

The parameters of this study have changed in the past year. In the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and the subsequent and prudent focus on homeland security, the Nation began noticing the relationship of pre-disaster mitigation programs to proposed new preparedness efforts for homeland security. I asked GAO to expand its study to include an assessment of how the increased emphasis on preventing and preparing for terrorism events is affecting natural hazard mitigation.

In March 2002 the administration proposed to change fundamentally FEMA's disaster mitigation strategy again by eliminating the HMGP. Currently, HMGP funding is issued to States after a presidentially declared disaster as a percentage of total Federal assistance, a process deemed ineffective and not cost-efficient by the administration. The administration instead is seeking to fund all mitigation through an expanded Project Impact-like program on a nationally competitive grant basis. The administration believes that such a program will ensure that mitigation funding remains stable from year to year and that the most cost-beneficial projects receive funding. At that time, I asked GAO to include this latest proposal.

GAO interviewed hazard mitigation officials from 24 states to get their perspectives on current FEMA programs and the administration's proposals. The States range from large population States, such as Florida and Illinois, to smaller States, such as Nebraska and Utah. GAO purposely selected both small and large States, containing urban and rural communities, that have received both small and large amounts of mitigation funding. Despite geographic differences, emergency management officials view FEMA's mitigation programs as successful and effective.

Emergency management officials described how, in addition to traditional "brick and mortar" programs, such as retrofitting buildings and relocating properties, mitigation effects can be intangible. Mitigation includes outreach activities, such as increasing public awareness and support for mitigation, building public-private partnerships to pool mitigation resources, and ever-important planning and risk assessment.

We must listen to these officials, the end-users of mitigation programs, when determining program success or failure. These dedicated men and women have many concerns over the administration's proposal. They worry that FEMA will lose the window of opportunity that exists after a disaster strikes if HMGP funds are not included in Federal assistance. This is when public and community interest in mitigating against future disasters is highest. They worry that a competitive grant system might exclude some States entirely from mitigation funding.

GAO also interviewed FEMA officials. FEMA headquarters and regional office personnel identified several challenges in implementing a national competitive grant program. Chief among them is establishing a process for comparing the costs and benefits of projects. Emergency managers around the country share FEMA's concerns that the outreach and planning activities they feel are so important will be curtailed because of the difficulty associated with assigning cost-benefit to such programs. This issue will have ramifications in homeland security when the new Department of Homeland Security is told to determine the cost-benefit of terrorism preparedness efforts.

I was heartened to learn that FEMA is working to ensure and strengthen natural hazard mitigation, response, and recovery efforts while attending to homeland security needs. FEMA officials are identifying and correcting redundancies in reporting, planning, training, and other activities across mitigation and preparedness programs. FEMA mitigation experts are working to identify terrorism mitigation activities that are also "all hazard" and address natural hazard mitigation priorities.

The Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, passed by Congress 2 years ago, emphasized involvement by all States, funding for planning activities, and increased post-disaster mitigation funding for States willing to undertake enhanced mitigation efforts. FEMA has taken our directive to heart and is implementing multi-hazard mitigation programs in coordination and cooperation with State and local officials. While a focus on obtaining the most cost-effective program is well intended, I share the concerns of the emergency management community and FEMA personnel that assigning a dollar amount to the benefit of doing mitigation, or the cost of not doing it, is a difficult and ill-defined task. I share their doubts that consolidating the HMGP and Project Impact programs will make disaster mitigation more effective or successful.

After reviewing the GAO report, FEMA Director Joseph Allbaugh wrote to GAO, "I appreciate your support of my strongly held belief that funding and support of both pre- and post-disaster mitigation programs are critical to FEMA's success in leading the nation to reduce disaster losses." I agree with Director Allbaugh. We must continue to support pre-disaster mitigation as an investment for the future. I commend GAO on their insightful report, and I thank JayEtta Hecker and her team at GAO for their work.

HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, each year between September 15 and October 15, we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month. This tradition began in 1968 when Congress set aside a week to celebrate His-

panic culture, achievements, and contributions to American culture and society. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month-long commemoration.

