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FEMA REFORM

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Introduction

Established in 1979, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is responsible for coordinating emergency management for disasters. Initially, disaster management had been divided among numerous federal agencies; FEMA absorbed those functions to centralize and improve disaster response efforts. Once the president has authorized a disaster declaration, FEMA is called upon to work with state and local officials to respond to the disaster.

The procedures for disaster response were intended to preserve the state's jurisdiction in handling emergencies, as state and local authorities are best equipped to act in times of crisis. As a result, it takes longer for the federal government to be able to mobilize its resources when the disaster is beyond the capacity of the states. Although these procedures were intended to preserve the state's jurisdiction in handling emergencies, in recent years FEMA has been assuming an increasing role in handling these disasters. In the 1980s and 1990s, FEMA began assuming an expanded role in the response to natural disasters and with that, increasingly drew criticism from the media, the public, and even other branches of the government. FEMA first drew significant national attention for its inadequate response to Hurricane Andrew which struck Florida in 1992. Delayed response, late arrival of troops, and shortages of supplies all contributed to exacerbated damages and increased suffering for the hurricane victims.

Following Hurricane Andrew, Congress discussed possible reforms for the agency, but the most effective changes were implemented by FEMA itself to better coordinate disaster management in the future. The next major change came under the Clinton Administration, in which President Bill Clinton elevated FEMA leadership to cabinet level status. A change in leadership also improved the effectiveness of FEMA, as director James Lee Witt helped FEMA operations run more smoothly through the 1990s, helping the agency garner a reputation of efficiency and expediency. Other significant adjustments were still in store for FEMA, and in March 2003 the agency became a part of the newly-minted Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The move was intended to

further consolidate the various forms of emergency management. As a result of limited resources and employees, however, FEMA was ultimately unprepared for future disasters, most notably in its response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in August 2005. After the hurricane, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and the House Homeland Security Committee both conducted investigations into FEMA's handling of disaster. Findings from both committees revealed extensive waste, fraud, and abuse. FEMA employees were also criticized, many of whom seemed to be unqualified, inexperienced political appointees.

The Senate Homeland Security Committee issued a report offering recommendations for improving FEMA, including keeping the agency within the DHS but elevating its status within the department. Senators Nancy Collins (R-ME) and Joe Lieberman (D-CT) introduced legislation based on that recommendation with opposing legislation introduced by Senators Trent Lott (R-MI) and Hillary Clinton (D-NY) to restore FEMA to an independent cabinet-level agency. In the House of Representatives, a similar bipartisan split occurred between those who agreed with Collins and Lieberman and those supporting Lott and Clinton. Ultimately, Congress agreed to elevate FEMA within the structure of the DHS. Bipartisan cooperation helped pass the reform proposals and established a basis for further efforts to improve emergency management for future natural disasters. Still, questions regarding the reform of FEMA persist.

Background

History

Following a wave of natural disasters in the 1960s, the federal government attempted to unify disaster assistance programs to establish a comprehensive relief department. The Federal Disaster Assistance Administration, overseen by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, was established to better coordinate disaster response and recovery efforts.¹ In 1974, the president's role in disaster

¹ "FEMA History," FEMA, March 2006, <http://www.fema.gov/about/history.shtm>

assistance was expanded with the passage of the Disaster Relief Act, which gave the president the power to declare national disasters.² With more than one hundred federal agencies involved in disaster response in addition to supplementary and often overlapping efforts on the state level, however, disaster response remained fragmented.

The first centralization of disaster response efforts occurred under the administration of President Jimmy Carter in 1979. In Executive Order 12148, Carter authorized the “transfer [of] emergency functions to the Federal Emergency Management Agency,”³ and the Department of Housing and Urban Development transferred its emergency management functions to the new, independent Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). FEMA absorbed the functions of agencies such as the National Fire Prevention and Control Administration, the Federal Preparedness Agency of the General Services Administration, and the National Weather Service Community Preparedness Program.⁴ Furthermore, the order established the position of director to “establish Federal policies for, and coordinate, all civil defense and civil emergency planning, management, mitigation, and assistance functions of Executive agencies.”⁵ Led by Director John Macy, the new agency responded to disasters including the contamination of Love Canal in New York, the Cuban refugee crisis, and the accident at the Three Mile Island nuclear power plant.⁶ It was not until Hurricane Andrew in 1992, however, that FEMA first drew major national attention because of its failure to provide the necessary relief and recovery services.

In 1993, FEMA underwent significant changes in its structure and leadership. President Clinton elevated FEMA to cabinet-level status during his administration, and appointed James Lee Witt as the new director of the agency. As director, Witt’s management improved the reputation of FEMA, and can be credited to his experience in emergency management and a reduction in the number of political appointees assigned to

2 Ibid.

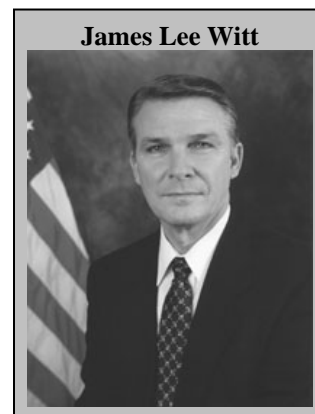
3 James Carter, “Executive Order 12148- Federal Emergency Management,” July 1979, <http://www.archives.gov/federal-register/codification/executive-order/12148.html>

4 FEMA History. Op cit.

5 Executive Order. Op cit.

6 FEMA History. Op cit.

jobs designed for emergency response experts. Hazard mitigation became the foundation of emergency preparedness; he recognized it was more cost-effective to buy homes in locations prone to flooding, instead of continually rebuilding homes after successive disasters.⁷ He also shifted the focus of the agency to natural disaster preparation and implemented reforms which helped streamline disaster relief and recovery efforts, especially between federal and state officials.⁸



The attacks of 11 September later expanded the focus of the agency to include preparation, response, and relief in the event of a terrorist attack. Two years later, in March 2003, FEMA and twenty-two other federal agencies became part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).⁹ The reorganization was intended to centralize the various agencies dealing with emergencies and disaster to better coordinate efforts.

