

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Ensuring Strong FEMA Regional Offices: An Examination of Resources and Responsibilities”**

March 16, 2010 (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 “Ensuring Strong FEMA Regional Offices: An Examination of Resources and Responsibilities”:

“As any state or local emergency manager will tell you, the Regional Offices are FEMA’s “front line” for facilitating emergency management programs. That is why this Committee made sure language was included in the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA) to bolster the role of the Regional Office.

Hurricane Katrina demonstrated that we needed better coordination between headquarters and the regions, stronger regional preparedness, and more autonomy for the Regional Administrators to make timely decisions.

I was very encouraged to see Administrator Fugate tackle these mandates by delegating many new authorities to the Regional Offices. Now, Regional Administrators will be empowered to hire senior level staff, provide stronger oversight, and further expedite disaster assistance to state and local governments.

This is an important step but much more work still needs to be done.

According to a recent report from the National Academy for Public Administration (NAPA), the regions may not have the capacity to handle all their new responsibilities. When the regions were asked by NAPA, “what does being a ‘robust’ regional office mean,” the number one response from all those surveyed was: more personnel.

Unfortunately, NAPA also found that FEMA has a weak Five-Year Strategic Human Capital Plan that does not meet PKEMRA mandates. Since becoming Chairman, I have consistently called on FEMA to build a larger, more qualified and diverse workforce.

Completing a comprehensive Five-Year Human Capital Plan and properly staffing the Regional Offices must be a priority for FEMA. NAPA also highlighted the need for better communication between FEMA headquarters and the regions, as well as the possible transfer of additional authorities to the Regions.

I strongly urge FEMA to further analyze NAPA’s recommendations and make any needed adjustments to its new Regional Office strategy. We must ensure that we are not setting up the Regional Offices for failure. They must have the staffing, authority, funding, and expertise to carry out all of their missions.

Again, I commend Administrator Fugate for taking bold steps to empower the regions, but many questions still remain, including how the new reorganization at FEMA headquarters will impact the Regions.”

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