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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6250

May 29, 2008

R. David Paulison
Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
500 C Street
Washington, D.C. 20472

Dear Administrator Paulison:

As you know, June 1st marks the beginning of the third post-Katrina hurricane season, and Congress has yet to receive the National Disaster Housing Strategy, which was required by the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (P.L.109-295) to be submitted by July of 2007. I am writing because you personally assured me that the Strategy would be "in place" by June 1. I implore you to fulfill that assurance.

I urge you to submit the Strategy to Congress on the date that you publicly pledged to adhere to during an April 3, 2008 hearing before the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee. At that hearing, I asked you, "When are we going to get something from this administration on what we are going to do with people to house them in something other than trailers laced with formaldehyde?" You replied, "…The Housing Plan that you have asked for was given to me April 1st. It is a draft…We are going to give it to our National Advisory Council as required by law and get input from our stakeholders. It will be in place before June 1st. It will be in place before June 1st. I know we did not meet the April deadline, but it will be a good policy…"

I am inclined to accept you at your word, however, I am concerned because on two other occasions, I was told by FEMA officials that the Strategy would be completed, and to date, it has not. First, in your response to a December 5, 2007 letter from Ranking Member, Ted Stevens and myself, asking for the Strategy, you personally responded on December 21, 2007 that, "The National Disaster Housing Strategy will be completed this winter…and is currently under final review by FEMA." Then, at a March 4th hearing before my Subcommittee, the Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, your Acting Deputy Administrator, Admiral Harvey Johnson said, "I believe we can try to get this report to you by the 1st of April, another month now." Please understand my concern that at these public events, you and other officials have agreed upon dates that you are either unwilling or unable to meet. This will no longer be tolerated by the Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery.

Since the beginning of the year, news of disasters ranging from earthquakes to tornados has startled Americans and people around the globe. In the United States, more than 110 people have died during powerful tornados this year, the highest number since 1998. The NOAA Storms Prediction Center reports that there have been 1191 tornado sightings this year. As we enter what may be a severe hurricane season, we must do everything in our power to be ready for the possibility of a catastrophic event that could come at any time.

If Hurricanes Katrina and Rita taught us anything it is that we cannot afford to respond as we go—we must have strategies in place to house masses of people in the event of the next catastrophe. The American people expect their government to learn from the mistakes made during these storms. As we wait for the National Disaster Housing Strategy to be completed and put into to place, I am afraid that we are one earthquake, tornado, or hurricane away from failing to make good on that expectation. I hope that you will complete the strategy, submit it to Congress, and put it into place by June 1st.

I look forward to working with you to improve our disaster response and recovery system.

Sincerely,

Mary Landrieu

Mary L. Landrieu
Chairman
Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery