



COMMITTEE *ON* HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Field Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Emergency Preparedness: Examining Federal, State, and Local Coordination in Coastal Communities

November 28, 2023

I want to thank Ranking Member Troy Carter for bringing the Subcommittee to his congressional district to look at issues regarding emergency preparedness and how the Federal government can better support the needs of coastal communities. Ranking Member Carter is a tireless advocate in Washington, D.C., for the people of the 2nd district of Louisiana, and I'm glad to participate in this important hearing.

I also want to thank Chairman D'Esposito for agreeing to hold today's hearing. I know he represents a coastal district on Long Island, New York, and I look forward to a productive discussion on issues of shared interest. I would also like to express my appreciation to all the witnesses present here today.

Finally, I am pleased to be at the Southern University at New Orleans, a prominent historically Black university. I would like to thank the university for hosting this hearing and its staff for their hospitality.

With that said, I want to turn to the topic of today's hearing. Over the years, we have seen more frequent and powerful storms, which have caused billions of dollars in damage. In my home state of Mississippi, each year since 1980, we have averaged about 2.3 disasters crossing the billion-dollar mark.

In 2005, both Mississippi and New Orleans were hit by one of the worst natural disasters, Hurricane Katrina, which was then followed by Hurricane Rita. The devastation and the lack of proper emergency response by local, state, and Federal officials during these disasters will forever be imprinted in my mind. Thankfully, emergency management has significantly improved since Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, due in no small part to action taken based on lessons learned from those storms. More recently, tornadoes devastated my district and tragically killed 22 people. FEMA has been present and ready to help at every step since the tornado, and we are thankful.

Disasters often hit vulnerable populations the hardest — including low-income communities, rural areas, racial minorities, tribes, individuals with disabilities, seniors, and children. Those with experience in disaster response are well aware of the unequal treatment marginalized communities received during Hurricane Katrina. I hope to never see people trapped, hungry, and fearing for their lives in the aftermath of a disaster because local, state, and Federal officials prioritized one group over another.

Fortunately, the Biden Administration is doing more to support communities like those in Louisiana and Mississippi, which frequently face unequal impacts of disasters. For example, it has included equity as one of the main pillars in FEMA's 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. The Biden Administration has also made long-needed policy changes that increase the accessibility of FEMA's programs, such as expanding allowable ownership documentation to help disaster survivors keep land that has been in their family for generations. As we face more frequent and severe emergencies, it is critical that we prioritize equity.

The lack of equitable resources during a disaster is appalling, which is why I, along with Representatives Carter, Titus, and Brian Higgins, created the Congressional Disaster Equity and Building Resilience Caucus. The caucus provides a valuable forum to discuss Federal policies that impact underserved communities in disasters.

I am eager to hear from our witnesses today on how we can continue to support emergency preparedness for the people of Louisiana.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978