

Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart

Statement on Catastrophic Disasters

Hearing – “Post-Katrina: What it Takes to Cut the Bureaucracy and Assure a More Rapid Response After a Catastrophic Disaster.”

July 27, 2009

- **I want to thank the Chairwoman for holding this important hearing and the witnesses for contributing their expert testimony.**
- **I want to welcome Administrator Fugate to his first hearing before this Committee in his new position.**
- **After Hurricane Katrina, Congress made it clear we need a FEMA Administrator who knows what he is doing and has the authority to get the job done.**
- **I have tremendous confidence in Administrator Fugate and am looking forward to continue our work together**
- **I also want to acknowledge the tremendous work Congressman Cao has done to speed up recovery funding to Louisiana.**
- **He has held several roundtables with FEMA, State and local officials and Members of Congress and freed up hundreds of millions of dollars.**
- **He also has been working closely with experts such as our witness today, Fran McCarthy of the Congressional Research Service, on possible changes to the Stafford Act.**
- **I believe many of the options Mr. McCarthy will be presenting to the committee for reforming the Stafford Act are a direct result of Congressman Cao’s efforts.**

- **Though Hurricane Katrina was the most devastating disaster to hit our country, there is a very likely chance of a more catastrophic event occurring.**
- **A category 5 hurricane in South Florida, an 8.0 earthquake in California or a pandemic flu are all possible catastrophes.**
- **While disasters this large would stress the entire emergency management system, I want to focus on a few important areas that are of the most concern.**
- **A clear federal chain of command is essential during a catastrophic disaster, and it can be a critical point of failure as we saw during Katrina.**
- **As I mentioned earlier, Congress changed the law to ensure the Nation has a qualified FEMA Administrator who would coordinate the federal response on behalf of the President.**
- **Yet the President has not updated the presidential directive on incident management (HSPD-5) to reflect this change, and DHS has built a duplicative incident management organization outside of FEMA.**
- **As I recall, the entire reason FEMA had to be in DHS was so it could use FEMA to manage the response to a terrorist attack.**
- **Yet for the last 3 years, DHS has built a parallel incident command structure that bypasses FEMA.**

- **As a result, it is not clear to me – or to some of our witnesses – who will be in charge of coordinating the federal response if the Secretary decides to appoint a Principal Federal Official (PFO) during a disaster.**
- **This confusion is a recipe for failure and the department needs to follow the law.**
- **Another critical issue I hope we can address is the role of the Department of Defense.**
- **During a mega-disaster DoD forces will be needed quickly and their efforts should be well coordinated with FEMA ... and be in support of the state.**
- **I understand the Department of Defense is recommending a change in the way it would respond to a disaster and this has caused considerable concern among our governors.**
- **Another critical failure point is housing. What do we do with 500,000 or over a million families forced out of their homes by one of these catastrophic disasters?**
- **Despite the release of a National Disaster Housing Strategy, there is still no clear solution to address housing issues of that scale.**
- **Mitigation and preparation are other issues that must be examined and improved.**
- **Earlier this year, I introduced the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System Modernization Act along with**

Chairwoman Norton and Representatives Cao, Guthrie, and Graves of this Subcommittee.

- **I also introduced the Safe Building Code Incentive Act.**
- **Both of these bills are intended to help prepare for and mitigate against disasters.**
- **Providing incentives for states to enact building codes is an effective way to minimize damage and the loss of life in catastrophic disasters.**
- **And, developing a truly integrated public alert and warning system is critical to saving lives.**
- **With countless methods of communication available today, it is inexcusable that we are still limited to broadcast technology to warn the public about an impending disaster.**
- **The issues I have raised impact disasters of all sizes, but catastrophic disasters magnify their significance.**
- **It is important for us today to determine if the current framework for emergency management is adequate for catastrophic disasters or should there be more capability and flexibility built into the system.**
- **I hope we will hear from our witnesses today on these and other issues.**

Thank you.