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SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE HOLDS FIELD HEARING ON FEMA HOMES

The Senate's Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee held a field hearing today at the request of Senator Mark Pryor (D-AR) in Hope, Arkansas entitled "FEMA'S Manufactured Housing Program: Haste Makes Waste." Thousands of manufactured homes built for hurricane evacuees in Louisiana and Mississippi remain on the airport's tarmac and nearby pastures, and have become a symbol of FEMA's poor planning and response efforts.

Committee Chairman Susan Collins (R-ME) and Committee Member Pryor heard testimony from representatives at FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security and local and state representatives about the procurement of the manufactured homes as well as issues related to the installation, future use, cost, need and disposal of the homes.

"In order to provide transitional housing for the victims of the Gulf hurricanes, FEMA purchased nearly 25,000 manufactured homes at a cost of more than \$850 million. To date, fewer than half of these homes have been put into service. The rest remain in storage, including approximately 10,000 here in Hope.

Meanwhile, just a few hundred miles away on the Gulf Coast and nearly eight months after Katrina devastated entire communities, many people still lack temporary housing,” said Senator Collins. “This wasteful expenditure should prompt a thorough examination of FEMA’s procurement process and logistics planning. The fact that the 2006 hurricane season begins a little over a month from now adds to the urgency, with forecasters predicting a year even more brutal than 2005. It is simply unacceptable that, as we prepare for a new round of disasters, the suffering from a disaster eight months ago persists, surrounded by evidence of wasteful spending and missed opportunities.”

“Today’s hearing was about how FEMA made a half billion dollar mistake, how to keep it from happening again, and what can be done to make the best use of the manufactured homes going forward,” said Senator Pryor. “We made progress in finding answers today and I hope progress will come as a result.”

Panelists for this hearing included:

- Congressman Mike Ross (AR-4);
- Director of Recovery Efforts at the Federal Emergency Management Agency David Garratt;
- Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Richard L. Skinner;
- Hope Mayor Dennis Ramsey;
- Executive Director of the Arkansas Manufactured Housing Association J.D. Harper.

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