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COMMITTEE HOLDS HEARING ON FEMA, ICE NOMINEES



WASHINGTON – At his nomination hearing (<http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?Fuseaction=Hearings.Detail&HearingID=14b3986d-420f-40fd-b3df-fc1d2d15fdf7>) this morning before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, the nominee to be the next Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Craig Fugate (http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/_files/042209Fugate.pdf), declared that FEMA should stay within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

In response to questions from Committee members about this issue, Mr. Fugate responded, “The debate, as far as I am concerned, is over... We have to be a team.” The nominee indicated that, if confirmed, his focus would be on preparing for the next disaster.

“Mr. Fugate’s support for keeping FEMA within the Department is terrific news,” said Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn. “FEMA is a core part of DHS, helping to marshal the Department’s many resources and coordinating unity of effort among the Department’s various components during a disaster response. Mr. Fugate has provided strong leadership throughout his career, helping guide the State of Florida and relevant local governments through a range of challenges, including several devastating and deadly hurricanes. He is more than qualified to lead an ever-improving FEMA, and I strongly support his nomination.”

Ranking Member Susan Collins, R-Me., said: “FEMA has made a great deal of progress since the passage of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, as we have seen from the responses to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike, the California wildfires, flooding in the Midwest, and winter storms in Maine. Returning FEMA to its status as an independent agency would hinder efforts to reform our nation’s emergency response system, create competing agencies, cause confusion among emergency responders, and undermine an all-hazards approach, leading to the perception that DHS deals with terrorism while FEMA is in charge of natural disasters. Above all, those who put their lives on

the line, who are on the front lines of emergency response, say it would be a colossal mistake to sever FEMA's connection to DHS by taking it out of the Department."

Shortly after the Fugate hearing was adjourned, the Committee held a second hearing – for [John Morton](#) (<http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/042209Morton.pdf>) to be Assistant Secretary of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), also within DHS.

Morton, a career prosecutor at the Department of Justice (DOJ), said in response to Lieberman's questions, that he would work to improve coordination between the DOJ and DHS agencies working to prevent drug and human smuggling north across the Mexican border and gun and cash smuggling south from the U.S. into Mexico. He also vowed to improve ICE's treatment of 30,000 detainees being held on immigration violations, many with no criminal records.

First responder groups in favor of keeping FEMA within DHS include: the Congressional Fire Services Institute; the International Association of Chiefs of Police; the International Association of Fire Chiefs; the International Association of Fire Fighters; National Fraternal Order of Police; National Sheriffs' Association; the National Troopers Coalition, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

Following the failed response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Senators Lieberman and Collins conducted a comprehensive, bipartisan investigation that led to the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006. Among the reforms included in the Collins-Lieberman legislation are the requirement that FEMA be led by an Administrator with emergency management experience; better coordination between the Department of Defense and FEMA; the requirement that FEMA assist states with developing evacuation plans; and the requirement that FEMA take into account those with disabilities, children and the elderly when developing preparedness activities. Since then, FEMA has made great strides, as demonstrated by its efficient response to Hurricanes Ike and Gustav in 2008.

During the hearing, Mr. Fugate offered his support for the landmark law and stated he would continue to implement the reforms and other improvements as required by the law.

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