

**Washington, D.C.** - Today, US Rep. David Price (NC-04), a member of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee and a longtime advocate for FEMA and first responders, called for major changes in the way the federal government prepares for natural disasters.

"Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation go out to our troops, emergency personnel, and volunteers who are on the ground and doing everything in their power to help the victims of Hurricane Katrina. While our focus remains on helping those who so desperately need it, we must also ask some very important questions about the inadequate overall planning for this disaster and the role the federal government has played in it," Price said.

"When the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was shifted to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) two years ago, I raised concerns about the possible implications for the response to natural disasters," Price continued. "FEMA was extremely effective and fast-acting in responding to Hurricane Floyd when it hit North Carolina in 1999, and I did not want to see this nimble agency compromised or bogged down in the bureaucracy of a newly-created government agency."

In hearing after hearing, including one with DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff just a few months ago, Price also stated that he was deeply concerned about DHS's new trend toward increased funding for urban areas at "high risk" for terrorist attacks, with a decreased emphasis on overall preparedness for hurricane-prone states like North Carolina and the Gulf Coast region. A series of funding cuts by the Bush Administration has seriously undercut support for our first responders in recent years.

In an earlier exchange with former DHS Secretary Tom Ridge, Price also questioned whether the Bush Administration was compromising the federal government's ability to prepare for and respond to natural disasters, especially with law enforcement resources. Ridge responded by saying the federal government should have less responsibility when it comes to providing funding for law enforcement, and that the burden should be shouldered primarily by local communities.

Price continued, "With our worst fears confirmed, I think it's now time for Congress to reconsider the President's ill-fated decision to shift disaster funding away from our first responders and FEMA and to smother FEMA within the Homeland Security bureaucracy. With hurricane season

still ongoing and North Carolina permanently vulnerable to natural disasters, we cannot afford to wait. We must rebuild our capacity to respond and ensure that this never happens again."

Additional background on Price's efforts to call attention to FEMA and first responder cuts can be found on the Homeland Security page and its "related documents" section.

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