Organization of FEMA

FEMA's declared mission is "to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident."¹⁰ Dealing with disaster involves a multi-layered approach: advance preparation, relief efforts during the disaster, and assistance after the disaster has passed. FEMA, however, had struggled to effectively meet all the components of disaster management because it was just a small agency, composed of about 2,600 employees both in Washington, D.C. and spread around the country.¹¹ The intended purpose of the agency was not to take the lead in disaster response, but to aid in situations only when federal intervention is deemed necessary because of the severity of the disaster.

7 "The History of Civil Defense and Emergency Management in Tennessee," Tennessee Emergency Management Agency, 2002, <http://www.tnema.org/Archives/EMHistory/TNCDHistory7.htm>

8 FEMA History. Op cit.

9 Ibid...

10 "About FEMA," FEMA, August 2006, www.fema.gov/about/index.shtm

11 Ibid..

Prior to FEMA's involvement in disaster assistance, state governors must make an explicit request to the president for a disaster declaration. This process is required by the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, which states: "All requests for a declaration by the President that a major disaster exists shall be made by the Governor of the affected State."¹² The officials of the regional FEMA office then appraise the severity of the disaster and include the information in the governor's request to the president. The president then is responsible for determining whether the situation is severe enough to warrant a disaster declaration and whether state resources are sufficient to address the crisis. Even if the president decides the disaster warrants a federal response, the state still must execute its own emergency plan, apply available resources, and demonstrate that state and local governments will fulfill their responsibility to share the costs with the federal government.¹³ These requirements are to help ensure that FEMA is supplemental to the state's response to the disaster, interfering only as needed, and to prevent FEMA from emerging as the sole responsible agency for administering the disaster response and providing funding for disaster-related expenses.

There are two types of disaster declarations the president can issue to authorize the involvement of FEMA and obtain federal funding for the disaster response. The first, the Emergency Declaration, occurs when the president decides federal assistance is necessary to address the situation. Emergency Declarations are meant primarily to supplement state funds, and the amount of assistance is limited to \$5 million per event.¹⁴ The alternate type of declaration is the Major Declaration, which does not have a monetary cap. The president issues Major Declarations in the case of severe natural disasters that require resources beyond the capabilities of state and local governments.¹⁵ This declaration is intended for severe disasters which require intensive funding, preparation, and post-disaster relief efforts.

12 "Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (Public Law 93-288) as amended," United States Code, August 2006, <http://www.fema.gov/about/stafact.shtm>

13 "The Declaration Process," FEMA, 18 April 2006, http://www.fema.gov/rebuild/recover/dec_guide.shtm

14 "Disaster Declarations," *op cit*.

15 *Ibid.*

In the event of a declared disaster, FEMA provides three types of assistance. The first, individual assistance, supplies aid through the Individual and Households Program to provide homeowners and renters housing and funding for essential expenses.¹⁶ Additionally, the Housing Assistance division of the program provides options such as temporary housing, funds for damage repair, home replacement, and funding for permanent housing construction.¹⁷ According to FEMA, the agency requires a strict registration process to verify the accuracy and legitimacy of the claims for assistance to avoid cases of fraud. The second category, public assistance, is designed to fund repairs, construction, and rebuilding of public facilities or infrastructure that were damaged or completely destroyed by the disaster.¹⁸ The renovation of public buildings and infrastructure is essential for rebuilding a community, particularly to revive the economy and provide necessary resources for people affected by the disaster. The third form of aid is hazard mitigation assistance, which provides funding to implement measures that will help prevent the same severity of damages in the event of a future disaster.¹⁹

FEMA in the 1990s

Despite established plans for dealing with disaster, FEMA has faced numerous difficulties handling the disaster response. FEMA had been criticized following its slow response to Hurricane Hugo which hit South Carolina in 1989, for “arriving late and armed with reams of red tape that confounded disaster victims and delayed getting help to the people who needed it most.”²⁰ Measures had supposedly been taken to make the agency more efficient and flexible in response to disaster, although they proved insufficient during Hurricane Andrew. The General Accounting Office reviewed FEMA’s effort following that disaster and found its three biggest weaknesses were

16 “Disaster Assistance for Individuals,” FEMA< June 2006, www.fema.gov/media/fact_sheets/individual-assistance.shtm

17 Ibid..

18 “Public Assistance,” FEMA, June 2006, www.fema.gov/media/fact_sheets/public-assistance.shtm

19 “Hazard Assistance,” FEMA, June 2006, www.fema.gov/media/fact_sheets/hazard-assistance.shtm

20 Scott Bronstein, “Desperate Hurricane Victims Fed Up with FEMA,” *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, September 1, 1992, http://web.lexis-nexis.com/universe/document?_m=39094e657ea04d72ca3b0517f19dd25c&_docnum=14&wchp=dGLbVzz-zSkVA&_md5=2db65cf4d424b62d2c1e3bbe4d86b5d1

preparedness, immediate response, and recovery.²¹ One criticism was that political appointees, not necessarily qualified for the position of coordinating efficient disaster response, staffed the organization. In fact, the House Committee on Appropriations issued a report that found FEMA employed approximately ten times more political appointees than any other federal agency.²² After extensive criticism of FEMA and its response efforts, discussion emerged over opportunities to reform the agency. The director of FEMA, Wallace Stickney, discussed the idea of reform, and noted the importance of resolving policy questions on disaster relief and making improvements to ensure the agency was more prepared before the next disaster struck.²³ He introduced an important policy question of the jurisdictional relationship between state and federal governments for disaster coordination, which contributed to the slow response to Hurricane Andrew.²⁴ Since FEMA could not involve itself without an explicit request from the governor, which it did not receive until four days before the disaster, Stickney insisted that the late request left insufficient time for FEMA to adequately prepare for the hurricane.

President Clinton nominated James Lee Witt as the new FEMA director in 1993. He was the first FEMA director with experience in emergency management and initiated major reforms to improve the agency.²⁵ Hurricane Emily was the next challenge FEMA faced following Hurricane Andrew, and the new regulations appear to have helped those affected by the storm. The weekend prior to the expected arrival of Hurricane Emily, FEMA officials had already brought power generators, tents, and plastic sheeting supplies into the region.²⁶ The military, equipped with emergency supplies, arrived before the disaster even hit, in contrast to Hurricane Andrew, during which several days passed after thousands of persons had been displaced and major damages had affected the

21 Judy Keen and Paul Hoversten, "Agency labors amid disaster," USA TODAY, September 1, 1992

22 Ibid..

23 William Claiborne, "After Storms and Controversy, What's in Store for FEMA?;

Response to Andrew Didn't Meet Expectations, Director Says," The Washington Post, October 6, 1992

24 William Claiborne, op cit.

25 "FEMA History," op cit.

