

Background

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The Truth About FEMA: Analysis and Proposals

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The days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall saw a flood engulf the city of New Orleans and a deluge of instant incriminations and knee-jerk solutions for improving the national response to catastrophes. Many complaints centered on the performance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the division of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) responsible for coordinating federal disaster support to state and local governments. More sober analysis of FEMA's performance before and after it joined the DHS suggests that many of these criticisms were unfounded.

However, some of the complaints are valid. As Katrina demonstrated, the nation is not adequately prepared to respond to catastrophic disasters. In a July 2005 review of the structure and organization of the Department of Homeland Security, Secretary Michael Chertoff correctly identified many of the systemic shortfalls that have retarded the development of a more effective national response system. Congress should evaluate his proposals in light of Katrina and consider reforming the grant allocation process, regional preparedness, and FEMA's response mission—initiatives that could strengthen the department's capacity to deal with deadly disasters.

FEMA Before 9/11

President Jimmy Carter created FEMA in April 1979 with an executive order that combined a patchwork of over 100 federal programs and organizations addressing the different phases and types of national

Talking Points

- Even before its inclusion in the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA never had the resources or authority needed to prepare adequately for disasters on the scale of Hurricane Katrina. Joining the DHS did not significantly improve (or hurt) its disaster response time.
- FEMA should stay within the Department of Homeland Security and focus on its core mission of mobilizing the nation in times of disaster. Preparedness efforts should be managed by an Undersecretary for Preparedness, as proposed by DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff.
- To improve FEMA's capacity, Congress should implement Secretary Chertoff's proposals, restructure the Homeland Security Grant Program to distribute money based on risk, and see that the DHS establishes a regional preparedness framework as already required by law.

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emergencies. The new agency absorbed the Federal Insurance Administration, the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration, the National Weather Service Community Preparedness Program, the Integrated Hazard Information System administered by the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the General Services Administration's Federal Preparedness Agency, the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Federal Disaster Assistance Administration, the Department of Defense's Defense Civil Preparedness Agency, and several entities from the Department of Health and Human Services. State and local authorities, who had found it frustrating to deal with the large number of overlapping programs administered by an ever-changing medley of federal agencies, applauded the reorganization.

Since its creation, FEMA has responded to hundreds of disasters in all 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, the Pacific Island Trust Territories, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Despite mediocre results during its first dozen years, especially in its response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992, FEMA's ability to manage domestic emergencies has increased with experience.

During the Clinton Administration, the FEMA director was elevated to Cabinet rank and allocated a hefty budget increase. Director James Witt streamlined emergency relief and recovery operations, improved commitment to client services, and gave increased priority to disaster mitigation.¹

Under President George W. Bush, FEMA received additional resources and responsibilities for homeland security even before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. For example, in May 2001, the President directed FEMA to create an Office of National Preparedness (ONP) to coordinate all federal programs designed to respond to an incident involving the use of weapons of mass

destruction (WMD) in the United States. A major ONP consequence management task was to assist state and local governments to improve their WMD-related planning, training, and equipment. The ONP also took charge of the national and information security functions that previously had been the responsibility of other FEMA offices.²

Throughout its history, FEMA has had two core missions: enhancing the federal government's ability to survive a foreign attack (especially a nuclear war) and assisting state and local authorities in responding to natural disasters. These two missions have coexisted uneasily within a single organization.³

While national security managers in Washington, D.C., tended to prioritize civil defense, state and local authorities were more concerned about floods and potential nuclear power accidents. FEMA was responsible for developing the Federal Response Plan, which defined the roles and responsibilities of federal agencies and their various partners, including voluntary organizations, in managing domestic emergencies. Moreover, in the mid-1990s, FEMA became the lead federal agency for responding to a terrorist incident within the United States.

Despite its daunting responsibilities, FEMA never received the resources necessary to prepare for catastrophic disasters on the scale of Katrina, in which hundreds of thousands of lives might be at stake over areas covering tens of thousands of square miles. FEMA has never controlled all federal government emergency preparedness efforts, especially grants and training designed to enhance the ability of state and local authorities to manage domestic terrorist incidents involving WMD. Both the Department of Defense and the Department of Justice retained major responsibilities in this area.⁴

Consistent funding has also been a recurring problem. FEMA has typically found responding

