

## Rep. Bilirakis Questions FEMA's Fugate on Tampa Bay's Hurricane Preparedness

WASHINGTON (8 July) — During a House Homeland Security Committee hearing Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.) questioned FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate on how prepared Florida, and specifically, the Tampa Bay area is for a major hurricane.

Recently a report published by the Tampa Bay Regional Planning Council titled "Economic Analysis of a Hurricane Event in Hillsborough County, Florida" suggested that a category 3 storm, which is considered major, could result in nearly \$20 billion in estimated property damage in the first year after the storm. In addition, the report projected 150,000 job losses and a \$9 billion dollar decrease in gross regional product.

During Wednesday's hearing, Bilirakis asked about the most effective actions families and individuals can take to help federal and state emergency management officials in their efforts to minimize life and property loss that could result from a major hurricane.

"One of my greatest concerns during hurricane season is that a major storm will hit the Tampa Bay area, resulting in loss of life and wide-scale property damage that could cripple our state's economy," said Bilirakis. "What are the most effective actions my constituents can take to help federal and state emergency management officials in their efforts to minimize life and property loss that could result from a major hurricane?"

Fugate emphasized that the general public must play an active part in the effort to prepare and respond to a hurricane by having a plan in place, being familiar with first aid, and finally checking on neighbors to determine if they need assistance. He also stressed the importance of heeding calls by local officials to evacuate promptly in the event of a major storm, noting that Tampa Bay area residents would face significant traffic congestion in an evacuation scenario.

"Since this hurricane season has already begun, it is imperative that we all do our best to prepare for what is expected to be a 'near-normal' storm year," Bilirakis added after the hearing. "Disaster readiness should not solely lie on the shoulders of the government. Individuals must properly prepare themselves for the worst case scenario."

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