

C.A. DUTCH RUPPERSBERGER

2ND DISTRICT, MARYLAND

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AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-2002**

September 8, 2005

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The Honorable George W. Bush
President
United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Bush:

Our nation is still reeling in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina - the worst natural catastrophe to hit our shores. I join all Americans in expressing our great sorrow for those who have lost loved ones and our outrage for those still suffering in the South.

You called the overall response to Hurricane Katrina "Not Acceptable" and I agree. The response to this natural disaster was a local, state, and federal failure. The system absolutely failed the people of the Gulf Coast. We must acknowledge this breakdown that included a lack of planning and a failure to communicate across all levels. I applaud your move to launch an inquiry into the situation but that is not enough.

I believe Congress must establish an independent, bi-partisan commission with subpoena powers to investigate what went wrong and what went right in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. We must learn from the mistakes that were made and hold leaders accountable for their actions. In the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, Congress passed and you signed legislation that established the 9-11 Commission. The Commission investigated the circumstances surrounding 9-11 and issued recommendations to help protect our country against future terrorist attacks. The 9-11 Commission worked and I believe our country is safer because of it. We need to do the same thing for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. They deserve to know what went wrong and we must learn from this experience so we can better respond next time. We must do this quickly to keep our country and her citizens safe. We can not control when the next natural disaster will hit but we can control how we prepare for it. We must be ready.

In addition, I respectfully urge you to support the removal of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) from the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and restore it to a fully independent agency headed by an emergency management professional reporting directly to the President. We must allow FEMA to work independently and hire more disaster related personnel to respond to and deal with natural disasters quickly and efficiently. We must also ensure that FEMA coordinates directly with the local and state emergency response teams and shares its disaster plan with them. I believe FEMA must have two Deputy Directors - one responsible for natural disasters and the other responsible for terrorism related disasters. The Deputy Director in charge of terrorism related disasters would also consult and coordinate with DHS to ensure proper communication in the case of a terrorist attack.

DHS was established to keep our shores safe from terror and to respond to emergencies. While this is an important goal, it has also led to the reprioritizing of personnel, equipment, and direction from addressing natural disasters to fighting terrorism at home. Securing our homeland is a priority, but Hurricane Katrina has shown us all that we cannot lose focus on natural disasters. We have to remember that our country faces a number of natural disasters each year and without the expertise, resources and training we will never be able to adequately assist American citizens in need. Hurricane Katrina has shown that DHS personnel have too many missions and not enough resources.

As the Baltimore County Executive, I managed 19,000 employees. The eastern portion of the county and the rest of the Maryland shoreline are prone to floods, blizzards, hurricanes and other forces of nature that are difficult to predict. We designed and carried out drills and exercises in anticipation of these crisis situations. We trained and established a chain of command for everyone to follow. In 2003, when Hurricane Isabel hit, the region was organized and able to help those people flooded out of their homes. During Isabel there was a direct chain of command and a definite plan of attack. That is why we must move FEMA out of DHS and establish it as an independent agency. It needs the expertise and independence to address disasters without having to navigate through layers of bureaucracy. It needs its own authority to act quickly and not have to wait for Cabinet level approval. I am a co-sponsor of legislation that moves FEMA out of DHS and creates these two Deputy Director positions.

I have heard some truly touching stories of heroism - daring rescues and neighbors helping neighbors. I especially want to acknowledge the Coast Guard who quickly answered the call to serve in the South with all of the resources they could gather. I would also like to thank the National Guard who moved in delivering much needed supplies and restoring order to the area. Their stories will be heard. They are what maintain the true American spirit. We must strive to do better and be better in the future. Our nation depends on us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C.A. Dutch Ruppensberger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "C" and "A" at the beginning.

C.A. Dutch Ruppensberger
Member of Congress

CADR:js