



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

“Examining the Military's Support of Civil Authorities During Disasters”

April 25, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Communication, Preparedness, and Response Subcommittee hearing entitled “Examining the Military's Support of Civil Authorities During Disasters”:

“The subject before us today, our government’s ability to respond to manmade and natural disasters, is not just of interest to certain geographical regions, political affiliations, religions, or creeds. As Hurricane Katrina taught us, disasters happen often without much warning and they do not discriminate in their destructive nature. Katrina taught us tough lessons that are not easy to admit.

Even the best planning and preparedness may never be enough to safeguard every innocent human life. And the loss of life, in any emergency, is never acceptable. Our emergency managers and responders carry a heavy burden that all too often goes unrecognized.

Today, the Members of this Subcommittee will hear testimony from some of our nation’s most trusted and admired public servants... the men and women of the National Guard, volunteers from the Civil Air Patrol, state emergency managers, as well as from FEMA.

I’d like to take a moment to thank one panelist in particular, Mr. Mike Womack, who is the director of emergency management in the great State of Mississippi, my home State. For 29 years, Mike served in active and reserve military service, retiring in June 2001 as a Lieutenant Colonel with the Mississippi Army National Guard. Like many of our other distinguished panelists, Mike has been able to look critically at emergency management from several vantage points. He has the experience to know that partnerships and teamwork trump turf wars when it comes to emergency preparedness and response.

Today’s hearing is the first of at least three that this Committee will hold to examine the relationship between military organizations such as the National Guard and the homeland security missions they are increasingly being relied on to support. Friends, the National Guard today finds itself at a very tough crossroad, pursuing two very important and very different missions, one overseas, and one here at home.

No matter what your political beliefs about the Wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, certain facts ARE undeniable. The conflicts abroad have left our citizen-soldiers at home without enough working equipment and stretched far too thin. I look forward to working with my colleagues on this Committee to empower our first responders regardless of the uniform they wear.

Men and women in camouflage, FEMA windbreakers, civilian clothing, and fire gear all have something in common. They all come from our communities and they all deserve our support.”

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