26 Ibid..

region.²⁷ Improved leadership and coordination among state and federal officials helped the response to the disaster, and helped to mitigate follow-on damage. New FEMA leadership appeared to have had a significant impact on the speed and efficiency of the disaster relief efforts and Witt was highly praised for the response to Hurricane Emily.²⁸ Disaster response efforts continued to improve throughout the 1990s. The next major test Witt faced was Hurricane Floyd in 1999, considered one of the worst storms of the 1990s. Again, FEMA was extremely prepared for the onset of the hurricane. Emergency response centers were activated, emergency officials stationed to respond, and emergency supplies such as food, water, and ice, were readily available for the disaster response.²⁹

As FEMA Director, Witt oversaw more than one-hundred-seventy declared disasters, which included major storms such as Hurricane Emily, Hurricane Floyd, and the flooding throughout the Midwest in 1993.³⁰ Despite the many challenges he faced, Witt was highly praised for dramatically improving FEMA and restoring confidence in the agency. The public perception of FEMA improved as well; in 1992, disaster victims had expressed a forty-five *per cent* approval rating of FEMA, which jumped to eighty-five *per cent* under Witt.³¹ The response from state officials was equally praising. Director of the Alabama Emergency Management Authority credited Witt with a “total restoration of FEMA.”³² Patricia McGinnis, president of the Council for Excellence in Government, claimed she had “never seen such a turnaround in an agency [...] now it is thought of as one of the best agencies in government.”³³ Even Sen. Hollings (D-SC), who famously called FEMA “the sorriest bunch of jackasses I’ve ever known” after Hurricane

27 Lori Sharn, “FEMA ‘ahead of the game’ this time / Disaster aid already is in place,” USA Today, September 1, 1993

28 Ibid..

29 Larry Lipman, “Rescuers Are Ready for Action,” The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 14 September 1999: News

30 James Thurman, “James Witt: Why Federal Disaster Relief Works,” Christian Science Monitor, 6 April 1998: United States

31 Ibid..

32 Edward Walsh, “Federal Emergency Manager Gets High Marks,” St. Louis Post, 23 August 1998: Metro

33 Ibid..

Andrew, had only praise for Witt's management.³⁴ He highlighted important changes in the agency's approach to emergency management; for example, better coordination among federal agencies, pre-positioning of equipment and personnel before disasters, and a focus on prevention rather than "clean-up" in the aftermath. "We work now. We get it done," Hollings commented on FEMA.³⁵

Hurricane Katrina

In 2003, President George W. Bush nominated Michael Brown as the new FEMA director and following his confirmation in the Senate, Brown assumed leadership of the agency. Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Louisiana in August 2005, becoming one of the worst natural disasters America has ever faced. FEMA was responsible for preparation and recovery efforts, but it was unable to effectively address the disaster ultimate effects of the disaster. The media and government loudly criticized FEMA's handling of the storm, and a House of Representatives inquiry into the handling of Katrina determined that "at every level individual, corporate, philanthropic, and governmental [FEMA] failed to meet the challenge that was Katrina."³⁶

Preparations for Hurricane Katrina were criticized as inadequate and the slow response time by FEMA only compounded the already horrific situation. The media disparaged FEMA director Michael Brown for the lack of busing to help indigent New Orleans residents evacuate the city. In an interview, Brown refused to take personal responsibility for the buses, saying:

The buses are something that the governor directly asked me for and I said 'Governor, I'll get you 500 buses.' But that request fell into the black hole of DHS [...] But now the way it works with DHS is I go to you, you go to the DHS procurement officer, they go to the secretary, they go the secretary of transportation. It is a bureaucratic morass; it's too big.³⁷

34 Michelle Davis, "FEMA Director Witt Turns Inactive Agency into Pro-Active Service," The Houston Chronicle, 26 August 1998: Section A

35 Ibid..

36 Lara Jakes Jordan, "Government-wide failings to blame for U.S. Katrina response, congressional report finds," Associated Press Worldstream, February 13, 2006

37 Michael Brown, Interview by Chris Matthews, Hardball with Chris Matthews MSNBC, August 2006, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/14570837/>

The bureaucracy of the federal government, though, was not solely at fault. Findings from the House report showed the state and local governments were also responsible, noting that New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco did not issue mandatory evacuation orders soon enough, contributing to the numbers of lives lost to the hurricane.³⁸ State and local officials, according to the report, had not taken enough preemptive action prior to Hurricane Katrina and had relied too greatly on FEMA's assistance.

Another contributing factor to the poor handling of the effects of Katrina was the lack of communication among the federal, state, and local officials, causing additional failures in the management of the process. For example, many New Orleans residents, upon evacuating, had been instructed to take shelter in the Morial Convention Center, but upon their arrival they discovered a complete absence of supplies or any sort of oversight. The conditions in the convention center were plastered all over the news for approximately forty-eight hours before Michael Brown admitted in a television interview that "we first learned of the convention center, we being the Federal government, today."³⁹ Brown acknowledged that two days after being in the convention center the evacuees had yet to receive food, water, and additional supplies. The interview demonstrated the slow response of FEMA to assist disaster victims and the inadequate communication chain within the federal government.

