

MONDAY, JANUARY 29, 2007

LIEBERMAN, LANDRIEU CONVENE KATRINA FIELD HEARING IN NEW ORLEANS

NEW ORLEANS – Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., and new Committee Member Mary Landrieu, D-La., Chairman of the newly created Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, convened a Katrina recovery field hearing Monday to examine the slow pace of federal, state, and local programs designed to help the Gulf Coast recover in the wake of the devastating 2005 hurricane season.

They were joined by Senator Barack Obama, D-Ill., also a new Committee Member in taking testimony from federal, state, and local officials administering housing aid, small business loans, public assistance, and other recovery programs. Among the witnesses were Donald Powell, federal Coordinator for Gulf Coast Rebuilding; Gil Jamieson, Deputy Director of Gulf Coast Recovery, Federal Emergency Management Agency; Walter Leger, Chairman of the Housing and Redevelopment Task Force, Louisiana Recovery Authority; Mayor Ray Nagin; and representatives from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Small Business Administration.

“New Orleans and the Gulf Coast are an important part of the commerce and culture, the past, present and future of America,” Lieberman said. “That is why we have come here today. A year and a half after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, it’s time to redouble our efforts to win the new Battle for New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Congress has provided over \$110 billion dollars to the region since

Katrina and Rita.... Yet for all of the funding Congress approved, the reality seems to be that the money is not arriving fast enough or is sitting idle while the people of New Orleans and the Gulf states continue to suffer and struggle.”

Lieberman specifically cited the “painfully slow” distribution of Louisiana’s \$7.5 billion in Community Development Block Grants through the state of Louisiana’s “Road Home Program,” designed to help individual homeowners rebuild. Some 101,657 homeowners have applied for assistance under the program but only 258 homeowners have received funding. “How can this be?” Lieberman asked. “We must find a way to streamline this process to eliminate this extraordinary disconnect.”

“Many challenges remain in our struggle to rebuild and recover in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast,” Sen. Landrieu said. “Meeting these challenges will require a concerted effort at all levels of government and the private sector. With partners like Senators Lieberman and the other members of the Senate Homeland Security Committee, we can meet them head-on.

“Today’s hearing exposed how Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the levee breaks that followed stretched our national disaster response structures to their limit, exposing many weaknesses in nearly every agency involved. Over the coming months, the Disaster Response Subcommittee I chair will examine each of these cracks in the strategy in more detail and will develop common sense solutions to improving the recovery along the Gulf Coast and better prepare our nation for future disasters.”

Lieberman praised Senator Landrieu for her commitment to keeping the federal government’s feet to the fire on Gulf Coast recovery.

“Her unyielding concern for the people of her state and region, coupled with her unrelenting work to keep our government in Washington focused on the challenges and obstacles this area faces, moved me to call this hearing,” Lieberman said.