

# Trans group says FEMA sex change scandal was fabricated

Exact origin of story remains unclear  
by Mark Smith

Last month, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) testified before a House Homeland Security subcommittee to investigating an estimated \$1.4 billion fraudulent waste of Emergency Assistance Funds (EAF) to Hurricane Katrina victims. The unprecedented level of Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) fraud was blared over television newscasts and emblazoned on newspaper headlines. Much of the coverage led with the same outraged fact: "FEMA funds paid for a sex change."

However, the National Transgender Advocacy Coalition (NTAC) is now publicly calling the media and authorities on this claim, demanding proof that this occurred and calling the press accounts "fabricated" and "fraudulent." In reviewing both House subcommittee testimony and the GAO report that uncovered the fraud there was no



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reference of a sex change, nor any surgery of any type being paid for by FEMA funds.

"It appears [the sex change] story was prime red meat for conservatives looking to turn attention away from the president and onto Katrina victims and FEMA," said NTAC President Vanessa Edwards Foster. "It also appears there's no veracity to the story that EAF funds were used for gender reassignment surgery. These press claims are what's fraudulent."

House Homeland Security Investigations subcommittee chair Rep. Michael McCaul (R-TX) called the discovered waste "criminal" but never mentioned anything about sex changes. However Rep. Charles Dent (R-PA) did note the sex change claim shortly after the House testimony, commenting, "I don't understand how this could happen."

How the sex change allegation originated remains unclear. The June 14 story by Larry Margasak of The Associated Press noted a sex change in a laundry list of items scammed from FEMA. While news outlets as diverse as

*The Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, ABC News, MSNBC and Bloomberg Report carried the story, the more conservative news outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal* or Fox News made no mention of the sex change accusation.

When questioned about the story, the GAO's Office of Public Affairs stated: "There was no reference to that allegation — because we cannot confirm it."

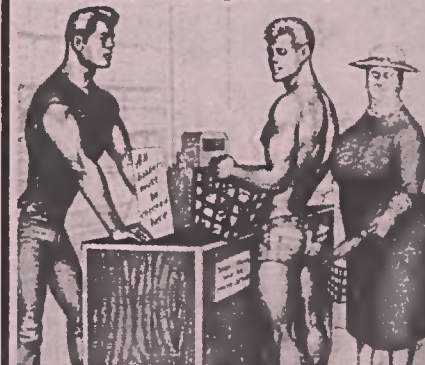
"The press reported on fabricated claims of sex changes paid with FEMA funds, but no media ever mentioned \$2,000 paid to a Christian Broadcast Network from EAF payments," Foster of NTAC commented. The GAO report listed \$2,000 paid to Colorado-based LeSEA Broadcasting Network.

After anguishing over the initial FEMA news reports, NTAC Vice President Courtney Sharp said she "was shocked to discover that the [GAO] report didn't mention anything about anyone misusing funds to have gender reassignment surgery."

A New Orleans resident who lost nearly everything during Katrina, Sharp said she listened as co-workers and friends disparaged the person who used FEMA funds to obtain a sex change. "[It] was extremely hurtful to realize that someone had embellished the GAO report and was probably using the negative

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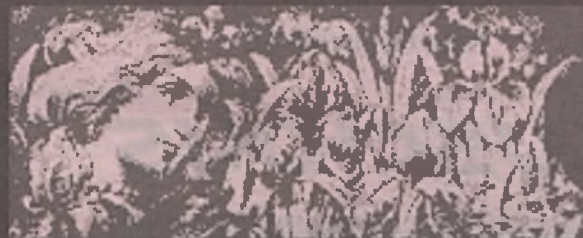
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