

**Opening Statement of Chairman Joseph Lieberman
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee Nomination Hearing for W.
Craig Fugate
April 22, 2009**

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Good morning. The hearing will now come to order. Today our Committee will consider the nomination of W. Craig Fugate to be Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Mr. Fugate, welcome. I also want to welcome my friends and colleagues, Senators Bill Nelson and Mel Martinez, who will be introducing the nominee.

Senators Nelson and Martinez have worked closely with Mr. Fugate in his capacity as Director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, a position he has held since October 2001 and which has provided essential preparation for the post to which Mr. Fugate has been nominated.

Before being appointed Director, Mr. Fugate was the Division of Emergency Management's Chief of Preparedness and Response. Before that, he served for 15 years in local government, including 10 years as the Emergency Manager for Alachua County, three years as a Lieutenant

with Alachua County Fire Rescue, and many years as a volunteer firefighter and paramedic.

In each of these positions, Mr. Fugate has provided strong leadership, helping guide the State of Florida and relevant local governments through a range of challenges, including several devastating and deadly hurricanes.

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act - authored by Senator Collins and myself in 2006 to address the failures uncovered by this Committee's investigation into the response to Hurricane Katrina - requires that the FEMA Administrator have a demonstrated ability in and knowledge of emergency management and homeland security and at least five years of executive leadership and management experience. Mr. Fugate's background far exceeds these requirements.

The Post-Katrina Act strengthened FEMA, giving it significantly new and enhanced responsibilities and missions. A very important aspect of the Post-Katrina Act was the decision to keep FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security.

Since passage of the Post-Katrina Act, FEMA has come a long ways, showing steady improvement year by year. FEMA's successful responses to Hurricanes Ike and Gustav in 2008 were proof of the agency's progress and few now dispute that FEMA is a stronger agency than it was before Hurricane Katrina. I particularly hope the career public servants in FEMA appreciate the fact that we appreciate what they have done and what FEMA has done over the last couple of years.

Last April, Department of Homeland Security Inspector General Skinner testified before this Committee that FEMA was better prepared for a catastrophe now than it was when Katrina struck and that actions taken to implement the Post-Katrina Act have resulted in a more muscular agency. More recently, Mr. Skinner testified that FEMA is stronger now than it has ever been in its history as a result of its cooperative relationships within the Department of Homeland Security, the implementation of the Post-Katrina Act, and other improvements made as a result of the lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina.

Additionally, Mr. Skinner reported in February this year that removing FEMA from DHS would be a mistake.

Despite clear signs of FEMA's improvement and the Inspector General's assessments, some continue to advocate for taking FEMA out of DHS. When we drafted the Post-Katrina Act we thought it would be a serious mistake to remove FEMA from the Department and sever its cooperative relationship with other DHS assets.

Our Katrina investigation found that FEMA had never been capable of handling a hurricane the magnitude of Katrina, even when it was a stand-alone agency. And we are certain that stripping FEMA from DHS now would undermine the positive developments of the past few years and once again throw FEMA and its employees into turmoil.

Although FEMA has come a long way, the new Administrator will face many tough challenges. Among the top priorities will be kick-starting what has become a stalled recovery to Hurricane Katrina; developing a long-term recovery strategy and improving FEMA's recovery programs; completing plans to respond to future large-scale

disasters; working with states to ensure they are better prepared for response and recovery responsibilities; and better tracking where our homeland security grant dollars are going to ensure they are being used most effectively to strengthen our national preparedness.

The next FEMA Administrator, of course, will be responsible for continuing to implement the Post-Katrina Act so that FEMA really does become the world class standard for emergency management that we want and need it to be..

Everything I know of Mr. Fugate's record suggests he is the best man for this job. Furthermore, he has the support of his peers, having been endorsed by the International Association of Emergency Managers, the National Emergency Management Association, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the National Sheriffs Association, and Florida Governor Charles Crist.

I look forward to your testimony this morning and working with you in the coming months and years if you are confirmed.

Thank you. Senator Collins?

