

**Hearing before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on State, Local, and
Private Sector Preparedness and Integration**

“Mission Possible: FEMA’s Future Preparedness Planning”

September 24, 2008

Opening Statement

Panelists, Ranking Member Sununu, and guests, welcome to today’s hearing on FEMA’s future preparedness efforts. I appreciate you taking the time to be here today.

The purpose of this hearing is to assess FEMA’s preparedness and continuity of operations over the next 12 to 18 months. As we all know, the next year to year-and-a-half will bring leadership changes to all federal agencies. Many of our state and local partners will also undergo political change in their home states. My goal in holding this hearing is to assess our ability to respond to a catastrophic incident during this time.

The period before, during and after a presidential transition is often a vulnerable time for our government. We are in the process tying up loose ends, staffing up agencies, defining roles and responsibilities and evaluating our capacity. History indicates that terrorists capitalize on this perceived period of instability. And if this hurricane season is any indication, we can’t count on Mother Nature to give us a break either.

It’s my hope that this hearing will shed light on our nation’s emergency management and response capabilities and identify

areas which can be strengthened. Some of my concerns include on-going policy initiatives, like the establishment of a target capabilities list and inventory of federal response capabilities. I am also interested in planning efforts to wrap up or hand off projects like the National Disaster Housing Strategy, National Response Framework, Pandemic Flu preparedness and the continuing flooding and hurricane recovery effort.

It is critical that we focus on gaps in preparedness and response capabilities now rather than later. In my experience, homeland security and emergency management issues have crossed the partisan divide. I hope that they continue to do so. This Administration and previous administrations offer valuable emergency response and planning experience. Our state, local and private sector partners must also be brought to the table as we identify best practices in remaining prepared over the next 12 to 18 months.

Again, I appreciate everyone's time and attention to this issue. Thank you all for being here.