

**SUGGESTED QUESTIONS
FOR CONFIRMATION HEARING OF
FEMA ADMINISTRATOR NOMINEE MR. CRAIG FUGATE**

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About Disaster Accountability Project

The Disaster Accountability Project (DAP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the improvement of the United States disaster management systems through public accountability, citizen oversight and empowerment, whistle-blower engagement, and policy research and advocacy.

What We Do

1) Real-Time/Immediate Oversight: DAP runs a toll-free hotline (866-9-TIP-DAP) that allows survivors and relief workers to report gaps or shortcomings in services in the immediate aftermath of disasters and works to get gaps addressed by responsible agencies and organizations.

2) Policy Oversight: DAP engages in informed and targeted policy oversight and advocacy to ensure that disaster planning, law, and policy are comprehensive, inclusive, and reflect best practices and lessons learned from recent disasters. Problems reported to the DAP hotline provide tangible and real-time examples that DAP works to address through long-term policy change.

3) Citizen Engagement: DAP engages citizens across the United States to ask informed questions, learn about local and regional preparedness efforts, and demand transparency and accountability in local disaster planning and management systems.

Our History

As the most expensive, and arguably most devastating, natural disaster in modern U.S. history, Hurricane Katrina exposed critical deficiencies in disaster management on all levels. These failures illustrated the dire need for public accountability in government agencies and nonprofit organizations responsible for disaster preparedness, response, relief, and recovery. At the time, no citizen watchdog existed to provide oversight to FEMA, the American Red Cross, and other agencies and organizations that comprise the U.S. disaster management system. DAP was founded in 2007 to fill that need.

DAP has been profiled and/or quoted in national, regional, and local media ranging from: ABC News, AP, Politico, Houston Chronicle, Baton Rouge Advocate, The Hartford Courant, Sun Herald, South Florida Sun Sentinel, and public radio stations in Minnesota and Connecticut.

In 2008, DAP received an Echoing Green Fellowship.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Contact: Ben Smilowitz, 314-761-7631

**Disaster Accountability Project Calls For Meaningful Confirmation Hearing of
FEMA Administrator Nominee**

Prepares Questions For Fugate Confirmation Hearing Set For Wed, 4/22 @ 10AM

**DAP to Nominee: "Tell The Public How You Will Fix FEMA Before Your
Confirmation"**

On Wednesday, April 22, the Senate Homeland Security Committee is set to confirm Craig Fugate for FEMA's top spot. The Disaster Accountability Project is asking Craig Fugate, the President's FEMA Administrator nominee, to explain how he plans to fix FEMA before he is confirmed. The bungled response to Hurricane Katrina underscores the need for the Senate to provide comprehensive FEMA oversight.

--Questions For Senate Committee Below--

The Baton Rouge Advocate editorial staff endorsed the Disaster Accountability Project's position that the Senate should use Mr. Fugate's confirmation hearing as an opportunity to learn if, and exactly how, FEMA is turning a new page.

See: <http://www.2theadvocate.com/opinion/41004072.html>

"The Senate has an opportunity to create a new 'culture of accountability' in the confirmation of a new FEMA Administrator. Wednesday's hearing should set clear benchmarks for FEMA improvements that the public can monitor. The nation cannot afford a rubber-stamping of FEMA's leader while the nation remains dangerously unprepared for hurricane season and other man-made and natural hazards," **said Ben Smilowitz, Executive Director of the Disaster Accountability Project.**

To achieve that end, the Disaster Accountability Project has prepared a number of questions the organization is sending to Senators and Mr. Fugate. Full-text of the questions and more extensive background can be viewed below.

The Disaster Accountability Project (DAP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to the improvement of the United States disaster management systems through public accountability, citizen oversight and empowerment, whistle-blower engagement, and policy research and advocacy. The Disaster Accountability Project's website is <http://www.DisasterAccountability.org> .

A toll-free hotline (866-9-TIP-DAP) is available as a public service for disaster survivors, workers and volunteers to report critical gaps in disaster prevention, response, relief, and recovery services or planning. The group is recruiting a national network of Disaster Accountability Monitors and Bloggers to help report, verify, and publicize gaps in disaster services or planning.

