

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
STATEMENT OF

Mr. David Garratt
Associate Administrator
Mission Support

and

Mr. Tony Russell
Regional Administrator
FEMA Region 6

On

**“Ensuring Strong FEMA Regional Offices:
An Examination of Resources and Responsibilities”**

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

March 16, 2010

Good morning Madam Chairwoman, Ranking Member Rogers, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am David Garratt, Associate Administrator at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Joining me is my colleague Tony Russell, Regional Administrator of FEMA Region 6, which encompasses the states of Texas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. On behalf of FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security, we appreciate the opportunity to testify today about our regional offices, their resources, and their responsibilities.

As you know, FEMA's mission is to "support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards." This is not a mission for the faint of heart. It requires great personal and professional dedication, constant engagement with our partners at every level of government and across the private sector; and the authority, ability and resolve to act quickly and decisively respond as events develop on the ground.

FEMA's Administrator, Mr. Craig Fugate, strongly believes that emergency management organizations are most responsive and effective when the unambiguous authority to make necessary operational decisions is delegated to the lowest command levels possible. Administrator Fugate's vision, shared without reservation by members of his senior staff and senior Department leadership, is that headquarters is responsible for the "rules and tools" and the regions in the field are the implementers. In other words, the role of headquarters is to prescribe policy and develop systems to support national policy, but personnel in the regions and the field are responsible for actually

implementing policy and preparing for, responding to, recovering from and mitigating all hazards.

Soon after he was sworn in, Administrator Fugate made it a priority to ensure that FEMA's regional and field organizations were appropriately equipped and fully empowered to exercise those operational responsibilities. Accordingly, in July of last year, not long after taking office, Administrator Fugate issued a memorandum which began what is an ongoing process of realigning key operational responsibilities and authorities to – and in some cases back to – our regional offices. Among the delegated authorities are:

- The authority to issue mission assignments in excess of \$10 million. Previously, regions could only approve up to \$10 million without headquarters approval in the Enterprise Coordination and Approval Process (ECAP) systems.
- The authority to contract for aircraft to support requirements organic to that specific region. Previously, regions were required to rely on headquarters to find a contractor to fit the regional requirement. This was time consuming and inefficient.
- The restoration of regional authority to approve requisitions for non-disaster goods and services, thereby reducing previous delays incurred when the regions were required to seek headquarters approval.
- The authority to select and hire staff in senior regional positions. Previously, such hires had to be approved by FEMA headquarters.

This ongoing regional delegation and empowerment effort reflects a fundamental institutional shift toward a more decentralized approach to disaster management, and serves to develop more robust regional offices. Regardless of the impetus, the re-empowerment of regional and field offices recognizes three important principles.

First, our regional colleagues, as a result of their regular and routine interactions with their principal customers, have developed relationships and are far more likely to have an acute understanding of the unique capabilities and needs of the state, local, and tribal governments in their respective geographic areas of responsibility. Clearly, they are in the best position to effectively communicate with local stakeholders and work proactively to address regional issues, both day-to-day and during emergency operations.

Second, empowering the regions will help reduce unnecessary bureaucracy. Overly complex decision-making chains inevitably contribute to costly delays in providing needed support, and may episodically result in operational paralysis. Micromanagement and mismanagement go hand in hand, and are fatal to timely and effective emergency management. We simply cannot allow a micro-managerial reliance on overly centralized decision-making to undermine our responsiveness and hinder our ability to react swiftly and successfully to the needs of our partners and customers. When, under emergency conditions, the top priority is to save lives and assist disaster survivors, regions must be empowered to take necessary action.

Finally, delegating more responsibility to our regional offices will reinforce their authority and operational relevance, as well as fortify them with a greater sense of direct ownership in FEMA's multifaceted mission. The shift sends a strong signal of national confidence to our regional staff, as well as to the jurisdictions with which they regularly

interact and support. By strengthening our regions, FEMA effectively strengthens its relationships with and responsiveness to our state, local and tribal customers.

In October 2009, the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) concluded a study of FEMA requested by Congress and released its report, “FEMA’s Integration of Preparedness and Development of Robust Regional Offices: An Independent Assessment.” This report revealed that FEMA has made significant progress in better integrating preparedness across our functional fabric, as well as in creating more robust regional offices. Specifically, the report found that FEMA has taken significant steps to create more robust regional offices, including developing and promulgating guidance to identify the respective preparedness responsibilities of headquarters and regional offices, and creating a regional advisory council in each region to represent stakeholders. The report cited clear efforts to improve the ongoing working relationship between headquarters and the regions, and identified measures to review the success of evolving regional office authorities. Significantly, the National Academy of Public Administration’s report stated that among these significant steps, FEMA “[d]elegated ten additional authorities to regional administrators, pursuant to a July 2009 memorandum from the Administrator”. FEMA is pleased that the National Academy of Public Administration has recognized the agency’s efforts to create more robust regions and highlighted the importance of the Administrator’s July 2009 memorandum to that objective; we also agree with the report’s assessment that there is more work to be done and that additional opportunities for improvement and empowerment remain. We are

committed to address these and other concerns raised in the report, while continuing to build on our recognized successes.

Strengthening our regions will ultimately involve more than just delegating responsibility and authority; it will also require optimizing manpower. Accordingly, the Deputy Administrator is personally leading a high-priority, senior-level initiative to examine how our positions are organized between headquarters and the regions, and reviewing how best to reposition resources to the regions to complement and to fully support the implementation of the programs in the regions. This effort may well drive additional functional management changes as we continue to decentralize for success.

Administrator Fugate and Secretary Napolitano both recognize that strong regions require strong leaders, and both are committed to seeking and selecting Regional Administrators who are both qualified and prepared to handle these additional responsibilities. The Administration is actively pursuing, selecting and assigning Regional Administrators who have “a demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management and homeland security.” We firmly and fundamentally agree that these key leadership positions are no place for emergency management novices, and will continue to ensure that only experienced and qualified emergency managers fill these critical positions.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that this regional empowerment initiative represents not a devolution of responsibility and authority from headquarters to our regions, but the evolutionary recognition that our regions must grow into stronger and more capable extensions of our national emergency management capability. We look

forward to working with this Subcommittee and all of our stakeholders to continue these efforts to bolster our regional efficacy and meet FEMA's mission. Thank you.

###