

## Emergency Readiness

### *Witnesses*

#### Panel 1

##### **Craig Fugate**

Administrator, Federal Emergency Management Agency

##### **Rand Beers**

Under Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, National Protection and Programs Directorate

#### Panel 2

##### **Mark Riley**

Chief of Staff, Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, State of Louisiana

##### **David W. Vice**

Executive Director, Integrated Public Safety Commission, State of Indiana

##### **Eddie Hicks**

International Association of Emergency Managers-USA President and Director of Morgan County, Alabama Emergency Management

##### **Ron Lane**

Director, Office of Emergency Services, San Diego County, California

### *Committee Members Present*

Mary Landrieu, Chairwoman (D-LA)

Dan Coats, Ranking Member (R-IN)

Patrick Leahy (D-VT)

Jon Tester (D-MT)

Thad Cochran (R-MS)

Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)

Jerry Moran (R-KS)

With the United States currently battling disasters and recoveries in 40 states, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security held a hearing on emergency management communications. The hearing is intended to review the current status of the emergency management operations and in particular, communication systems.

Chairwoman Mary Landrieu (D-LA) began the hearing with an opening statement emphasizing the importance of "real time" communication before, during, and after disasters. Landrieu stated, "The recent unprecedented flooding, tornadoes, and wildfires here in the United States are reminders that this federal government must continue to be a reliable partner, with state and local governments as well as with our private partners." She further acknowledged that these partnerships are essential in maintaining command and control of the situation as well as ensuring that devastated areas are able to recover and rebuild in an intelligent and timely manner. Emphasizing the budget condition the U.S. is currently witnessing, evaluation in the field is needed to allocate the dollars wisely. In his opening remarks, Coats agreed with Landrieu in stating that the U.S. has challenges ahead and serious decisions are to be made concerning the potential shortfall in funding.

Craig Fugate, the Administrator of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), began his testimony by stating the progress local and state communities have made in rapid first response efforts. These efforts were recently put into action when the devastating tornado struck Joplin, Missouri. Because of communications between local and state communities, agencies in Missouri and surrounding states were able to respond quickly and start the recovery process immediately. Fugate added that sometimes your neighbor may be able to provide the fastest response but only if prior planning has been made.

The Under Secretary of National Protection and Programs Directorate, Rand Beers, began by describing the three organizations that are responsible for emergency communications, the Office of Emergency Communications, the National Communications System, and the Office of Infrastructure Protection. He emphasized the creation of the communication network, National Emergency Communications Plan

(NECP), which allowed Gulf Coast state officials to communicate with one another and the Coast Guard. This network demonstrates the effectiveness of the National Protection and Programs Directorate offices and FEMA.

Landrieu started the questioning by asking Fugate how close FEMA is to getting a “capability assessment of readiness” for communities throughout the nation. Fugate answered by asking, “What is the national level we have to build to? How big is big?” Many questions still surround the ability to create a system measuring the readiness of communities. An assessment by FEMA will be presented to the subcommittee within a week. Once this assessment is put into place then emergency responders can measure the damage and manage it accordingly. Landrieu asked Beers if progress of first responder grants is being made regarding the recommendations set forth by the Office of the Inspector General. Beers responded that progress is being made and mock situations have been planned in “testing” urban and rural communities’ timely responses to these situations. To date, all urban areas have achieved the minimum goals set and rural areas are yet to be tested.

Ranking Member Dan Coats (R-IN) proceeded to ask about the results of the simulated major earthquake in the New Madrid fault zone. According to Fugate, this was one of the largest exercises ever held and there was significant local participation. This simulation proved to be successful as the tests and instruments used in this trial were later implemented after the devastating tornado hit in the Joplin, Missouri. In attempts to reach more people in emergency situations, Coats asked if social media is being used. In FEMA, Fugate stated that more people are moving towards mobile devices and FEMA is taking some actions to keep up with the public. FEMA is implementing PLAN (Personal Location Alert Networks), a network that will alert and warn people in a crisis through text-like messages on cell phones. Government officials will be able to target specific geographic areas through cell towers. So far 200 carriers are participating in PLAN. Social media is not as easy for emergency responders and thus the National Protection and Programs Directorate must still use land mobile radios because of its secure network and ability to have constant connection.

Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Thad Cochran (R-MS) were interested in disasters in their states. They were interested in the budget and in FEMA's needs. Fugate noted that if there is a large scale disaster such as an earthquake or hurricane, disaster relief funds will diminish rapidly and response to these disasters requires a substantial amount of resources. As Cochran stated, “We don't want to you be shy by sitting there and not asking for the funds that we need in our states that have been hit hard by these storms.”

In the second panel of witnesses, Mark Riley stated in his testimony that more money should be invested in educating officials and citizens and preparing emergency readiness programs locally. This process will engage individuals in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery and in turn reduce federal costs for FEMA. David Vice commented on Project Hoosier SAFE-T (Safety Acting For Everyone-Together), a state funded system to make interoperable communications affordable and available to all Indiana communities. However, the success of this project has now resulted in reaching system capacity which puts a hold on adding additional agencies, and the funding is currently not there to add capacity. Eddie Hicks said in his testimony that communications are vital before, during, and after a crisis. He also stated that FEMA has responded to the Alabama tornadoes more efficiently than in past disasters. Ron Lane said that the government investments in local homeland security support have led to a prepared nation.

Landrieu asked each witness how each state would react to funding cuts of 20 to 30 percent for FEMA. All agreed that a lack of funds will affect the capabilities and sustainability of local communities and the equipment for operability. Landrieu concluded that the subcommittee appropriations bill will reflect the needs of the nation with regards to emergency management.

Written testimony from the witnesses and an archived webcast is available from the Senate Committee on Appropriations web page.

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