

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Ensuring Effective Preparedness and Response - An Assessment of the Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request for the Federal Emergency Management Agency***

March 9, 2011 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications subcommittee hearing entitled “Ensuring Effective Preparedness and Response - An Assessment of the Fiscal Year 2012 Budget Request for the Federal Emergency Management Agency”:

“I appreciate the Administration’s attempt to balance the commitment to fiscal responsibility with the need to strengthen the security of our Nation in the FY12 budget. But unfortunately, we have not finalized the Fiscal Year 2011 budget.

Instead, we are relying on a Continuing Resolution process that fails to provide the stability necessary to implement important homeland security initiatives. Specifically, the failure to pass the FY2011 budget will place additional strain on FEMA’s Grants Directorate and State and local agencies trying to invest in critical homeland security priorities.

I hope that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will end this dangerous budgetary strategy and pursue a course that provides our first responders with the financial certainty they need to fulfill their missions. We must continue to make those critical investments in preparedness even in these tough economic times because preparedness and mitigation is cost effective.

Reports by the Congressional Budget Office and Multihazard Mitigation Council confirm that mitigation saves lives and reduces property damage. Therefore, I am concerned that the proposals to decrease FEMA’s budget could limit the progress the Agency has experienced in the last few years.

Thankfully, we have not experienced a storm of the same force of Hurricane Katrina. But last year, FEMA processed the largest number of disaster declarations in its history. Additionally, we have seen a rise in the number of devastating natural disasters across the world.

Therefore, I do have some concerns about the budget proposal, including the possible devastating effects of House Resolution 1, which calls for significant cuts to first responder grants and training programs.

We should learn the lessons from Hurricane Katrina and not reverse FEMA’s progress by creating budgetary shortfalls and decreasing capacity at the State and local levels. First responder investments through grant programs not only enhance a specific locality but also build our national capacity to be resilient in the face of disasters.

Additionally, I am concerned about proposals to consolidate several free-standing grants, such as the Metropolitan Medical Response System grant, which could diminish investments in these important initiatives. As a former volunteer firefighter I believe that we must continue to support these critical emergency preparedness efforts and build capacity at the local levels.”

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