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House in CT eminent domain dispute finds new home

By Associated Press

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NEW LONDON, Conn. — A small house that was once at the center of a U.S. Supreme Court decision on government seizure of private property has found a safe haven.

The pink clapboard house that stood in the way of New London's efforts to build a riverfront project and sparked a property rights movement was disassembled and relocated to a site close to downtown.

Avner Gregory of New London, the new owner, dedicated his house Saturday before a crowd of about 200 participants and onlookers.

"This was somebody's house and they were asked to leave," he said. "This is a house that represents a home to the everyday people of America."

Gregory paid \$1 for the house and spent \$100,000 dismantling and moving it from Fort Trumbull and rebuilding it on property he owns near downtown New London.

The house once belonged to Susette Kelo, who raised a battle cry of eminent domain abuse against New London's efforts to make way for condominiums, a hotel and offices. She said Saturday that the relocated home will be a reminder of how the city reshaped the neighborhood she had to abandon.

"I think it's going to make the city of New London remember what they did to the Fort Trumbull neighborhood," she said.

Kelo lost her battle when the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in June 2005 that local governments may seize homes and businesses -- even against the owners' will -- for private economic development. The stakes were high because many areas, particularly rapidly growing urban and suburban areas, face competing pressures of development and property ownership rights.

Monday will be the third anniversary of the court's decision.

The Institute for Justice, a Washington law firm that helped Kelo with the legal work, participated in the dedication Saturday. It unveiled a plaque summarizing the significance of the house and presented an address post engraved with the message, "Not for sale."

Scott Bullock, the lawyer for the Institute for Justice who argued the case before the U.S. Supreme Court, said the house is now a part of U.S. history.

"This little pink house will take its place among homes that have changed the face of America," he said.

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