

**Ms. Paula Collins Restore Louisiana Public Comments June 9, 2017
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The Difficulties Homeowners and families faced during and shortly after the 2016 floods in Louisiana are best learned by listening to the disaster surveyor.

RESTORE LOUISIANA TASK FORCE
June 9, 2017
Louisiana State Capitol
House Committee Room 1

Task Force Meeting June 9, 2017 public comments

Ms. Paula Collins, Representing Self

Ms. Collins: I'm Paula Collins. I'm a resident of Park Forest subdivision, and I'm here today because I flooded on August 13, I had just gotten out of the emergency room, and the streets were flooded and I wanted to get back home. That was about the time I woke up, 9 am, I was unable to drive out of my driveway. Because I've lived in the house over 16 years, and my street never flooded from standing water. I could not fathom that we would flood, to the manner that we did. About 3:30, my daughter said, Mom, I think we need to get out of here. And my husband agreed, so we called 911 to be rescued. But nobody ever came. 6:30, there was a boat that drove up to my door with some guys who'd seen on Facebook that my granddaughter said please don't let my grandmamma drown. And these guys came and took us, helped me get in the boat. We got in with what we could, just the one bag. And there was so many people in our community that were left. And it just happened to be sick people. So the boat was picking up additional people. When that boat picked up additional people, one guy was a diabetic like I am. Another family was sitting on the hood of their car. He had heart problems. This boat only could take like ten people. The boat turned over, and we had to walk in water that met my chest. And you could see the snakes in the street. And when it turned over, my back turned over, but I still had my medicine. I lost my clothing, so all I had was what I had left. And to make a long story short, that was the most traumatic night of my life. I worked for the Department of Labor Workforce Development 26 and a half years. And I retired on disability. My husband is 69, and he retired on social security. We built a home for ourselves. I wouldn't be here today, if the federal government had not

allotted money to help those recover. Because we didn't live in a flood area, we were not required to have flood insurance. We were assisted by FEMA, and of course you know that that was ten months ago. We bought things to help recover, but we couldn't recover fully. The shelter in place program came in to help. Because there was no accountability for that program, I think some of the construction worker does ran roughshod. I'm embarrassed to show you how they left my house, how they left my bathroom. I had bought a tub, a bathtub, I had bought a toilet. They took pieces of sheet rock, and replaced just placed it anywhere on there. The inside of my house flooded to the air condition, rusted my air conditioner started making a lot of noise. I contacted my state representative, and I say I want to be back, I'm trying to get back whole. If they could buy like a hot water heater. The guy says, well, we don't know if that's in the budget. I bought the hot water heater. They did nothing for my house, they didn't buy a sink. As I understand it, because we now only have one door, interior door in our home. And that was to the bathroom. And they said that that was all there was supposed to do to, to make sure we had a bathroom that we could use. So we don't have, everything is open in the house, we don't have that. I dare not trust another contractor, who said that they're coming in for my good. Working for the Department of Labor, I did a lot with contracts. After Katrina, I was responsible for making sure that workforce development activities happened in the trailer parks that they developed across the state. I did that I sought to everything being done. Nobody came to my house to see the mess that these people left with their recovery. I went to the model home, the model home they're talking about was, there's no bedrooms, there's just a kitchen and a bathroom, and a washroom that you can see. So I understand that they're doing that to the best of their ability. Recovering to me means more. And while I'm not in a position to say what you will give, I will appreciate if the program worked to the point that. As I am recovering, I didn't have a laminate counter tops in my house. What are you going to do help me get me back to the pieces that I had before? Money was wasted, totally wasted with shelter in place. I don't want to repair just to get by. I would rather repair to the ability that this program can help. But also in the manner that I would like, such as the things that I like. So if I need flooring, because the allergies, I don't want carpet. But tell me how much you'll give me for flooring, and I'll do that. So, when I went to the model home I said, I'm in phase one. And they said, well, you're lucky, you're on the top of the list. And I been telling people to rephrase that because to be in phase one, you have to be elderly, you have to be disabled, and you have to have low to moderate income. So it's not just a bargain to be in phase one. I didn't receive the application. They said that, I heard this morning that all phase one applicants have received an invitation to apply for the application. I didn't receive it. And I checked my email just now, so I got the invitation today, but that wasn't given to me before. Why am I frustrated? I'm frustrated because, it's taken too long, too much red tape, too much redundancy to get it done. Why are people not applying? Because they don't believe, they haven't seen any success. They don't know anybody personally whose house, or who's been reimbursed. That they could come forward to consider the real people, the people who are impacted by this. I apologize for the way I'm dressed but it's been 24 hours at the hospital with my brother. And I didn't have time to go home and freshen up, and look good for the committee. But, I'm here, because if you can help me expedite the program. I hear a lot of statistics and numbers. But in our community where our houses were valued at over a \$100,000, now, or in the \$80,000 range because of the flood. My car insurance, because I lost two cars. It's increased, it's doubled. My homeowners insurance, went from \$1500 to \$3,000 a year. And I didn't have flood insurance. They said, they increased my homeowner's because I called to find out if I had flood insurance. And that's called an inquiry, and they give you a claim number. Now I am required to have flood insurance, because if any event happens in the future, and FEMA has helped me once. They've told me to get flood insurance, and if I don't have flood insurance then I can't get any assistance from FEMA in the future. So I want you to understand where we are. So much has changed, there's so many demands but to be able to sleep in a house when you can close your doors, where you can walk around, where you can cook. And be comfortable and not live in a bathroom with holes in it. And they destroyed my plumbing. Some kind of way they changed the pipe, so now the air condition leaks through the bathroom piping, and we have to dump the water every day. When we washed two or three times just for that. When the water comes on in the new bathroom, you have to get rid of the rust or whatever that's coming out of the pipe before you can take a bath. This is the United States of America and as a citizen of the United States of America and the state of Louisiana, I just don't think that I shouldn't live the way I'm living. So I implore you to please, not only will you get statistics and numbers but like Mr. Pope said it, real people having real problems. And I just don't