Disaster Accountability Project is a 2008 Echoing Green Fellowship Organization.

For more information: <http://www.echoinggreen.org/fellows/ben-smilowitz>

**SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR CONFIRMATION HEARING
OF FEMA ADMINISTRATOR NOMINEE, MR. CRAIG FUGATE**

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Supporting Local and State Emergency Plan Development

Background

In April 2009, the Disaster Accountability Project released a report on an exercise reviewing the emergency plans of 22 Southern Louisiana parishes. The purpose of the exercise was to (1) determine public accessibility of parish emergency plans and (2) evaluate the comprehensiveness of the available emergency plans. The report identified plans missing key review criteria (such as being outdated or failing to include plans for evacuating the homeless) and parishes that need to improve plan accessibility.

The report finds that FEMA and the State of Louisiana have been less than vigilant in requiring parishes to maintain updated emergency plans and supporting them in achieving that end. It is very likely that the problems exposed by this exercise are not isolated to Louisiana. This reality necessitates a sustained intervention by FEMA and other related federal agencies to ensure state and local governments are completely prepared for disasters and, more specifically, the approaching hurricane season.

The Disaster Accountability Project is recommending that FEMA attach related conditions to preparedness grants by requiring the development of comprehensive emergency plans that account for best practices. To qualify for additional funding, FEMA should require that state and local governments develop and/or maintain comprehensive emergency plans. Additionally, FEMA should proactively send teams of specialists to state and local governments to provide technical support for emergency plan updating and development.

Questions

1) As FEMA Administrator, what will you do to ensure state and local governments maintain the most comprehensive and updated emergency plans? Would you support attaching requirements to FEMA's preparedness grants that require state and local governments to maintain updated and comprehensive emergency plans?

Additional Questions

Communication- Given your background in local and state emergency management, you are in a unique position because you understand the varying needs of different levels of emergency management. How can you enhance communication amongst local and state emergency management leaders to provide a more fluid response to disasters?

FEMA Oversight- According to a March 12, 2009 AP report, you have “plenty of hurricane experience, a blunt style, and a belief that preparation begins on the local level.” Given this belief that preparation begins on the local level, how can you equalize the resources available to counties of all sizes, given that larger counties generally have greater access to media, technology, and funding to respond to emergencies? Will FEMA engage in any sort of oversight of local emergency planning and response?

Inter and Intra Agency Inefficiencies

Background

The September 2008 GAO report on Voluntary Organizations criticized FEMA for "not fully assessing the capabilities of relief groups and for not clearly documenting the roles that each should play in a disaster." [See (a) below].

The lack of clearly defined roles discussed in the GAO report was evident after Hurricane Ike. The Red Cross made plans to close its Houston shelters after about a month, despite the 300 individuals still remaining. [See (b) below]. The long-term Disaster Housing Assistance Program was not scheduled to start until Nov. 1 and many were told they did not qualify.

Harvey Johnson, FEMA's Deputy Administrator at the time, admitted "We were talking to each other, but we weren't communicating." [See (c) below]. These communication problems also led situations where otherwise ready mobile homes could not be occupied because power had not yet been turned on. Delays have also been caused by breakdowns in communication and coordination with local governments.

Local organizations often play a valuable role in disaster preparedness, relief, response, and recovery as their on-the-ground presence and situational awareness positions them well to respond to immediate post-disaster needs. However, significant benefit is lost because these organizations often have a very difficult time coordinating with the national agencies and organizations, such as FEMA and the American Red Cross, due to a lack of experience, knowledge, and assigned liaisons between the organizations. [See (d) below].

The current system for the provision of housing assistance is marred with inefficiencies that result in unnecessary hurdles for disaster survivors. As currently arranged, FEMA does initial research on claims and then refers potential beneficiaries of housing aid to HUD, who in turn does further research and puts the names in the Disaster Information System. Once in the system, individuals are considered eligible referrals and are directed toward Public Housing Agencies. [See (e) below].

