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## **SAFE HOMES FOR ALL LEADERSHIP FORUM OUTLINES NEW PRINCIPLES TO REFOCUS AMERICA'S DISASTER PREPAREDNESS POLICIES**

### Chairman of Homeland Security Committee Lays Groundwork for New Approach with Introduction of Three Bills Aimed at Helping Americans Strengthen Homes Through Mitigation Incentives

**Washington, D.C....**The architects of America's burgeoning disaster safety movement achieved a critical success in recent days when 250 leading scientists, environmentalists, emergency managers, housing and mitigation experts gathered in Washington, D.C. at the June 24<sup>th</sup> Safe Homes for All Leadership Forum. At the event, new mitigation movement principles were ratified that call upon the nation's elected leaders to embrace pre-disaster mitigation as the cornerstone of disaster safety public policy. Delegates also called for greater efforts to better protect vulnerable low-income citizens from natural disasters.

The Forum included a key address from Representative Bennie Thompson, Chairman of the House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security, who announced the introduction of innovative, forward-looking disaster preparedness legislation that would focus on reducing the risk of loss of life and property proactively, rather than on increasingly expensive post-disaster response. Among other things, Chairman Thompson's bills would help low and middle income homeowners harden their houses and apartments; address pre-disaster mitigation activities for an often excluded segment of our population—residents of public housing authorities, recipients of Section 8 vouchers, and residents of assisted housing; support innovative first responder programs, focusing on projects that the first responders themselves identify as most likely to save lives and property; and commission an important study of the benefits of natural storm buffers, such as undeveloped barrier islands and wetlands, to provide maximum protection to vulnerable communities.

"It is said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. As Chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, I have come to believe that, likewise, a dollar of prevention is worth many dollars of post-disaster assistance," said Congressman Thompson. "The most cost-effective and humane policy for coping with natural disasters is to focus more of our resources on preventing damage and ensuring personal safety before catastrophes occur, so that we do not have casualties and the need to spend scores of billions afterwards."

A 2004 Congressionally-mandated study showed that every dollar spent on building codes and mitigation returns up to four dollars of post-catastrophe savings. <http://www.nibs.org/MMC/mmcaactiv5.html>

"Congressman Thompson's extraordinary leadership embodies the vision of our Forum delegates and represents a critical shift and fresh policy approach to protecting American families and communities from natural disasters," said Leslie Chapman-Henderson, President and CEO of the Federal Alliance for Safe Homes (FLASH), a Forum presenter. "We must move away from the more expensive, reactive post-disaster approach to recovery and embrace a more comprehensive, pre-disaster effort to create a resilient nation based on adoption and enforcement of model building codes, a marketplace where individuals will build, buy or do business only

in structures constructed to withstand natural disasters and climate change and common sense policies that leverage the logic of prevention.”

Julie Rochman, President and CEO of the Institute for Business and Home Safety (IBHS), another Forum sponsor said, “It’s important for policy makers to recognize that vulnerable populations are those most in need of strong, clear, compelling voices speaking out on their behalf and demanding safer homes for them. I applaud Chairman Thompson and our partners at FEMA for standing alongside us as we work to transform our vision for a safer America into reality.”

The National Housing Conference (NHC) joined the Safe Homes for All Forum as a first time sponsor of the Risk Mitigation Leadership Series. “We were delighted to join with FLASH and IBHS as non-profit sponsors of the Safe Homes for All Leadership Forum,” said Conrad Egan, NHC president and CEO. “The very name of the event underscores the commitment the Forum organizers have to addressing the safety needs of all, regardless of income. The knowledge shared at the Forum by speakers and other attendees provides an excellent blueprint to guide us in making housing for low-income Americans safer. I also applaud the legislation unveiled by Congressman Thompson at the Forum to provide incentives for upgrading Section 8 housing - ultimately, strengthening homes of even the most modest-means so that citizens are made more resilient to the hazards of extreme weather.”

The Forum delegates outlined a set of principles that added further detail to their vision for a new approach to disaster safety. Beyond insisting that pre-disaster mitigation become the linchpin of disaster safety public policy, and urging greater attention to the disaster safety needs of low-income Americans, other principles included:

- Aligning green building construction and retrofits with disaster safety. To this end, delegates agreed that weatherization and building resilience should go hand-in-hand.
- Taking greater steps to protect the environment in order to reduce the impact of natural disasters. Delegates agreed that development in sensitive coastal areas has undermined the ability of natural coastal barriers to blunt the impact of hurricanes. They called for the adaptation of the built environment to preserve the natural environment and agreed that one will not survive and thrive without the other.
- Levering existing and emerging technologies to strengthen new and existing structures using measures affordable to all income levels.

“Even since our first Leadership Forum, the science to understand and mitigate the risks of natural disasters has progressed substantially,” said Craig Tillman, President of WeatherPredict Consulting. “Thanks to the research and testing being conducted by our internal team, which we believe represents the largest team of experts studying atmospheric hazards in the private sector worldwide, as well as continuing advancements in the broader scientific community, it is no longer necessary to make educated guesses about how to protect our homes and businesses against hurricanes. The consensus of the science presented at the Forum and elsewhere tells us it is time to implement these life saving technologies and take other preventative actions to create more sustainable, resilient communities and reduce the risk of loss of life and property which will otherwise continue to rise.”

Stephen Weinstein of the RenaissanceRe Risk Sciences Foundation, another lead Forum sponsor, thanked the attendees at the Safe Homes for All Forum for their participation. “Not only did the Forum attract a capacity crowd, the speakers and delegates represented diverse views, expertise and constituencies and that added greatly to the richness of the discussions,” said Weinstein. “The passion and innovative ideas of the Forum speakers and delegates, the introduction Chairman Thompson’s forward-looking legislation, and the increasing awareness among policymakers and other leaders of the need to pursue policies that reduce rather than incentivize risk portend well for disaster prevention and mitigation. We believe that investing proactively to

increase the safety of homes, businesses and natural environments is the best way to reduce over time the costs of living and working in catastrophe-exposed regions and, most importantly, reduce the risk of loss of life.” More information about the Safe Homes for All Leadership Forum is available at [www.mitigationleadership.com](http://www.mitigationleadership.com).

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