



**One Hundred Eleventh Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515**

February 6, 2009

Nancy Ward
Acting Administrator
Federal Emergency Management Agency
500 C. Street, SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Administrator Ward:

I am writing to express concern about the sluggish pace employed by the State of Mississippi in expending disaster funds in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

On August 29, 2005, the same day that Hurricane Katrina made landfall along the Mississippi coast, President Bush issued an emergency disaster declaration allowing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to provide federal funding to the State of Mississippi. Three and a half years later, FEMA reported to this Committee that Mississippi has used just over one-half of the \$2.865 billion in federal funds provided to the State for public assistance. This is extremely troubling given the obvious need for recovery assistance along the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

According to a "Financial Status Report" signed and submitted to FEMA on October 25, 2008 by the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), over \$1.263 billion of the Public Assistance funds are still unobligated. Public Assistance funds are typically used to remove disaster debris and to restore roads, bridges, sewers, and other critical infrastructure such as harbors and marinas. In essence, as of October 2008 the State of Mississippi has used only an estimated 56% of the awarded Public Assistance funds. Clearly, the failure to quickly and effectively make use of these funds when so many lives and communities remain devastated deeply concerns me.

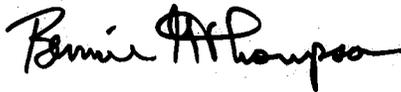
In addition, I am concerned about the state's apparently lethargic pace in accessing funds from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP). HMGP funds can be used to provide long term solutions to specific risks on public or private property. Not only can this money be used to elevate flood-prone homes and businesses, but it can also be used by local governments to purchase flood prone homes and retrofit public buildings to minimize damage from future hazards. According to FEMA officials, Mississippi was awarded \$142 million through the HMGP, but as of December 31, 2008 the State had only expended \$28 million. Clearly given the importance of this program in promoting

hazard mitigation projects that reduce the loss of life and destruction of property in future disasters, I am at a loss to understand a rationale that would explain why less than 20% of available funds have been expended well over three years later.

Therefore, pursuant to Rule X (3)(g) and Rule XI of the Rules of the United States House of Representatives, I request that you provide this committee a full report of Mississippi's use of Public Assistance and HMGP funds by February 23, 2009. This report should account for all funds awarded to the State through Public Assistance or HMGP, including the Public Assistance funds that have yet to be expended. Additionally, because HMGP funding requires that a project be completed prior to reimbursement, please provide me with the dollar values of any HMGP funding requests made by the state of Mississippi that may be awaiting approval or reimbursement from FEMA or MEMA. If there are no requests currently awaiting FEMA approval, please provide this information as it becomes available.

Should you have any questions, please contact Cherri Branson, Chief Oversight Counsel, Committee on Homeland Security, at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial "B".

Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security

BGT: dh