Most recently, a decision made within FEMA indicated deep-rooted and persistent inefficiency and dysfunction. After being instructed to keep receipts, most Hurricane Gustav evacuees requested evacuation reimbursements for the three days following the storm. However, arguing that these three days were prior to the formal Disaster Declaration, FEMA denied all claims made in that time period. [See (f) below].

Question

How will FEMA's approach change to ensure there is more inter- and intra-agency coordination to ensure those in the greatest need are not left without essential services or supplies in the immediate and extended aftermath of a disaster?

Additional Questions

Evacuations- You have spoken of economic barriers to evacuation in response to Hurricane Wilma. Presumably, most of these barriers are systemic and are not within the auspices of FEMA. How will you work with other agencies, both local, state, and federal in improving and reducing the economic barriers to evacuation?

General- Cooperation with the Army Corps of Engineers is an essential ingredient to a proper response to flooding along the Mississippi River and implementation of the Blue Roof Program. How will you keep the lines of communication open and collaborate with the Corp to effectively serve those affected by flooding and storms?

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- (d) Voluntary Organizations: FEMA Should More Fully Assess Organization's Mass Care Capabilities and Update the Red Cross Role in Catastrophic Events, GAO-08-823, Sept. 18, 2008, pp. 54-58, <http://gao.gov/products/GAO-08-823> .
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- (f) Katy Reckdahl, FEMA unlikely to pay for hotel evacuation during Gustav, New Orleans Times Picayune, April 17, 2009, http://www.nola.com/news/index.ssf/2009/04/colley_photo_for_evacuate.html .

Mass Care Issues

Background

The sinking economy, post-Katrina donor-fatigue, and the absence of prolonged national media coverage of post-disaster issues has created a major funding crisis for the American Red Cross. [See (a) below]. This has resulted reductions in staff, a transition from paid staff to potentially less reliable, less experienced volunteer staff, and the closing of Red Cross chapters throughout the country. [See (b) below].

This past fall, Congress gave the Red Cross \$100 million, \$50 million short of what was requested, in order continue disaster relief services. [See (c) below]. Overwhelmed by the high number of disasters in the last year, the American Red Cross had to rely on the federal government to provide funding to continue operations.

The September 2008 GAO Report on Volunteer Organizations identified specific and general problems with relying on volunteer organizations to provide care. In particular, the Report's initial assessments determined that the major voluntary organizations would be completely overwhelmed in the event of another disaster on the scale of Katrina. [See (d) below].

After Hurricane Katrina, the National Response Framework changed the role of the American Red Cross from the primary agency responsible for mass care, to its current role as a lead supporting agency under the newly issued National Response Framework. [See (e) below]. However, the Catastrophic Incident Supplement to the Framework still cites the Red Cross as being the primary mass care organization.

Question

Given the fact that the American Red Cross is not capable of filling the role of primary agency for mass care, how can FEMA compensate and ensure that mass care services will be adequately provided? When will FEMA clearly document the expectations of the Red Cross and other volunteer organizations relating to mass care? When will FEMA come out with the revised Supplement?

Additional Question

In October 2005, during your tenure as Director of Florida's Division of Emergency Management, Hurricane Wilma struck southwest Florida. Three days following the hurricane, Floridians reported shortages of essentials including food, water, electricity, and fuel. You were quoted in an October 27, 2005 article appearing in the South Florida Sun-Sentinel stating, "We did not meet expectations." [See (f) below]. In your capacity as Director of Florida's Division of Emergency Management, you are charged with "coordinating disaster response, recovery, preparedness and mitigation efforts with each of Florida's 67 counties and local governments." Given your admitted failures to adequately respond to the needs of Floridians after Hurricane Wilma, paired with the

criticisms of FEMA's response to Hurricane Katrina, how can you ensure that as FEMA Administrator, your agency will adequately response to the needs of Americans after disasters?

References

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- (d) GAO Report: Voluntary Organizations, Sept. 2008, p. 35.
- (e) Id. at 3.
- (f) Robert Nolan et. al., What A Mess, Sun-Sentinel, Oct. 27, 2005, <http://tinyurl.com/cv8nro> .

