

Opening Statement for Chairman Henry Cuellar D-TX (as prepared)

Subcommittee on Emergency Communications, Preparedness and Response

“The FY 2010 Budget for the Federal Emergency Management Agency”

10:00 A.M. on Tuesday, June 9, 2009 - 311 Cannon House Office Building

At the outset, I would like to express our gratitude for your participation in today’s hearing—especially given the commencement of the 2009 Hurricane Season.

Mr. Fugate, the Subcommittee is impressed by your years of homeland security experience as both a first responder and an emergency manager in Florida. We look forward to working with you as you lead FEMA’s efforts to improve Federal emergency response, recovery, and preparedness efforts across the Nation.

In the years since Hurricane Katrina crashed the shores of the Gulf Coast, FEMA has made significant progress, especially in preparation for and response to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike as well as in its response to the severe storms and tornadoes in the Midwest in 2008.

Yet, there is definitely room for FEMA to improve. Mr. Fugate, you are certainly being put to task and your leadership is definitely needed. Today’s hearing will be an opportunity to discuss President Obama’s Fiscal Year 2010 Budget Request submitted to Congress on May 7, 2009.

Specifically, the Subcommittee wants to discuss the \$7.2 billion proposed for FEMA as well as the President’s priorities in the budget. I should note that state that this Subcommittee is very supportive of the President’s budget request for Fiscal Year 2010 funding.

We applaud the Department for developing a comprehensive budget proposal to support FEMA in fulfilling its critical mission to prepare, protect, respond, and mitigate against major disasters or emergencies.

Although the President’s budget provided an increase of \$197 million above the Fiscal Year 2009 enacted budget, there are a few programmatic changes within FEMA that I look forward to discussing in greater detail in today’s hearing.

In particular, the Committee is somewhat dismayed to learn that the proposed budget of \$170 million—a 70 percent decrease—for the FIRE Grant program. The Committee is concerned that the proposed funding is woefully inadequate of addressing the equipment, training, and other resource needs of fire fighters to carry out their critical life-saving missions.

Another area of concern that involves first responders is the leveling of grant funds for the Interoperable Emergency Communications Grants Program, which is 85 percent short of the authorized level of \$400 million in the 9/11 Commission Act that this Committee worked diligently to develop.

I will simply state that we must ensure that our first responders—the Nation’s first line of defense—are adequately equipped to protect and respond to catastrophic incidents at all times.

As Chairman of this Subcommittee, it has become clear to me that, a prepared citizenry is the cornerstone of a resilient Nation.

While the storm winds may change direction and the level of threats to our security may vary, one thing remains constant—and that is the spirit of the American people to withstand any adversity that they may face.

That is why I will work to ensure that the Department of Homeland Security and particularly FEMA, has the appropriate resources and authorities to strengthen their partnerships with individuals as well as with State, local, and Tribal governments.

In closing, Mr. Fugate, I look forward to your testimony and hearing how the budget for FEMA will pull together the talents from our diverse Nation to make clear that our government can provide the American people security, accountability, and most importantly, freedom from fear.