

February 6, 2007

**Congressman Sires Opening Statement for Committee on Financial Services
Hearing entitled, “Federal Housing Response to Hurricane Katrina”**

Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for your leadership in calling this hearing today. It is a shame that 17 months after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast region, the task of repairing homes and rebuilding housing in the region remains largely unfulfilled. But we are making progress today; by highlighting what still needs to be done. I am hopeful that all those affected by Katrina and, in particular, those who have yet to return home will be able to do so soon.

I do not need to spend a good deal of time today sharing the horrible statistics that describe the reality in the Gulf Coast Region. We all know that Hurricane Katrina devastated 90,000 square miles and made 770,000 people homeless. We know that nearly 300,000 homes were completely destroyed or made uninhabitable because of Katrina. And we know that the numbers of evacuees who have returned home is low, especially in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans where only 20 percent of these residents have returned home.

Many residents of New Orleans and other hurricane-affected communities long to come home, yet they cannot because safe and affordable housing is not available. The vibrancy of a community is tied to the residents who call it home. By bringing folks back home, the region will see an improved economy with more jobs, stronger families, and more students who are ready to learn.

I look forward to hearing what our witnesses have to say, but I am specifically interested in learning what we, here in Congress, can do to bring the people and their communities back together. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.