

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Five Years Later: An Assessment of the Post Katrina
Emergency Management Reform Act***

October 25, 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 “Five Years Later: An Assessment of the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act”:

“A perfect storm is a popular expression. It describes an event where isolated conditions merge to create a radically worsened situation. In the process, deep and profound problems are revealed.

Katrina was a perfect storm. Hurricane Katrina’s devastation of the Gulf Coast revealed a Federal emergency management structure that was disorganized, uncoordinated, and seemed uncaring.

In the aftermath of the storm, numerous investigations led to suggested changes in the organizational structure and the culture of FEMA. These changes were not to be merely window-dressing. FEMA clearly needed to find a way to fulfill its mission, improve disaster response, and regain the trust of the American people.

Congress acted and passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act. Five years after the passage of that legislation, I think we can all agree that FEMA’s implementation of the legislation is a mixed bag. Improvements were made, but challenges remain.

I am pleased that Administrator Fugate is here today to report on both the improvements and the remaining challenges. I look forward to hearing his testimony. But before we get to Mr. Fugate, I want to take this opportunity to talk about disaster relief.

I hope that we can all agree that funding for disaster relief should never be held hostage to political ideology. When a hurricane, wildfire or earthquake strikes a community, it does not ask about party affiliation.

That is why I was troubled to read that some on the other side of the aisle are now accusing this Administration of using the Federal disaster declaration process as a way to turn low-cost storms into federal disasters. Instead of addressing the underlying need to assure adequate money in the Disaster Relief Fund, claims are being made that the act of declaring a disaster is some kind of political game.

They are saying that declaring a disaster is simply a way to drain FEMA aid from the Federal government, weaken the capacity of the states to respond to disasters without Federal help, and divert FEMA from preparing for catastrophic events. These are conspiracy theories worthy of a Tom Clancy novel.

So before we begin this hearing, let me set the record straight: In 2010, there were 81 major disaster declarations. In 2009, there were 59 major disaster declarations. While the numbers are clear, the reasons for the increases are subject to interpretation. It could be that more disaster declarations occurred because more disasters have occurred.

It could also be that more disaster declarations occurred because states with stretched-thin budgets are seeking disaster assistance. It is unlikely that FEMA is forcing states to take disaster declaration funding.

But whatever the reason, given the increase in disaster declarations, a compassionate Congress would hear the cries of those who have lost everything and provide help.

Instead, this Congress has called for fiscal discipline. FEMA's budget for management and preparedness programs has decreased. FEMA's management budget was reduced by \$10 million between FY 2010 and FY 2011. FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation Fund was cut from \$100 million in FY 2010 to \$50 million in FY 2011. FEMA's Grant Programs Directorate was cut from \$4.165 billion in FY 2010 to \$3.380 billion in FY 2011.

This is a situation that is not sustainable. As we move forward, I am hopeful we can focus on the facts and provide the help that people truly need. "

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