



# Congressman Richard Baker

Chairman, House Subcommittee on Capital Markets

The News from

## Louisiana's Sixth District



### The News from Congressman Richard H. Baker Sixth District, Louisiana

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#### **Opening Statement, U.S. Rep. Richard Baker, Member U.S. House Financial Services Committee Field Hearing, New Orleans, La., June 4, 2001 Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations “HANO and Inspector General’s Report”**

I want to thank Chairwoman Kelly for her leadership and commitment in traveling so far to convene this important hearing today. I am grateful too of the presence here this afternoon of fellow members of the Louisiana congressional delegation. And I also want to thank beforehand all of our witnesses for taking the time to provide this proceeding with valuable insight and information.

It’s my hope that behind every question in our inquiry today lies one unwavering concern: the well being of the residents of New Orleans public housing. Congress has made a promise to these thousands of struggling families to provide a safe, livable environment to assist their efforts to make a brighter future for their children. As a member of the House Financial Services Committee, which has jurisdiction over public housing, I know that we will keep that promise. But to the extent the promise has been broken in the past, we should not rest before we find a lasting framework for fulfilling it in the future.

We are here as a result of a recent report by HUD’s Inspector General on the continuing poor condition of New Orleans public housing and the failure of HANO’s management and HUD’s supervision to improve it. In 1996 I was present in New Orleans following a similar critical report for a similar hearing, which I hoped, at the time, would be the last of its kind. Indeed, when *Time* magazine published a report in 1998 on HANO’s improvement, entitled “Miracle in New Orleans,” there was every reason to hope. This recent Inspector General’s report, however, says enough to suggest what New Orleans had was not a miracle but a mirage.

There has been some progress this year under the new executive monitor, Mr. Frank Nicotera, but, though commendable, it stands as small defense for an agency that still appears to be wasting millions of taxpayer dollars while failing to provide residents a decent place to live. I trust there won’t be much to debate there.

We have, as I see it, three goals today: to gauge the poor conditions in which residents currently live, to assess what management has done and not done to improve them, and to explore a final solution for making them better. We are here today to inquire, not to blame. But rest assured: wrongdoers will be held to account.

Finally, as a lifelong Louisiana resident, I should not be surprised that such a scandalous report would come out regarding Louisiana service to the public. Yet even in Louisiana, knowing that fellow Louisiana citizens have been made to live in such unjust conditions, it’s appalling and a disgrace. We must and will fix this.