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

The Future of FEMA: Stakeholder Recommendations for the Next Administrator

**Emergency Preparedness, Response & Communications
Subcommittee**

February 14, 2017

During the Obama Administration, FEMA benefited from the steady leadership of former Administrator Craig Fugate. Although there is still work to be done to make FEMA the disaster response agency that our country needs and our constituents deserve, I can tell you with confidence that FEMA is a better place than it was eleven years ago when Hurricane Katrina pummeled the Gulf Coast.

While I credit Administrator Fugate with much of the progress FEMA has made in becoming a more reliable disaster response partner to State and local governments, I believe that rigorous oversight from this Committee – informed by the emergency response community – helped hold FEMA accountable.

I can say with certainty that we will continue to hold FEMA's feet to the fire to ensure that the Trump Administration builds upon the Obama Administration's progress.

Although President Trump has not yet nominated a FEMA Administrator, the qualifications and criteria for the position established by the *Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act* should provide the Administration the guidance necessary to select an individual equal to the task.

Nevertheless, the new Administration has taken some actions whose implications on first responders are not fully understood. For example, Executive Order 13768 on *Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States* directs the Department of Homeland Security to ensure that “sanctuary jurisdictions” are ineligible for Federal grants, except for “law enforcement” purposes.

Setting aside the fact that this Executive Order could make some of our largest cities that are at greatest risk of terrorist attacks ineligible for grant funds, the sloppy drafting of the Executive Order also suggests emergency response activities, such as fire suppression, may be ineligible.

I was a Member of Congress when terrorists struck the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, and my district is in a State that was devastated by Hurricane Katrina, so I can tell you with a great degree of confidence that emergency response is too serious of an issue to be handled haphazardly.

Additionally, the Administration has made conflicting statements about its plans for the countering violent extremism program, with some suggesting that the word “Islamic” will be integrated into the title.

The rumored title change has reverberated throughout the country with at least four groups that were awarded funds during the Obama Administration under the Countering Violent Extremism Program saying they will not accept the grant awards because of the rumored title change.

To date, the Trump Administration has not provided clear answers about how the implementation of the President’s Executive Orders will impact public safety grantees or its plans for how to refer to efforts to counter violent extremism.

What is clear is that the Trump Administration acted cavalierly and failed to do outreach to anyone who would be impacted by its actions. Moving forward, I would hope the Trump Administration treats emergency preparedness and response with the seriousness it deserves. With that said, I look forward to hearing the witness’ thoughts on the confusion caused by the Executive Orders.

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