1. Shane Harris, "What FEMA May Have Gotten Right," *The National Journal*, September 17, 2005.
2. Keith Bea, "Transfer of FEMA to the Department of Homeland Security: Issues for Congressional Oversight," Congressional Research Service, December 17, 2002, pp. 27–28.
3. R. Steven Daniels and Carolyn L. Clark-Daniels, "Transforming Government: The Renewal and Revitalization of the Federal Emergency Management Agency," PricewaterhouseCoopers Endowment for the Business of Government, April 2000, at www.fema.gov/pdf/library/danielsreport.pdf (November 30, 2005).

and recovering after an emergency—when its budget and personnel surge—easier than preparing for and mitigating potential future disasters. For example, although its core operating budget has hovered slightly below \$1 billion annually in recent years, its total spending exceeded \$12 billion in fiscal year 2002 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Besides its core budget, FEMA has access to a separate Disaster Relief Account to finance assistance and coordination efforts during disasters declared by the President. Following major domestic incidents such as earthquakes, major terrorist attacks, and (most frequently) hurricanes, Congress typically appropriates billions of dollars for this account through emergency supplemental appropriations.⁵

In short, the history of FEMA before its inclusion in the Department of Homeland Security was hardly the stuff of “halcyon days.” FEMA never had the resources or authority needed to manage disasters on the scale of Katrina.

Clearly, as a stand-alone agency, FEMA was inadequate to address catastrophic disasters and other 21st century national security threats such as terrorist attacks employing nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. Several studies conducted before 9/11 rec-

ommended merging FEMA into a larger organization dedicated to homeland security. For example, in February 2001, the U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century (the Hart–Rudman Commission) recommended including FEMA as “a key building block” of its proposed independent National Homeland Security Agency.⁶ Some congressional efforts to establish a new federal homeland security department immediately after 9/11 also envisaged including FEMA in the new organization.⁷

In the DHS

The Homeland Security Act of 2002⁸ made FEMA a component of the Department of Homeland Security and transferred most FEMA “functions, personnel, assets, and liabilities” to the Emergency Preparedness and Response (EPR) Directorate of the new department.⁹ The most important exception was that the Office of Domestic Preparedness (ODP) was transferred from the Department of Justice to the new DHS Border and Transportation Security (BTS) Directorate to assume the terrorism-related training and preparedness responsibilities previously handled by FEMA’s ONP.¹⁰

To coordinate EPR and BTS emergency management efforts, the act required the ODP, “as the lead

4. Ivo H. Daalder, I. M. Destler, James M. Lindsay, Paul C. Light, Robert E. Litan, Michael E. O’Hanlon, Peter R. Orszag, and James B. Steinberg, *Assessing the Department of Homeland Security*, Brookings Institution, July 2002, pp. 37–38, at www.brook.edu/dybdocroot/fp/projects/homeland/assessdhs.pdf (November 30, 2005).
5. For example, Congress has already enacted three supplemental appropriations this year, providing over \$60 billion in emergency spending through the Disaster Relief Account. One act (Public Law 108–324) helps communities to recover from four of the past year’s hurricanes, and two acts (Public Law 109–61 and Public Law 109–62) finance response and recovery operations related to Hurricane Katrina.
6. U.S. Commission on National Security for the 21st Century, *Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change*, February 21, 2001, p. 15, at govinfo.library.unt.edu/nssg/PhaseIII/FR.pdf (November 30, 2005). “We propose building the National Homeland Security Agency upon the capabilities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), an existing federal agency that has performed well in recent years, especially in responding to natural disasters. NHSA would be legislatively chartered to provide a focal point for all natural and manmade crisis and emergency planning scenarios. It would retain and strengthen FEMA’s ten existing regional offices as a core element of its organizational structure” (p. 15). According to the commission, “While taking on homeland security responsibilities, the proposed NHSA would strengthen FEMA’s ability to respond to such disasters. It would streamline the federal apparatus and provide greater support to the state and local officials who, as the nation’s first responders, possess enormous expertise” (p. 21).
7. Daalder *et al.*, *Assessing the Department of Homeland Security*, p. 10.
8. Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107–296.
9. *Ibid.*, Section 503(1).
10. *Ibid.*, Section 430(c).

executive branch agency for preparedness of the United States for acts of terrorism,” to cooperate “closely” with FEMA, “which shall have the primary responsibility within the executive branch to prepare for and mitigate the effects of nonterrorism-related disasters in the United States.”¹¹ The Administration had originally proposed that FEMA’s ONP administer all federal domestic terrorism and non-terrorist preparedness activities, including its proposed First Responder Initiative. The EPR Directorate also acquired disaster-related missions from the Departments of Commerce, Justice, and Health and Human Services.¹²

