

The Honorable Don Young
Full Committee Hearing Statement
“Disasters And The Department Of Homeland Security: Where Do We Go From Here?”
February 16, 2006

Secretary Chertoff, thank you for being here today. You have the distinct honor of being the first Secretary of Homeland Security to testify before this committee.

Even though this committee created all the major transportation security laws and we have jurisdiction over FEMA, emergency management, and the Coast Guard, we've been sensitive to the demands on your time and have not required you to personally appear before this committee.

However, the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA are so broken with respect to disaster management that we have no choice but to bring you before our committee so that we can fix this mess.

The House Katrina Task Force Report makes clear that the federal emergency management system is broken.

Under the current system most of the key disaster authorities belong to the Secretary of Homeland Security. Those authorities and decisions should be with an emergency management professional.

Ultimately, it takes the President to get all federal departments to respond, and the President needs solid professional advice to make the right choices.

Whether FEMA stays in DHS or not, we have to put FEMA back together again. FEMA has been weakened and responsibility has been spread out all over DHS. Preparedness responsibility is one place and response is in another.

We need to rebuild FEMA's professional workforce and emergency response teams. We need to improve logistics capacity and the ability to communicate in a disaster.

We also have to do a better job building state and local emergency management capacity. Since 9/11 we have spent almost \$15 billion dollars on equipment, but when we have a big disaster we can't get it where it is need it.

We also have to resolve the tension between our all-hazards emergency system and our terrorism only preparedness grants.

These programs as implemented have driven a wedge between many state homeland security advisors and state emergency management directors.

The Secretary's recommendation to strengthen FEMA's professional workforce, response teams, and communications ability is a step in the right direction. But these recommendations only address a fraction of the problems revealed by the Katrina Report.

I want to thank Chairman Shuster and Congressman Taylor for their hard work on the House Katrina Task Force.

The report you helped write is a hard-hitting, comprehensive review of what worked and what failed.

As the committee with primary jurisdiction over emergency management, the Katrina Report will be invaluable for guiding our efforts to draft legislation to fix our disaster system.

Next week Chairman Shuster will hold hearings in California and Missouri to solicit advice and recommendations from state and local officials and disaster professionals.

Our goal is to get the best advice we can and build an emergency management system that works for all disasters. Thank you again for being here today Mr. Secretary and I look forward to your testimony.

With that I recognize my colleague, Congressman Oberstar.