

**Statement of
The Honorable James L. Oberstar
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management
Hearing On
“Saving Lives and Money Through The
Pre-disaster Mitigation Program”
April 30, 2008**

Thank you, Chairwoman Norton, for holding this hearing on “Saving Lives and Money through the Pre-disaster Mitigation Program”, a program that helps protect communities across the country from the natural hazards they face every day.

An all-hazard mitigation program was first authorized by the Transportation and Public Works Committee (a predecessor to this Committee) in 1988, through the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program in the Stafford Act. This program provides grants to communities to build better after a disaster. While the hazard mitigation grant program is effective, it only provides assistance after a disaster strikes. No program existed to help communities mitigate risk before a disaster strikes.

As a result of this concern, the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee authorized the Pre-disaster Mitigation program (“PDM”) in the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000. The PDM program was the “marquee” provision of that legislation and followed a well regarded pilot program known as “Project Impact”.

The PDM program reduces the risk of natural hazards, which is where the preponderance of risk is in our country. While it is prudent to prepare for the possibility of terrorist attacks, the occurrence of natural disasters of all types and sizes is a known certainty. Natural disasters strike our country every year, every month, and every week. For example, just last year in my home state of Minnesota, we faced the devastation of a fire in the spring and a flood in the summer.

As we will hear from witnesses today, there is empirical data to show that mitigation has been proven to save money. Studies by the Congressional Budget Office and National Institute of Building Sciences show that for every dollar spent on pre-disaster mitigation projects, future losses are reduced by three to four dollars. These are not just federal tax dollars, but also state and local tax dollars as well as the dollars of homeowners.

Mitigation is an investment. It is an investment that not only benefits the Federal Government, but state and local governments as well. Mitigation reduces the damage that would be paid for by the Federal government and state and local governments in a Major Disaster under the Stafford Act. However, mitigation also reduces the risks from smaller, more frequent, events that state and local governments face every day as not every storm, fire, or flood warrants the assistance of the Federal government under the Stafford Act.

As the title of today's hearing points out, mitigation not only saves money but, even more notably, it saves lives. The Pre-disaster Mitigation program, through property improvements, takes citizens out of harms way, by elevating a house, or making sure a hospital can survive a hurricane or earthquake. In doing so, it allows first responders to focus on what is unpredictable in a disaster, rather than on what is foreseeable and predictable.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses this morning and hear in more detail about the Predisaster Mitigation Program saves lives and property.