

**“Weathering the Storm: A State and Local Perspective on  
Emergency Management”**

Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response and Communications  
Committee on Homeland Security

**JUNE 10, 2011 at 10:00 AM  
Clearwater City Hall (Council Chambers)**

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Thank you Chairman Bilirakis for convening this important hearing on the frontlines of hurricane response. It is good to get a feel for the situation on the ground and speak with citizens and State and local officials, who are really the ones who respond when disaster strikes.

It is vitally important that we provide them with the support they need, so their testimony today will be very valuable in understanding that need. Thank you to all of those first responders here for your service in protecting our communities, and thanks especially to our witnesses for appearing to provide expert testimony here today.

Each community faces its own challenges and the local responders there are best prepared to address and handle a disaster response.

As the Representative of the 13th district of Michigan, I represent the city of Detroit, which has one of our nation’s busiest border crossings. Like this region, we have our own waterway (the Great Lakes), our own extreme weather conditions (floods and sub-zero temperatures), and our own infrastructure needs.

While Tampa region emergency managers have to annually plan for an intense hurricane season, emergency managers in my district have to prepare for brutal winter storms.

Both urban areas maintain a common bond in understanding the need to ensure constant readiness for man-made and natural disasters.

Unfortunately, over the last several years we have seen more intense and devastating natural disasters, internationally and here at home.

These disasters have completely transformed whole communities sadly causing lives to be lost and the destruction of homes and businesses.

Today, recovery activities continue in Alabama and Missouri, as well as in New Orleans and other Gulf Coast states where the Nation experienced its worst natural disaster over 5 years ago.

As the emergency managers in Florida know, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted another active hurricane season.

In addition to natural disasters, homegrown and foreign terrorist are still committed to attacking the homeland in small and large cities across the country.

The terrorist threat is at its highest level since 9/11 according to the Department of Homeland Security.

The demise of Osama Bin Laden does not provide an opportunity for us to rest and limit our preparedness.

In fact, it requires that we reaffirm our commitment to preparedness, especially given terrorists intent to expand their targets to include smaller cities, ports, and various modes of transportation.

As I said last week on the floor of the House of Representatives, given the numerous threats we face, this is not the time to cut back on homeland security.

The resources provided to state and local first responders are essential and ensure they have the equipment, staffing levels, and training needed to effectively respond.

Unfortunately, some of my colleagues in Congress have questioned the usefulness of these grant funds.

We can all agree that the Nation must pursue responsible fiscal policies, but we should not shortchange the Nation's preparedness.

The Fiscal Year 2012 Homeland Security Budget passed last week makes dramatic and devastating cuts to preparedness grants.

Grant programs such as the Urban Area Security Initiative provide cities such as Detroit and the Tampa Area with funds to safeguard against terrorist attack and plan for a host of catastrophic incidents.

Last week, I was able to be apart of a group of legislators to amend the flawed budget to ensure that Detroit and Tampa weren't arbitrarily removed from the list of cities eligible for UASI funding.

The erosion of State and local preparedness funding leaves us at risk of not being adequately prepared to respond to man-made and natural disasters.

I look forward to hearing from the panel about what specific affects Federal cuts to funding will have on State and local response capabilities. Your insight will help inform Congress and hopefully reverse the recent trend of cutting homeland security grant programs.

Additionally, I would like for you to provide an assessment of FEMA's progress since Hurricane Katrina and how the Federal government can better partner with State and local emergency officials.

Finally, I would like to hear how non-governmental organizations are working to fill the gaps in disaster preparedness and response and what support is needed to ensure all needs are met efficiently.