

High cost of insurance highlights roundtable

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By Doug Walker

GULFPORT, MS (WLOX) - When do we stop talking and start getting some results. That question was directed at Senator Wicker numerous times during Thursday's roundtable discussion. The senator admits it's been a slow, painful process.

"This is a complex issue." Wicker said. "If this were easy, we would have solved it right after the storm, so it's something that has been tough. But we hope by putting forward a number of ideas today, letting the public and the elected officials voice their concerns that we can come up with legislation that might pass and actually work."

Congressman Gene Taylor again pushed for his all-perils bill, saying the current system is unfair.

"People want to know they are covered, without having to hire an engineer or an attorney or wait years to get paid," Taylor said. "A U.S. Senator waited two years to get paid; a federal judge waited two years to get paid. What kind of chances does a football coach have?"

There were many thoughts and ideas shared at Thursday's insurance summit, but one theme kept coming up time and time again, and that was mitigation. Make your house stronger, reduce the risk and lower your insurance premium, according to Greg Toczydlowski with Travelers Insurance.

"The best way to avoid losses is to prevent losses, and we believe that the more you can educate and inform consumers about some of the best building materials and the best building processes are that when the wind does come, they are protected," Toczydlowski said.

"But one thing does not change, more and more people are moving into high risk areas," says Dr. Erwann O. Michel-Kerjan of the University of Pennsylvania.

"The population of Florida in 1950 was about two million people. Today it's close to 20 million." Michel-Kerjan said. "It doesn't take rocket science but just common sense to know that we're going to be in trouble if we don't seriously address this issue."

There was only one topic everyone agreed on at the roundtable. That is, neither private insurers or the state and federal governments can go it alone. The final solution will have to come in the form of a public-private partnership to end of insurance crises and stabilize the markets.

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