Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina

Tom Davis, Chairman

"Hurricane Katrina: Preparedness and Response by the State of Louisiana."

Wednesday, December 14, 2005
10:00 a.m.
2154 Rayburn House Office Building

Chairman's Opening Statement

WITNESS LIST

PANEL ONE

The Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco
Governor
State of Louisiana

Colonel Jeff Smith
Deputy Director
Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

PANEL TWO

The Honorable C. Ray Nagin
Mayor
City of New Orleans

http://katrina.house.gov/hearings/12_14_05/witness_list_121405.htm
Colonel (ret.) Terry J. Ebbert
Director
Homeland Security for New Orleans

Mr. William M. Lokey
Federal Coordinating Officer (in Baton Rouge)
Federal Emergency Management Agency

Mr. Philip Parr
Deputy Federal Coordinating Officer
Federal Emergency Management Agency
(Advance Team in New Orleans)
Good morning, and welcome to this morning’s hearing on the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina in the State of Louisiana.

This committee has held many hearings in a short period of time. We’re doing the job we were asked to do.

We’ve focused on FEMA and DHS. The Defense Department, National Guard, and Coast Guard. We’ve examined the contracting process and its impact on preparation and response. We’ve heard from victims and organizations now representing them. We’ve looked specifically at Alabama and Mississippi.

Today we turn to Louisiana, in an effort to determine what went right and what went wrong there, so that we’re all better prepared the next time.

Let me begin by thanking our witnesses for being here today. Our hearts continue to go out to the leaders and residents of Louisiana in the aftermath of this tragedy. We need to hear your stories, and we’re grateful for your cooperation.

When Hurricane Katrina made landfall near the Louisiana-Mississippi border on the morning of August 29th, 2005, it set in motion a series of events that exposed vast numbers of Americans to extraordinary suffering.

With the breaching of the levees, the City of New Orleans flooded, requiring the emergency evacuation of tens of thousands of residents who had not evacuated prior to the storm. Lifted off roofs by helicopters or carried to safety in boats, they were taken to the Superdome, the Convention Center, a piece of high ground known as the Cloverleaf, and other dry spots around the city.

At these locations, they were subjected to unbearable conditions: limited light, air, and sewage facilities in the Superdome, the heat of the sun, in many cases limited food and water, and fear for their personal safety and survival -- and the survival of their city.

This hearing will examine how the Governor of Louisiana, the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, the Mayor of New Orleans, the Mayor’s Director of Homeland Security, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency worked together to alleviate the suffering of so many of our fellow citizens.

We’ll focus on some basic but important questions:
Why did so many New Orleans residents not evacuate when the consequences of a Category 4 or 5 hurricane were well known? Was the evacuation not ordered soon enough? Was the message not clear enough? Did the city and state provide adequate assistance to allow residents without their own transportation, or those with special needs, to evacuate?

As officials realized on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning that tens of thousands would be unable to return to their flooded homes and would need to be evacuated from the Superdome and other locations, why did it take three days to send any relief to the Convention Center and to arrange evacuation of other locations?

Were federal, state, and local governments coordinating their response effectively?

Who was responsible for getting people food, water, and medical assistance while they waited?

How much did telecommunications problems impede effective response?

Did violence and disorder, or the perception of it, hamper the response? Was assistance delayed by concerns over the security of relief workers and others? Were staff time and resources diverted to address unfounded but incessantly reported security concerns? What was the security situation and who was responsible for it?

Today’s testimony and questioning will provide a much-needed layer to our investigation, complementing information we’ve received from other federal, state, and local sources.

We’ve learned some important lessons over the past two months. There were heroes and goats at all levels of government; some were a little of both.

If 9/11 was a failure of imagination, Katrina was a failure of initiative.

Particularly in Louisiana – where officials at all levels of government had the virtual lesson of Hurricane Pam, and the real lessons of Ivan and George – we have learned that a plan that can’t be implemented effectively is no plan at all.

Pam was so very prescient. And yet Katrina highlighted many, many weaknesses that either were not anticipated by Pam, or were lessons learned but not heeded. That’s probably the most painful thing about Katrina, and the tragic loss of life: the foreseeability of it all.

We’re not here to point fingers. And we continue to remind ourselves that this was a big, big storm.
But we should continue to ask what a more successful response would have looked like. I can’t believe it’s simply accepting as inevitable an evacuation process that left at least 70,000 people behind.

Today, we will again be asking what the benchmark of success is. I think in large part it’s leadership in the face of adversity. It’s protecting people unable to protect themselves. It’s caring more about doing good than getting credit.

We know it’s easy to be critical in hindsight. We know that officials in Louisiana did their best to save as many lives as they could, under tremendously difficult circumstances. There’s a difference between questioning effectiveness and questioning effort and motivation.

Today I urge all of our Members and witnesses to remember why we’re here:

To investigate aggressively, to follow the facts wherever they may lead, and to find out what went right and what went wrong.

To ask why coordination and information sharing between local, state, and federal governments appears to have been so dismal.

Why all residents, especially the most helpless, were not evacuated.

Why the New Orleans levee system failed.

Why relief and medical supplies and support were so slow in arriving.

Why so much federal money sent to Louisiana to better prepare has been left on the table, unspent or misspent.

And why government at all levels failed to react more effectively to a storm that was predicted with unprecedented timeliness and accuracy.

The task before us is too important for carping. The American people want the facts, and they’re watching. They alone will judge whether our review is thorough and fair. Our final exam will be the report we are tasked with completing.

This is not about politics. Katrina did not distinguish between Republicans and Democrats.

This is about getting the information we need to chart a new and better course for emergency preparation and response.
Helping us get there today is a distinguished panel of witnesses:

Panel 1

The Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Governor, State of Louisiana

Colonel Jeff Smith, Deputy Director, Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness

Panel 2

The Honorable C. Ray Nagin, Mayor, City of New Orleans

Colonel (ret.) Terry Ebbert, Director, City of New Orleans, Director of Homeland Security


Phillip Parr, Federal Emergency Management Agency, Deputy Federal Coordinating Officer (Advance Team in New Orleans)
Chairman Davis and distinguished members of the Committee, Representatives Jefferson, Melancon, and Alexander from Louisiana, thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

People from across America and the world opened their hearts to Louisiana in response to Katrina and Rita, and I thank you. You opened your homes, wallets and classrooms, and uplifted us with your prayers. The Red Cross and faith-based organizations went the extra mile.

