

**God help FEMA... the president and congress had forgot them until just this last weekend.**

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As our nation and the people along the gulf coast region respond to the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, we will be reminded again just, how important it is to have a federal agency that is capable of dealing with natural disasters like this one. This is a human tragedy, one that effects on millions of people. It is beyond the capabilities of state and local government to deal with, thus it requires a federal response. That makes this all the more difficult to understand why, over the last four years, the federal agency for dealing with such events, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has been all but dismantled by the Department of Homeland Security.

Whether elected officials and government leaders realize it or not, homeland security now consists almost entirely for protection against terrorist acts. In most all cases homeland security agencies are operated by law enforcement and military personnel who have little knowledge of emergency management or natural disaster preparedness. The best example of the homeland security mind set is that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is no longer responsible for disaster preparedness? That move for all practical purposes closed the doors on the Federal Emergency Management Agency. Now looking at both preparedness and response to hurricane Kitrina, how much sense does it make that homeland security is in charge of our preparedness for natural disasters? FEMA was once more of the most efficient federal agencies with in our government, providing assistance and direction to Americans in times of disaster. But as Kitrina approached and now after it's devastation on the gulf coast, FEMA is lost somewhere in the bureaucracy know as the Department of Homeland Security.

It was none other than Ohio Senator George Voinovich who last year fought to keep the Emergency Management Assistance Funds in the federal budget and keep the local emergency management agencies across the country open. While everyone else was focused on Homeland Security, they forgot we have natural disasters, hopefully Kitrina has sent awake up call. Now is the time for the federal government to lead state and local governments to refocus attention on emergency management at all levels, with definite separation of emergency management and homeland security. Emergency managers at the state and local level are totally confused about where they fit into the homeland security system. While the focus has been on terrorism, we emergency managers knew that natural disaster would continue. Those of us who have been part of emergency management for years find ourselves still trying to focus on an "all-hazards" approach, but have been overwhelmed with the responsibilities of homeland security.

Yes, another terrorist attack, is not only possible but likely and we should be prepared for such an event. But I will guarantee you that tornadoes will continue to strike all across our nation, our river valleys will continue to flood each spring and summer,

winter storms will cause power outages and snarl traffic, major earthquakes in time will occur in the Midwest as well as California, and all of these disaster must be prepared for on a weekly and daily basis by all levels of our government. All of these natural disasters will happen

sooner or later, we know it and we must work everyday to mitigate the damage they will cause and prepare for the response when they do occur.

Senator George Voinovich looks like the wisest man in the congress today. If not for his support of emergency management the situation we face today might be even worse. Hopefully, Senator Voinovich will find many supporters in congress now to continue the work of FEMA, as well as state and local emergency management agencies.

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