

STATEMENT OF CHAIRWOMAN LAURA RICHARDSON (D-CA)
Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness, and Response
Committee on Homeland Security

FEMA's FY 2011 Priorities and Beyond:
Aligning Budget, Mission, and Vision

April 27, 2010 at 2:00 PM
311 Cannon House Office Building

I want to welcome our sole witness to today's hearing, the Honorable Craig Fugate, Administrator of FEMA.

Before we get started, I'd like to take a moment to pass along my sincerest condolences to the good people of Mississippi, including many in the Chairman's district, and the neighboring states that were impacted by this weekend's tornadoes.

My thoughts and prayers go out to all families affected by the devastating storms and we will make sure they get all the help they need.

In addition to last weekend's tornadoes, we have witnessed the destruction caused by some of the most powerful earthquakes to ever hit our neighbors to the south.

Not only do these disasters serve as humbling reminders of the massive responsibilities that come with your job, they require us to ask whether FEMA has the resources to carry out its mission here at home.

Given the current economic environment, I was pleased to see the Administration request \$10.5 billion for FEMA in FY 2011, an increase of \$168 million from the FY 2010 enacted level.

While I am supportive of the overall proposed budget increase for FEMA, I do have several concerns.

First, the budget proposes about a four percent reduction for state and local grants, training, and technical assistance programs.

In particular, the budget request includes a \$200 million cut to vital firefighter grant programs: the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) and the Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG).

Collectively, these two programs are often the last life-line for fire departments struggling to sustain their capabilities in this economic downturn.

I would like to hear from you why—of all the grant programs FEMA manages—these two programs were singled-out to be cut by so much.

I am also extremely concerned about the proposal to consolidate several free-standing grant programs, such as Citizen Corps and Interoperable Emergency Communications (IECGP), within the State Homeland Security Grant Program.

I saw firsthand the devastation in American Samoa after the tsunamis last fall and we must ensure that our citizens are prepared for a serious disaster. Programs like Citizen Corps are key to this effort and must remain adequately funded.

The same holds true for interoperability grants. I believe lumping these grants into the State Homeland Security Grant Program could dilute the amount of funding for the integration of state and local emergency communication systems.

I am also troubled by the elimination of the separate funding for Emergency Operations Centers.

I understand that it is an eligible expense under the Emergency Management Performance Grants (EMPG), but again, I am concerned that these centers will lose critical funding when combined with EMPG.

The budget is a very good indication of your vision for the upcoming year Mr. Administrator, but we also know you have taken many other steps in your first year to build a stronger FEMA for the years to come.

I was pleased to review your “Administrator’s Intent for Fiscal Years 2012 through 2016.” This document outlines critical FEMA priorities, such as community resilience and performance metrics.

But, the overarching principle of the Administrator’s Intent memo is Regional Office empowerment.

I largely support this strategy, however, questions do remain about how FEMA intends to provide the regions with the resources necessary to fulfill their duties.

The subcommittee did not get a lot of answers from FEMA last month, so I hope it is something you can address today.

I also know your vision for FEMA includes a shift away from “government-centric” disaster management to a multi-sector collaborative approach.

While there is certainly some strength in this strategy, I caution that FEMA must not shy away from its leadership role in disaster management.

For instance, I was very disappointed that FEMA’s role was not more clearly defined in the draft National Disaster Recovery Framework and I expect the final version to emphasize FEMA’s leadership capacity.

As we approach your one-year anniversary as Administrator, I believe FEMA has come a long way under your leadership, but I am sure you will agree, much more work lies ahead.

The recent \$3.9 million contract award to Partnership for Temporary Housing to build only 8 homes in American Samoa is just one example of the challenges that I expect you to address immediately.

This contract is completely unjustifiable and there must be accountability, starting from the top.