

**Washington, D.C.** - Congressman David Price (NC-04) will pose a question to FEMA Director David Paulison tomorrow that is on the minds of many North Carolinians: Have we learned from the lessons of Hurricane Katrina, and is our country fully prepared to respond to the next disaster?

Price, who is Chairman of the House Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, will convene a hearing tomorrow to probe the Department of Homeland Security's progress in restoring the federal government's ability to respond to disasters, whether natural or man made. FEMA was moved to the Department of Homeland Security when it was created in 2002.

Price was an early critic of the Administration's almost singular focus on the threat of terrorism at the Department of Homeland Security at the expense of preparing for natural disasters. And he has long championed enhanced federal support for local first responders, which has lagged under the Bush Administration. He was also an early critic of the downgrading of FEMA within the department, which has been cited as one of the major factors in the inadequate federal response to Hurricane Katrina. As part of the FY 2007 Appropriations bill, Congress mandated that FEMA be elevated within the department and that the FEMA director be given more authority, as well as direct access to the President during an emergency.

"North Carolinians know all too well the destruction that can result from natural disasters, and especially from hurricanes and floods," Price said. "We are also keenly aware that successfully responding to disasters of any kind requires a strong partnership among federal, state and local authorities. That partnership was dysfunctional during the crisis in the Gulf Coast in 2005, and I want to ensure that FEMA has the capacity to do its job before the next big disaster strikes."

Price's hearing comes on the heels of a report released this week by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), citing the potential for increased Atlantic hurricane activity this year associated with a possible transition to "La Niña" climate conditions.

During testimony scheduled for 10 am tomorrow, representatives from first responder organizations will provide their assessments of the current state of disaster preparedness. Jeff Cash, the North Carolina State Director of the National Volunteer Fire Council, will testify in the first panel. During the second panel, Price and his colleagues on the subcommittee will question FEMA Director Paulison and a Homeland Security expert from the Government Accountability

Office (GAO). Details of the hearing are below.

Price will hold an additional hearing next Thursday (3/15) on the government's efforts to rebuild the Gulf Coast.

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