I want to offer a special thanks to the governors and officials from all 50 states, four territories, and the District of Columbia who sent National Guard troops and other first responders in response to my plea for assistance.

You also welcomed our people in states all over this country, and many of you are still helping three months later. Thank you for your generosity. Know that we are doing everything we can to bring our people home.

As you know, I have sent over 100,000 pages documenting the state’s actions from Hurricane Katrina. I am sure you have had a chance to review this information. The documents and timelines will show that the state of Louisiana was working against great odds but was focused on saving lives. Did hurricane Katrina overwhelm our resources? You bet. And at every level – federal, state and local. Can we do it better? I hope so. There are many lessons to be learned.

I am here today because Louisiana needs your help. The economic security of our country is at stake. Trade from more than 190 countries flows through our ports, where the mighty Mississippi merges with the Gulf of Mexico.

Louisiana’s oil, natural gas and petrochemical corridor drive the nation’s economy.

Prior to Katrina, the manufacturing industry was booming, and we had attracted over $3 billion in new manufacturing investment in just a year and a half. Tourism thrived in the birthplace of jazz that is our beloved New Orleans. Thomas Jefferson made a wise investment when he authorized the Louisiana Purchase. I urge Congress to demonstrate the same foresight and make an investment in our recovery.

Louisiana is a small state with a big sense of duty. Since 9-11, over 7,000 sons and daughters of Louisiana’s National Guard have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and thousands more are there serving in the active duty forces.
Fifty-four Louisiana heroes died in service. One hundred wounded earned purple hearts. I visited Baghdad last year to see firsthand the sacrifices our troops are making.

I proudly received over 2500 soldiers and airmen home after Katrina. What should have been a joyful occasion was wrought with pain when I received a planeload of broken-hearted soldiers who returned knowing Katrina destroyed their homes. I have two of those soldiers with me today, and I would like to introduce them to you. Staff Sgt. Norman Norfleet and Sgt. Corey Allbritton, please stand. They are here wondering if Congress will help families like theirs. Thank you for your sacrifices and commitment to our recovery.

If I achieve nothing else today, it would be to urge you to reconsider the gravity of our situation. I would like to leave Washington, DC with a message of hope coming from Congress. After World War II our decision to rebuild Europe was far-sighted and courageous. History will treat us well if we exhibit the same kind of political courage now.

I urge all members of Congress who have not had an opportunity to do so to come to Louisiana and evaluate with your own eyes the extent of the damage wrought by Katrina and Rita.

You will be shocked by the devastation brought on by the double punch of two hurricanes in less than a month. Forty-one of 64 parishes in our state were impacted. People of Louisiana’s entire coastline were affected. Homes and businesses were destroyed from Texas to Mississippi, border to border.

Hurricanes are a way of life for all of us in the Gulf South. We have rebounded from these storms for generations. What happened to us this year, however, can only be described as a catastrophe of Biblical proportions. We in Louisiana know hurricanes and hurricanes know us. We would not be here today if the levees had not failed.

As President Bush recognized, hurricanes and floods do not discriminate, and people from all backgrounds were impacted: black and white, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican. Katrina took nearly 1100 lives in Louisiana alone. We owe it to those we lost and those who lost so much to rebuild safer, stronger, and better than before.

I know we must devise a better response to large-scale disasters at the federal, state, and local levels. Looking back is a necessary exercise, and we will improve our response. But none of this negates the obligation of this Congress to help American citizens from the Gulf Coast who literally and figuratively are feeling they have been left out in the cold.

There are important steps Congress must take in support of our recovery, and that is why I am here today. There are endless needs that must be addressed. Today I ask you to focus on five specific priorities:

- Strengthening our levee system and rebuilding our coastal wetlands;
- Restoring housing;
• Directing special tax incentives to affected businesses and families;
• Addressing health care needs; and
• Providing support for our displaced students and their schools.

If families don’t feel safe, they won’t come home. We experienced a catastrophic structural failure of our levee system. It needs to be repaired immediately and then strengthened, so our families can come home.

My Administration is developing Louisiana’s master plan for a Category 5 hurricane coastal protection and restoration system. I hope you can support this critical long-term solution, which can be paid for by simply giving Louisiana our fair share of oil and gas revenues from the Outer Continental Shelf.

I am recommending that we implant monitoring installations and conduct more rigorous inspections of our levees. The federal government funds our levees just as they do bridges and dams across the country, and we need you to provide adequate funding now. This is our number one priority. As I’ve said before, if the levees had not failed, we wouldn’t have this hearing.

Next, we must address housing. In Louisiana, Katrina and Rita wiped out 205,000 homes in less than a month. This has never happened to any state in this nation. Our people have homes that are not livable. Some are just piles of rubble. Others are washed away. Our people need affordable housing.

I allocated nearly $200 million in tax-exempt bonds for low-interest loans to rebuild and renovate damaged houses and apartments. We need Congress too. I ask you to appropriate Community Development Block Grant funding, just as you did for New York after 9-11. Louisiana needs at least $12.1 Billion, a significant amount of which will be allocated to rebuilding housing stock and providing other assistance to homeowners.

Congressman Richard Baker’s bill to create a Louisiana Recovery Corporation to help homeowners whose homes were destroyed to clear their mortgages and prevent them from losing their pre-storm equity is one way to help. The important thing about this bill is that returning residents receive first priority to buy back in their neighborhoods.

The insurance problem has to be addressed head-on. Many families were told that they were not vulnerable to flooding. Therefore, only two out of every five people affected by the storms had flood insurance. Most homeowners’ policies will not pay flood losses. We have an estimated $20-30 Billion in uninsured losses.

If Congress fails to help our people will have no money to rebuild. This is the situation. Hardworking Americans who did everything right have lost their homes, they’re being denied insurance coverage, and end up with ruined credit ratings, all through no fault of their own. I am asking you not to forget them.
It’s all because the levees failed.
I am also asking you to at least prevent foreclosures and bankruptcies resulting from the storms from appearing against credit ratings. It is the humane thing to do.

Our businesses need help quickly. More than 80,000 businesses in Louisiana were stilled, and at least 18,000 of those were completely destroyed. Our businesses need far more than the state can provide for them to survive. Please provide significant tax incentives for them. We need them open. Then government can get out of the way and let businesses get back to the business of creating jobs.

Let me tell you about one company. The New Orleans Public Service utility system lost every single customer for a sustained period of time, and their entire system was destroyed. That has never happened to a utility before. Congress helped CON-ED after 9-11, and I ask you to help this utility. High electric rates will compromise our ability to recover.