Investigating Katrina

Following the disaster, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Homeland Security examined FEMA management of Hurricane Katrina and discovered rampant fraud, waste, and abuse. Due to the extensive damages from Katrina, and to avoid criticism for not providing hurricane victims with financial resources to cope with the disaster, FEMA expedited its assistance to disaster victims, distributing payments of \$2,000 for food, shelter, and other basic

38 Lara Jakes Jordan. Op cit.

39 Michael Brown, Interview by Ted Koppel, Nightline ABC News, September 2005, <http://www.american-buddha.com/Katrina.nightlinekoppelbrowninterview.htm>

needs.⁴⁰ According to the House Committee's investigation, by February 2006 FEMA had distributed approximately \$6.3 billion in aid to hurricane victims and estimated that approximately sixteen *per cent* of those payments, about a total of about \$1 billion, were likely fraudulent because of invalid registrations.⁴¹ FEMA had set up various safeguards to protect against fraudulent claims for financial assistance but it did not actually apply verification methods to many registrations, resulting in considerable loss of funds.⁴²

Both the House and Senate conducted investigations, examining randomly selected case studies and testing the registration processes to examine the security of the system. Individuals could register for disaster assistance either online or by telephone; in its investigation, the Senate Committee determined that those registering online were subject to a very limited verification process and those who failed the online verification were told to contact FEMA by phone, where the verification process was not implemented at all. As a result, 1.5 million telephone callers registered without undergoing the identity validation process.⁴³ Investigators also applied for disaster assistance funding with false identities, addresses, and stories. Even when giving the exact same false information rejected online, operators accepted their information, processed their claims, and processed expedited assistance checks in the amount of \$2,000.⁴⁴

As a result of the lapse in the identity verification process, FEMA distributed at least \$1 billion to people with invalid Social Security numbers, addresses, or other invalid information; registrants who did not, or had never, lived at the declared address; and to duplicate registrations.⁴⁵ For example, in a case study from the Senate Committee's investigation, an individual:

used 15 different [Social Security Numbers]--one of which was the individual's own--to submit at least 15 registrations over the telephone. The individual claimed a different damaged address on all 15 registrations, and used 3 different current addresses-including a post office box, where the

40 Gregory Kutz, "Hurricane Preparedness," Senate Committee on Homeland Security, February 13, 2006

41 Gregory Kutz, "Waste, Fraud, and Abuse in Katrina Aftermath," House Homeland Security, June 14, 2006

42 Gregory Kutz, "Hurricane Preparedness," *op cit*.

43 *Ibid.*

44 *Ibid.*

45 Gregory Kutz, "Waste, Fraud, and Abuse in Katrina Aftermath," *op cit*.

individual received payments. The individual received 16 payments totaling over \$41,000 on 15 of the registrations.⁴⁶

Among the random sampling of cases investigators examined, instances of fraud were numerous. The investigation revealed the need for a stricter, more manageable registration process to prevent the instances of fraud and abuse.

In addition to the frequent occurrence of fraud, the committees took issue with the distribution and usage of debit cards. While the majority of debit cards were used for appropriate purchases, such as food, clothing, and other personal necessities, there were cases in which the debit cards were used to pay for entirely unrelated expenses, such as adult entertainment, a .45-caliber hand gun, jewelry, bail bond services, and traffic violations.⁴⁷

The General Accountability Office reported that the “improper and potentially fraudulent payments occurred mainly because FEMA did not validate the identity of the registrant, the physical location of the damaged address, and ownership and occupancy of all registrants at the time of registration.”⁴⁸ FEMA also issued its employees debit cards for work-related expenses. The General Accountability Office conducted an investigation and found that after Hurricane Katrina, Homeland Security employees, including FEMA workers, used government funds to buy products such as MP3 players, beer-making equipment and a flat-screen TV.⁴⁹

The disaster response efforts also revealed numerous examples of monetary waste. Ice is often an essential resource for disaster assistance, with its use ranging from food preservation to hydration, and FEMA had requested large shipments of it. They soon discovered that due to the extent of the flooding, ice would in fact not be needed. After the ice was deemed unnecessary, FEMA sent more than two hundred trucks filled with ice, to other parts of the country to store the ice for future disasters, but more miscommunication resulted in “circuitous routes, frustrated truck drivers, and an agency

46 Gregory Kutz, “Hurricane Preparedness,” op cit.

47 Ibid..

48 Larry Margasak, “FEMA Funds Spent on Divorce, Sex Change,” Associated Press, June 14, 2006

49 “GAO: TV, iPods part of post-Katrina waste,” USA Today, July 19, 2006

that truly had no idea what its right and left hands were doing.”⁵⁰ Because of a lack of communication and coordination, FEMA officials wasted more than \$100 million on ice shipments.⁵¹ FEMA even continued to order more shipments of ice, while the previous, unnecessary shipments were still being shipped around the country.

Another example also highlights extensive FEMA wastefulness. Following the hurricane, FEMA intended to provide housing to the thousands of Katrina victims evacuated from their homes. They purchased eleven thousand trailer homes, but instead of supplying the victims with them, the trailers were unused and began deteriorating.⁵² The homes, costing \$879 million dollars, were originally placed in Arkansas because of FEMA’s regulation that prohibits homes from being moved into flood zones, such as New Orleans, after hurricanes.⁵³ The agency, however, not only spent close to \$1 billion purchasing those mobile homes left in Arkansas, but they had placed the trailers on sinking land and then spent an additional \$4-7 million laying down gravel to prevent the trailers from sinking.⁵⁴ Six months following the purchase of the trailers, legislation was introduced to lift the restrictions that would permit moving the homes to Louisiana where they could be used by the disaster victims. Other problems with FEMA trailers surfaced. In August 2006, the Sierra Club reported finding high levels of formaldehyde, a dangerous gas, in trailers used for hurricane victims.⁵⁵

FEMA Leadership

Just ten days after President George W. Bush famously declared “Brownie, you’re doing a heck of a job,” he removed the embattled FEMA director from his position, as the brunt of the responsibility and blame for the response to Hurricane Katrina fell on his shoulders. As the media criticized his management of the disaster, they also began looking into his background and his qualifications for the position. The media pointed

50 Ibid..

51 Kathy Gill, “FEMA and Ice,” U.S. Politics, October 3, 2005

52 Mimi Hall, “Senators hear ‘shocking examples’ of FEMA waste,” USA Today,

53 Ibid..

54 Alison Vekshin, “Pryor introduces bill to lift restrictions on FEMA homes,” Arkansas News Bureau, 2 March 2006, <http://www.arkansasnews.com/archive/2006/03/02/WashingtonDCBureau/334574.html>

55 Bill Walsh, “Testing of FEMA Trailers Pressed,” Times-Picayune, 11 August 2006: National

out numerous discrepancies between the description of Brown issued by the White House and the actuality of the positions he held. For example, according to his official biography posted on the FEMA website, Brown had experience in emergency management serving as an assistant city manager with emergency services oversight; the position, according to the city, actually did not entail any authority over other employees.⁵⁶ Furthermore, before joining the Bush administration, Brown spent a decade serving as the stewards and judges commissioner of the International Arabian Horse Association, raising further questions of his qualifications for the position of FEMA director.⁵⁷