Communications

Background

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Ike, residents and relief workers in affected areas reported a lack of information about the location of shelters, open hospitals, and points of distribution. [See (a) below]. The most common problem reported was that people did not know where to go to access relief services and how to obtain them. [See (b) below]. Millions were without power and had no access to television or the internet, but were continuously directed to the internet to obtain information about relief services. [See (c) below].

In 2007, the GAO reviewed the Emergency Alert System and found that it does not have the capacity to relay information about all open shelters and points of distribution after a disaster and it may be unreasonable to expect commercial radio to provide that information with uniform regularity. In fact, a Federal Communications Commission report from 2002 strongly argued for dedicated public radio stations rather than trying to assert content control over private broadcasters. [See (d) below]. The GAO offered two recommendations to the FEMA Administrator: (A) review the effectiveness of the system that disseminates national-level EAS alerts and ensure that the people using the system have adequate training, and (B) create a forum for stakeholders in emergency communication to discuss issues regarding an integrated public alert system. [See (e) below].

Question

Many local and state governments lack effective means of extensive communication with the public during emergencies. Given recent GAO findings that the current Emergency Alert System has limitations, coupled with the reality of piecemeal information provided by public or commercial radio, how can FEMA ensure adequate disaster relief information is provided to the public in a timely fashion?

Question

As FEMA Administrator, how will FEMA work with states and vulnerable communities to ensure information about post-disaster relief services is provided effectively, especially when television and internet is not available? Might FEMA provide preparedness grants to states, counties, or municipalities to create radio stations dedicated to providing emergency information?

Additional Question

Foreign Language- According to a 2003 report by the U.S. Census Bureau, nearly 1 in 5 people, or 47 million U.S. residents age 5 and older speak a language other than English at home. Given the growing multilingual populations in our country, how is FEMA prepared to handle and how can FEMA improve handling communicating with people

who are non-English speakers?

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Disability Policy

Background

Two years after President Bush issued Executive Order 13347 – Individuals With Disabilities in Emergency Preparedness, Congress approved Section 513 of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act in compliance with the President’s policy initiative. [See (a) below]. Section 513(a) dictates that “[t]he Disability Coordinator shall report directly to the Administrator, in order to ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are being properly addressed in emergency preparedness and disaster relief.” [See (b) below].

This undertaking requires, among other things, that the Disability Coordinator interact with a range of governmental offices and citizen advocacy groups, ensure the use and efficacy of telephone lines, websites and video programming distributors in times of emergencies, incorporate the needs of individuals with disabilities into national preparedness systems, and ensure accessible transportation for individuals in the event of an evacuation.

To fulfill these mandates, the FEMA National Advisory Council’s Special Needs Subcommittee advised that FEMA create a Regional Disability Coordinator position in each of the ten FEMA Regions. [See (c) below]. This structure would provide the Disability Coordinator with the means necessary to effectively craft policy, curriculum, and training at the national level and oversee their application across the country. Furthermore, Regional Disability Coordinators would enable the National Disability Coordinator to more accurately monitor the application and provision of FEMA services to those with additional needs.

Preamble

Congress has authorized the creation of 10 Regional Disability Coordinator positions, but it appears that FEMA will not prioritize the creation of these positions until the 2011 fiscal year. [See (d) below].

Question

In light of Section 513 of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act and the federal government’s commitment to providing disaster preparedness and assistance to individuals with disabilities, as FEMA Administrator, how will you prioritize the creation of these regional disability coordinator positions and fund these positions in the current or next fiscal year?

Additional Questions

Disability- Section 513 of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform (PKEMRA) establishes a Disability Coordinator, intended to report directly to the FEMA

Administrator and "ensure that the needs of the individuals with disabilities are being properly addressed in emergency preparedness and disaster relief." The Disability Coordinator, however, is currently housed within the Office of Equal Rights and reports to the Director of that office, not the FEMA Administrator. The current scheme also fails to provide the Disability Coordinator with any staff. What would you do to remedy this situation? Would you be receptive to moving the Disability Coordinator to the Office of the Administrator and expanding it to include a staff and Regional Coordinators?

