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# **KOHL, LIEBERMAN URGE NEW FEMA DISABILITY COORDINATOR TO MEET NEEDS OF SENIORS IN EMERGENCY PLANNING**

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WASHINGTON – Senate Special Committee on Aging Chairman Herb Kohl (D-WI) and Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Chairman Joe Lieberman (ID-CT) yesterday sent a letter to Cindy Lou Daniel, the newly instated Disability Coordinator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), a role which was created by Congress in response to Hurricane Katrina. Citing that 44.9 percent of those 65-to-69 years old and 73.6 percent of those 80 years and older have some sort of disability, Senators Kohl and Lieberman urged Daniel to consider the extensive overlap between the disabled and elderly communities, and to ensure that planning for both groups is consistent and compatible.

“Older Americans who are homebound or otherwise transportation disadvantaged, low-income, non-English speakers, and/or live in rural or frontier areas may fall through the cracks during times of disaster if their unique needs are not addressed by emergency management officials and response providers at all levels of the federal, state, local and tribal governments,” Kohl and Lieberman stated in the letter. “Your role as Disability Coordinator brings much needed attention to the special needs of some of our most vulnerable citizens, but also leaves open the possibility of gaps in emergency planning for some older Americans.”

Created last year as part of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 (the Act), which was included in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act of 2007, the position of Disability Coordinator reports directly to the Administrator of FEMA. The Act included a series of responsibilities specific to the role of Disability Coordinator and left room for expansion of those duties by giving the Administrator the flexibility to assign additional duties. In the letter, Senators Kohl and Lieberman addressed concerns that, under current law, safeguarding the needs of older Americans during emergencies or disasters is not explicitly mentioned within the context of the Disability Coordinator’s existing responsibilities.

Therefore they ask Daniel to work with the FEMA Administrator to broaden and clarify the scope of her current responsibilities in addressing the unique needs of seniors who may not be technically “disabled,” but nonetheless need to be considered in all facets of emergency planning.

Finally, the letter implores Daniel to integrate the unique needs of older Americans into all aspects of her planning. Senators Kohl and Lieberman suggest that as Daniel consults with government and private sector entities on the needs of the disabled in emergency situations, that she also take advantage of the expertise available to her within the Aging Network to develop best practices and model evacuations, training materials and curriculum for first responders, and accessible transportation options. Entities within the Aging Network, such as the Administration on Aging and the Geriatric Education Centers, have developed a leading national curriculum on emergency preparedness and seniors.

It was requested that a written response from Daniel be received by July 31.