

February 11, 2009

Senator Inhofe's press release and prepared statement on the introduction of S. 412, the Federal Emergency Management Advancement Act of 2009 follow:

Note: Sen. Inhofe posted a more detailed introductory statement and comments on his website on You Tube including his conversation with President Obama on the issue.
http://inhofe.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressRoom.PressReleases&ContentRecord_id=66e4fb20-802a-23ad-4f6a-cff8397d837f&Region_id=&Issue_id=4afd45b5-e2e8-be06-d58b-91d455490bcc

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Senator Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) today reintroduced the Federal Emergency Management Advancement Act of 2009, (S. 412) legislation to establish the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as an independent agency of the United States government. Senator Inhofe said today he looks forward to discussing this bill with President Obama who has previously made remarks supporting the goal of the bill. Senator Inhofe's legislation would make the cabinet level position the principal advisor to the President, Homeland Security Council, and Secretary for Homeland Security for all matters relating to emergency management, and gives them the authority to report directly to the President.

“Today I am reintroducing legislation to give the Director of FEMA cabinet-level status in the event of natural disasters and acts of terrorism,” Senator Inhofe said. **“This has long been a priority of mine, and from what we heard on the campaign trail, this is also priority of President Obama. I look forward to working with the President as we look for ways to help FEMA provide the best response possible.”**

The introduction of the legislation coincides with the latest natural disaster to hit Oklahoma. Last night, three confirmed tornadoes touched down throughout Oklahoma, impacting the communities of Oklahoma City, Edmond, Pawnee, and Lone Grove. Senator Inhofe has been in contact with President Obama, Governor Henry, as well as local leaders Gary Hicks and City Manager Marianne Elfert this morning.

“Oklahoma has had more than our share of natural disasters. Only last night, three confirmed tornadoes touched down throughout Oklahoma, impacting the communities of Oklahoma City, Edmond, Pawnee, and Lone Grove. Currently, there are 8 confirmed fatalities and 14 serious injuries in the Lone Grove area where more than 60 homes were destroyed. I spoke with local leaders Gary Hicks and City Manager Marianne Elfert only this morning to learn that at least 38 other residents of Lone Grove are presently missing. There are currently about 6,000 people without power, including 3,461 in Lone Grove, a small community.”

Statements In Support of Moving FEMA

- General Russel Honore, the general placed in charge of the military's relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina, recently said that FEMA and the Department of Homeland

Security should be separate agencies. In an interview reported in the *Politico*, General Honore said of FEMA, "I just think we've had some experience that demonstrates that the best thing to do is separate it and make it a separate agency."

- President Obama said in remarks he delivered in New Orleans in February last year, "If catastrophe comes, the American people must be able to call on a competent government.... The director of FEMA will report to me... And as soon as we take office, my FEMA director will work with emergency management officials in all fifty states to create a National Response Plan. Because we need to know - before disaster comes - who will be in charge; and how the federal, state and local governments will work together to respond."

Senator Inhofe's Full Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Mr. President, I am reintroducing the Federal Emergency Management Advancement Act of 2009 today, a bill to establish the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as an independent agency of the United States government.

Only a few months ago, General Russel Honore, the general placed in charge of the military's relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina, said that FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security should be separate agencies. In an interview reported in the *Politico*, General Honore said of FEMA, "I just think we've had some experience that demonstrates that the best thing to do is separate it and make it a separate agency."

Most importantly, President Obama said in remarks he delivered in New Orleans in February last year, "If catastrophe comes, the American people must be able to call on a competent government.... The director of FEMA will report to me... And as soon as we take office, my FEMA director will work with emergency management officials in all fifty states to create a National Response Plan. Because we need to know - before disaster comes - who will be in charge; and how the federal, state and local governments will work together to respond."

I know my colleagues will not be surprised to know that I rarely agree with parts of the Democratic Platform. However, even the Democratic Platform approved last August includes a plank part of which says, "the FEMA Director will report directly to the President." I could not agree more.

Oklahoma has had more than our share of natural disasters. Only last night, three confirmed tornadoes touched down throughout Oklahoma, impacting the communities of Oklahoma City, Edmond, Pawnee, and Lone Grove. Currently, there are 8 confirmed fatalities and 14 serious injuries in the Lone Grove area where more than 60 homes were destroyed. I spoke with local leaders Gary Hicks and City Manager Marianne Elfert only this morning to learn that at least 38 other residents of Lone Grove are presently missing. There are currently about 6,000 people without power, including 3,461 in Lone Grove, a small community.

Injuries have been reported in the Oklahoma City and Edmond area as well where homes were destroyed. Just last year in May, I surveyed tornado damage in Picher and Cardin, two communities in the middle of a superfund site, with Secretary Chertoff, FEMA Director Paulison, Governor Henry, and Congressman Boren where 7 people were killed, over 100 people were injured, and many homes were destroyed.

FEMA's integration into the Department of Homeland Security in 2003 added an extra layer of bureaucracy and removed much of the autonomy that once kept the agency operating efficiently. We learned in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina that the extra coordination required between the Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Emergency Management Agency was at least partly responsible for the shortcomings of the federal response. I believe that by removing the additional layers of bureaucracy, FEMA will be able to more effectively accomplish its mission, thus reducing the loss of life and property and protecting the Nation from all hazards, including natural disasters and acts of terrorism.

My legislation takes the necessary step of giving the Director of FEMA cabinet-level status in the event of natural disasters and acts of terrorism, makes that person the principal advisor to the President, Homeland Security Council, and Secretary for Homeland Security for all matters relating to emergency management, and gives them the authority to report directly to the President. Perhaps most importantly, this legislation defines the primary mission and specific activities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its Director, and places directly upon them the obligation of ensuring that FEMA's mission is carried out.

Let me explain some events that originally led me to introduce this legislation. Oklahoma first encountered significant problems with FEMA when wildfires ravaged the state in 2005 and 2006. These devastating wildfires swept through the entire state, leading to declarations for public assistance, individual assistance and hazard mitigation funding. In January 2007, Oklahoma encountered severe winter storms, with devastating results. These storms led to prolonged loss of power and extensive building damage for many of my constituents. Later that year, Oklahoma was hit by heavy rain, tornadoes, and flooding from May through September of that year. The State made a number of disaster declarations during each of these periods, but each and every time, the process it took to obtain aid from FEMA became increasingly difficult, wrought with indecisiveness and an inability of homeland security entities to communicate among each other.

Prior to the placement of FEMA under DHS, my State had not encountered nearly the same level of bureaucratic delays or communications difficulties. This was not the result of the failures of one individual or even one agency. All signs pointed to an agency that had too much oversight from the Department of Homeland Security and too many elements making up the decision-making process. In an emergency, it is imperative that quick and decisive action be taken within the first hours and days, and the bureaucratic hierarchy between the White House, DHS, and FEMA is preventing this from happening.

Oklahoma has also struggled with FEMA regarding the determination of the dates of incident periods, which is why I have included language in my bill to give deference to the State's documentation regarding the dates of such incidents. It makes sense that the State would have the most accurate information available regarding the disasters and the cause.

I believe this is an extremely important bill that will free FEMA from additional layers of bureaucracy and allow it to work in a more effective manner.

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