Disability- Florida recently created the position of disability coordinator for emergency services. You were quoted as asking, "What if there's a disaster, and you haven't thought ahead? These populations could really be in trouble. That's why we need someone who knows both sides of this problem and can be a facilitator." How will you implement these values in FEMA to improve service delivery for those with disabilities?

References

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First Responder Budget Cuts and FEMA Grants

Background

The economic downturn has caused budget reductions for a number of agencies and organizations that play an important role in the disaster/emergency management system. Cities and states have been forced to make dramatic budget cuts that affect firefighters, police officers, and other first responders. Additionally, organizations with key Mass Care roles in the National Response Framework, like the American Red Cross, have made cuts throughout the country, closing chapters, laying off staff, and relying on volunteers to carry even more weight in core emergency response activities.

Budget cuts have created situations where there are far fewer full-time firefighters and police officers in disaster prone areas.

State/Local Budget Cut Highlights

FL: Miami Beach, FL was forced to turn five of their eight firefighter positions into “civilian inspectors.” [See (a) below]. Cape Coral, FL, has been hit extremely hard. The Cape Coral Fire Department is unable to staff a tanker, two rescue units, and a fire truck as a result of the elimination of 25 firefighter positions. [See (b) below]. The Police Department has been hit equally as hard, losing 29 officers resulting in understaffed field operations and special programs.

NYC: In December, New York City decided to hire fewer firefighters, reduce training, and close four companies from 6 p.m. until 9 a.m. in an attempt to trim its firefighting budget. [See (c) below]. While officials said this would not create any danger, the president of the Uniformed Firefighters Association pointed out that the cuts are coming when the department was responding to the most emergency calls in its history.

TX: The Galveston, TX Police and Fire departments were recently faced with the choice of job cuts or pay reductions. [See (d) below]. The decision to cut pay leaves these local heroes in a tough position after suffering great losses after Hurricane Ike.

SC: Columbia, South Carolina was forced to cut 3 of 8 firefighters and one of two trucks at two stations. [See (e) below]. According to Fire Chief Bradley Anderson, these cuts will still not be enough for the fire department (that covers all of Richmond County) to make its budget.

LA: 1) Even before economic downturn, police staffing was cut after Katrina. Staffing is down across the board due to mandated budget cuts that were well below an acceptable level before the storm. The NOPD has lost about 400 police officers from a cadre of 1700. [See (f) below].

2) Mayor Nagin imposed an immediate hiring freeze for all departments and reduced the Police Department's authorized strength from 1,700 officers to about 1,550 and the City

currently has about 1,450 officers in place. [See (g) below].

3) Gov. Jindal is reportedly considering budget cuts that would effectively close 10 public hospitals in Louisiana. [See (h) below].

MO: 1) Kansas City police might need to ground their helicopters, lose 54 officer positions and force week-long unpaid furloughs to deal with looming budget cuts. Police also are considering freezing civilian hiring, which would leave 41 positions vacant. And they could eliminate \$1 million in overtime pay -- equal to losing work conducted by 36 patrol officers over the course of a year, police said. [See (i) below].

(2) Five police and five firefighter (as well as 7 other emergency support) positions eliminated due to budget constraints. [See (j) below].

Existing FEMA Grants

FEMA does currently have a grant program to provide assistance to fire departments to help cover this gap. The FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG), Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S), and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants are all available to help fire departments avoid personnel reductions that put public safety at risk. [See (k) below]. Florida fire departments recently received nearly \$300,000 in funding through the AFG program. [See (l) below].

While these grants do provide substantial support, fire departments around the country are still forced to make cuts. As states and municipalities continue to slash budgets, the 2009 budget for the AFG program was increased by less than 1%. [See (m) below].

Some fire departments have even begun to turn down SAFER grants due to its five year commitment requirement. [See (n) below]. The grant is set up to cover 90% of a newly hired firefighter's salary and benefits in the first year, but decreases incrementally over the next four years to the point where the fire department must pay that firefighter's entire salary in the fifth year of the commitment.

