

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JAMES L. OBERSTAR
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
HEARING ON
FEMA'S PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE TO ALL HAZARDS
APRIL 27, 2007**

This morning our Committee's is holding another hearing of FEMA related issues in the 110th Congress. In addition to today's hearing our Committee is vigorously pursuing an agenda on FEMA-related issues, including working with the Democratic leadership on critical legislation to address the continuing needs in the Gulf Coast region after Hurricane Katrina.

The jurisdiction of the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure over FEMA issues is well known and well established. On March 1, the Committee considered and reported H.R. 1144, the Hurricanes Katrina and Rita Federal Match Relief Act of 2007, introduced by the Majority Whip (Mr. Clyburn). The bill provides significant legislative relief for communities devastated by Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma and addresses serious needs that have been left unaddressed since these disasters. An amended form of the bill is included in the Emergency Supplemental Appropriations that passed the House and Senate and will soon go to conference. We also worked with the Committee on Financial Services on H.R. 1227, the Gulf Coast Hurricane Housing Recovery Act of 2007 to ensure that the bill allows Louisiana to use its Hazard Mitigation Program funds for its Road Home program. Those protections were included in the bill that passed the House last month.

Today we turn to an issue that was the basis of last summer's FEMA reform legislation. Specifically it is the notion that FEMA return to and restore its all hazards approach to managing disasters, which is a risk based approach. It ensures a consistent framework for responding to any disaster or emergency whether from natural hazard, an accident, or an intentional act such as a terrorist attack.

As you all know, I believe the legislation passed in the last Congress, while well intended, did not go far enough, and thus FEMA will not be able to serve our citizens in need in the best way possible, as they did when they were independent. However as the reorganization of FEMA called for in that legislation has only taken effect in the last few weeks, I am willing to see how it works first. Given that these subcommittee hearings are being held as FEMA begins a fresh start I must express my personal disappointment at the absence of Administrator Paulison. No one can get off on the right foot or commit to a close working Congressional relationship better than the head of the agency.

The issue before us today is FEMA's return to an all hazards approach to disaster management. We learned a heart breaking lesson in the aftermath of Katrina that preparedness, response, and recovery are so closely related and intertwined that any rupture in that relationship eventually ruptures FEMA's effectiveness.

We now know for certainty that response and recovery operations are based on plans created by the preparedness function. Planning, training, and exercise form the basis for effective disaster response. It seems to me this fundamental lack of understanding regarding the very nature of disaster is symptomatic of the "brain drain" at FEMA where experienced

emergency managers left as morale sank and they were replaced by well intentioned people who nonetheless have little or no experience in emergency management.

Under the Post-Katrina Reform Act I hope to see a restoration of professionalism at FEMA. I am heartened to learn at the subcommittee hearing last week on FEMA's logistics and supply chain the Deputy Administrator Johnson announced it has hired an expert from the Defense Logistics Agency and this senior officer reports directly to Administrator Paulison. This is certainly a step in the right direction.

However, I was equally as disappointed to hear at the Federal Protective Service hearing, also held last week, that DHS did not require the new hire for the position of Director for the FPS have a law enforcement background. I believe this is a short sighted decision and am disappointed with it.

Our Committee intends a vigorous oversight of FEMA and how the agency will implement this legislation. For example there are already indications that the Department of Homeland Security is not fully implementing the reorganization of FEMA called for in the legislation. I will use fire grants as an example of how FEMA is not fully implementing the reforms contemplated in the 2006 Act.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 seeks to restore the rightful balance between preparedness, response, and recovery and apply this logic to all hazards.

I look forward to hearing from this wide array of "all hazards" experts this morning.

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