

Congress of the United States
Washington, D.C. 20515
June 29, 2006

**JOIN STATE FLOODPLAIN MANAGERS IN SUPPORT OF
AN INDEPENDENT AND EFFECTIVE FEMA
COSPONSOR AND SUPPORT H.R. 5316, THE RESPOND ACT**

Dear Colleague:

When the House returns from the Independence Day work period, it may consider H.R. 5316, the Restoring Emergency Services to Protect Our Nation from Disasters (RESPOND) Act, a bill that will restore the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) independence, and strengthen and enhance its capabilities.

We invite you to join the Association of State Floodplain Managers' 9,000 members and 24 State Chapters, all of whom are engaged in reducing flood losses and natural hazard mitigation, in supporting H.R. 5316, and opposing any amendments to keep FEMA in the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In its May 19, 2006 letter the Floodplain Managers' Association writes:

The Association of State Floodplain Managers strongly supports H.R. 5316, the RESPOND Act of 2006. Our 9,000 members are appreciative of your Committee's recognition of the damage done to our nation's system of emergency management by the inclusion of FEMA in the Department of Homeland Security and your strong action to restore the Federal Emergency Management Agency to its former organizational and independent status.

Since becoming part of DHS, FEMA has been degraded, downsized, and demoralized due to conflicting missions. A once nimble, 2,500-person agency is now trapped in a massive bureaucracy with 190,000 workers and several layers of management. As the Floodplain Managers' Association states:

Those who work to prepare for and mitigate the effects of disasters know how critical it is to utilize the synergy of all aspects of emergency management: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. ... At the state and local levels, where much of the "on the ground" work of disaster management occurs, the scattering of FEMA's component parts [throughout DHS] has created confusion and a dysfunctional separation of programs. [emphasis added].

H.R. 5316, the RESPOND Act, returns all these critical four functions – preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation – to FEMA and strengthens and enhances its capabilities.

The **RESPOND Act** will:

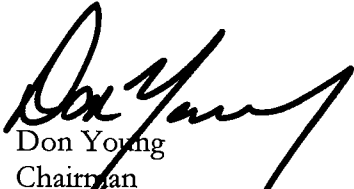
- Restore FEMA to an independent, cabinet-level agency;
- Require that the Director of FEMA be qualified and have extensive experience in emergency management;
- Ensure that FEMA's core functions of preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation activities once again coexist and work together;
- Greatly strengthen FEMA by providing it with the tools necessary to rebuild a competent workforce; and
- Greatly strengthen the Nation's emergency preparedness system to ensure that all levels of government are prepared to respond effectively to a disaster.

It Is Not Too Late To Take Action

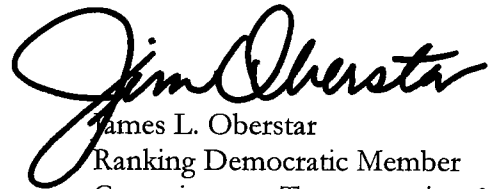
We urge you to cosponsor H.R. 5316 and oppose any amendments to keep FEMA in DHS.

Attached is a copy of the May 19, 2006 Association of State Floodplain Managers' letter. For more information or to cosponsor the bill, please contact the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure staff at ext. 53014 (Republican staff) or ext. 54472 (Democratic staff).

Sincerely,



Don Young
Chairman
Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure



James L. Oberstar
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Transportation &
Infrastructure



Tom Davis
Chairman
Select Committee to Investigate the
Preparation for and Response to
Hurricane Katrina



Eleanor Holmes Norton
Ranking Democratic Member
Subcommittee on Economic
Development, Public Buildings,
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Honorable James L. Oberstar
Ranking Minority Member
House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
2163 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Oberstar,

The Association of State Floodplain Managers strongly supports H.R. 5316, the RESPOND Act of 2006.

Our 9,000 members are appreciative of your Committee's recognition of the damage done to our nation's system of emergency management by the inclusion of FEMA in the Department of Homeland Security and your strong action to restore the Federal Emergency Management Agency to its former organizational and independent status. Those who work to prepare for and mitigate the effects of disasters know how critical it is to utilize the synergy of all aspects of emergency management: preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. That critical synergy and the related effective partnership with state and local officials have been seriously undermined by pulling apart the functions.

At the state and local levels, where much of the "on the ground" work of disaster management occurs, the scattering of FEMA's component parts has created confusion and a dysfunctional separation of programs. ASFPM members note the particular problems this has posed for development and implementation of policies and programs for disaster loss reduction (mitigation). At the federal level, competition with the DHS's primary mission of prevention of terrorism has resulted in inordinate delays in moving FEMA decisions, hiring, regulations and policy initiatives through DHS. This has resulted in FEMA's diminished ability to make timely decisions and actions and a worrisome loss of staff expertise and morale among the dedicated FEMA staff.

One key element in HR 5316 for reconstituting FEMA is the provision of independence for the agency and its Director at all times, not just in times of national emergency as recommended by other proposals. It is not logical to think the head of FEMA can work with the president during an emergency, but for ongoing budget and policy issues to reduce disasters must work through the head of DHS, who may or not share FEMA priorities. The clear provision for coordination with DHS (and all involved federal agencies) as your bill provides will provide for a nimble, effective FEMA that can once again do its job for all Americans.

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Honorable James Oberstar

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The Department of Homeland Security provides a vitally important service in its efforts to detect and prevent terrorist attacks on the United States. This is its mission; an important one for the nation, which is by nature covert. FEMA's role is that of the nation's emergency management agency and must operate openly, not covertly. It is not and should not be a detection and terrorist prevention agency. This fundamental difference in roles explains much about the failure of the merger.

We also support the continued use of the agency name and acronym FEMA. Americans know the name and its rightful function, and find it difficult to understand why agency names change without good reason. DHS attempted to retire the use of the name FEMA, which was a mistake. Your bill appropriately maintains the FEMA name.

The Association of State Floodplain Managers is an association of 9,000 members and 24 State Chapters, all of whom are engaged in reducing flood losses and in natural hazard mitigation. Our state and local officials are the federal government's partners in implementing flood loss reduction policies and programs and lessening the suffering and costs from flooding. Flooding is our nation's most common disaster that has affected hundreds of thousands of citizens in recent years.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



Pamela Mayer Pogue
ASFPM Chair