

**Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing
November 27, 2007
Orange County Supervisor Bill Campbell**

Good morning Senator Feinstein and Committee members. I'm Bill Campbell, member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors. I represent Orange County's Third Supervisorial District which includes the Canyon areas which were the areas most heavily impacted by the Santiago Fire.

I want to thank you for holding this hearing to allow local officials to provide you with our insights into the recent fire disasters here in Southern California.

For the Committee's information, I have provided the attached outline that details the fire activities during and after the Santiago Fire in Orange County. The fire events that occurred in Southern California

were cataclysmic. No scenarios had anticipated the number and intensity of the simultaneous fires.

I will be discussing the Federal Government's support efforts, making suggestions for improvements in the Federal Government's response, and describing a funding issue as it relates to the preparations for anticipated flooding due to the fires.

I would like to first compliment the Federal Government for providing their Southwest Incident Management Team, the Federal Fire service agencies, U.S. Forest Service, FEMA, as well as other resources. The Incident Management Team helped augment our Fire command unit and became part of the Unified Command under the National Incident Management System or NIMS. The FEMA personnel arrived first with their mobile unit and then personally visited individual homes. The Federal Agencies have been a tremendous asset; they have been professional and skilled in the areas of their expertise.

During dry, windy weather, there is always the concern that there could be multiple fires at any given time, but because our planning efforts rely on mutual aid from the surrounding counties, CALFIRE, and U.S. Forestry, the response didn't happen as quickly as was needed. Resources from surrounding areas were fully deployed within their immediate fire disaster areas.

Our request at this time would be for the Federal Government to act more rapidly in moving resources from other regions into fire prone areas when adverse weather is forecasted. FEMA presently has a model which, among other things, pre-positions several Urban Search and Rescue Task Forces during predicted hurricane events into the expected theater of operations.

Orange County is currently reviewing the resources that are controlled internally to determine if

there are additional assets or alternative deployments which could improve our response. We would also note that the U.S. Forest Service grounded a sizeable portion of its fleet of air tankers for flight safety reasons and, we're told, has not acquired air assets to restore its fleet either by purchase or contract. We ask that the U.S. Forest Service, with the support of Congress and the President, expedite the acquisition and deployment of an air tanker fleet for future fire disasters.

Post fire recovery efforts in Orange County are underway as we speak. The fire disaster burned much of the vegetation on hillsides and canyons, so the County is working with Federal and State Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) teams to advise residents on how to prepare themselves for the inevitable flooding that will occur during the rains as a result of the fire.

The County is carefully documenting what can be submitted for funding reimbursement through the Federal Government. We have been told that Orange County is not able to seek full reimbursement or funding for specific flood control measures that need to be implemented in order to keep our residents safe from a flood disaster. We have been specifically informed that funding is not available for clearing creek beds and flood control channels in areas that were not impacted by the fire. We believe that it would be shortsighted not to fund protective measures needed as a result of the fires.

In conclusion, Orange County is thankful for the Federal Government's help during and after the fire. We are requesting that the Federal Government move resources into fire disaster areas earlier when catastrophic events occur. We ask that Congress' earlier funding for an air tanker fleet be implemented. And we ask for an expansion of Federal funding to include reimbursement for clearing creek beds and

flood control channels downstream of the immediate fire area.

I would welcome any questions from the Committee.