

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
ROOM 2163 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

February 28, 2006

**Restore FEMA to an Independent, Cabinet-Level Agency  
Co-Sponsor H.R. 4493**

Dear Democratic Colleague:

Last December, I, along with many Democratic Members of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, introduced H.R. 4493, a bill to reestablish the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) as an independent, cabinet-level agency.

Many Democrats had grave concerns about FEMA's ability to function within a new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and opposed FEMA's transfer to the new Department. I testified before the Select Committee on Homeland Security in July 2002 and set forth what I believed to be the dangers of moving FEMA to DHS:

To move [FEMA] into this new Department of Homeland Security without a clearly defined homeland security role is, [in] my judgment, a mistake. We have not seen a delineation of what is homeland security compared to response to floods, hurricanes, blizzards, earthquakes, tornadoes. You know, when your home is underwater up to the eaves are you going to wonder, where is FEMA? Are they on some mission looking for terrorists or are they going to be on a mission looking for your lost children and rescuing you from the rooftop of your home?

The Federal government's disastrous response to Hurricane Katrina has confirmed what many of us have long predicted: FEMA simply does not work as part of the massive Department of Homeland Security. During its time in DHS, FEMA has been partially dismantled, been unable to fill key management positions on a permanent basis, and has been forced to focus on terrorism at the expense of natural disasters.

Several government investigations have concluded that layers of bureaucracy hamstrung the government's ability to respond to Hurricane Katrina. The Republican authors of the Report of the House Select Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina Report concluded "With the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the development of the National Response Plan (NRP), an additional layer of management and response authority was placed between the President and FEMA ... ." They also found that the Secretary of Homeland Security has the ultimate responsibility to respond to disasters, but that Secretary Chertoff fulfilled his responsibilities "late, ineffectively or not at all."

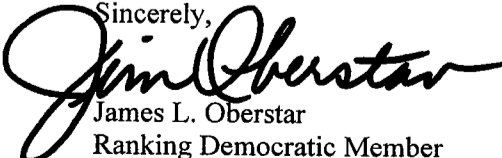
H.R. 4493 will restore FEMA to the nimble, effective agency it was under the Clinton Administration. It will:

- Establish FEMA as an independent, cabinet-level agency within the Executive Branch with the FEMA Director reporting directly to the President.
- Mandate the Director of FEMA be qualified and have extensive experience in emergency preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation for disasters and emergencies.
- Reintegrate FEMA's preparedness functions with its response and recovery functions.

In testimony before Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management last October, emergency managers from across the country were unanimous in their conclusions that the only way to "fix" FEMA is to take it out of DHS and once again make it an independent, cabinet-level agency.

Simply put, FEMA in DHS does not work. How many more disasters must we suffer through before we learn this lesson? Let's restore FEMA to the independent agency it once was so that it can focus on responding swiftly and effectively to the needs of our citizens when a disaster strikes.

To cosponsor H.R. 4493, please call Dara Schlieker or Jen Walsh at ext. 54472.

Sincerely,  
  
James L. Oberstar  
Ranking Democratic Member