



Feinstein Urges Improved Tsunami Preparedness

- Demands progress report, timetable for completion to keep California's coastal communities safe -

June 8, 2006

Washington, DC – In the wake of a government study that found serious deficiencies in our nation's ability to rapidly respond to tsunamis, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) today called on the Commerce Department to take immediate action to improve tsunami preparedness and ensure that the resources go toward areas that face the highest risk.

"The General Accountability Office determined that serious deficiencies in our tsunami preparedness exist despite strides made at the federal, state, and local levels," Senator Feinstein wrote in a letter to Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez of the Department of Commerce. **"I would like to know how you plan to meet the goal of preparedness in all coastal areas while still making sure that those regions at highest risk, like California, receive the requisite priority."**

Senator Feinstein is particularly concerned about preparedness in California's coastal communities, which have been historically susceptible to tsunamis. She requested the investigation by the GAO shortly after the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and the agency's report was released on Monday.

Since 1800, at least 14 tsunamis with waves six-feet or higher have struck the coast of California, several of which inflicted major destruction. In 1964, an Alaskan tsunami with waves reaching 20 feet struck the coast of California near Crescent City causing \$7.5 million in damages and eleven deaths. Three tsunamis also flooded Santa Barbara during the early 1800s, including one in 1812 that caused widespread devastation.

The following is the text of the letter sent by Senator Feinstein to Secretary Gutierrez:

June 7, 2006

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary
US Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez,

I am writing to ask for your specific plans to address the recommendations offered to the Department of Commerce in the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) recently release report, "U.S. Tsunami Preparedness – Federal and State Partners Collaborate to Help Communities Reduce Potential Impacts, but Significant Challenges Remain."

Shortly after the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, I asked the GAO to investigate our nation's readiness for a large-scale tsunami. In a report released Monday, the GAO determined that serious deficiencies in our tsunami preparedness exist despite important strides made at the federal, state, and local levels.

As you can imagine, this is an issue of particular importance to me as California has historically been susceptible to tsunamis. Since 1800, at least 14 tsunamis with waves six-feet or higher have struck the coast of California, several of which inflicted major destruction. In 1964, an Alaskan tsunami with waves reaching 20 feet struck the coast of California near Crescent City causing \$7.5 million in damages and eleven deaths. Three tsunamis also flooded Santa Barbara during the early 1800s, including one in 1812 that caused widespread devastation.

As part of the report, the GAO recommended that you direct the NOAA Administrator to take the following six actions:

- Work with FEMA and the U.S. Geological Survey to create standardized tsunami loss estimation software like that which already exists for floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes.
- Reduce the number of tsunami warning false alarms.
- Work with applicable states to conduct periodic end-to-end tests of the tsunami warning system.
- Evaluate the TsunamiReady program to determine how to increase participation by high-risk communities.
- Evaluate the National Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Program (NTHMP) to determine past successes and future priorities.
- Develop comprehensive risk-based strategic plans for the integrated national Tsunami Program and the NTHMP.

I am asking to know your detailed plans for meeting these recommendations, including current progress and timetables for completion, and reasons for disagreeing with any recommendations.

I am particularly concerned about NOAA's goal of ensuring that all of our nation's coastal areas be prepared for a tsunami. It is clear from past tsunamis, and the GAO's recent research, that the Pacific coast states of Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington, as well as Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, face the greatest tsunami hazard. While making all coastal areas prepared for a tsunami is a valuable goal, I am deeply concerned that fortifying communities where a minimal tsunami hazard exists will draw limited resources away from areas that are at highest risk. I would like to know how you plan to meet the goal of

preparedness in all coastal areas while still making sure that those regions at highest risk receive the requisite priority.

I thank you for your consideration in this matter and offer my full assistance and cooperation in realizing these recommendations. If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely yours,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

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