



One Hundred Ninth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

April 5, 2006

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary
Department of Homeland Security
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

It has been nearly seven months since former FEMA Director Michael Brown resigned on September 12, 2005. While the Department has repeatedly said that filling this position is a top priority, we have seen no action. This is simply unacceptable.

With hurricane season less than 60 days away, and potential earthquakes, tornados and terrorist attacks a reality for many Americans; I fear that we are unprepared for the next significant emergency. I also worry that the delay in putting permanent leadership in place at FEMA will only exacerbate the morale problems that have been caused by the lack of direction at the Department of Homeland Security.

I find it illogical that the position has been reportedly been offered to and declined by up to seven individuals, while a qualified and respected leader like Acting FEMA Director R. David Paulison has expressed his willingness to serve. Chief Paulison admirably stepped in at FEMA's darkest hour and has begun, with limited success due to his acting status, to implement some much needed reforms. Nobody, especially an individual with the stature of Chief Paulison, should be treated in this fashion.

In addition, three out of the ten FEMA regional offices are led by acting Directors. Two of these, in the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions, are located in the East Coast. This is troubling as hurricane forecasters revealed yesterday that the East Coast's chances of being hit by a major hurricane has more than doubled to 64 percent this year.

While you cannot control when and where natural disasters strike, you can make sure that the necessary leadership is in place to properly prepare and respond to such incidents. I implore you to move quickly to correct this gap immediately.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security