

**Statement Of
The Honorable Eleanor Holmes Norton
Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and
Emergency Management
Hearing On
“U.S. Mayors Speak Out: Addressing Disasters in Cities”
March 4, 2010**

Good afternoon and welcome to all, especially our witnesses, to today's hearing, which will address the recent report of the United States Conference of Mayors Stafford Act Reform Task Force (Task Force) and disasters in cities. This report, from mayors who have on-the-ground experience with emergencies and disasters, is an important contribution to the subcommittee's ongoing work to improve the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Stafford Act).

We are pleased that the United States Conference of Mayors convened its Task Force of 24 mayors to review and make recommendations on the Stafford Act, as well as on the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA's) programs, regulations and policies. Today, we will receive testimony from three of the mayors who were members of the Task Force, as well as from professional emergency managers and flood plain managers, regarding the Task Force's recommendations.

The Task Force's report is comprehensive, covering a number of areas, including catastrophic disasters, hazard mitigation, individual and household assistance, insurance, emergency preparedness and response, and FEMA administration. Many of the recommendations in the report have wide support and agreement. However, in other cases, as we will hear today, some of the recommendations require further analysis and discussion.

Not all the report's recommendations require legislation. Many could be implemented by FEMA administratively through regulations or changes in policies, and the Subcommittee has always encouraged much greater use of FEMA's considerable administrative authority. In other cases, changes in law will be necessary. The Committee already has addressed some of the recommendations in legislation, including H.R. 3377, the "Disaster Response, Recovery, and Mitigation Enhancement Act of 2009," and other legislation that I am pleased to be a co-sponsor of, along with Chairman Oberstar and Ranking Members Mica and Diaz-Ballard. H.R. 3377 reinstates the mortgage and rental assistance program and contains a provision to provide additional mitigation assistance to states that adopt building codes. Both of these ideas are recommended by the Task Force's report. H.R. 3377 was ordered reported favorably to the House in November, and I expect it to be taken up by the full House soon.

I am pleased to recognize the mayors who are testifying on behalf of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, including Mayor T.M. Franklin Cownie of Des Moines, Iowa and Mayor Robert Duffy of Rochester, New York. If I may, I should say a special word about Mayor Ray Nagin, who also is testifying and who has appeared before this Subcommittee a number of times. This is likely the last time he will do so as the Mayor of New Orleans. We commend Mayor Nagin for leading his city through the greatest natural disaster to strike our nation, and

for chairing of the Task Force to help ensure that cities across the country can learn from his experience and the experience of the citizens of his city.

We look forward to hearing the testimony of all of today's witnesses about how we can improve how our nation addresses disasters in its cities.

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