for their testimony and being with us here today and I would also like to thank our gracious Chairman for scheduling the committee's first hearing of the year on such an important topic.

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit New Orleans and have a first hand look at the ongoing recovery efforts. I toured some of the most devastated areas on foot, by bus, and by helicopter. I spoke to business, civic, and government leaders. I explored the problems of red tape encountered by the contractors who are working to physically rebuild New Orleans and other Gulf Coast cities. Mr. Chairman, I know there are still many ongoing problems in the affected areas and I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues to see that the needs of the region are met.

Mr. Chairman, one thing I would like to focus my questions on today is some of the problems of waste, fraud and abuse of the money that Congress appropriated to the area. Currently, by my count, there have been at least 7 GAO reports detailing multitude abuses that have resulted in the waste of billions of taxpayer dollars. Just today, in an Associated Press report, I read that, "At least 162,750 homes that didn't exist before the storms may have received a total of more than \$1 billion in improper or illegal payments."

The most unfortunate thing demonstrated by these reports is that the victims of the storm were clearly penalized a second time by waste, fraud, and abuse in the relief mechanisms set up to help them. It is a matter of trust and a matter of accountability and we owe it to the victims of the Hurricane to do better. We owe that to the hardworking American taxpayers who funded the relief as well.

There is no doubt that there is a lot of work still to be done – both in meeting the needs of the victims of Katrina and Rita and in rebuilding the infrastructure of the region. But we must make certain that the money that Congress sends to help these victims rebuild their lives actually gets to the people who need it most. Simply pouring money into the region without any controls for accountability and oversight helps no one.

Congressman Scott Garrett