ABSTRACT

Our nation continues to experience increased frequency and severity of weather disasters. All of these risks demand that we look at the current system and assess if this system, which is predicated on strong Federal leadership in partnership with State and local governments and which failed so visibly in Hurricane Katrina, needs to be rebuilt on a new model. We are suggesting a plan of action that, we believe, is practical, achievable, and will reduce the costs in lives, property, environmental and economic damage from future disasters. The next President is the only person who can make this happen. We suggest that the next President undertake the following steps: (1) move FEMA out of the Department of Homeland Security; (2) appoint a FEMA Director, who is a trusted adviser to the President; (3) include the appointment of the FEMA Director in the first round of Presidential appointees to the Cabinet; (4) rebuild the Federal Response Plan; (5) remove the hazard mitigation and long-term recovery functions from FEMA; (6) invest $2.5 billion annually in hazard mitigation; (7) support community disaster resiliency efforts. The next President will have the opportunity to build the new partnership of Federal, State and local governments, voluntary agencies, nonprofits and the private sector that is needed to make our nation resilient. The question is will the next President take advantage of this opportunity?

Key words: FEMA, President, mitigation, emergency management, state and local government
priority, initiate efforts to rebuild the Federal government’s disaster response capability, and lead the effort to reduce the impacts of future disasters.

To accomplish these goals, we suggest that the next President undertake the following steps:

- **Move FEMA** out of the Department of Homeland Security and reestablish FEMA as an independent executive branch agency with the FEMA Director reporting directly to the President;

- **Appoint a FEMA Director**, who is a trusted adviser to the President and understands the relationship between the Federal government and its State and local partners and Congress, has the capability and vision to lead and manage a government agency, and who understands the disaster environment and is a good politician.

- **Include the appointment of the FEMA Director in the first round of Presidential appointees to the Cabinet** so that the FEMA Director will be on board from Day 1 of the Administration and ready to take charge if an earthquake occurs on January 21, 2009;

- **Rebuild the Federal Response Plan** that designates FEMA as the lead agency in directing and managing the response of the Federal government to major disasters and includes agreements with all Federal government departments and agencies concerning what resources will be made available to support the efforts of State and local governments in responding to a major disaster;

- **Remove the hazard mitigation and long-term recovery functions** from FEMA and establish a new quasi-governmental entity that would create a public/private partnership to support community based pre-disaster mitigation and long-term recovery after disasters. The organization would manage federally supported efforts in these functions, leverage private sector contributions and establish new partnerships with nonprofit, voluntary agencies, business and industry, research and academia, and other governmental sources. Potential models are the US Fish and Wildlife Foundation or the Appalachian Regional Commission;

- **Invest $2.5 billion annually**, the equivalent of what is roughly spent annually by the Federal government on disaster response, in hazard mitigation planning and implementing hazard mitigation projects by creating a National Mitigation Trust fund. This fund could be financed through disaster appropriations, small surcharges on flood insurance and other insurance policies, a disaster stamp and private, tax deductible contributions;

- **Support community disaster resilience efforts** by providing resources, technical assistance and training to community-based groups, nonprofit organizations, business groups, and voluntary organizations to undertake grass roots disaster preparedness and mitigation programs. A model for such efforts is the highly successful Project Impact: Building Disaster Resistant Communities started in the late 90s.

The next President will have the opportunity to build the new partnership of Federal, State and local governments, voluntary agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector that is needed to make our Nation resilient. The question is will the next President take advantage of this opportunity?

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