Even before FEMA formally joined the DHS on March 1, 2003, there was concern that the reorganization directed by Congress was flawed. A July 2002 Brookings Institution assessment of the Bush Administration’s original proposal argued that all preparedness efforts should be consolidated. Creating a “one-stop shop” would reduce the confusing array of programs aimed at assisting state and local governments and would yield efficiencies and improved performance.¹³

In December 2002, FEMA Acting Inspector General Richard Skinner wrote:

Members of Congress and the general public have expressed concern that FEMA’s disaster response and recovery and mitigation missions will be diluted as it is absorbed into a much larger organization and that funding issues will limit FEMA’s ability to respond to disasters as it had in the past.¹⁴

However, in the two years since the DHS was created, FEMA’s ability to respond does not appear to have been greatly affected. The speed of FEMA’s

response was not a subject of significant criticism during either the 2003 or 2004 hurricane seasons.

DHS Second Stage Review

After appointment as DHS Secretary, Michael Chertoff initiated a department-wide Second Stage Review of Homeland Security’s missions, resources, and organizations. The reorganization plan was released in July, a month before Katrina. The review recognized that FEMA had been saddled with a number of activities over the years that are unrelated to its core function, such as handing out grants and running the U.S. Fire Administration. At the same time, the law that created the DHS spread the tasks of preparing for, protecting against, and mitigating natural and man-made disasters all over the department. This ran contrary to the law’s stated purpose of creating a “one-stop shop” for state and local governments and the private sector.

Secretary Chertoff’s proposed consolidation of all preparedness functions under a new Undersecretary for Preparedness would lead to better management of these support activities. Once disasters strike, FEMA’s job would be to take over the response effort. As a stand-alone agency in the department, it could focus “24/7/365” on its core mission of mobilizing the nation for disasters like Katrina. In addition, Chertoff wanted to “beef up” the agency so that it is better prepared to deal with catastrophic events. He also rightly insisted that FEMA remain in the DHS. Taking FEMA’s activities—which must be closely coordinated with preparedness measures like planning, training, and issuing grants—out of the DHS makes no sense.

Secretary Chertoff’s proposed reorganization would address many of the shortfalls created by

11. *Ibid.*, Section 430(c)(6).

12. For a discussion of how the original reorganization plans of the Administration and Congress would have affected FEMA, see Bea, “Transfer of FEMA to the Department of Homeland Security.”

13. The study also recommended leaving FEMA an independent agency until the results of the DHS organization become clearer because, “while a merged FEMA might become highly adept at preparing for and responding to terrorism, it would likely become less effective in performing its current mission in case of natural disasters as time, effort, and attention are invariably diverted to other tasks within the larger organization.” Daalder *et al.*, *Assessing the Department of Homeland Security*, p. 24.

14. Richard L. Skinner, “Management Challenges,” memorandum to Joe M. Allbaugh, Federal Emergency Management Agency, December 31, 2002, reprinted in Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Annual Performance & Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2002*, 2002, pp. 143–144, at www.fema.gov/pdf/ofm/143memo_031103.pdf (November 30, 2005).

placing FEMA within the DHS. At the same time, it would preserve the advantages of having most major federal disaster-related preparedness and response activities, for both man-made and natural disasters, concentrated in one department. In addition, in the event of large-scale disasters, FEMA could be reinforced by other assets from within the DHS.

Preparing for All Hazards

Another complaint lodged in Katrina's wake was that the DHS overemphasized preparedness for terrorist attacks at the expense of preparing for natural disasters. However, a comparison of the amount spent on antiterrorism with the sums allocated specifically for disaster preparedness and mitigation suggests that the DHS has not neglected preparing for natural disasters.

FEMA has long adhered to such an "all-hazards" approach to emergency management. The all-hazards approach is to establish a single response system that can be adapted to meet a range of potential disasters: natural (e.g., earthquakes, floods, droughts, tornadoes, and hurricanes); accidental (e.g., the disintegration of the space shuttle *Columbia* over the southwestern United States); and deliberate (e.g., sabotage and terrorism). Experts on emergency management stress that many of the instruments and policies required to prevent, respond to, and recover from terrorist acts are much the same as those required for natural disasters.¹⁵

The Homeland Security Act also directs FEMA to "protect the Nation from all hazards by leading and

supporting the Nation in a comprehensive, risk-based emergency management program."¹⁶ The National Strategy for Homeland Security affirmed the Administration's intent to create "one genuinely all-discipline, all-hazard plan."¹⁷ Two homeland security presidential directives¹⁸ instructed the DHS to promote the use of the all-hazards approach throughout the rest of the federal government and, using federal preparedness grants, by the states.¹⁹ Instead of developing a separate plan for every conceivable domestic incident—an impossible task—FEMA currently applies its general framework for mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery to all types of calamities, including the consequences of natural disasters, major accidents, and domestic terrorism.

