



COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

David Price (D-NC), Chairman, Subcommittee on Homeland Security

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OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN DAVID PRICE *Disaster Response: Is FEMA Up to the Challenge?* *February 26, 10 am*

Welcome to the Subcommittee's first hearing of the 111th Congress, Disaster Response: Is FEMA up to the challenge? Today's hearing will probe FEMA's current level of preparedness for disaster response, assess its performance in recent disasters, and hopefully arrive at some of the ways that we can work to make FEMA even stronger as we go forward.

I want to welcome all of our new Subcommittee Members and especially welcome Hal Rogers back as our Ranking Member. I am pleased that Hal was able to earn his caucus's approval to remain with us.

Today our witnesses are Dave Garratt, FEMA Acting Deputy Administrator and Kentucky's Adjutant General Edward Tonini. I appreciate your participation in this hearing. I especially want to thank General Tonini for coming, given that Kentucky was recently hit by devastating ice storms. We asked several other states who have experienced a variety of disasters to participate in this hearing to give us a broad perspective on how FEMA is doing, but budget constraints at the local level prevented their attendance.

Is FEMA up to the challenge? It's unfortunate that we have to ask that question, given that FEMA was once an agency heralded by State and local emergency managers as a model of agility and responsiveness. In the 1990s, when disaster victims laid eyes on those blue jackets with FEMA on the back, that meant the cavalry had arrived. But Hurricane Katrina and the confusion created by multiple reorganizations beginning when DHS was formed left us with an agency whose pieces had to be put back together.

How are we to know when we have succeeded in bringing the agency back to full strength? Last year I stressed over and over to the previous Administrator that FEMA was going

to have to evaluate and measure its progress. We can't wait until the next disaster to determine FEMA's capabilities. Mr. Garratt, I look forward to your highlighting what progress FEMA has made since Hurricane Katrina and how you are evaluating the agency's ability to respond to current and future disasters. The Federal government should be held to the same standard as our States. Through our various state and local programs, we ask them to justify and evaluate how Federal investments have made them more prepared to respond. FEMA should be able to do the same when it comes to its Congressional appropriations.

FEMA has been the recipient of healthy increases during the past two years. For example, FEMA's management budget has increased by 79 percent--from \$526 million in fiscal year 2007 to \$943 million in fiscal year 2009. As I said last year, "with that funding, comes expectations":

- We expect a FEMA that can provide commodities and generators quickly after a disaster.
- We expect a FEMA that respects the State's lead role in disaster response, but steps in when States are overwhelmed.
- We expect a FEMA that has established relationships with State officials prior to a disaster, and can thereby coordinate in the most seamless way possible when people's lives and property are on the line.

I want to stress this last point. Disaster response is a business that is driven by customer service and good, productive relationships. FEMA must know its partners prior to the disaster. We can't afford to have the team meet on the field on game day. The agency has to know the strengths and weaknesses of each State and anticipate where Federal assistance will be needed. So FEMA has to do what it can to rebuild those State and local relationships and empower its Regional offices to make decisions.

In 2008, FEMA declared 75 major disasters, 17 emergencies, and 51 fire emergencies. Those disasters occurred in 39 States and 2 territories, with many having multiple declarations. There seem to be no signs of slowing down. The recent ice storms have resulted in major disaster declarations for the States of Kentucky, Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. When responding to the recent disasters, FEMA not only had to ensure that generators were in place and that the states were supported in their various recovery efforts, but they also had to

ensure that contaminated peanut butter was not in food given to victims. That is one example of the unknowns the agency must be nimble enough to react to.

Today we are looking to our witnesses to help us measure where FEMA is and to answer the essential question: "Is the agency up to the challenge of its mission?" Also, we are looking to the panel to clear up misconceptions regarding FEMA's role and elaborate on States' roles in disaster response. We look forward to a healthy exchange.

In a moment, we will begin with Mr. Garratt followed by General Tonini. I ask that you summarize your written testimony, as it will be entered into the record. But first let me yield to Mr. Rogers for any statement that he would like to make.

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