Many of our citizens now find themselves unemployed and newly eligible for Medicaid as a result of the storm. We are asking for a 100% federal match for Medicaid to help us get past our problems.

Our displaced students are in schools all over the country. Please allow funding to follow students to their new districts. Our colleges and universities need help too.

We are writing the book on lessons learned in a catastrophe of this magnitude, and I recommend five hard-core musts for Congress and the private sector to consider. They are:

- Achieving Communications Interoperability;
- Reforming the Stafford Act for flexibility;
- Focusing on the Elderly in Disasters;
- Adopting First Responder EMACs; and
- Negotiating Agreements with the Private Sector.

Hurricane Ivan threatened us last year. Our evacuation looked like Houston’s – not very pretty. Before Katrina came, I developed a new evacuation plan that includes contra-flow, where both sides of the interstates are used for outbound traffic. I am proud that we rapidly moved over 1.2 million people – some 92% of the population – to safety without gridlock or undue delay prior to Katrina. I know most of you did not notice our success. After all, when 1000 airplanes land safely it’s not news. When one crashes, it is.

Communication systems collapsed. You can’t coordinate if you can’t communicate. What we experienced in Katrina was not a failure to communicate, but an inability to communicate. Four years after 9-11, our nation should have learned this lesson. Prior to Katrina, I instructed the Louisiana State Police to make interoperability our top homeland security priority. We were making the investments to move to the new emergency 700-megahertz frequency and will continue to do so. This is an expensive project that must extend beyond law enforcement to include all emergency services.
We need uniform standards and funding for a network that stands up under stressful conditions. Also, mobile communications units should always be pre-positioned to move in quickly as a backup.

Members of Congress, thank you for putting $62 billion into a fund to help us in the early days of this catastrophic event. This money, because of limitations in the Stafford Act, often cannot be used to meet the real needs of our communities. Our hands are tied because there is no mechanism to turn the dollars into action on the ground in mega emergencies. The law limits our ability to adopt practical, less expensive solutions.

Let me give you two examples. FEMA is not allowed to use Stafford Act funding to invest in permanent housing. We have lost a massive amount of housing, hundreds of millions are being spent on temporary housing. That money would be better invested in meeting our very real need for permanent housing.

And second, in an extraordinary catastrophe, when local governments lose their entire tax base, the Stafford Act should allow local governments to be able to pay regular time for some period of time. Currently, only overtime pay is allowed.

There are many more examples of needed reforms, and I discussed these with Secretary Chertoff yesterday.

We learned from Katrina the vulnerability of senior citizens in the event of a catastrophe. It breaks my heart that the victims of this storm were mostly elderly. We are looking into this tragedy at a state level, and we will share our recommendations so we can all do more to protect the elderly in the event of other natural disasters or terrorist attacks.

Normal procedures for large hospitals in the event of hurricanes are to shelter in place in order to treat hurricane related injuries. In a hurricane prone region such as the Gulf Coast, it would be impractical to fly patients in frail health all over the country every time serious storms threaten. This is the challenge. With the movement and threat posed only by Hurricane Katrina, all coastal hospitals and nursing homes from Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana would have evacuated.

We must do a better job at ensuring that hospitals that do remain open are able to retain power and functionality in the event of a storm.

To eliminate paperwork and get all first responders on the ground working quickly, states should negotiate pre-storm first responder compacts called EMACs. These agreements would pre-certify personnel like sheriffs, deputies, firefighters, municipal police, marshals, and other first responders, saving valuable search and rescue time.

The private sector needs to step up to the plate too. Some major airlines cancelled flights into the New Orleans area on Saturday before the storm hit on Monday. They could have flown safely through noon on Sunday. Thousands of tourists were left stranded. I
encourage the airline industry to adopt voluntary agreements to fly tourists out of threatened areas as part of a larger emergency network.

At home in Louisiana, we have all tightened our belts and reshuffled our priorities to help our state recover. We are taking bold steps to help ourselves, but the gravity of our loss demands help from Congress too. In November, we completed a Special Session of the legislature dedicated to the recovery. We enacted legislation to provide aggressive oversight of local levee boards while integrating Louisiana’s hurricane and coastal protection efforts. I will be proposing further levee board consolidation and reform.

For the first time ever, we adopted a uniform statewide building code.

The state took over control of the failing schools of New Orleans.

We enacted significant tax breaks and incentives for businesses and families.

And ethics laws related to the handling of recovery funds have been strengthened.

In Louisiana, there is no such thing as deficit spending. We have to balance our budget every year. The $600 million in budget cuts were tough. But these tough choices are in response to our new reality.

We are a small and hardworking state operating on a tight budget. We are doing everything we can to overcome the crippling nature of the storms. We have been served with a $3.7 billion estimated bill from FEMA – adding insult to injury. This is an unprecedented amount for any state to have to pay as its share of FEMA expenditures.

In light of all the money the United States has forgiven foreign debtors, in light of the billions of Federal dollars poured into New York after 9-11, into California after the earthquakes, and into Florida after Andrew, surely we are entitled to no less.

If we can rebuild Baghdad, we can surely rebuild the Gulf Coast.

The President of the United States stood in Jackson Square and vowed that America would do whatever it took to rebuild our state. You are the guarantors of the President's word.

Down in Louisiana, our people watch the national news and they hear about something called Katrina fatigue....they hear that Washington is tired of talking about the storm and the problems of the Louisiana people. Well, we’re tired of it too. We’re tired of the tears. We’re tired of the suffering. We're tired of being out of our homes and businesses. We're tired of the separation of our families. All this because the levees failed.

Our people are anxious to renew, rebuild and restore. We don’t want your pity, we just need a little help.
I ask Congress to stand up and help us rebuild. Please stand by our people in this winter of discontent.

Please do not delay. Our people deserve a peaceful and holy Christmas season.

Thank you.
Mr. Chairman, Committee Members,

I am Jeff Smith, Deputy Director For Emergency Preparedness with the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, and I am pleased to testify here today concerning events leading up to Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath. Katrina is the single largest disaster in our nation’s history.

I am here today to share my views of what went right and what went wrong, to tell you of our plans for the future, and to ask for your support in Louisiana’s recovery.

As part of my testimony I have brought some charts that show the magnitude of Hurricane Katrina, and I refer you to Appendix A to this written testimony, which I incorporate by reference.

Please remember that the damage suffered by Louisiana was caused by a horrific storm. It was not caused in any way by the response, but by a catastrophic event. When you look at the numbers you can clearly see that Katrina stands alone as the number one natural disaster in history.

