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Musgrave: Nation needs 'rainy-day fund'

Congresswoman says country isn't prepared to handle disaster

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WASHINGTON — A Colorado congresswoman says the country is not yet ready to handle a major disaster like Hurricane Katrina and should have a "rainy-day fund" to cover such an emergency.

"We are really ill prepared," said Rep. Marilyn Musgrave, a Republican from Fort Morgan. With Hurricane Katrina, "we've been taught a lesson that Mother Nature can be just as devastating as terrorists."

Musgrave indicated that in the wake of Katrina, it is important to have a contingency fund, but one, she said, that coincides with Congress' concern with overspending.

This year, the federal government will spend \$333 billion more than it receives in revenue, according to a July forecast by the White House's Office of Management and Budget.

Members of Congress this week pressed former Federal Emergency Management Agency head Michael Brown on the agency's roundly criti-

cized response to Hurricane Katrina.

Although no Colorado politicians in Washington participated in the hearing, lawmakers from the state have spoken out recently on FEMA's response to the disaster.

"It doesn't matter where you live. Preparedness is absolutely critical," Musgrave said.

Colorado is no stranger to the wrath of the elements. The state has been declared a major disaster area by FEMA 15 times since 1955. Fourteen

of these declarations have been due to severe storms or flooding.

Another Colorado lawmaker, Rep. Mark Udall, a Democrat, has taken his concerns one step further by proposing legislation that would make FEMA again an independent agency as it was prior to March 2003.

Udall voted against making FEMA a part of the Department of Homeland Security, where it now resides.

"I intend to work with my colleagues to pass this legislation to restore confidence in

our federal emergency planning and management activities," Udall said in a statement.

Udall has also issued sharp criticism for the politics involved in appointments to federal agencies.

"Congress should begin the process of strengthening FEMA and assuring Americans that federal emergency management efforts will be handled by a capable and effective leader," Udall said.



Musgrave