Charges of political patronage became louder after the Washington Post reported that three officials at the top of the FEMA hierarchy had ties to Bush's campaign in 2000, and five out of eight top officials lacked experience in crisis management, raising questions of credibility and how "cronyism" affected the management of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.⁵⁸ Criticism was not limited to the accuracy of resumes, as investigators identified the lack of communication among those at top positions on a state and federal level that contributed to numerous failures. In a television interview, Michael Brown discussed the impact of the communication flaws, stating that the lack of communication or unified command structure prevented any meaningful coordination of relief operations.⁵⁹ Communication failures between FEMA officials and the state government, and among FEMA officials themselves, were responsible for a slow response and delayed recovery efforts. In the aftermath of Katrina, FEMA and government officials acknowledged a need to improve communication measures in the event of future disasters.

56 Daren Fonda and Rita Healy, "How Reliable is Brown's Resume," Time, September 8, 2005, <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1103003,00.html>, Accessed September 20, 2006

57 Ted Barret, "Brown: 'I know what I am doing,'" CNN.com, November 4, 2005, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/POLITICS/09/27/brown.background/> Accessed September 20, 2006

58 Ibid..

59 "Hardball with Chris Matthews," op cit.

Current Status

Findings and Recommendations

The Senate Committee Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs conducted an investigation following Hurricane Katrina to determine the flaws in emergency management and propose changes for improvement. The committee, led by Chairman Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Member Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), released a report entitled “Hurricane Katrina: A Nation Still Unprepared.”⁶⁰ The report outlines eighty-six findings on the failures of the government to adequately plan, prepare and execute the response and relief efforts for Hurricane Katrina, and attributed responsibility for Katrina failures to both state and federal officials.⁶¹ Specifically, it held state officials responsible for not implementing necessary measures to completely evacuate New Orleans; it held former FEMA director Michael Brown, and Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff responsible for failing to uphold federal disaster response plans.⁶²

More than just criticizing prior failures, the bipartisan panel concluded that FEMA remained unprepared to address future natural disasters, and the panel issued a series of recommendations to improve the agency’s preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. The panel concluded that the best way to improve FEMA was replacing it with a new agency, the National Preparedness and Response Authority.⁶³ According to the report, the new agency would be elevated within the hierarchy of the Department of Homeland Security, but would still remain within the department. Furthermore, the report recommended implementing direct communication between the director and the president; during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Michael Brown reported to

60 “Committee Responds to Sen. Clinton’s Request That FEMA Be Returned to Independent Agency,” US Fed News, 3 May 2006

61 Ibid..

62 Jordan, Lara Jakes, “Senate Panel Recommends Abolishing FEMA,” The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 27 April, 2006: STATE AND REGIONAL

63 Ibid..

Secretary Chertoff, and had no direct contact with the president.⁶⁴ The goal of these recommendations was to apply the findings to proposals for reform.

Legislation in the Senate

Using the recommendations outlined in their report, Senators Collins and Lieberman co-sponsored the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, known as the Collins-Lieberman FEMA bill, with an aim to strengthen FEMA by elevating its status within the DHS, ensuring it retained its budget and resources. It also proposed increasing the qualifications for the agency's leadership positions.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the bill called for improved communication and coordination among federal, state, and local agencies. Communication would also be improved, the bill stated, by establishing the head of FEMA as the primary advisor to the president on emergency management issues.⁶⁶ The goal of the bill was to reinvent, protect, and strengthen FEMA to improve disaster response and recovery efforts in the event of future natural disasters.

Other senators, notably Senator Hillary Clinton (D-NY) and Senator Trent Lott (R-MS), opposed legislation to recreate FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security. They argued instead for FEMA to be removed from the control of the DHS and be restored as an independent, cabinet-level agency. Senator Clinton wrote to Senators Collins and Lieberman "urging them to drop their effort to kill off FEMA and redistribute its functions within the Department of Homeland Security."⁶⁷ Senator Clinton introduced legislation to restore FEMA as an independent federal agency, as it was under the Clinton Administration, under the direct authority of the president. Senator Lott, who co-sponsored Clinton's bill, along with Senators David Vitter (R-LA) and Diane Feinstein (D-CA), commented that many Senators wanted to bring FEMA back into a strong,

64 Ibid..

65 "Homeland Security Committee Approves Senators Collins', Lieberman's Legislation to Implement Findings of the Hurricane Katrina Report," Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 27 July 2006, http://www.senate.gov/~govtaff/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&Affiliation=R&PressRelease_id=1299&Month=7&Year=2006

66 Ibid..

67 "Sen. Clinton opposes senators' plan to scrap FEMA," The Associated Press State & Local Wire, 28 April 2006: State and Regional

independent agency.⁶⁸ He said the intent of the legislation was to eliminate “a huge layer of time-consuming red tape and an unnecessary barrier between FEMA and direct presidential and congressional accountability.”⁶⁹

In response to the legislation and, in particular, a letter from Senator Clinton to the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, Collins and Lieberman co-authored a letter defending their recommendations. In the letter, they assert that FEMA had never fully been capable of responding to natural disasters, nor was it prepared to effectively address a future disaster. They believed it would be ineffective to establish FEMA as an independent agency because it “would result in a still-weak, but independent, FEMA.”⁷⁰ They cited their proposal as the most effective method to strengthen FEMA and improve preparedness and response efforts.

