



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

The Future of FEMA: Recommendations of Former Administrators
Emergency Preparedness, Response & Communications Subcommittee

February 28, 2017

At the outset, I would like to acknowledge the important contributions both Former Administrator Paulison and Former Administrator Fugate made toward restoring FEMA's competence and reputation.

I served as Ranking Member of the Full Committee when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the gulf coast, and as Chairman as the long, protracted recovery process began. A little over a decade has passed, and I am proud to say that FEMA is not the same agency it was in late summer 2005. You both are to thank for that.

Since Hurricane Katrina, we have seen improvements in how we integrate vulnerable populations into emergency plans, first responder interoperable communications capabilities, and proactive disaster response activities – from pre-positioning supplies to expedite disaster response, to establishing recovery doctrine to ensure that roles and responsibilities among Federal, State, local, and private sector partners are clear.

We reaped the benefit of the authorities set forth in the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act following Hurricane Sandy in 2012, but the aftermath of this devastating storm illustrated that challenges still remained.

Congress - working with FEMA – passed the Sandy Recovery Improvement Act, which gave FEMA flexibility to expedite aid and hazard mitigation to disaster survivors, among other things.

The important progress FEMA has made in carrying out its mission since Hurricane Katrina demonstrates the good that can come of a positive relationship between Congress and FEMA.

Despite the well-documented progress FEMA has made since 2006, there are still challenges that undermine FEMA's ability to carry out its mission.

FEMA's workforce morale problems are well documented. In the past, I have expressed concern regarding the state of FEMA's disaster workforce with respect to both its training and size.

The last time Administrator Fugate testified before this Subcommittee in October 2015, I asked whether our reserve workforce was as robust as it would need to be to respond to a disaster the scale of Hurricane Katrina.

At the time, Administrator Fugate candidly told the Subcommittee that “We’re not there,” because of changes to the disaster workforce program, limited deployment and training opportunities, and limited retention mechanisms.

I am interested in understanding what progress FEMA has made in bolstering its disaster workforce since 2015 and how Congress can help FEMA continue that progress.

I also share concerns Administrator Fugate has expressed in his written testimony regarding the politicization of disasters and the impact of the irregular budget and appropriations cycle.

As we speak, it is unclear who will be able to receive grant funds under the President’s “sanctuary cities” executive order, and the Federal government is operating under a continuing resolution until at least April 28.

This kind of uncertainty and unpredictability undermine progress, and I will be interested in hearing our witness’ thoughts on how to address these troubling issues.

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