Reflecting its two core missions of civil defense and disaster response, FEMA traditionally has allowed state and local authorities to employ federal funds to pay for "dual-use" equipment, such as emergency communications devices and other preparedness efforts that could help them to manage both man-made and natural disasters. Although a July 2005 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that many state preparedness officials and local first responders believed that DHS planners focused excessively on anti-terrorism criteria in their grant, training, and exercise programs, the auditors concluded that 30 of the 36 essential capabilities that first responders need to fulfill the critical tasks generated by the department's 15 catastrophic emergency planning scenarios would apply to both terrorist and non-terrorist incidents.²⁰

15. For more on the effects of radiological dispersal devices, see James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Jack Spencer, "Dealing with Dirty Bombs: Plain Facts, Practical Solutions," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1723, January 27, 2004, at www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/bg1723.cfm.
16. Homeland Security Act of 2002, Public Law 107-296, Section 507(a)(2).
17. Office of Homeland Security, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, July 2002, p. 42, at www.whitehouse.gov/homeland/book/nat_strat_hls.pdf (November 30, 2005).
18. George W. Bush, "Management of Domestic Incidents," Homeland Security Presidential Directive HSPD-5, February 28, 2003, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030228-9.html (December 1, 2005), and George W. Bush, "National Preparedness," Homeland Security Presidential Directive HSPD-8, December 17, 2004, at www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/12/20031217-6.html (December 1, 2005).
19. "To the extent permitted by law, Federal preparedness assistance will be predicated on adoption of Statewide comprehensive all-hazards preparedness strategies." Bush, "National Preparedness," Section 9.
20. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Homeland Security: DHS' Efforts to Enhance First Responders' All Hazards Capabilities Continue to Evolve*, GAO-05-652, August 2005, at www.gao.gov/new.items/d05652.pdf (November 30, 2005).

The GAO study also found that, while spending on terrorist-oriented first responder grants increased faster than funding for grant programs with an all-hazards focus between FY 2001 and FY 2005, overall expenditures for both types of grants increased substantially during this period. Moreover, the study noted that most DHS preparedness grants, even if aimed primarily at enhancing state and local anti-terrorist capabilities, could contribute to their response to non-terrorist incidents. The GAO auditors concluded that DHS planning supported an all-hazards approach.²¹

FEMA and First Responders

Other complaints about FEMA's performance during Katrina centered on the sluggish pace of emergency response operations in the first days after the storm hit. In part, these criticisms reflect misconceptions concerning FEMA's role during a disaster.

FEMA has long-standing relationships with emergency responders including the military and other federal agencies, state governors, tribal leaders, municipal and county governments, professional associations of first responders, and voluntary organizations. These partnerships are essential since the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act²² characterizes FEMA primarily as a *coordination* agency. Its main function is to manage assistance from other federal government agencies and non-government organizations that help to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and recover from domestic disasters. For example, FEMA works with the Department of Energy to restore electricity, the Department of Transportation to provide buses to help evacuate victims,

the National Guard to provide security, and the American Red Cross to find emergency housing for evacuees.²³

FEMA does not have the authority to tell other federal agencies what to do or sufficient budget or staff to manage large emergencies without external assistance. At present, FEMA has only about 2,500 full-time permanent employees and 5,000 "reserve" employees available on standby.²⁴ It also directly controls a few emergency response assets, such as urban search and rescue teams and warehouses storing stockpiles of commodities and equipment that disaster field offices can use in an emergency. Like the military and many other federal departments and agencies, FEMA increasingly hires contractors to provide assistance in meeting short-term and specialized needs.

Similarly, FEMA is usually not required to provide immediate emergency response assistance. In "normal" disasters, whether terrorist attacks like 9/11 or a natural disaster such as a flood or an earthquake, a tiered response is employed.

- Local leaders turn to state resources when local resources are exhausted,
- States then turn to FEMA when their means are exceeded, and
- Both local and state leaders play a critical role in effectively communicating their requirements to FEMA officials and managing the response.