Legislation in the House of Representatives

Similar opposing sides formed in the House of Representatives creating further obstacles for FEMA reform proposals. On one side were those supporting FEMA’s restoration to an independent agency. They criticized the Collins-Lieberman proposal, calling it “a recipe for disaster.”⁷¹ Reps. Don Young (D-AK), Tom Davis (R-VA), James Oberstar (D-MN), Bill Shuster (R-PA) introduced the Restoring Emergency Services to Protect Our Nation from Disasters Act of 2006 (RESPOND Act).⁷² The bill provided for reestablishment of FEMA’s independence and elevation to a cabinet-level agency, and had containing numerous provisions to improve communications and coordination of response efforts. It also sets professional qualifications for the director of FEMA to improve leadership of emergency management. Some other provisions of the bill include

68 “Senator Trent Lott Says Make F.E.M.A. Independent Again,” WorldNow, 30 April 2006, <http://www.wdam.com/Global/story.asp?S=4839964>

69 Lott, Trent, “Lott: FEMA should be independent,” Meridian Star, 25 February 2006, http://www.meridianstar.com/opinion/local_story_056012636.html?keyword=topstory

70 “Committee Responds to Sen. Clinton’s Request That FEMA Be Returned to Independent Agency,” US Fed News, 3 May 2006

71 “Removing FEMA from the Department of Homeland Security,” Federal News Service, 9 May 2006: Press Conference or Speech

72 “Bipartisan Bill Designed to Strengthen, Restore FEMA Approved By House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee,” US Fed News, 17 May 2006

authorizing the development of a catastrophic planning program, assembling national and regional response teams, establishment of a national emergency operations center, and the integration of updated technology to improve the logistics system and communication capabilities, among many other recommendations.⁷³ The House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure approved the bill, but after passing in committee it met opposition from a competing reform proposal.

The House Homeland Security Committee sided with the Collins-Lieberman proposal, supporting its position to keep FEMA within the DHS. The committee chairman, Rep. Peter King (R-NY), had the support of Reps. Bennie Thompson (D-MS), David Reichert (R-WA), Bill Pascrell (D-NJ), Bob Etheridge (D-NC), and Michael McCaul (R-TX).⁷⁴ They issued a statement that called for a focus on the critical responsibilities of the agency rather than complete a restructure.⁷⁵ Rep. Bob R. Etheridge (D-NC) introduced the National Emergency Management Reform and Enhancement Act of 2006, designed to strengthen FEMA.⁷⁶ Its measures intended to improve communication and coordination at the federal, state and local levels; strengthen disaster preparedness and response capabilities nationwide; and eliminate waste, fraud and abuse.⁷⁷ The bill received bipartisan support in the House Homeland Security Committee, and also received support from Collins and Lieberman.

Compromise in Congress

In the Senate, compromise prevailed as the body reached an agreement on FEMA's reorganization. On 29 June 2006, Senators Collins and Lott made an announcement detailing the terms of their compromise on the best way to strengthen

⁷³ Ibid..

⁷⁴ "Senate and House Homeland Security Committees Stress Importance of Keeping FEMA Capabilities Within DHS," States News Service, 11 May 2006

⁷⁵ "Reps. Thompson, King, Reichert, Pascrell Call for Keeping FEMA in Department of Homeland Security," US Fed News, 12 April 2006

⁷⁶ "Rep. Etheridge Introduces Bill to Restructure, Strengthen FEMA," US Fed News, 18 May 2006

⁷⁷ Ibid..

FEMA.⁷⁸ Lott agreed to support the proposal making FEMA an independent agency within the Department of Homeland Security, on the condition that any restructuring of the agency required approval from Congress.⁷⁹ Additionally, the compromise outlined the role of the director, who would report to the DHS Secretary but would also have direct access to the president and who could make recommendations directly to Congress.⁸⁰

In the House of Representatives, Congressmen also agreed that the best reorganization would keep FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security. They were strongly influenced by the agreement that had been reached within the Senate. Following this compromise, the House and Senate members met to cooperate on the development of the bill. Collins and Lieberman made an announcement saying that an agreement was reached with House leaders.⁸¹

The goal of the bill is to strengthen FEMA by making it an independent entity within the Department of Homeland Security. It promotes the administrator to the level of deputy security and requires that he have background and knowledge in emergency management, homeland security, and executive management.⁸² The bill also addressed the communication failures that occurred and seeks to improve them by establishing an Office of Emergency Communications, a director of emergency communications, and a National Emergency Communications plan.⁸³ The restructuring and technological improvements are intended to facilitate better communication among government officials and disaster responders. The compromise also includes increases of ten *per cent* for FEMA's operating budget for three years: \$175 million for emergency management

78 Trent Lott, "Senators Lott and Collins Announce Compromise on FEMA Reorganization," Congressional Press Releases, 29 June 2006: Press Release

79 "Sens. Collins, Lieberman Introduce Legislation to Reinvent, Protect, Strengthen FEMA," US Fed News, 28 June 2006

80 Ibid..

81 "House-Senate Negotiators Reach Agreement on Collins-Lieberman FEMA, Hurricane Katrina Legislation," Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 18 September 2006, http://www.senate.gov/~govtaff/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&Affiliation=R&PressRelease_id=1328&Month=9&Year=2006

82 Reichert, Rep. Dave, "Should FEMA be separated from the Homeland Security Department?; Reform Bill Offers FEMA Improvements," Roll Call, 25 September 2006: Homeland Security Policy Briefing

83 Ibid..

performance grants, \$30 million for metropolitan medical response teams, and \$20 million for urban search and rescue teams.⁸⁴

On 29 September 2006, Congress passed the Department of Homeland Security Fiscal Year 2007 Appropriations Act which contained the aforementioned compromises. Senator Lieberman praised the passage, saying it will lead to “an improved federal emergency response to disasters.”⁸⁵ President Bush signed the bill into law on 4 October 2006.⁸⁶

The signing, though, did not proceed without controversy. President George W. Bush opposed the bill’s provisions requiring higher qualifications and at least five years in emergency management for the agency’s director.⁸⁷ Just hours after signing the bill, Bush issued a signing statement which suggested that the provision setting qualifications for the

Signing Statement:

Although not specifically provisioned in the Constitution, presidents have historically offered these clarifications regarding how they intend to execute laws passed by Congress. Although used throughout American history, signing statements received some legitimacy when the Supreme Court, in *Chevron U.S.A., Inc., v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.* 467 U.S. 837 (1984), deferred to executive interpretations of the law “if Congress has not directly spoken to the precise question at issue.”

agency’s director obstructs his authority to make personnel decisions and potentially rules out applicants that may be best qualified to fill the position.⁸⁸ In the signing statement, President Bush also opposed the bill’s provision authorizing the FEMA director to notify Congress about emergency management necessities without prior approval from the president.⁸⁹ His response prompted angry reactions from both Democrats and Republicans. Democrats claimed President Bush was ignoring the

84 Strohm, Chris “Plan to overhaul FEMA lacks funding commitment,” Congress Daily, 18 September 2996, <http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0906/091806cdpm1.htm>

