



**Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Martha McSally (R-AZ)
Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communication Subcommittee
House Homeland Security Committee**

Ready and Resilient?: Examining Federal Emergency Preparedness & Response Capabilities

Remarks as Prepared

August 29th marked the 10th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, the response to which was a failure at all levels of government. The storm took more than 1800 lives, impacted millions of Gulf Coast residents, and cost an estimated \$108 billion – the most costly disaster in U.S. history. Ten years later, the Gulf Coast still bears the scars of this disaster.

Since Katrina, much has changed in how we manage and respond to disasters. There have been major legislative reforms and improvements made to the emergency preparedness and response enterprise. The Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA) gave FEMA more authority to “lean forward” and be more pro-active as threats emerge.

We have also seen improvement in the way we collectively look at preparedness through the development of the National Preparedness System and its associated National Preparedness Goal and Planning Frameworks, including the National Response Framework; assessment of core capabilities; and planning and exercising to identify and address gaps.

Finally, the way information moves, especially through use of social media, has changed how we communicate and interact with each other, and how we get news and critical information. In emergencies, we use social media to relay information to first responders, communicate with loved ones, and request assistance. Response organizations, including FEMA and the emergency managers Mr. Coons represents, use social media to quickly share public safety information and maintain direct communication with disaster survivors during and after an incident.

As a whole, these changes have resulted in more coordinated and effective responses to the more than 1200 declared disasters in the 10 years since Katrina.

Three years ago next week, Hurricane Sandy made landfall on the Eastern seaboard, including areas represented by several of my colleagues on this Subcommittee. The response to Sandy is in contrast to the failures of Hurricane Katrina. FEMA pre-deployed more than 900 personnel and established incident support bases and federal staging areas to pre-position commodities, generators, and communications vehicles. These actions contributed to a more efficient response.

Despite these improvements, the response to Hurricane Sandy wasn't without its challenges. For example, issues related to fuel distribution and power restoration impacted response and recovery efforts.

At the request of this Committee, the Government Accountability Office has been evaluating FEMA's response capabilities, particularly in light of authorities provided in PKEMRA. Some of this work is ongoing, but GAO has issued reports on FEMA's workforce, potentially improper disaster assistance, coordination of Emergency Support Function responsibilities of federal agencies, and logistics, to name a few. I look forward to hearing from Mr. Currie about GAO's reviews and his suggestions for ways to further improve our Federal response posture.

This nation faces innumerable threats including natural disasters, terrorist attacks, emerging infectious diseases, and a porous border. These complex threats pose unique challenges. Administrator Fugate, I look forward to hearing how you are working to continue to improve FEMA so it is a nimble organization prepared to respond, along with federal, state, local, private, and non-profit partners, to the evolving challenges we face.

I also want to commend you for FEMA's recent work responding to the devastating flooding in the Carolinas. Our thoughts are with all who have been impacted.

With that, I welcome our distinguished witnesses here today. I look forward to your testimony and our discussion of ways we can work together to continue to improve response capabilities.

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