

News  
From \_\_\_\_\_

CONGRESSMAN

# Nick Rahall

WEST VIRGINIA-4th DISTRICT

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Washington D.C. --- "Although disaster assistance was offered to elderly persons in southern West Virginia, few received the help they deserved, and if they did, it was marked by delays, complicated paper work, age discrimination and an apparent unwillingness by the government to really assist those who needed it the most," U.S. Representative Nick J. Rahall said today.

Rahall's remarks came in a statement before the House Select Committee on the Aging. The Select Committee is studying the Federal Government's response to the elderly in natural disaster situations.

Congressman Rahall was accompanied by Mrs. Oma Norman of Matewan, who related her experiences in obtaining disaster relief after her town was ravaged by flooding in early April of this year.

"If anything was worse than the damage and suffering caused by the floods," Rahall observed, "it was the frustration that resulted as the disaster victims tried to obtain Federal assistance, and in many cases older individuals just gave up and assumed that the Government really didn't care much about them."

In his testimony, Rahall outlined 6 recommendations that Congress should act on to help the elderly:

1. to determine the special needs of the elderly in disaster situations and the effectiveness of the Federal relief assistance in responding to those needs.
2. to determine the extent that elderly disaster victims require assistance different from others.
3. to determine the elderly's capacity to acquire temporary housing, loans and medical assistance.
4. to determine whether or not age discrimination exists in the application process for Small Business Disaster loans.
5. to evaluate the coordination of services offered the elderly by the Administration on Aging and the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration.
6. to determine the need for additional Federal funds to the training of personnel to respond to the needs of elderly disaster victims.

Congressman Rahall also pointed out the need for lower disaster loan interest rates, "Although the age of a loan applicant is not a criteria of eligibility, those living on pensions, social security, simply do not have sufficient income to repay a loan, and we must do something to alleviate this situation."