

Oregon troops sent to assist Gulf Coast after Katrina continue to await reimbursement for services

December 7, 2006

Press Release | Contact: Danielle Langone (202) 225-6416

WASHINGTON, DC—All seven members of the Oregon delegation sent a letter today to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) urging the agency to reimburse the Oregon National Guard as promised for the emergency assistance it provided to areas affected by Hurricane Katrina.

Because of the federal government's belated response to Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco enlisted the Oregon National Guard to assist in the relief effort. The Oregon National Guard exceeded expectations by deploying over 2,100 soldiers and their equipment to New Orleans in less than three days. However, over a year later, FEMA has not reimbursed the Oregon National Guard for the \$2.7 million the Guard expended in the relief effort.

These reimbursement funds are vital to the Oregon Military Department, which is facing a significant shortfall because of this unresolved issue.

The text of the letter is below:

December 21, 2006

The Honorable R. David Paulison
Federal Emergency Management Agency
Federal Center Plaza
500 C Street SW
Washington, DC 20472

Dear Director Paulison:

We are writing the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) role in the lengthy delay in reimbursing the Oregon National Guard for the expenses incurred in rendering assistance to Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco asked Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski to send the Oregon National Guard to assist in the relief effort. The

Oregon National Guard exceeded all expectations by deploying over 2,100 soldiers and their equipment 1,500 miles to New Orleans in less than 3 days. Their performance while deployed was superb and they have been recognized for the exceptional work they accomplished. Yet, over a year later, the Oregon National Guard has not been reimbursed for \$2.7 million the Guard expended in this relief effort.

Because the federal government did not initially react to the crisis in Louisiana, Oregon's Governor was forced to activate the Guard in state active duty status on September 1, 2005. Because of Oregon's minimum wage laws, Oregon state active duty pay exceeds the Department of Defense pay tables. Under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact these costs are the responsibility of the state that requested the assistance. However, because of the nature of the disaster and assistance provided, there appears to be much confusion regarding FEMA's role in reimbursing the Oregon National Guard.

For more than a year, the Oregon Military Department has continued to seek reimbursement from the State of Louisiana and FEMA for the \$2,727,800.92 expended. The Department is now facing a significant shortfall in their accounts because of this unresolved issue. Brig. Gen. Mike Caldwell of the Oregon Guard was recently quoted in an interview that if the money is not allocated by February, "We could be turning off lights and laying off people."

This issue has been unresolved far too long and we ask that you resolve this matter expeditiously. Because of the timeliness of this matter and its effect on the budget of the Oregon National Guard, we request a response within 15 days.

Sincerely,

/s/

Peter DeFazio
House of Representatives

Ron Wyden
United States Senate

Gordon H. Smith
United States Senate

Earl Blumenauer
House of Representatives

Greg Walden
House of Representatives

Darlene Hooley
House of Representatives

David Wu
House of Representatives