Gil Coronado, founder and chairman of Heroes and Heritage: Saluting a Legacy of Hispanic Patriotism and Pride, was one of the driving forces behind the creation of Hispanic Heritage Month. Mr. Coronado enlisted with the Air Force when he was just 16. He served for 30 years in Vietnam, Panama, Germany, and Spain before he retired as a colonel. During his stellar career, he received over 35 awards, including the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star. Like Colonel Coronado, countless numbers of Hispanic Americans have answered the call, defending our liberty and freedoms as members of our Armed Forces and in other capacities. Twelve Hispanic Americans were among the firefighters killed on September 11 as they tried to rescue their fellow Americans trapped in the World Trade Center's two towers.

Hispanic contributions to America date back nearly 500 years to Easter, March 27, 1513 when Juan Ponce de Leon sighted land, which he claimed for Spain and named "La Florida," meaning "Land of Flowers." De Leon and his fellow explorers such as Alvarez de Pinela and Cabeza de Vaca traversed most of what we now call America's sunbelt. Hernando de Soto was the first European to discover the Mississippi River, an event depicted in one of the great historical canvases which hang in the Rotunda of the Capitol Building. St. Augustine, FL, was founded in 1565, 42 years before the English colony at Jamestown, VA, and 55 years before the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts. St. Augustine is the oldest permanent European settlement on the North American continent. In 1787, St. Augustine had the first free, integrated public school.

America's diverse and vibrant Hispanic population has made enormous contributions to our Nation, its culture, and its economy. Former Senator Dennis Chavez, union organizers Antonio Pantoja and Caesar Chavez, entertainers Gloria Estefan and Jennifer Lopez, actor Martin Sheen, and baseball players Alex Rodriguez and Sammy Sosa are just a few of the Hispanics Americans who have done so much to enrich all Americans' lives.

My hometown, Detroit, has benefited greatly from Hispanic immigrants pursuing the American Dream. Southwest Detroit, known affectionately as Mexicantown by its residents, is the fastest growing part of the city. Hispanics from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Cuba, and other Caribbean nations have opened businesses, bought homes, and turned a once neglected urban neighborhood into a thriving community and one of the city's centers. Maria Elena Rodriguez, president of the Mexicantown Community Development Corporation, has been one of the primary catalysts of the turnaround.

Hispanic contributions to Michigan's businesses abound. The Kellogg Company, founded and headquartered in Battle Creek, is the world's leading cereal producer. It has millions of customers in over 160 countries. At present, the chief executive officer is Carlos Gutierrez, who started at Kellogg's as a sales representative in Mexico City over 25 years ago.

Other prominent Hispanics with ties to Michigan include Antonia Novello, who started her medical career at the University of Michigan. In 1990, she became the first woman U.S. Surgeon General, and the first Hispanic American to hold the post.

Grammy-winning musician Jose Feliciano, a native of Puerto Rico, made his professional debut at the Retort Coffee House in Detroit in 1963. He is, perhaps, most famous for his Latin-soul version of the Doors' hit, "Light My Fire," a blues-rock rendition of the "Star-Spangled Banner" performed at a 1968 World Series game between Detroit and St. Louis, and the Christmas classic, "Feliz Navidad."

Rebecca Arenas received the "Caesar Chavez Civil Rights Achievement Award" in 2000 for her work to improve the lives of Hispanics generally, and migrant workers in particular. Rebecca's parents brought her to Michigan from Crystal City, TX, when she was 5. They were migrant workers who chose Michigan because they believed Rebecca would get a better education. Rebecca has passed this commitment to education on to her children, all seven of whom have received a postsecondary education. Rebecca has worked tirelessly to increase Hispanics' access to education and health care and to boost their voter registration.

Hispanic Americans constitute the fastest growing segment of our population. Right now, one in eight Americans is Hispanic—about 32 million Americans. By 2050, one in four Americans will be Hispanic. Hispanic Americans are the fastest growing small business owners nationwide. Hispanic Americans will purchase \$580 billion in goods and services this year. By 2007, that purchasing power will increase by 315 percent to \$926 billion.

Cities such as Los Angeles, San Antonio, New York, and Miami traditionally have been centers of Hispanic influence. Increasingly, however, Hispanics and Hispanic Americans are moving to other parts of the country, such as Arkansas, Georgia, and North Carolina. This shift in migration will spread Hispanic culture and influence throughout the country.

