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Rahall Raps FEMA handling of Flood Claims

Matewan, W. Va. -- Fourth District Representative Nick J. Rahall, II today criticized the Federal Emergency Management Agency's handling of flood insurance claims in the aftermath of the May, 1984 flood.

Speaking at the dedication of the Matewan Sewer Treatment Plant, Rahall referred to the response he had received to a letter he wrote to FEMA relating many complaints from his constituents who were experiencing difficulty in processing their claims through FEMA.

"According to FEMA's own estimates, there are as many as sixty claims still outstanding", Rahall pointed out. "At a time when the economy of southern West Virginia is in such bad shape, delays in processing these insurance claims further multiply the hardships placed upon these victims of the flood, and stifle any chance for economic recovery in the region."

Rahall referred to specific cases such as the cancellation of a flood policy in May of 1984 after the premium was paid one work day late to an insurance agent; a home badly damaged in the flood being condemned by local authorities while the owner is still waiting for FEMA to make a settlement; a man who was hospitalized for cancer surgery during FEMA's application for assistance period being denied assistance for not applying in time.

"I am sending a letter today to FEMA along with copies of the replies that my office has received from FEMA with regard to constituent complaints", Rahall said. "These will show FEMA's responses to my individual inquiries which FEMA claims to never have received."

"FEMA was boastful of having settled 73% of the claims within two months of the flood", Rahall pointed out. "Well, I think that two months is an awful long time to be without a home. FEMA describes this record as 'a high level of service'".