85 “FEMA Reinvention Clears Congress,” Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, 29 September 2006, http://hsgac.senate.gov/index.cfm?FuseAction=PressReleases.Detail&Affiliation=R&PressRelease_id=1341&Month=9&Year=2006

86 Charlie Savage, “Bush Cites Authority to Bypass FEMA Law,” The Boston Globe, 6 October 2006: National

87 Spencer S Hsu, “Bush Balks at Criteria for FEMA Director;

Signing Statement Asserts Right to Ignore Parts of New Homeland Security Law,” Washington Post, 7 October 2006: A Section; A02

88 Charlie Savage, op cit.

89 Bruce Alpert, “Bush Rejects Minimum Experience to Lead FEMA,” Times-Picayune, 7 October 2006: National

lessons of Hurricane Katrina in favor of increasing his executive power.⁹⁰ Republicans, in particular Senator Collins, were frustrated, feeling that the provisions were designed to strengthen FEMA and disregarding them would be a “move in the wrong direction.”⁹¹

Changes within FEMA

In September 2005, Robert David Paulison was appointed by President Bush to serve as Acting Director of FEMA and to replace Michael Brown.⁹² In April 2006, President Bush nominated Paulison to serve as Director of FEMA and Under Secretary of Federal Management.⁹³ Bush had offered the position to others experienced in disaster management, but they turned down the opportunity down, saying they were not convinced the Bush administration would give significant attention to rebuilding FEMA.⁹⁴ Both Republican and Democratic leaders supported the nomination; Reps. Peter King (R-NY) commented that Paulison had shown himself as “a very capable leader” and Bennie Thompson (D-MS) said he was impressed with Paulison.⁹⁵ In May 2006, the Senate unanimously confirmed Paulison to the position.⁹⁶ Paulison asserted his commitment to improving FEMA and emergency management, saying “we are ready, and we are going to be ready. We are retooling FEMA, getting those things figured out that didn’t work well.”⁹⁷

As Congress debated various proposals for reforming the agency, FEMA itself began making changes to improve emergency management. Paulison acknowledged the anxiety of the public, saying “Americans want to know if we are ready for future disasters and that is reassurance we can give them.”⁹⁸ FEMA issued a press release providing details on the major changes being made to improve response time,

90 Spencer S. Hsu, *op cit.*

91 Charlie Savage, *op cit.*

92 “R. David Paulison,” FEMA, 15 September 2006, <http://www.fema.gov/about/bios/rpaulison.shtm>

93 *Ibid.*

94 Eric Lipton, “Nominations made for Top Post at FEMA and Three Other Slots,” *New York Times*, 7 April 2006: Section A

95 *Ibid.*

96 Eric Lipton, “Senate Back Several Nominees,” *New York Times*, 27 May 2006: Section A

97 Graham Brink, “New Leader: FEMA Is Ready for Next Katrina,” *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 April 2006: National

98 “Emergency Management Prepares For 2006 Hurricane Season: FEMA Acting Director Paulison Addresses Conference,” Homeland Security Department Documents and Publications, 12 April 2006: FEMA

communication, preparedness, and organization. First, FEMA implemented a measure to improve its coordination with the Department of Defense; the goal of which is to “synchronize coordination and readiness with the military,” which has played a vital role in disaster response.⁹⁹ The change will place a Defense Coordinating Officer permanently in each of the ten regional offices. FEMA additionally upgraded its operations center within the DHS to improve equipment and technology to facilitate better information exchange with the Department of Homeland Security Operations Center. Communication during disasters will also be enhanced by sending liaisons with satellite phones to prevent the restrictions in communication that occurred during Katrina. FEMA also established Situational Awareness Teams to improve understanding of specific circumstances, and to provide more accurate information from the source of the disaster. Also, FEMA will work with vendors prior to natural disasters to ensure that they have an adequate supply of resources available for the disaster victims and will improve work to ensure that food, water, tarps, medical equipment, and pharmaceuticals are available at the time of a disaster. Points of distribution for delivery and ways of tracking these commodities would also be improved.¹⁰⁰

Major problems during Katrina included those with registration for individual assistance funds. FEMA will work to improve the registration process over the internet to allow up to two-hundred-thousand registrants a day. To combat the possibility of fraud and abuse, there will be an enhanced identity verification process. The lack of employees and first-responders was also a major issue during Katrina. FEMA increased the number of Disaster Assistance Employees from 3,992 to 8,094 employees, and established seven hundred Cadre-on-Response Employee positions which will focus on disaster recovery work. FEMA will also train three thousand generalists who will prepare for disasters and be ready for deployment should one occur.¹⁰¹

99 “Ready for 2006 Hurricane Season,” US Fed News, 12 April 2006

100 Ibid..

101 Ibid..

Following the release of this information, FEMA was confronted with new natural disasters and the changes implemented seem to have helped create a more structured, organized response. In response to the mid-Atlantic flooding that occurred at the end of June 2006, FEMA activated the Regional Response Coordination Center in Philadelphia and deployed liaisons to state Emergency Operations Centers in order to provide assistance to state officials.¹⁰² Statistics show that aid for individuals, families, and business owners was approximately \$98 million.¹⁰³ With noticeable improvement in disaster response, FEMA showed it could effectively handle disasters provided it maintained order, communication, and available resources. FEMA Director David Paulison has focused largely on improving the disaster response without specifically commenting on the nature of proposals discussed in Congress.

Party Positions

With evidence of FEMA's failures clearly apparent following Hurricane Katrina, there was unsurprisingly strong support for reform from both the Republican and Democratic parties. The parties have largely been in agreement on the source of the failures; however, tension between the two parties and the midterm elections resulted in both parties attributing responsibility to the other for those failures.

