

# Additional Views

## Senator George V. Voinovich

I commend Senators Collins and Lieberman and their investigative staff for producing a thorough examination of the government's response to Hurricane Katrina.

It is clear there were serious and regrettable deficiencies in the response at every level of government during the days leading up to and following the unprecedented catastrophe in the Gulf Coast. This country can and must improve its capabilities in preparing for and responding to future disasters, whether natural or man-made.

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has produced a substantial report, which I am confident will contribute positively to the future of emergency management. I wholeheartedly agree with the following recommendations detailed in the report:

- Commitment to emergency management across federal, state, and local governments must be strengthened;
- The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) must develop a true all-hazards focus and strike the appropriate balance between addressing terrorism and natural disasters;
- A stronger regional DHS/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) framework is necessary;
- Collaboration and coordination must be improved among federal agencies and between federal, state, and local governments;
- FEMA – or the proposed National Preparedness and Response Authority (NPRO) – must have capable and qualified leadership with a robust and well-trained workforce; and
- Our nation's plans and systems for responding to disasters and catastrophes should be improved and clarified to establish clear lines of authority, roles, and responsibilities by all appropriate federal, state, and local parties.

While I concur with many of the Chairman and Ranking Member's findings and recommendations, I appreciate the opportunity to express my differing opinion on several key matters.

I believe too much emphasis has been placed upon reconsidering the organizational structure of FEMA. Whether FEMA is an independent, Cabinet-level agency or reorganized within DHS is not the most critical factor. The key to FEMA's effectiveness is ensuring the agency has capable and qualified leadership, is fully staffed with a well-trained and experienced workforce, and has the necessary budgetary resources. As this Report details, FEMA did not have the appropriate leadership, staffing levels, or budgetary resources necessary for optimal readiness prior to Hurricane Katrina.

This Report declares that FEMA is beyond repair. I do not share that assessment. Nor do I agree at this time that reorganizing and renaming FEMA is the answer. I am concerned that yet another reorganization of FEMA and DHS would be disruptive and could cause more harm than good. Instead of "moving boxes around" yet again, I believe this Committee

should focus its oversight authority and legislative efforts on ensuring that DHS and FEMA are working as effectively as possible to strengthen institutional capabilities, assemble the appropriate leadership team with the optimal staffing levels, and make the best use of budgetary resources.

In the past months, DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff, Acting FEMA Director R. David Paulson, and Under Secretary for Preparedness George Foresman have assured this Committee that they are rehabilitating FEMA and improving preparedness and response capabilities throughout DHS for the impending hurricane season and beyond. DHS is already implementing many of the recommendations in this Committee's Report. However, Secretary Chertoff does not support the Report's reorganization proposal. As a former government executive, I believe the Secretary's views are critical and deserve serious consideration in this matter. Congress must hold DHS accountable for its performance, but should refrain from micromanaging the agency.

Much attention has been paid in this Report to the link between the emergency preparedness and response functions within DHS. While I agree these two functions are necessarily interdependent, I am not presently convinced the agency must be reorganized to achieve coordination. When Secretary Chertoff conducted his management review of the agency last year, he determined that the preparedness and response offices should be separated – but work together closely – because the two functions require different core competencies. Therefore, he proposed creating a Preparedness Directorate to focus exclusively on grants, training, and exercises; while allowing FEMA to focus entirely on its response and recovery missions. The new Preparedness Directorate became operational only months ago, in October 2005, following Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, I believe judgments regarding the current structure of the preparedness and response functions within DHS are premature.

I also have reservations regarding the proposed dual-reporting structure for the Director of NPRA. The chain of command recommended in this report would allow the Director of the proposed NPRA to bypass the DHS Secretary and report directly to the President. Following the leadership failures during Hurricane Katrina, a dual-reporting structure is a tempting recommendation, but one that would ultimately harm accountability and the effectiveness and coherence of the chain of command. If the DHS Secretary is to be held fully accountable for the actions of his Department, the NPRA Director should not be allowed to circumvent the Secretary's authority, even during times of crisis.

Overall, it seems that the recommendations in this Report could entail shifting an increased burden to the federal government for emergency management, which has historically been recognized as a shared responsibility between federal, state, and local governments. In an environment of limited federal budgetary resources, I would urge that where possible, improvements in emergency preparedness and response capabilities should primarily be achieved through better management, training, coordination, and leveraging of existing resources at all levels of government.

I feel strongly that we in Congress have an obligation to exercise our oversight capacity to ensure our nation develops a more robust and effective emergency-management system in order to prevent future devastation and suffering on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. I support the spirit in which this Report is offered, however, I would caution my colleagues that Congress should avoid being overly prescriptive toward the Executive Branch or the States. Certain recommendations in this report denote a specificity with which I am uncomfortable.

In total, I believe the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Committee have produced a solid Report, and I greatly appreciate their efforts. I hope the Congress and the Administra-

tion can work cooperatively in the coming months to identify and implement the appropriate modifications to improve our nation's disaster preparedness and response capabilities.