

Statement of
Congressman Nick J. Rahall
4th District, West Virginia
to the
Subcommittee on Water Resources

Mr. Chairman; let me first offer my thanks to you and your Committee for holding these hearings on this very important legislation. They could not take place at a more appropriate time.

I come before this Committee today after 15 days in the flood ravaged regions of southern West Virginia. All eight counties of the Fourth Congressional District, of which I am proud to represent, have been declared Federal Disaster areas due to the recent flooding.

Many of my friends and neighbors have had all they've worked for their entire lives, destroyed by the waters of the Tug Fork River.

It is estimated that at least 57,470 persons have been assisted by relief operations so far, according to the Red Cross.

17,854 persons have been sheltered at 171 relief centers throughout the disaster area. 393 homes have been completely destroyed. Another 1,052 have sustained major structural damage, and 3,241 have sustained minor damage. 282 mobile homes have been destroyed. 435 businesses have either been destroyed or have sustained major damage. What is worse, these are only preliminary figures on the wide-reaching destruction.

Needless to say, I do not have to explain to the members of this Committee why I am before you today, in support of HR 6197, legislation to provide additional appropriations for the Federal Disaster Assistance Program.

West Virginians are a proud people. They do not want hand-outs. They intend to rebuild their homes, their businesses, and their towns; such as Williamson and Matewan, two communities that have for all purposes been washed

off the map by the worst flood in West Virginia's history.

Due to the recent time spent in my own Congressional District, I believe by extending the Federal Disaster Assistance Program through 1978, help will come to the victims of future disasters more quickly and effectively.

The suffering experienced by the people of southern West Virginia over the last two weeks, would have been much less I judge, if more personnel had been on hand to guide the victims through the maze of forms and applications they had to complete before obtaining the assistance they were entitled to.

I also feel that the clean up operation would have taken place sooner if more workers were available. Now much of the mud has turned to rock and the effort is much more difficult.

No one can ever do enough when such disasters take place, but we must be prepared and we must try. The span of time in which an individual experiences the actual disaster, in this case the flood, and the time it takes for them to put their lives back together, is terrifying.

Federal funds must be available at all times to finance the speedy implementation of a Federal disaster relief operation. The victims do not want excuses as to why help is not readily on hand, and they should not be given any excuses. We owe them answers and immediate results.

It almost tore my heart out to tell some of my constituents, who had just lost their home, all of their belongings, their car and their livelihood, that help would arrive in two or three days.

I witnessed this type of situation all too often during those 15 days. And I hope none of my colleagues in the House of Representatives or the Senate ever have to face a similar occurrence.

We must remember, no area of this great nation is immune to a disaster of equal magnitude. For example, just last winter the Northeastern region of the

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United States was crippled by bitter cold and raging blizzards. The Midwest is constantly hit every spring by tornados, the South by hurricanes, and in the Western states right now, the drought that is taking place may have far-reaching affects on all of us.

Mr. Chairman, I support HR 6197, because we can never be fully prepared for a natural disaster. We can however, be ready to quickly help the victims of those disasters and provide them with the assistance that will get them back on their feet.

Thank you.