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Summary of Leadership Activities: Mobile Home Removal Project / Lt. Governor Phil Scott

After Tropical Storm Irene tore through Vermont on August 28, 2011, 14 of the state's mobile home parks reported substantial damage. Flood waters had risen up to 4 feet inside the homes in many cases. For these homeowners, the best way to address their damaged homes – many of which contained waterlogged insulation that was already starting to show signs of mold – was literally to throw them away and replace them.

However, for mobile home residents, most of whom are seniors, disabled, or low-income families, the cost to hire a contractor to truck their mobile home unit out of the park, dismantle it, and dispose of the materials exceeded their ability to pay. Cost estimates ranged from \$3,500 to upwards of \$4,500. Although most flood-impacted mobile home owners received some assistance from FEMA, those disaster grants were not enough to fully cover removal costs in addition to all of their other expenses, including temporary housing costs and replacement of destroyed household contents.

Lt. Governor Scott, who is also the co-owner of a construction company, responded by turning to his business experience and his contacts in the construction community. He reached out to members of the Associated General Contractors of VT and asked them to submit their bids for the collective, on-site demolition of 6 to 10 homes in the same mobile home park at the same time – as opposed to trucking them individually out of the parks. He also contacted waste haulers and solicited their bids for the collective on-site sorting of destroyed building materials, the disposal of rubbish, and the recycling of salvageable metals. Finally, he assembled a small administrative team, consisting of a non-profit mobile home advocacy group and state housing officials, to handle outreach and legal paperwork, and to assist with other issues such as local property tax abatement and asbestos abatement.

This organization reduced the per-unit cost from the initial \$3,500-\$4,500 estimates, to \$1,500 each. The initial plan was to provide the organization for a collective project, but to pay for the services by individually invoicing each mobile home owner. However, Lt. Governor Scott's leadership inspired the state's philanthropic community to raise more than \$300,000 for this effort – enough so that the group could offer the removal service completely free of charge to mobile home owners in need – and all without spending any taxpayer dollars. Further, the built-in efficiency made it possible to get all of the destroyed homes removed from the parks before winter, providing a "clean slate" for park owners and homeowners to set new homes on those lots and move forward.

The program removed 68 mobile homes between mid-September and mid-December. The group is currently in the process of awarding grants to mobile home owners who had already removed their homes between August 28 and September 15, when the project began. Those grants are expected to be awarded by the end of February.