In most disasters, local resources handle things in the first hours and days until national resources can be requested, marshaled, and rushed to the scene. That usually takes days. With the exception of a few federal assets such as Coast Guard and Urban Search and Rescue, FEMA-directed assis-

21. *Ibid.*

22. 42 U.S. Code 5121 *et seq.*, as amended.

23. For a description of the broad range of federal agencies assisting with the Katrina response and recovery under FEMA's coordination, see Sam Coates, "Wide Net Was Cast for Aid After Katrina: Leaving Day-to-Day Jobs, Federal Workers Volunteer by the Thousands for Duty," *The Washington Post*, September 22, 2005, p. A23. Besides the Stafford Act, the other core documents shaping FEMA policies include the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the National Strategy for Homeland Security, and Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5.

24. Federal Emergency Management Agency, "About FEMA: FEMA History," updated October 23, 2004, at www.fema.gov/about/history/shtm (November 30, 2005). The important role of FEMA's reserves is discussed in Griff Witte, "FEMA Let Reserves Wither, Hurting Response, Some Say," *The Washington Post*, September 26, 2005, p. A15.

tance does not reach the affected areas until well after the response is well underway.

In contrast, Katrina was a “catastrophic disaster.” In catastrophic disasters, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of lives are immediately at risk. State and local resources are exhausted from the onset, and government leaders are unable to determine or communicate their priority needs. In a catastrophic disaster, national resources need to be deployed in hours, not days, and in unprecedented amounts regardless of the difficulties. That is a requirement that is very different from FEMA’s normal mission.

The fact that FEMA and other federal agencies could not provide the immediate response required for catastrophic disasters should not be a surprise. Since 9/11, the overwhelming effort at the federal level, as well as at the state and local levels, has been to strengthen the ability to respond to “normal” disasters. In part, this is because Congress, the states, and cities insisted that the highest national priority should be enhancing the nation’s capacity to respond to “normal” disasters. The federal government was required to dole out grants with scant regard to national priorities.

Katrina shows the limitations of that approach. It left New Orleans fire stations under water, along with much of the equipment bought with federal dollars. Only a national system—capable of mustering the whole nation—can respond to catastrophic disasters. Ironically, before 9/11, FEMA grants were decided on the basis of a competitive nationwide process. The USA PATRIOT Act of 2001,²⁵ however, required the ODP to distribute grants according to a formula that sends some funds to every state regardless of threat or vulnerability.

The formulas that drive the grant process are turning homeland security initiatives into state

entitlement programs. Current funding formulas guarantee each state 0.75 percent of the funds available. As a result, 40 percent of funds is tied up immediately, leaving only 60 percent for discretionary allocations. Since 9/11, money has been distributed more on the basis of the desire to give every state an equitable slice of the federal dole than on the basis of national priorities.

Planning: Lifeline of a Guiding Idea

Uncertain lines of command and control appear to have degraded the response to the Katrina emergency. The federal and local agencies involved in the immediate recovery operations in New Orleans seem to have pursued uncoordinated and duplicative rescue efforts,²⁶ and the governor of Louisiana and federal authorities disagreed over who should take charge of the various dimensions of the response.²⁷ Moreover, during the first few days of media coverage of the emergency, it appeared unclear whether the FEMA Director or the DHS Secretary had the role of chief spokesperson for the federal relief effort.

The lack of smooth coordination should have come as no surprise, given that the DHS has only recently established a plan for a national response system. The National Response Plan (NRP), which formally took effect in December 2004, provides the framework for determining responsibilities during a domestic emergency.

In particular, the NRP and its various annexes specify which federal agencies and programs are activated for which types of incidents and defines their roles and responsibilities in managing all types of domestic emergencies, typically with FEMA coordinating the response. The NRP also specifies how federal agencies are to coordinate with state, local, and tribal governments and the private sector and when federal authorities assume control of the national response.²⁸

25. Public Law 107–56.

26. 9/11 Public Discourse Project, “Kean-Hamilton Statement on Release of 9/11 Public Discourse Project Report on Implementation of Recommendations,” September 14, 2005, p. 2, at www.9-11pdp.org/press/2005-09-14_statement.pdf (November 30, 2005).

27. Manuel Roig-Franzia and Spencer Hsu, “Many Evacuated, But Thousands Still Waiting: White House Shifts Blame to Local Officials,” *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2005, p. A1.

