



Chairman's Opening Remarks November 13th Hearing

"The U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging will now come to order.

Natural disasters do not discriminate. It doesn't matter how old you are, how much money you have, or how smart you think you may be – if you aren't prepared, nothing else matters.

And while being prepared starts with you and is vital for EVERYONE – it is also very important that your local, state, and federal governments do all they can to prevent disasters, and for those disasters that can't be prevented, they must be prepared to respond.

I believe the Palisades Fire was more than just a horrific tragedy, it was an unacceptable failure of government to protect the lives and property of its citizens. And we all know that this fire hurt our seniors more than anyone else.

Families in this community deserve answers and accountability. Over the years, billions upon billions of federal taxpayer dollars have been directed to California to support fire management and disaster mitigation efforts.

Yet, on the day of the Palisades Fire, reservoirs were empty, fire hydrants went dry, and innocent people, including many vulnerable seniors, perished while thousands more lost their homes, businesses, and everything they owned.

While nothing can undo the damage done by the Palisades fire, I am committed to advocating for the victims, their families, and this community to get answers and make sure this never happens anywhere in our great country ever again.

As the senior senator from Florida and former governor, I am no stranger to disasters.

Throughout my eight years as governor and six years serving Floridians in the U.S. Senate, I've seen the destruction left behind by multiple devastating hurricanes in the Sunshine State.

If there's one lesson I've learned – it's that PREPAREDNESS SAVES LIVES AND AFTER EVERY DISASTER YOU HAVE TO TALK TO PEOPLE AND SEE HOW YOU CAN BE BETTER NEXT TIME.

There is no alternative to getting prepared and having a disaster plan. When disasters strike, the things around us can be replaced, but if you don't protect your life, there is no second chance.

I tell Floridians constantly during hurricane season: you can rebuild your home, but you can't rebuild your life.

I cannot tell you how many Floridians I have talked to that barely survived hurricanes and wish they would have done more to be prepared.

And the goal is ALWAYS to keep people alive and save our homes and businesses.

Today we are here in beautiful southern California to hear from victims of the Palisades fire. As chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging, I think it is important we hear from victims who were directly impacted, many losing everything they had.

I am so thankful to have the witnesses before us today and have them share their stories.

Now, I'd like to recognize Senator Ron Johnson for his opening statement."

###