

**Washington, D.C.** - U.S. Representative David Price (D-NC) had sharp questions about the poor performance of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, whose huge department includes FEMA, testified before Price's Homeland Security Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee.

"Hurricane Katrina made pretty clear that FEMA is not the same top-notch emergency management agency it was when Hurricanes Fran and Floyd devastated North Carolina in the 1990s," Price told Secretary Chertoff. "To a great extent, I and many others attribute FEMA's loss of capacity to its downgraded status within the Executive Branch, accompanied as it was by a loss of experienced professional personnel and the siphoning off of critical funds."

In 1992, former President Bill Clinton elevated FEMA to cabinet status, with agency director James Lee Witt reporting directly to the White House. The Bush Administration lowered FEMA's standing and rolled it, along with all or parts of 22 other federal agencies, into the huge Department of Homeland Security.

Price posed three questions to Chertoff:

"You are now, in effect, the FEMA Director because you are the only one with direct access to the President – the only one who can make sure that FEMA's capabilities are restored to what they once were and expanded to adapt to the Post-9/11 world we live in. How you can possibly perform that role effectively? FEMA is only one of two dozen directorates, bureaus or offices that report to you and your Deputy Secretary. What reassurance can we have that FEMA's bureaucratic submersion will not continue?"

"FEMA has two essential functions: Disaster Preparedness and Disaster Response. Before Katrina made landfall, you had proposed splitting those functions, and you followed through after the hurricane. In light of the Preparedness weaknesses exposed by Katrina, have you reconsidered? What benefits are there to splitting the functions, and what do you think you might gain or lose by doing that?"

"The Department is requesting more funding in 2007 to coordinate with state and local emergency management personnel during disasters. But at the same time, you are proposing a \$12 million—or 7 percent—cut in Emergency Management Performance Grants that help pay for the same local and state personnel FEMA needs to coordinate with. How can FEMA improve its coordination efforts if state and local governments are being starved for resources?"

Price indicated that he was not satisfied with the Secretary's responses at this first budget hearing for the Department of Homeland Security, and said he would continue pushing for the information until his questions are fully answered.

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