Question

As FEMA Administrator, 1) how will FEMA address the increasing number of cuts in first-responder services across the United States? 2) What is FEMA's role in assisting local first-responder units facing cuts due to state and municipal budget deficits? 3) What changes would you make to these grant programs?

Additional Question

Economy- The economy is in recession. Funding for governmental programs will be difficult to come by in the coming years. How will this economy affect the way in which positions are filled? Will there be fewer employees hired, due to the economy? Further, will the economy affect the way in which FEMA will be able to respond to disasters? Will there be fewer resources available to disaster victims, or does FEMA have a plan to

avoid the affects of the current economic climate? If so, would you please explain.

References

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Long Term vs. Short Term Post-Disaster Housing

Background

FEMA's housing strategy can be boiled down to two phases: a) the initial "short-term" hotel/motel program, and b) the longer term Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP). As an onlooker, the system seems comprehensive and easy to understand, but when one places him- or herself in the shoes of someone in need of post-disaster housing, coordination efforts are difficult to follow and the criteria which must be met for both phases is confusing.

Even Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano admits that there has been (and remains) confusion about what is required to receive FEMA assistance. [See (a) below]. Because of this, many evacuees in need never reach the point at which DHAP becomes an option. While waiting for review of their FEMA claim appeals, many must choose between homelessness or short-term housing options for extended periods of time. [See (b) below].

In recognition of the higher costs of temporary housing, rather than dealing in a manner that would be most helpful to disaster evacuees forced to stay in hotels and other forms of temporary housing, FEMA has found loopholes to avoid such financial responsibility. A common loophole seems to be the ambiguity in criteria used to determine if a home is habitable; many people whose homes are clearly uninhabitable are denied aid, and in the alternative, transitional housing applications are denied on account of unavoidable peculiarities like losing identification paperwork in a disaster. [See (c) below]. The Senate Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery has taken note of FEMA's use of these loopholes and published a report exposing FEMA's preference for short-term disaster housing and the significant costs that result. [See (d) below].

It appears as though the new Administration sees the need for reform, and although plans have been unveiled to boost funding for long-term post-disaster housing assistance and other rebuilding efforts, it will take some time for the impact of these decisions to be determined. [5]

Questions

1) Under your leadership as FEMA Administrator, a) will FEMA focus on a short- or long-term housing strategy, b) what efforts will be made to ensure this planning happens before a major storm so people know what to expect from their government, c) how will you prioritize this?

2) Under your leadership as FEMA Administrator, how will FEMA streamline the process of obtaining housing assistance and improving public communication about FEMA housing assistance, so fewer people are caught in limbo, living in short-term housing for long periods of time?

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Additional Questions

Staffing- FEMA has been significantly increasing its staff in recent years. What measures will you take to assure that this staff will have the necessary experience and skill to deal with the complex issues and the confusion that arises during a disaster?

Public Image in FEMA- Following the inadequate responses to some national disasters, like Hurricane Katrina, FEMA seems to be in need of an image overhaul. How do you plan on restoring the public's faith in this agency?

Accountability- Following what was categorized as a botched response to Hurricane Katrina, Michael Brown quit his position as Administrator of FEMA. Shortly thereafter, in a September 6, 2005 article appearing in the Washington Post, you stated "It's easy to play the blame game, find a scapegoat, but no one person could be responsible for the challenges we face and the lives lost." If not the FEMA Administrator, who is responsible for the adequacy of the federal government's response to disasters? As Administrator, are you willing to be held accountable for the decisions made by your agency?

General- During the course of your work in Florida, you described that the state had lost its culture of preparedness. What is a culture of preparedness, and how will you work to address this issue on a national level?

General- Mr. Fugate, you rejected an offer to manage FEMA after Michael Brown quit his position as administrator. What has changed about the agency that makes this position more appealing to you now?

General- Is FEMA properly designed to respond to a Katrina-size catastrophe, and if not, how can it be remade to answer such needs?

General- Is it time for a full-scale overhaul of the federal legislation that guides disaster response? What would you change?