As we celebrate and commemorate Hispanic Heritage Month, we must also acknowledge the challenges facing the community—and the country—that lie ahead. Too many Hispanic American youth are incarcerated. Hispanic Americans have a lower rate of educational achievement than the national average. A higher than average number of Hispanic Americans live in poverty.

Congress can and must help Hispanic Americans by pursuing fair and mean-

ingful immigration reforms; supporting Hispanic education programs, increasing access to higher education, helping the economy to create good jobs at decent wages, and restoring benefits to legal immigrants under the Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program—SCHIP.

So, Hispanic Heritage Month is a time to celebrate what has been accomplished and recognize what still needs to be done. I congratulate Hispanic Americans in Michigan and across America for their wonderful contributions to our country. And I pledge my efforts to ensuring that more Hispanic Americans have access to the great opportunities our country has to offer.

FEMA FIRE ACT GRANT PROGRAM

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I wish to offer a few remarks in support of the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program, commonly known as FIRE Act grants. The FIRE Act grant program was established in fiscal year 2001, due in large part to the efforts of my distinguished colleague from Connecticut, Senator DODD.

Since its inception, the program has assisted firefighters across the Nation. I am especially pleased that this program has been a shining example of an effective partnership between local and Federal Governments. It provides Federal assistance to meet local objectives without imposing mandates or interfering with local prerogatives, and it provides Federal dollars directly to the fire departments. It also addresses critical needs, awarding grants for training, wellness and fitness programs, vehicles, firefighting equipment, personal protective equipment, and fire prevention.

FIRE Act grants have had a positive and very tangible impact on communities throughout the country, including in my home State of Wisconsin. In fiscal year 2002, as of October 1, 2002 my State received \$2.445 million in grants awarded to 41 departments.

These grants help firefighters to do their job better, make our neighborhoods safer, and, very importantly, give residents peace of mind. Increasing the training and equipment available to firefighters fosters an environment of enhanced safety between firefighters and the communities they serve. Keeping our communities safe has been and should continue to be a top priority for all of us. As the tragic events of September 11 have shown our Nation, local firefighters play a vital role to protect and secure our communities. We should give them the support they need.

As I travel through Wisconsin and talk to local firefighters and emergency response personnel, I hear the same refrain, time after time: the FIRE Act grant program is vital to their work and has enabled them to get needed equipment and training that they would otherwise be unable to afford.

We have taken up funding for the FIRE Act grant program in this body numerous times since its inception. In the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, the Congress amended the fiscal year 2002 Department of Defense Authorization Act to provide increased authorization levels to allow up to \$900 million per year to be allocated for the FIRE Act grant program. The program was also expanded to allow grant applicants to apply for equipment and training funds to help firefighters respond to terrorist attacks or attacks using weapons of mass destruction. Additionally, Congress, through both the fiscal year 2002 VA-HUD-Independent Agencies Appropriations bill and the Homeland Security package in the fiscal year 2002 Department of Defense Appropriations Act, appropriated \$360 million to the FIRE Act grant program.

As we finalize our appropriations bills this year we should continue to allocate resources to this important program. Keeping our communities safe has been and should continue to be a top priority for all of us. As the tragic events of September 11 have shown our Nation, local firefighters play a vital role to protect and secure our communities. We should give them the support they need.

THE NATIONAL INTEGRATED BALLISTICS INFORMATION NETWORK

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, I wish to bring the National Integrated Ballistics Information Network or NIBIN to the attention of my colleagues. NIBIN is an interconnected, computer-assisted ballistics imaging system that allows forensic firearms examiners to obtain computerized images of the unique marking made on bullets and casings when a gun is fired. Through NIBIN, investigators can rapidly compare these markings with images in the database of Federal, State, and local law enforcement laboratories. Law enforcement officials can then link evidence from multiple crime scenes, identify patterns of criminal activity, and possibly lead investigators to the arrest of suspects.

As an investigative instrument, ballistics imaging complements crime gun tracing. Crime gun tracing consists of tracking the history of a gun used to commit a crime. By tracing crime guns, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms helps State and local law enforcement agencies solve firearms-related crime by identifying suppliers of multiple-crime guns, and gun trafficking patterns. According to an ATF report, since March 2000, the NIBIN in coordination with crime gun tracing efforts has produced more than 8,800 ballistics matches, linking over 17,600 crime scenes. Some of these matches would not have been made without the use of a computer-assisted ballistics imaging system.