

**Senate Committee on
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions**

Roundtable:

Answering the Call: The Response of Community-Based
Organizations to the 2005 Gulf Coast Hurricanes

Opening Statement of Chairman Michael B. Enzi

Good afternoon and thank you for coming to our Roundtable discussion – Answering the Call: The Response of Community-Based Organizations to the 2005 Gulf Coast Hurricanes.

Today the Committee holds another in a series of hearings and roundtable discussions on the hurricanes that caused such great devastation in the Gulf Coast Region and our efforts to respond to the needs of those whose lives were forever changed by that catastrophe. Today's Roundtable will be taking a closer look at the role our community based organizations played in responding to the great needs of the region in the aftermath of these powerful storms.

Today we are six months away from the destruction caused by last year's hurricane season and just a few months away from the start of the next. As the Committee continues to

look back on the hurricanes and the destruction they caused to ensure we are better prepared for the next challenge, we will be discussing the role of the community-based organizations that came to the aid of the people of Louisiana, Texas, Alabama and Mississippi. These organizations, located in cities and towns all across the country, took in many of the people who evacuated the region. In addition, millions of Americans donated their time and resources to these organizations so that those who were in need of assistance could receive it as soon as possible.

I will never forget the trip that Senator Kennedy and I and several of our colleagues took to the New Orleans region soon after the storms had hit. The devastation that we saw there was unlike anything we had ever seen before. There is nothing to compare what the fury of Mother Nature can do to a city, town or community.

Fortunately, our community based organizations were quick to act and an important part of the cure for what was wrong with the Gulf Coast Region. All over the United States the people of every region wanted to know what they could do to help. More often than not, they turned to their community

based organizations to determine what could be done as a community to address so great a need.

There are many accomplishments these organizations have made that deserve our praise and appreciation for all they did to help so many. We will also look at what worked and what did not work with regard to the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster. This is an organization with important responsibilities in the National Response Plan for facilitating communication among community-based organizations and with the government.

As a former Mayor, and now as a Senator from Wyoming, I have seen for myself the devastation that severe weather can bring to a community. Last year Wright, Wyoming was hit by a tornado that did a lot of damage to the town. Plans to rebuild Wright have included support and cooperation on the local, state and federal level – much the same as will be required as we continue to recover from the Gulf Coast tragedy.

That is why we have brought together some of our nation's most experienced relief organizations. We are looking

forward to hearing your suggestions as to what we should do next as we continue the reconstruction and recovery of the Gulf Coast Region. We have no time to wait. Every minute is precious as it brings us closer and closer to the 2006 hurricane season – which again, is only a few months away.

We couldn't have this roundtable without you. So let me thank all of you who took the time from your schedules to be with us today. You will be the source of a lot of information that will help to guide the Committee's efforts and provide a record of what happened during those Hurricanes and since – as we have begun the work of restoring and rebuilding what was lost.

The Committee will continue to follow events in the Gulf Coast Region and work together to address the issues that demand our attention. I would like to thank our Ranking Member, Senator Kennedy, for his leadership, his concern, and his active involvement in these issues. I would now recognize him for his opening statement.