

**Opening Statement of Senator Herb Kohl
Special Committee on Aging Minority Hearing
Emergency Preparedness, Aging and Special Needs: Prepared vs. Scared!
June 24, 2009**

Good morning. I'd like to thank Ranking Member Martinez for holding today's hearing on emergency preparedness and the elderly.

This issue has been of great concern to me since we heard of the many tragedies that occurred when Hurricane Katrina struck nearly four years ago. One of today's witnesses will tell us that when Katrina hit, only 15 percent of the population in New Orleans was age 60 or older, yet 74 percent of hurricane-related deaths were seniors.

We saw then that more needed to be done to evacuate seniors and the disabled in the face of an impending disaster. As a result, I included provisions in the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 to train public transportation workers to meet the evacuation needs of seniors during an emergency. But while legislative steps such as these have been taken since 2005, more work remains ahead.

Last year, I released a GAO report on how prepared the government is to evacuate vulnerable populations, such as nursing home residents, in the event of an emergency. The study found that the Department of Homeland Security needs to improve requirements for evacuation planning by state and local entities that receive DHS funding. Last month I followed up with DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano, and though progress has been made under the new administration, it still does not appear that emergency preparedness requirements have been strengthened.

Disaster can strike at any time. Just last week parts of Wisconsin experienced heavy flooding, leaving some of my constituents stranded. We cannot hope to be ready for these kinds of emergencies tomorrow—we have to be ready today. Thank you once again, Senator Martinez, for holding this hearing. And thank you to today's witnesses. It is clear we have more to do.