

Statement of
The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management
Hearing on
“Assuring the National Guard is as Ready
at Home as It is Abroad”
May 18, 2007

Good morning and welcome to today’s hearing. This hearing responds to serious issues that have been raised by governors of several states, by the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, and increasingly by others throughout the nation, about the nation’s ability to respond to disasters and emergencies at home as well as the ability of states to defend themselves in case of terrorist attacks. Today we will take testimony that asks directly whether the National Guard is as ready at home as it is abroad.

There have been a number of reports that National Guard units and equipment that would normally be used to respond to disasters at home have been sent overseas to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, creating hardship at home. Equally troubling are reports that some National Guard units are being told to leave their equipment overseas for other military units, depriving Guard units headed home needed of equipment that possibly is needed stateside. Today we will hear witnesses elaborate on these issues and hopefully identify areas where all involved can take action to resolve these concerns.

This hearing is timely and necessary as the hurricane season begins. The National Guard is the mainstay for more than 3,000 communities throughout the United States for disasters and emergencies, including those declared by the President as well as less serious events that do not receive a Federal declaration. Guard units play a lead role in home states and support neighboring states through various mechanisms, including the Emergency Management Assistance Compact (EMAC). For example, today we will hear from Doug Hoell, Director of the North Carolina Division of Emergency Management. Frequently over the years, as hurricanes approached the Florida Keys, the North Carolina Air National Guard almost routinely sent a special plane to Florida to evacuate hospital patients in advance of the threatening storm. Federal state and local emergency managers also work closely with the National Guard on a day to day basis. Eighteen state emergency management agencies, for example, are either in the State military department or report to the State Adjutant General (the commander of the State National Guard).

The indispensable role of the National Guard in hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornados, and other disasters that we see every year is as important at home as the role the Guard is performing in Iraq and Afghanistan today. After four years at a war in which the Guard has participated in unprecedented numbers, it is time to inquire whether the National Guard is available and prepared to do the necessary job at home as well.

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