

May 15, 2007

WASHINGTON (15 May) - U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL) today questioned a panel of Florida state and federal emergency management officials on national hurricane readiness during their testimony before the House Homeland Security Committee.

Just two weeks before the official start of the new hurricane season, FEMA director R. David Paulison and Florida Emergency Management Director William "Craig" Fugate, were among the panelists discussing FEMA's preparations and the level of national hurricane readiness.

Congressman Bilirakis, a member of the Committee, strongly advocated for Director Fugate's testimony to establish a sense of Florida's preparedness. Fugate suggested that the federal government take a more proactive role in disaster preparedness. "Stop responding to disasters, and start mitigating," said Fugate.

In his remarks to FEMA Director Paulison, Rep. Bilirakis said, "many experts have predicted that this hurricane season will be 'very active.' Obviously, those of us who represent coastal states are very concerned about this potentially dangerous forecast." Bilirakis said that the Administration should support legislation he has introduced (H.R. 913) that would provide tax incentives for Americans who invest in their property to better withstand hurricane and tornado-force winds.

Next week kicks off Hurricane Preparedness Week (May 20-26, 2007), which seeks to raise awareness and preparation about the potential for hurricane disasters. "I encourage all Floridians to take this week to talk with their family members about having a plan ready in the event of a hurricane," said Bilirakis. "This is a good time to learn more about the type of information about disaster preparedness that can save lives."

Florida's Division of Emergency Management's website recommends taking the following steps to prepare for the 2007 Hurricane Season, which runs from June 1 through November 30.

- * Have a family disaster plan and disaster supply kit.
- * Build or identify a Safe-Room in your Home
- * Purchase and use a weather radio in your home with a tone alert feature to receive warnings issued by your local National Weather Service office.
- * Inquire if your Community is StormReady - a voluntary program run by the National Weather Services that prepares communities with an action plan responsive to all threat types of severe weather.

More information about these and other disaster preparedness recommendations can be found at <http://www.floridadisaster.org>. The Department of Homeland Security and FEMA also

provide checklists and information on natural disasters and other threats at
<http://ready.gov>
and
<http://fema.gov/plan>

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