I was listening to a radio show last week with Senator Trent Lott from Mississippi as a guest. Senator Lott indicated that while he had some concern about the federal response and the aftermath, he indicated that people need to realize that this was the worse natural disaster in American history.

An analyst at Fitch Rating, when describing Louisiana’s bond rating downgrade, said, in part, “the magnitude of the hurricane –
related losses will present the State with economic and financial challenges for the foreseeable future. In particular, the implication of the total and extended evacuation of a major city, New Orleans, distinguish this from other catastrophes.”

To complicate things further, in just a little over three weeks after the worst hurricane in history, along came Hurricane Rita. While I realize Rita has little bearing on this hearing, one should keep in mind that Louisiana was still in a full response mode for Katrina when Rita hit us in the southwest. Rita re-flooded St. Bernard and Plaquemine. Rita breached the temporary repair to the Industrial Canal levee.

To a degree Louisiana is still in response mode for Katrina and Rita. The recovery efforts will indeed be monumental and will last for many years to come.

You have heard many in the news media and some Federal officials ask why Louisiana did not do more in the week preceding Hurricane Katrina to prepare. Some have even suggested that we should have evacuated a week before the storm hit.

Let’s look at the weather reports---a week before Hurricane Katrina hit Louisiana, it does not even exist. The first weather advisory for Tropical Depression 12 is issued on August 23, 2005 at 4 p.m. –this is 6 days before landfall.

Four days before landfall, on Thursday, August 25, 2005 at 1:00 p.m Eastern Daylight Time the National Weather Service reports: Reconnaissance aircraft indicate the center of Tropical Storm Katrina is located near a latitude 26.2 North longitude 79.5 West or about 40 miles east, northeast of Fort Lauderdale, Florida or about 40 miles east, southeast of Boca Raton, Florida. This storm is not even in the Gulf of Mexico on Thursday afternoon, it is still in the Atlantic.

Katrina enters the Gulf sometime Friday morning with projections indicating that it will most likely make landfall in the mid-panhandle of Florida.
Friday morning the 10:00 am National Weather Service advisory still projects a Florida Panhandle landfall. Remember, this is less than three (3) days prior to actual Louisiana landfall.

In the early afternoon of Friday, August 26, the hurri-vac models reflects one of the most dramatic shifts in weather history. The projected path of Katrina moves approximately 150 miles west in a matter of hours.

For the first time, Louisiana is in the predicted path of Katrina. The Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness spins up. We start our conference calls with the fifteen (15) parishes in the Southeast Hurricane Task Force. The Governor declares a State of Emergency—all of this by five o’clock on Friday afternoon--- within a matter of hours once the storm’s path shifts and places Louisiana in the potential path of danger.

Governor Blanco, the State Police, and DOTD begin coordinating contra flow with the State of Mississippi. Louisiana starts staging assets that would be necessary to execute an evacuation. The National Guard and other state agencies go on alert and begin staging personnel and equipment.

Throughout Saturday and Sunday preparation for the storm intensifies. Local, state, federal, private, non-profit and other States’ resources move to assist Louisiana.

LOHSEP’s and other state agencies’ actions are detailed in the thousands of pages of documents and information that has been provided to this committee. I will not go through each event; however, I would like to cover some of the major pre-landfall activities that the LOHSEP undertook.

In the conference call of 6:30 a.m. Saturday morning, the State recommends that the evacuation plan for southeast Louisiana be implemented. Some parishes have already begun evacuation proceedings; however, we want to make it clear that we are recommending execution of the State plan for Southeast Louisiana. Many, many conference calls occur Saturday, Sunday and Monday morning with the Southeast Hurricane Taskforce, the Southwest
Hurricane Taskforce, and the Shelter Taskforce. These calls disseminate information to the parishes and receive information from the parishes.

The Governor requests an emergency declaration from the President on Saturday and an expedited major declaration on Sunday. These declarations acknowledge that local and state resources will be overwhelmed. She advises that the federal government is needed for the response. FEMA’s emergency response team (“ERT”) A from Denton, TX and an ERT-N team from FEMA headquarters arrive at the EOC on Saturday afternoon. These teams immediately begin integrating into the state and other federal agencies where a unified command is established. Saturday and Sunday are spent preparing.

The size of Hurricane Katrina is unparalleled. In fact, I heard an analyst from NOAH report that both New Orleans and Biloxi were actually in the eye wall at the same time. This is a huge storm. There are hurricane force winds over Louisiana for almost 11 hours. Therefore, most of the day Monday is spent hunkering down planning and preparing. There is not much you could do with 150 mile per hour winds. As we now know, some of the many levees in Katrina’s path breach on Monday. The effects of the levee breaches become worse on Tuesday. It is now apparent that Louisiana has suffered two disasters---the Hurricane and the flood from the levee breaches. Even Mike Brown acknowledges this.

The Governor directs that the primary emphasis is to save lives. Certainly, getting people evacuated from the Superdome and later from the Convention Center are very important, but during the first days when life is so fragile—people in water, people on rooftops—saving lives is the priority. Requests are made to FEMA, local responders, non-profit agencies and through EMAC, (Emergency Management Assistance Compact), to bring resources. Louisiana needs everything it can get. Requests are made early, in an unprecedented volume to respond to this truly catastrophic event. The State’s capability to respond is overwhelmed. Over 1,000 EMAC requests are made to other states and territories. Forty-eight states and two territories respond to this catastrophic event.
Let’s discuss benchmarks for success. When judging performance of an activity and deciding what went right and what went wrong, what is the measure of success? I ask you, what is the benchmark for evacuating over one million people out of an area such as New Orleans that has very restricted roadways in and out? The Governor’s pre-landfall evacuation plan is executed almost flawlessly. We estimate that over one million people, or approximately 90% of the affected parishes’ populations, evacuate in about a forty hour period. I don’t know of any other evacuation that has occurred with that many people under these circumstances with that high of percentage of people being evacuated in that short of a time period.

The search and rescue efforts occur primarily during the first five days of this event. About 62 thousand people are rescued off of rooftops and out of water. These are primary rescues. These do not include those who were already at the Superdome or in other areas considered high ground. These are direct rescue missions, people who are in peril.

I would like to know from anyone if there has ever been that number of people rescued in that short of a period of time, under these circumstances, in any disaster in this country. I ask again, what is the benchmark for success?

