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## Opening Statement of Rep. Henry Cuellar

Today, the Subcommittee will be considering three bills which are the result of a series of hearings and briefings that this Subcommittee has held. At the outset, I would like to thank the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee –the Gentleman from Pennsylvania— Charlie Dent for the bipartisanship he has shown since I took the gavel of this Subcommittee last January. I look forward to working with you in the coming months as we continue to address our Nation’s emergency preparedness needs. I also would like to acknowledge a leader on emergency preparedness issues, the gentle lady from the District of Columbia, Ms. Norton. Given our shared jurisdiction, there’s a lot of room to collaborate on legislation that will enhance the ability of each of our communities to respond to both acts of terrorism and natural disasters.

The first bill we will mark up is H.R. 4183, the National Urban Search and Rescue Response System Act, which was introduced by the gentlewoman from California, Ms. Loretta Sanchez. Specifically, H.R. 4183 authorizes the existing National Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Response System and provides liability protection, workers compensation and job protection for USAR Task Force members. In the aftermath of the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in the San Francisco Bay area that caused nearly \$6 billion in property damage, FEMA created the USAR Response System to serve as the national rescue capability for local emergency services personnel. The USAR System is the backbone of a coordinated Federal response and we need to make sure that they have the resources and management they need. I would also like to show appreciation for the letters of support for this legislation from the International Association of Fire Fighters, the International Association of Fire Chiefs and the Orange County (CA) Fire Authority.

The second bill we will mark up is H.R. 5890, the Citizen and Community Preparedness Act of 2008. I was joined in introducing this bill by a bipartisan group of Committee members, including the Chairman of the full Committee, Bennie Thompson. If a disaster –whether large or small— occurs in one of our communities, local responders and disaster-relief organizations will be there to help, but citizens need to be ready as well. Following the tragic events that occurred on September 11, 2001, Federal, State and local government officials agreed that the formula for ensuring a more secure and safe homeland consists of preparedness, training, and citizen involvement to support first responders. As a result, the Citizen Corps Program and Ready campaigns were created by the Department of Homeland Security. To date, with limited resources available, over 2,000 communities in all 56 States and territories have established Citizen Corps Councils to help inform and train citizens in emergency preparedness and to promote volunteerism. However, I think these programs can be improved. The legislation we are considering today formally authorizes the Community Preparedness Division and the Citizen Corps Program – which already exist within FEMA.

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This legislation does not move these programs out of FEMA. Instead, it strengthens them and authorizes the necessary funding to allow our citizen preparedness efforts to be effective. The bill also authorizes key Citizen Corps components administered by FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security – the Fire Corps and Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs. Fire Corps promotes the use of volunteers to assist fire and rescue departments in non-operational roles such as fire safety outreach, youth programs, and administrative support. Under the CERT Program citizens are training other citizens in basic disaster response skills, such as fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. As our nation continues to glean lessons from the catastrophic events of Hurricane Katrina, the Federal government must ensure that preparedness efforts help our Nation's most vulnerable populations. To that end, this legislation requires that all of these programs be administered while working closely with organizations representing the elderly, the disabled, communities with language and income barriers, and children. This legislation will also create a pilot program to enhance citizen preparedness at primary and secondary schools, as well as on university and college campuses, by supporting training, exercises, and public awareness campaigns. I don't need to remind everyone about the countless number of tragedies we have seen at our educational institutions in recent years. Further, the bill directs the Secretary and provides funding to continue to carry out a public affairs campaign utilizing diverse media outlets to get the word out to the public to assist them in preparing for disasters. Addressing the issue of citizen preparedness continues to be a major issue for our Nation. In fact, the National Governors' Association 2007 State Homeland Security Directors Survey, which polled the 56 State and territorial homeland security advisors, cited citizen preparedness as one of the top 5 priorities for their States. I will be offering an amendment in the nature of a substitute which makes some technical corrections to the bill. I would like to show my appreciation for the letters of support for this legislation from the National Volunteer Fire Council, the Home Safety Council and Dr. John Cooper, Coordinator of the Emergency Preparedness Demonstration Program.

The final bill we will consider today includes an amendment in the nature of a substitute to H.R. 1333, the Civil Air Patrol Homeland Security Support Act of 2007, introduced by Mr. Dent. It was a pleasure working with you and your staff in crafting this language which will direct the Government Accountability Office to examine the functions and capabilities of the Civil Air Patrol to support homeland security missions across the country. The Civil Air Patrol has been in existence for decades, providing assistance to governments at the Federal, State, and local levels in times of need. There is no doubt in my mind that the Civil Air Patrol is a United States treasure. In fact, during any given year, the Civil Air Patrol is responsible for nearly 95% of inland search and rescue missions directed by the Air Force, and that's only the beginning of what they do. The goal of this amendment is to better inform this Committee and the Department of Homeland Security about the Civil Air Patrol and the contributions it makes to our nation's homeland security. We need to understand, from a legislative perspective, if the operational structure currently in place for coordination between the Civil Air Patrol and its government and non-profit partners is sufficient and optimal, for the security of our nation. The amendment we will consider will do just that. Again, I would like thank the all the Members of the Subcommittee for their input on these important issues.