want to throw away any more money with shelter and place because if that had been given to me and someone made me accountable, I'd be straightening my house now. Somebody, somewhere else had probably charged half the money in labor charges. You know how it is when you have state contracts I was part of it, where I could go to Home Depot and get a chair for \$100, but I had to use Prison Enterprises, which charged \$300 for a chair. I don't think we need to waste our money like that. Trust the people and make us accountable. I'm sorry.

Mr. Durbin: Now, don't be sorry, Ms. Collins. We thank you for coming up and sharing.

Mr. Dartez: Thank you Mr. Chair. Ms. Collins, first off thank you for being here. Second, you don't have to apologize. I think you look fantastic and your worst day is better than my best day. I can promise you that when it comes to that. But in all seriousness, I apologize and I am saddened to hear your story. I can promise you this, when we started this shelter at home program and I know I can speak on behalf of this committee, the Governor, Pat Forbes' office, the intent was to do the best that we can to get you home and if it's appropriate, Pat, if you don't mind coming up, I need to find out who oversees these guys. I don't want to call anybody out publicly but after the meeting, if we could find out who these folks are, I can tell you this we work with the Association of General Contractors who have a complaint division and they've been extremely proactive in getting to the bottom of situations like this, and I'd just like to find out, Pat, is that your office that we need to work with?

Mr. Forbes: It's not, GOHSEP ran the Shelter at Home program but they know who the contractor is for each house and should be able to identify the contractor.

Mr. Dartez: Ms. Collins, I can tell you I have a long history with GOHSEP and I know their best intentions are going to be with you. So, after the meeting, I know some GOHSEP folks are here, if we can, at least get that name and start the process of reviewing it. I'd love to find out, get to the bottom of it. If we need to remove those folks from the list of working with our people, we need to remove them.

Ms. Collins: I just want to say when they came in, we had purchased 40 sheets of sheetrock. That was my bed. I slept on those sheets of sheetrock until my husband was putting them in and once they were put in, we slept on the floor. And I bought the little things, the little twin air mattresses. He and I slept on the floor on air mattresses because we didn't have a bed. We had to go back home because I was spending more money in hotels, thinking I should be spending this money getting somewhere to stay. Just because a person has been affected by a flood doesn't mean they're ready to settle for anything. I stayed a week at a place called Red Roof Inn I'm no better than anybody else, but there are some things that make me afraid. And my husband and I felt uncomfortable in that place, and we just knew we would feel more comfortable at home. It was three weeks before anybody else came on the street. That's the way we lived in the house.

Mr. Dartez: I know Pat, this committee and AGC all have the best interest for citizens so, and I appreciate Pat for working with us to try to get to the bottom of this because I know that that is not the intent of any of this. And I am so sad to hear your news today. So, thank you for being here today and I echo what Representative Pope and James have talked about, this committee needs to hear the real life stories, so thank you for just being here ma'am, we appreciate you.

Representative James: Ms. Paula, I wanted, you know how I feel about you and I've been hearing your story for quite some time, so thank you for being able to come up here. I know you've been through a lot. Not just since the flood, but in the last 48 hours. So I want to thank you for coming, to allow the committee members to hear your story. Mrs. Collins lives in my neighborhood and I pass by, I see her house very frequently and she doesn't even like people talking about me on Facebook. Somebody talked about me she sent me a text saying she was like who is this guy but again just thank you for coming and sharing your story with us.

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