Now, let me turn my attention to the Superdome, the Convention Center, and the Cloverleaf.

As the flood water moves through New Orleans, people leave their homes, apartments and hotels, and migrate to high ground.

Some 78 thousand people are evacuated from the Dome, the Convention Center and the Cloverleaf. They are taken to shelters in Louisiana and multiple states.

Contrary to what you heard in the news media, the people in the Dome have water. They have food. They have shelter. They have medical care. They have security. And, they have all of this for the entire time that they are there.
The initial population in the Superdome is reported to be 10,000 to 15,000. As the effects of the flood become known, more and more people migrate to the dome. People are transported there by search and rescue. The population in the Dome swells to 40,000 over a 36 hour period.

People seek refuge at the Convention Center, a place that has not been designated as a shelter by the City of New Orleans. By Friday, the population at the Convention Center is estimated to be 20,000.

The Cloverleaf springs up as a collection point. Helicopters drop evacuees. People migrate there. At the end, it is thought that 14,000 are evacuated from the Cloverleaf.

Several thousand people are evacuated out of St. Bernard Parish by the DOTD ferry, and brought to safety in school buses.

The special needs patients and hospital patients are evacuated by aircraft, boat and ambulance.

Where we initially thought we had 15,000 people to evacuate out of the Dome, we now realize that there are many, many more people who did not or were not able to heed the warnings to evacuate.

The State addresses these transportation and logistical challenges. Louisiana does not wait for FEMA buses. Louisiana begins to evacuate using school buses and tour buses that are obtained by order of the Governor.

The State requests buses and aircraft from FEMA; aircraft, ambulances, and buses through EMAC; and private corporations provide even more ambulances.

A few FEMA buses begin to roll on late Wednesday. By Thursday morning, there is a constant flow of buses. By Friday evening, the Superdome is virtually evacuated. The Convention Center is evacuated by Saturday afternoon. The Cloverleaf is evacuated by Friday. Air evacuations continue, and people are now taken to the airport for transport to shelters.
I would like to point out that had the levees not broken, scientific estimates indicate that only 30 percent of Orleans would have flooded. This would have been due to overtopping of the levees from storm surge. Without the breach in the levees, the people in the Dome would have been sheltered in New Orleans, and would not have required evacuation from the City. Power would have been supplied by generators. Food, water and medical care would have continued to be delivered.

Instead, the broken levees caused 80% of the City to flood.

It was the flood that caused the evacuation, not the hurricane force winds of Katrina. The severity and the magnitude of the flood in Orleans Parish was not fully scoped and identified until Tuesday morning.

Back to the benchmarks, how quickly should the evacuation of approximately 78,000 people occur? The Superdome is a virtual island.

There is only one way into the City, and one way out.

By Saturday, September 3, 2005, Louisiana evacuates 78,000 people to safety, all the while search and rescue continues.

I would like to recap the results of the three (3) major events in the first days of the response to Katrina: the pre-landfall evacuation, search and rescue, and the post-landfall evacuation.

What is the benchmark for evacuating over one million people from a city such as New Orleans? Louisiana accomplishes this in a forty hour period and achieved a 90% evacuation rate. I would submit to you that because of the Governor’s phased evacuation plan and the flawless execution by the National Guard, the State Police, and DOTD as coordinated through the Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, this is an excellent result!

How quickly should you be able to pluck over 62,000 people out of the water, off rooftops, and out of attics and move them to safety?
Louisiana did it in about five days. This averages 12,000 rescues per day. This is nothing short of outstanding.

How quickly should you be able to evacuate 78,000 people from a flooded city and move them to shelters in multiple states, while you are simultaneously rescuing and saving the lives of over 62,000? We did it in 3-4 days. This is impressive!

We made a conscious choice that life-saving was, by far, the most critical activity during the first days. Saving lives is more important than the evacuation of those who, while miserable, had food, water, medical care, and shelter.

The Louisiana Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness engaged in numerous activities to prepare for the 2005 hurricane season. One of the events is the publicized hurricane PAM catastrophic planning event that had its roots back in 2000. By the summer of 2004, FEMA had funded the project and LOHSEP held a week long exercise based on a scenario of a catastrophic hurricane hitting New Orleans. This event was followed up by workshops that occurred in November, 2004 and in July, 2005. It is important to know that the Hurricane Pam planning process has still not been completed. As a matter of fact, the draft of the medical plan, one of the key components of the plan, was received from the contractor in September of 2005. The process of completing this plan was slowed by a funding issue with FEMA. A finalized plan is only the first step in the process. The plan must then be resourced, and then the plan must be exercised. Adjustments are then made to the plan. We weren’t even through phase one at the time Katrina hit. Having said that, the planning that came from PAM benefited the response to Katrina greatly in the search and rescue area, the medical area, and the logistics areas.

The next major thing that happened in the year preceding Katrina was the Governor’s action in ordering the re-tooling of the evacuation plan for Southeast Louisiana. The Governor saw that the evacuation for Hurricane Ivan did not work effectively. There were traffic jams and many people did not evacuate because of the bottlenecks. She ordered the State Police, DOTD, augmented by
our agency to come up with a better plan. Phased evacuation was developed for the entire coastal area of the state.

A copy of this plan has been provided to you.

An intensive public education effort followed, and included public service announcements and distribution of hundreds of thousands of copies of the plan.

In my opinion, the phased evacuation plan and its execution prior to landfall were directly responsible for saving thousands and thousands of lives.

The Pam exercise predicted a death toll of over 60,000. As of last week, there were less than 1,100 deaths attributed to Katrina. All are tragic. Most were due to the flood, and not the winds.

Our agency met with emergency managers and their local elected officials in preparation for the 2005 hurricane season. From February of 2005 through July of 2005 we visited over twenty (20) parishes to discuss emergency procedures and organizational structure for manning a local EOC.

Prior to hurricane season, key personnel from FEMA Region VI personnel traveled to LOHSEP to work with our staff in planning and preparing for hurricane season. One of the issues discussed was logistic operations and unified command, both key issues in the Katrina response.

The week before Katrina, we hosted a state-wide two (2) day emergency management conference attended by emergency managers from most of the parishes. Topics included emergency operations procedures that included the use of E-team, methods for requesting assistance and other disaster related procedures.

During the 2004 hurricane season, the emergency managers indicated that the pre-landfall conference calls that our agency conducted could be improved. We put together a team of emergency managers and state agencies to revitalize and revamp the conference calls. It has been widely reported that emergency
managers and other people who participated in the conference calls, believe the new format for the calls to be an effective and efficient communication tool. Our agency also conducted a training exercise to test the new conference calls with each task force.