The DHS anticipates that the NRP will supersede the separate disaster plans developed by states, other U.S. federal agencies, and other bodies, but this integration process remains incomplete.²⁹ In fact, the NRP annex for disaster response was approved only weeks before the Katrina disaster.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) underpins the NRP by promoting an integrated response across all emergency management disciplines and at all levels of government—federal, state, local, and tribal—to any type of domestic disaster (“one all-discipline, all-hazards plan”).³⁰ Although Homeland Security Presidential Directive 5 requires all federal departments and agencies to employ NIMS in their preparedness efforts, including in their assistance to state and local entities, the system has yet to be implemented completely. States still have until October 1, 2006, before the DHS will require full compliance with the Incident Command System as a condition of receiving federal preparedness funds.³¹

When it published its interim National Preparedness Goal at the end of March 2005, the DHS identified 15 all-hazards catastrophic scenarios that should guide state homeland security authorities in developing their plans and capabilities, but the states do not need to finalize their responses until September 2007.³²

Improving Disaster Response

While many of the immediate criticisms of FEMA were simply wrongheaded, Katrina demonstrated

that the nation clearly needs to improve the capacity of FEMA and the DHS to respond to catastrophic disasters—improvements that will strengthen planning and coordination and increase response capacity.

Implementing the Second Stage Review. Congress’s first priority should be to support full implementation of the DHS Second Stage Review. Specifically, Congress should:

- Require that preparedness activities be consolidated under an Undersecretary for Preparedness.
- Insist that FEMA be an independently operating agency focused on national response.
- Insist that FEMA remain part of the DHS to ensure that response efforts are well integrated with all the critical homeland security missions.

Restructuring the Federal Grant Program. The Administration needs the authority and organization to build an effective national response system.³³ Congress should:

- Restructure the Homeland Security Grant Program to reduce the required minimum allocated to each state and distribute most of the money based on risk. The Faster and Smarter Funding First Responders Act (H.R. 1544) is a good example of how this might look. A similar measure should be applied to grants by the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Require the DHS to fully implement Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8.

28. U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *National Response Plan*, December 2004, at www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NRPbaseplan.pdf (November 30, 2005).

29. Office of Homeland Security, *National Strategy for Homeland Security*, p. 42.

30. See U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *National Incident Management System*, March 1, 2004, at www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NIMS-90-web.pdf (November 30, 2005).

31. 9/11 Public Discourse Project, “Report on the Status of 9/11 Commission Recommendations; Part I: Homeland Security, Emergency Preparedness and Response,” September 14, 2005, p. 2, at www.9-11pdp.org/press/2005-09-14_report.pdf (November 30, 2005).

32. Siobhan Gorman, “Key Planner Criticizes Homeland Security Emergency Plan: Designer Says Agency Response to Katrina Was Too Slow,” *Baltimore Sun*, September 7, 2005. The DHS plans to issue a final version of the national preparedness goal, which would include explicit performance metrics for various political jurisdictions, later this year.

33. James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Alane Kochems, “The First Responder Act: Congress Needs to Act,” Heritage Foundation *WebMemo* No. 742, May 8, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/wm742.cfm.

- Insist that the Catastrophic Disaster Annex to the National Response Plan be quickly implemented.

Establishing a Regional Preparedness Framework. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 requires the DHS to propose a regional framework, but the department has yet to announce a plan for such a framework. This organization could significantly improve coordination of the response to catastrophic disasters.³⁴ Congress should:

- Demand that the DHS create a regional framework with the primary aim of enhancing information sharing and other coordination among the states, the private sector, and DHS headquarters in Washington.
- Require that the regional offices be led by political appointees who have sufficient clout to gain ready access to local leaders. Ideally, these individuals would include former politicians, police chiefs, and other people with some background in both homeland security issues and their geographic areas of responsibility.
- Require that the regional organization's first priority must be to support the flow of information and to coordinate training, exercises, and

professional development for state and local governments and the private sector in responding to catastrophic disaster.

A well-established regional framework would go a long way toward mitigating the miscues in communication and mistrust among local, state, and federal officials that were apparent during the Katrina response.

What Next?

It is time to move past the blame game that makes FEMA the scapegoat for all of the ills in the national response to Katrina and to start fixing the flaws. Congress can take steps right now to shift the federal government toward building the right national response system for the nation.

Congress should make these steps a priority.

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34. Edwin Meese III, James Jay Carafano, Ph.D., and Richard Weitz, Ph.D., "Organizing for Victory: Proposals for Building a Regional Homeland Security Structure," Heritage Foundation *Background* No. 1817, January 21, 2005, at www.heritage.org/Research/HomelandDefense/bg1817.cfm.