Democratic Party

The Democratic Party believes that FEMA reform is necessary to adequately prepare for and respond to future disasters.¹⁰⁴ Democrats attributed responsibility for the failures of FEMA to the Bush Administration and to Republican cronyism. The central criticism of the Democratic Party was that mission critical positions went to political appointees, instead of going to experienced professionals, resulting in unqualified leaders, which had enormous consequences for the disaster response efforts. To this

102 "Department of Homeland Security Responds to Mid-Atlantic Flooding," US Fed News, 28 June 2006

103 "Weekly Recovery Information Update: New York Flood Aid Tops \$98 Million," Homeland Security Department Documents and Publications, 26 August 2006: FEMA

104 "Congressional Analysis: FEMA Reform Needed," Democratic Office: Committee on Homeland Security, 8 June 2006, <http://hsc-democrats.house.gov/issues/index.asp?ID=51&SubSection=&Issue=9&DocumentType=&PublishDate=&issue=9>

point, they emphasized the questionable qualifications of former FEMA Director Michael Brown. To combat the issue of political appointees, Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-CA) and House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) introduced the Anti-Cronyism and Public Safety Act, which would “prohibit the President from appointing unqualified individuals to critical public safety positions in the government.”¹⁰⁵ They said the bill was specifically in response to the failures of Katrina that result “when unqualified cronies are appointed to federal public safety positions.”¹⁰⁶ The Democrats also criticized recovery efforts, noting that more than a year after Katrina, the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans have been insufficient to restore the city.¹⁰⁷ Highlighting these failures and attributing blame to the Republican Administration helped publicize the question among voters of whether a Republican-led government is capable of handling future disasters.

In January 2007, Sen. Joe Lieberman, now an Independent and the chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security, stated that he would not pursue issuing subpoenas to the White House, as he had previously threatened in his “A Nation Unprepared” addendum.¹⁰⁸ Not all Democrats agree with this course of action, and they have left the door open for future investigations of Katrina. Rep. Waxman, the chair of the House Committee on Government Reform, speculated on including disaster response in a series of hearings regarding federal contracts beginning in February 2007.¹⁰⁹

Republican Party

Republicans agree with Democrats on the failures and in the need for reform. In February 2006, a Republican-led investigation into Hurricane Katrina concluded that

¹⁰⁵ “Rep. Waxman and Leader Pelosi Introduce Anti-Cronyism Bill,” House of Representatives, 27 September 2005, <http://www.democrats.reform.house.gov/story.asp?ID=930>

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ “Cheney and Bush Administration Fail to Fulfill Katrina Promises,” Democratic National Committee, 19 May 2006, http://www.democrats.org/a/2006/05/cheney_and_bush.php

¹⁰⁸ Bill Walsh, “Probe of White House response to Katrina dropped;

Lieberman doesn't want 'a witch hunt,’” *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans), 13 January 2007. Online, Lexis-Nexis. <http://www.lexis-nexis.com>

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

“Katrina was a national failure.”¹¹⁰ Members of the Republican Party have all advocated reform, but within the party, there was a decisive split between those in favor of an independent FEMA and those seeking to keep the agency within the Department of Homeland Security. In particular, in the Senate, Senators Collins and Lott had been on opposing camps, but they compromised to pass the bill within the Senate.¹¹¹ There was also disagreement among House Republicans, until Representatives Young and Davis, who originally called for restoring FEMA as an independent agency, agreed to the Collins-Lieberman proposal. Additionally, the Republican Party was concerned about political appointees and agreed there should be stronger qualifications for emergency management officials.

Party Disputes

One current battle between the two parties is how to finance the FEMA reforms. Republican Senator Judd Gregg (R-NH), the former chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, supported the bipartisan compromises, but also said “There is not a lot of money” to finance the bill.¹¹² In response, Rep. Bennie Thompson, the ranking Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, said that a reorganization of FEMA without sufficient funding was “an insult to every American.”¹¹³ This issue highlights the difficulty of reforming the agency, while still remaining fiscally responsible. It also reveals the parties’ tendency to attribute responsibility for circumstances that are not always within the control of the other party.

110 “Katrina: Government Failure, Private Fraud,” CBS News, 14 February 2006, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/02/13/katrina/main1308008.shtml>

111 Trent Lott, op cit.

112 “Republicans Looking To Strike Compromise On FEMA Reform Before November,” The Frontrunner, 6 September 2006: Washington News

113 Ibid.

Summary

Since its establishment in 1979, FEMA has undergone many changes to improve its capabilities for disaster management. Beginning as an independent agency, FEMA was elevated to cabinet-level status and then later incorporated into the Department of Homeland Security. Despite numerous changes, FEMA has not always been adequately prepared for a disaster. Hurricane Andrew revealed the need for better coordination and communication among federal, state, and local officials and advance availability of supplies to quickly meet the needs of disaster victims. Competent and experienced leadership under James Lee Witt proved to be the difference in the agency's disaster response and throughout the 1990s, the agency's response to disasters drastically improved. Under the leadership of Michael Brown, however, FEMA ineffectively responded to Hurricane Katrina, with many of the same issues surfacing in the disaster response that had been present during Hurricane Andrew. New Orleans erupted in chaos, with hurricane victims left confused and without supplies because FEMA, state, and local officials could not properly implement disaster response plans. A lack of communication resulting in significant monetary losses during the disaster and a later absence of proper controls to verify the registration process left FEMA vulnerable to fraud constituting approximately \$1 billion.

Findings on extensive waste, fraud, and abuse led both parties to agree on the need for reform. Although there was initially a dispute between those arguing in favor of keeping FEMA within the DHS and those arguing for FEMA to be restored as an independent agency, ultimately the congressmen compromised, agreeing that FEMA should be kept within the DHS, but with an elevated status. Legislation detailed many reforms to improve the agency's capabilities for emergency management, though it is imperative that Congress continues to examine FEMA to improve its emergency management to prevent its previous failures from repetition and to effectively support Americans in times of crisis.

Discussion Questions

- What have we learned from the management of previous disasters that can be applied to future disasters?
- What qualifications are necessary for leadership positions? How can “cronyism” be prevented within the agency?
- What measures can be taken to prevent waste and abuse of funds in disaster response?
- What measures can be taken to ensure that disaster victims receive monetary assistance for personal necessities, while preventing fraud?
- How can FEMA improve communication between FEMA and the President, other FEMA officials, state officials, and disaster victims?
- What are the jurisdictional issues in disaster response? Can the federal government effectively and quickly respond to disasters without infringing on the rights of the state?
- What should be the role of the military in disaster response efforts?
- How can rebuilding efforts be accelerated to help communities recover more quickly?
- Is keeping FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security the best way to improve disaster management?
- Does FEMA need greater autonomy or more control in making decisions for emergency management?

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