

March 10, 2005

Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity

Hearing: Oversight of the Rural Housing Service budget for 2006

Rep. Katherine Harris' Statement:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wish to express my appreciation for your leadership in scheduling today's hearing to review the Rural Housing Service's programs. I also wish to welcome our distinguished witnesses. I look forward to your testimony regarding how we can continue to assist our precious rural communities.

Rural Florida continues to occupy a very special place in my heart. I grew up in an agricultural community, and I represent central Florida's citrus and ranching heartland -- Hardee and DeSoto counties. This region symbolizes my state's rich heritage, as well as the fragile balance associated with agricultural economies.

Tragically, last year's hurricanes devastated both counties, threatening this delicate equilibrium while battering the morale of the residents, who have demonstrated extraordinary courage and resilience.

I commend Rural Development's exceptional engagement in recovery efforts. Nevertheless, difficult work remains before our communities can become truly whole again. I look forward to working with you to complete that job.

A significant challenge that we confront in connection with this task is small municipalities' dearth of knowledge and resources in addressing critical housing needs. Enhanced technical assistance for these jurisdictions is essential if they are to fully avail themselves of the funds that are available. I hope that we can make this objective a priority.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.