Our state has three task forces: the Southeast Hurricane Taskforce, the Southwest Hurricane Taskforce, and a Shelter Taskforce. Prior to the 2005 hurricane season, we attended numerous task force meetings. Coordination and preparation for the upcoming hurricane season was accomplished.

The state emergency operation plan was updated to be reflective of the National Response Plan. Each State agency had input in the plan and signed off on the new plan.

While we have noted many successes in the response to Katrina, we want to improve. Most of our state agencies have conducted internal after action reviews. On December 6, LOHSEP conducted an after action review (AAR) with all state agencies that were involved in the response. Our plan is to conduct an extensive 2-day AAR involving the local, state, and federal government agencies, non-profit organizations, private businesses, as well as those responders from around the country in the first quarter of 2006. I have submitted a request to FEMA Region VI asking for funding for travel expenses and a contractor. We need to get as many participants as possible and capture all lessons learned.

Let me take just a minute to recap some of the things that I think went right. It is very clear to me that the pre-landfall activities, the conference calls, the forming of the unified command, the pre-landfall evacuation process went extremely well, and was responsible for saving thousands of lives.

Search and rescue was truly a team effort, and included our state resources, local resources, National Guard, active military, Coast Guard, other Federal agencies, EMAC forces from other states—all of these entities came together to handle this monumental effort. To a large degree, I credit this success to the Hurricane Pam exercise.
While there were monumental challenges to the evacuation of the Dome, the Convention Center and the Cloverleaf, those who wanted to leave New Orleans were evacuated, and they were taken to shelters.

The pre-hurricane season planning developed a camaraderie and a connection between FEMA Region VI and our office. This is another bright spot.

The medical response was outstanding. The largest ever deployment of the National Disaster Medical System (“NDMS”) occurred after Katrina. NDMS combined efforts with Louisiana’s Department of Health and Hospitals (DHH). Thousands of civilian first responders: local, state, and literally from all over the country came together to provide medical care to those in need. What a smashing success.

The pre-staging of FEMA assets at Camp Beauregard, the pre-positioning of search and rescue teams, DMAT teams, DMORT teams, allowed these resources to move into the area quickly.

The plan for distribution of commodities worked extremely well. You did not see long lines of Louisiana people waiting for food, water, and ice.

I am very proud of our agency personnel. These individuals all worked tirelessly for days on end with little or no rest. They performed far beyond the call of duty and did an outstanding job without complaint. The career FEMA workers were there with us, shoulder to shoulder working diligently for our citizens.

The EMAC process was a huge success. Almost every state in the nation sent assets to Louisiana. These were not just National Guard assets. About half of the EMAC requests were for non-Guard resources and personnel. These were medical, fire, police, EMS. Individuals from all over the nation came in, assisted us, and worked with us in our time of need. The emergency managers in other states that stepped up and offered to house our displaced citizens were again critical to this response and this something that we can never repay.
Before we discuss lessons learned, I would like to remind you this is hard to measure. Many of these particular identified areas for improvement would never have surfaced if we weren’t dealing with the worst natural disaster in history. Many of these items would not have occurred during a normal disaster.

Much has been said about the degradation of communication during the first several days of Hurricane Katrina. Our state did have redundant communication systems; however, the devastation was so great that not only towers and antennas were blown down, and phone lines were inundated by flood water. Due to the heroic efforts of State Police, our agency and others, the 800 mhz system was boosted fairly quickly. Most of the time there was some form of communication, it just was not communication on demand. The number of frequencies available on our 800 mhz system were not nearly enough to handle the thousands of first responders who were in the area. When you needed to communicate, you were continually being stepped on, thereby making communication very difficult.

In many cases cell phones would reach out of state or out of the area, as did some satellite phones. However, cell phone service between New Orleans and Baton Rouge was virtually impossible.

First responders coming in from all over the country, as well as federal assets were not using the same communication system as Louisiana.

We should all take heart in this lesson and push to develop redundant inter-operable communication systems that can be used from the local to the state to the federal, indeed, a nation-wide interoperable communication system.

Our emergency agency is part of the Louisiana State Military Department. As such, the agency relies on the state military department to increase staffing during times of disaster. In this catastrophic event, our resources were stretched to the limit. The Governor and the Louisiana Legislature recognized the need for more resources and in a special legislative session, added 30 full time positions to the agency which will bring the staffing level to 74. Even this level of manning may not be sufficient for another catastrophic
event, necessitating contingency plans to augment permanent staffing.

We did not have a sufficient response to the media. We should have confronted and rebutted the rumors at the time the inaccurate information was reported. Here are a few of the myths: 300-400 people were dead in the Superdome. In truth, six (6) people died at the dome, 4 of natural causes, one drug overdose and an apparent suicide.

Another myth: there was no food, no water and no medical care at the Dome.

And another: National Guard not present at the Dome.

Not only did irresponsible reporting create the appearance that Louisiana was not responding properly, and that the response was going array, it also created an atmosphere of fear. Some first responders, school bus drivers, contractors, and others refused to go into the area to assist in the evacuation because they were concerned for their safety.

I believe that we should develop, train and equip incident management teams. The teams would be composed of a LOHSEP agency representative and individuals from the key agencies responsible for emergency response. These teams would be deployed pre-storm to the parishes most likely to receive the greatest impact. They would have robust communication equipment, to include voice, data, and video. The goal is to increase situational awareness, provide rapid resource requests, and other assistance to the local parish emergency managers in the critical first hours, and days of the response operation.

After Katrina, a mobile command center is a must. Immediately after an event, it is essential to move forward with key personnel from our agency and other ESFs. On scene situational awareness and evaluation will provide immediate feed back to the emergency operations center. Information is the key to triggering action and coordination of delivery of resources.
We received assistance from virtually every parish throughout the state, including local sheriffs, fire departments, public works departments and EMS. This process should be streamlined through formalized regional and state-wide mutual aide agreements for all locations throughout the state.

Each State agency that is assigned the lead for an emergency support function (ESF) should continue to improve and refine its emergency operations plans. These plans must incorporate the use of all supporting ESF agencies.

The current inability to contract for resources pre-storm hinders the response. It is necessary that LOHSEP and others be allowed to contract for certain critical items such as generators for special needs shelters prior to the storm. We must be able to ensure that these critical assets are available when needed.

