



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson

PKEMRA Implementation: An Examination of FEMA's Preparedness and Response Mission"

March 17, 2009 (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 "PKEMRA Implementation: An Examination of FEMA's Preparedness and Response Mission":

"I look forward to hearing how FEMA is implementing the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006, also known as PKEMRA.

I am also eager to hear from some of our witnesses about how PKEMRA has strengthened FEMA within DHS.

Hurricane Katrina made it clear to everyone that the Nation needed to improve its ability to prepare for and respond to all types of catastrophes.

Congress may have passed PKEMRA after a hurricane, but let me assure everyone here that PKEMRA was enacted to bolster DHS and FEMA's ability to prepare for and respond to all hazards.

Because of PKEMRA, FEMA's responses to the Midwest floods, the ice storms, the wild fires, the tornadoes, and Hurricanes Gustav and Ike were vastly different than its previous responses.

I believe that FEMA's newfound strength can be attributed to the agency's positioning within the Department of Homeland Security.

After all, today's FEMA has the ability to leverage the resources of over 200,000 DHS employees.

Now, we often forget that FEMA is not the actual first responder—FEMA's role is to plan for and coordinate the response to catastrophes.

When called to action, it is the fire fighters, law enforcement officials, and search and rescue teams that are the first boots on the ground—not FEMA.

When the Federal government is called to assist in search and rescue, FEMA tasks the Coast Guard.

When asked to help restore communications, FEMA tasks the Department's National Communication System.

When asked to establish a mass air evacuation, FEMA relies on TSA.

FEMA's positioning within the Department of Homeland Security is critical to its ability to leverage the resources of DHS components.

Today's hearing is also an opportunity to learn what additional tools or resources FEMA needs to continue its improvement.

As I have said before, FEMA is not where we want it to be yet. But, it is definitely moving in the right direction.

Now there are those who will never acknowledge that FEMA - in the words of Inspector General Skinner – is “stronger today than at any time in its history.”

They want to ignore the fact that PKEMRA gave the President the authority to make the FEMA Administrator a Cabinet level official during catastrophes.

Some want to overlook that PKEMRA makes it clear that the FEMA Administrator is the primary advisor to the President on emergency management issues.

There are also those who seem to forget that PKEMRA made FEMA a distinct entity within the Department.

So, today, I look forward to hearing the recommendations of the witnesses to improve PKEMRA, thereby strengthening FEMA within DHS.

I know Ms. Troupe—my fellow Mississippian—has some concrete ideas as to how we can improve Federal assistance to the disability community.”

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