



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson**

***The National Preparedness Report: Assessing the State of Preparedness***

June 6, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “The National Preparedness Report: Assessing the State of Preparedness”:

“Reviewing the report, I was encouraged to learn that State and local governments have made significant progress in the areas of all-hazards planning, interoperable communications, and public health and medical services

This report proved what many of us on this side of the aisle have been saying for quite some time: Targeted Homeland Security grants work.

When we target our resources to address gaps in capabilities, we become more prepared.

That said, having witnessed the suffering Hurricane Katrina brought, I was disturbed to learn that we have made little progress in developing the capabilities necessary to implement robust long-term recovery plans.

The National Preparedness Report indicates that States are less than half-way to achieving their preparedness capability objectives to ensure long-term recovery for economic activity, natural and cultural resources, and housing.

The Report candidly notes that recovery capabilities saw little investment by way of federal grant dollars.

But funding is only part of the problem.

Over the past three years, the Government Accountability Office has issued a series of reports exploring the challenges of long-term recovery projects and identifying lessons learned from previous recovery efforts.

In particular, the GAO has indicated that confusion among stakeholders and the Federal Coordinator regarding their roles and functions during recovery efforts and a lack of clarity regarding decision-making authority have historically hindered successful recovery efforts.

In each report, the GAO has recommended strategies to address gaps in recovery capabilities, from facilitating better public-private partnerships to improve economic recovery to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Public Assistance Grant program.

I understand that many of GAO’s recommendations are addressed in the National Disaster Recovery Framework.

While it appears that some progress has been made, it is unclear whether additional movement forward is likely.

I am mindful of NEMA's report which finds that funding has been relatively flat at state and local emergency management agencies.

In most places, these agencies plan and oversee long-term recovery efforts.

And given the discussion on long-term recovery, I would be remiss if I did not briefly mention the findings in a GAO report released last week on FEMA's Disaster Assistance Workforce.

It found that FEMA lacks hiring standards for Disaster Assistance Employees, who comprise 57 percent of FEMA's workforce and play a major role in recovery efforts.

GAO also found that FEMA does not provide DAEs with uniform training.

Without uniform hiring standards and uniform training, it should come as no surprise that DAEs do not have uniform skill sets.

Yet, even more troubling is GAO's finding that FEMA lacks a uniform process for monitoring how DAEs implement disaster policies from region to region.

In light of gaps in recovery capabilities identified in the National Preparedness Report, the GAO's findings regarding DAEs are particularly concerning.

I will be interested to learn how FEMA intends to address the long-term recovery issues."

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