

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2009

SUPPORT FOR KEEPING FEMA IN DHS GROWS

WASHINGTON – Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Chairman Joe Lieberman, ID-Conn., and Ranking Member Susan Collins R-Maine., Tuesday released a series of documents showing that support for keeping FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) continues to grow.

Eight first responder organizations have endorsed retaining FEMA as a part of DHS rather than stripping it out as some have suggested. In addition, a new DHS Inspector General [report \(http://www.dhs.gov/xoig/assets/mgmtrpts/OIG_09-25_Feb09.pdf\)](http://www.dhs.gov/xoig/assets/mgmtrpts/OIG_09-25_Feb09.pdf) concluded that FEMA stay where it is.

“When Congress passed the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act in 2006, we built a new, stronger FEMA, giving it a renewed mission and greater stature and resources, which has significantly contributed to FEMA’s success in responding to recent disasters,” said Lieberman. “Moving it out now would weaken FEMA, since the agency would no longer have the same ready access to the resources and expertise of the rest of DHS, and it would be more difficult to coordinate in a disaster. I am pleased that the chorus of voices opposed to reversing these gains is growing louder.”

Collins 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, and unprecedented flooding in the Midwest. Returning FEMA to its status as an independent agency would hinder efforts to reform our nation’s emergency response system, create competing agencies, allow for 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.”

Letters of support for FEMA to stay within DHS from the eight organizations, representing more than 1.7 million first responders, can be read here: the [Congressional Fire Services Institute \(http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IAFC-IAFF-CFSIFEMA.pdf\)](http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IAFC-IAFF-CFSIFEMA.pdf); the [International Association of Chiefs of Police \(http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IACP-FEMA.pdf\)](http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IACP-FEMA.pdf); the [International Association of Fire Chiefs \(http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IAFC-IAFF-CFSIFEMA.pdf\)](http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IAFC-IAFF-CFSIFEMA.pdf); the [International Association of Fire Fighters \(http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IAFC-IAFF-CFSIFEMA.pdf\)](http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/IAFC-IAFF-CFSIFEMA.pdf); [National Fraternal Order of Police \(http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/FOP-](http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/FOP-)

FEMA.pdf); National Sheriffs' Association (<http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/NSA-FEMA.pdf>); the National Troopers Coalition (<http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/NTC-FEMA.pdf>), and the National Volunteer Fire Council (http://www.hsgac.senate.gov/public/files/Dem_Files/NVFCLtrObamaFEMA.pdf). In addition, the DHS IG reported that FEMA's past problems are no justification for removing it from the agency.

"Now is not the time to think short term, particularly when it comes to our homeland security," the IG wrote. "Thinking long term requires giving the Department of Homeland Security the time any large organization needs to mature. Thinking long term means giving the reforms introduced by the Post Katrina Reform Act time to work. Thinking long term means... ensuring that FEMA is positioned to continue as a vital component of our homeland security and emergency management infrastructure."

In 2005 and 2006, the Senators conducted an extensive investigation of Hurricane Katrina that resulted in 24 hearings, interviews of more than 300 witnesses, and the review of more than 838,000 pages of documents. Upon completion of the investigation, the Senators issued a comprehensive report (<http://www.gpoaccess.gov/serialset/creports/katrinanation.html>) and authored the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=109_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ295.109.pdf) which helped strengthen and reform FEMA and elevated its status within DHS. Since then, there has been a marked improvement in FEMA's performance in recent disasters.

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