

LARSON CALLS FOR BROWN'S RESIGNATION AND RETURN OF FEMA TO CABINET-LEVEL POSITION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 7, 2005

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The Nation's Security and the Welfare of its People Need Competence not Cronyism

WASHINGTON – Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today joined a growing list of lawmakers in calling for the resignation of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director Michael D. Brown and urging that FEMA be returned to a Cabinet-level position.

FEMA was established in 1979 as an independent agency and was elevated to a Cabinet-level position during the Clinton Administration. In 2002, FEMA was downgraded to an agency within the newly created Department of Homeland Security.

“The Director of FEMA should be fully credentialed in emergency preparedness and vetted by the United States Senate,” said Larson. “There is no more important position in the federal government than being in charge of the response to emergencies and disasters that occur within our borders. This individual should have the ear of the President and the necessary experience to deal with emergency situations.

“Unfortunately, FEMA has become a patronage shop filled with President Bush's friends, not professional emergency managers. Director Brown was asked to resign from his previous job at the International Arabian Horse Association before being hired by his old college roommate at FEMA. As is evidenced by the host of errors and miscalculations by FEMA in the wake of this hurricane, he does not have the experience to deal with this disaster and should resign immediately to allow someone more capable to take charge.

“Before being engulfed by the bureaucracy of the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA had been successful at disaster response. Natural disasters differ from terrorist attacks and the response to Hurricane Katrina is an indication that this was the wrong move.”

Larson added, “As we have seen with this disaster, more needs to be done within the federal government. FEMA should be charged with creating a national pre-disaster mitigation plan to identify and prioritize across the country locations most likely to be effected by such non-terrorist disasters as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, oil spills, or nuclear power incidents. It must improve interoperability of communications between federal, state, and local authorities. Additionally, it should be working to unify families that have been scattered.

“The ultimate responsibility for preventing harm from and responding to natural disasters falls on the federal government. There will be plenty of time to examine the response to Hurricane Katrina, but these steps should be taken immediately to ensure nothing like the devastation we have seen on the Gulf Coast happens again.”

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