A disaster historian is needed to document key events. An intelligence cell that monitors live media coverage is a must. This is another tool for obtaining situational awareness.

Our agency needs to provide more assistance to local entities in reviewing their emergency operations plans and their continuity of operations and continuity of government plans.

Our State is already reviewing the existing laws and regulations pertaining to evacuation of nursing homes and special needs facilities. The evacuation of hospitals is also being evaluated in light of Katrina.

In addressing the shortcomings in the Federal response, I share the views of many other emergency managers and other that many of the shortcomings are directly a result of FEMA being brought under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). While I believe that it was correct to combine all enforcement and intelligence sharing agencies under one umbrella, I feel that it was absolutely the wrong thing to bring the agency responsible for mitigation, emergency preparedness, response and recovery under an umbrella of law enforcement. Emergency management is made up of ten disciplines:
1) Law Enforcement
2) Emergency Medical Services
3) Emergency Management
4) Fire Services
5) HAZMAT Response
6) Public Works
7) Government Administration
8) Public Safety Communications
9) Health Care
10) Public Health

It is my understanding that the Department of Homeland Security is made up some 180,000 employees of which FEMA is barely over 2,000. Critics of the current federal structure have been validated by the response of DHS and FEMA to Katrina. It is apparent that DHS does not understand the full spectrum of emergency management. DHS hindered FEMA’s ability to plan and coordinate. It appears that DHS has literally stripped FEMA of its assets: just recently the Preparedness Division of FEMA was taken away from FEMA and moved into DHS.

While natural disasters such as Katrina cannot be prevented, there can be preparation. The desperately needed ability to prepare has been stripped from FEMA. When you read about the role of the new preparedness division that is now in DHS, it is clear that the emphasis is terrorism and preventing terrorism. This is not the same as “preparing”. Only one short reference is made to natural disasters.

DHS publicizes that it is “all hazards” but the grant guidelines reflect an entirely different picture. Unless the training exercise has something to do with weapons of mass destruction (“WMD”), it is very difficult to get funding.

The complexity that DHS has added to grant applications, reporting and guidelines have many local emergency managers ready to tell DHS to keep its money as it is not worth the effort. DHS funding has six (6) separate funding streams with five (5) solution areas and three (3) grants years may be open at one time. The expenditures must be tracked separately requiring accounting for as
many as ninety (90) accounts. A local emergency manager needs to be a CPA and attorney to administer DHS programs!

The Federal response did not follow the National Incident Management System (“NIMS”) as outlined in the National Response Plan which calls for a unified command. In essence, in Katrina, there were three (3) Federal commands, not one, unified command. The Primary Federal Official (“PFO”) by doctrine is not supposed to be an operational person directly involved in response activities. This individual is supposed to de-conflict conflicts between Federal agencies and keep the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and the President apprised of situations. The PFO in Katrina went operational and began directing and guiding response operations and to a large degree left out the Federal Coordinating Officer (“FCO”) who, by doctrine, is the individual that is supposed to be in charge of response operations. The PFO cell was operating on its own, communicating directly with the Governor, communicating directly with the Mayor of New Orleans and a myriad of other local elected officials. There was a unified joint command at the Joint Field Office with the FCO and the State Coordinating Officer (“SCO”). The problems with a disjointed Federal command are not limited to communications outside the chain of command. Whenever the task force commander of Hurricane Katrina, General Honoré, came onto the scene, he was also operating independently with little regard whatsoever for the Joint Field Office, which should have been the only unified command. DHS in essence acknowledges that there was a problem as reflected in the third or fourth week of the disaster, when DHS appointed the PFO as the FCO as well. DHS discovered the PFO did not have the authority to obligate money. Only the FCO has authority to obligate money. NIMS calls for a unified command where all entities work together. In this case, anyone who was there, anyone who chose to look, would realize that there were literally three separate Federal commands.

There are conflicts between the National Response Plan and those items that can be funded by the Stafford Act. As an example, the re-interment of disinterred remains is, according to the National Response Plan, an activity that the Federal government will handle in a catastrophic event such as Katrina. The State of Louisiana requested this assistance and was initially told that the Federal
government would perform this function. Later the State was told that FEMA could not perform this function because the Stafford Act would not allow such funding. This is only one example of a conflict between the National Response Plan responsibilities and the funding through the Stafford Act.

Two huge issues emerged with FEMA in resourcing: Not only were resources slow in coming, but there is no tracking system in place. FEMA could not advise with a degree of certainty when a particular resource would arrive. Once something is ordered FEMA has no way to determine the arrival date. When FEMA provided an arrival date, yet did not deliver, huge problems were created. The most notable example is the failure to deliver buses, as promised, to evacuate the City of New Orleans.

Generators are a key element in emergency response. FEMA’s method to supply generators is totally absurd. There are many documented cases where it took three and four days to get generators in place and operating, when there were generators on hand at a staging area.

After 911 the nation recognized a need to address prevention of terrorism. Indeed the Department of Homeland Security has taken many steps in preventing a catastrophic terrorist event. However, nothing has been done to address the Federal legislation that provides the recovery from such a catastrophic event, the Stafford Act.

The FCO for Katrina described the Stafford Act as like bringing a donkey to the Kentucky Derby – it just doesn’t cut it because the needs are so great in a catastrophic event and the Stafford Acts ability is so limited. Our nation’s failure to address and amend the Stafford Act to define a catastrophic event and then to allow additional funding under defined criteria, is a failure on the nation’s part.

Contract review by FEMA headquarters has taken weeks in many cases. I have been told that contracts now have to be reviewed by FEMA legal and programs as well as DHS. It seems no one in the headquarters contracting element understands what
“emergency” means. This double review is absurd. The FCO indicated that after FEMA came under DHS that his authority to make decisions in the field has been curtailed and many of his actions are now subject to review at FEMA headquarters and in many cases DHS. This slows the recovery process greatly.

The biggest single failure of the Federal response was the Department of Homeland Security’s failure to recognize that Katrina was a catastrophic event and implement the catastrophic incident annex to the National Response Plan. Had DHS recognized Katrina for the event that it was, a truly catastrophic event, had DHS implemented the catastrophic incident annex to the National Response Plan, Louisiana should have had a significant number of Federal troops and Federal assets, days prior to their actual arrival. The National Weather Service issued an ominous warning mid-day Sunday indicating just how devastating Katrina was predicted to be in the New Orleans area. Had the catastrophic incident annex been implemented on Sunday, Federal resources and troops, per the National Response Plan, should have been leaning forward preparing. These assets should have moved in after the storm without a request from the State of Louisiana (even though the State did ask for this assistance). Had the catastrophic incident annex been implemented, I submit that there should have been thousands of Federal troops on the ground performing search and rescue and performing evacuation, by late Tuesday and surely by Wednesday morning. Instead federal troops did not arrive in number until Saturday, after the evacuations of the Dome, Convention Center and Cloverleaf were complete. The failure to recognize Katrina for what it was, the worst natural disaster in U.S. history, cost precious time and strained Louisiana’s already overwhelmed resources.

Thank you for allowing me to share my views with this Committee. I sincerely hope that this testimony, in some small way, will assist our State and Nation in improving future emergency response operations.
I'm Mayor Ray Nagin, Mayor of America's Most Unique City, New Orleans. A City that is being allowed to die as we speak. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

On August 29th, New Orleans was a victim to the largest natural disaster in the nation’s history. I would like to thank you for taking the time to try to understand the magnitude of Katrina's impact, not only on New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, but also on our nation. I encourage each of you to visit New Orleans to see first hand the complexity of the devastation.

Please allow me to take a moment to thank the American people for the compassion, support and generosity they have shown our city and our residents over the last few months. The outpouring from private citizens and corporations all over the world has been remarkable.

I begin my testimony by painting a picture of New Orleans before Katrina. Our city government was transparent and fiscally sound. We had more than $3 billion in construction activity, real estate was on fire and Donald Trump had just announced the latest Trump Tower would grace our skyline.

We had a starring role as "Hollywood South" with hundreds of millions of dollars in films being made in the area. Tourism was better than ever, with a record 10.1 million visitors coming to our city and thousands of people cruising out of New Orleans.

Equally as important, about 38,000 people moved from the poverty rolls into the several thousand new jobs created in 2004. New Orleans and its port continued to supply raw goods and our nation’s energy supply.

The Friday before landfall, August 26, 2005, Katrina crossed Florida into the Gulf of Mexico. Although the path was still projected to hit the Florida panhandle, I notified the citizens that we needed to watch this storm closely. I activated essential staff and worked with regional and state officials to enact our emergency plans and Contra flow.

On Saturday, August 27, models started to converge showing the path of the Category 3 storm changed placing New Orleans in the middle of the cone.
I called for a voluntary evacuation urging all citizens that were able to evacuate the city to leave. I reminded citizens of how important it was to prepare for the worst. Many New Orleans residents boarded up their homes, packed up, and got on the road to safety. We enacted Contra flow and encouraged citizens to follow the plan created by the State of Louisiana and implemented on a parish by parish basis.

Our region had one of the most successful mass evacuations in the history of the United States. 90% of our residents evacuated. Over a million people left the region within 24 hours. Compare that to what happened in Texas during Hurricane Rita. We were successful in saving lives.

On Saturday evening, the Governor called to tell me that she had just spoken to Max Mayfield with the National Weather Center and that I should call him. He told me that in his over 30 years experience in watching hurricanes, he had never seen a storm or conditions like this. I immediately called my staff and visited every television station in the city to alert the citizens to stress the need for evacuation.

To provide a safety net to seniors and other citizens who relied on public transportation, I took another very important step by encouraging our faith based community to reinforce evacuations through buddy systems within their communities.

On Saturday night, the National Weather Service reported that Katrina was now a category 5 hurricane and was approximately 250 miles away from New Orleans with 190 mile per hour sustained winds. Katrina had increased its size within hours and had a predicted storm surge of 15 to 20 feet high.

After a Sunday morning statewide conference call, I announced the first ever citywide Mandatory Evacuation order, opened the Louisiana Superdome as our refuge of last resort, staged busses throughout the city to transport people to the Superdome and set a curfew for dusk.

The City evacuated 400 special needs residents to a state shelter and then opened the Superdome at 8 a.m. for the remaining special needs population.

There were thousands of residents that did not leave, including those with means who would choose to ride out the storm like their parents had done.
during Hurricane Betsy. When reality set in for many of them on Sunday, they made their way to the refuge of last resort.

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Katrina, the most powerful Category 4 hurricane to hit the region, made landfall. We began to receive reports of levees breaking. Waters rose as high as 18 feet with 80% of the City receiving some level of flooding. Thousands of people were stranded on their rooftops, or in attics, needing to be rescued. Hundreds died in the waters that engulfed our city. The fact that thousands did not die was a blessing because all predictions estimated by scientist was that 10,000 should have died. Primary and secondary power sources, sewerage and draining systems and Communication and power lines were incapacitated.

Later that evening, in a meeting with FEMA, we gave a priority list identifying commodity and equipment needs to FEMA to get the appropriate resources needed. I also devised a rescue recovery and rebuilding plan. Marty Bahamonde, the FEMA Sr. representative, told me "This is one of the best plans I have ever seen presented by a city after a disaster".

After the storm hit, the swelling crowd at the Superdome and the number of people needing shelter required us to open the Convention Center as another refuge. In discussions with FEMA on Monday, 350 busses were promised.

In other parts of the city, our first responders were jumping into the water to rescue people as 911 operators were consumed with traumatic calls for rescue. They received thousand upon thousands of frantic and desperate calls.

Those limited resources were further strained as people desperate for necessities and others taking advantage of the unstable situation caused a security problem.

Fires were breaking out in the city and firefighters had very little means to contain them. The lack of utilities and communications crippled our city.

During the week, we faced a serious set of new challenges daily. We faced them head-on ready to do whatever it would take to save our city.

I directed our team to focus on the following priorities:

1. Search and rescue of people trapped and stranded
2. Evacuation of the Superdome, Convention Center and bridges
3. Patching the levee breaks
4. Draining the floodwaters
5. Recovery of the dead

Every day, requests were sent to the State and Federal authorities for emergency assistance needed to save lives and restore order. We requested search and rescue assistance, busses for evacuation, assistance in patching the levees, food, water, medical supplies, police and fire equipment and pumps to drain water.

I don’t know if I can convey the desperation, but I was looking at my city with thousands of people who were on the street, on our bridges, in the water, in the Dome and at the Convention Center….people from St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes, the lower-lying areas beneath New Orleans, being dropped into our city. We were in most desperate need for assistance.

On Wednesday, the situation in the Superdome was tenuous at best and no food or water had arrived at the Convention Center. Rescue efforts by air were only beginning to get underway. Because communication channels were down and inconsistent, we found creative ways to communicate via text messaging to a communications person in Houston. We were trying to get a message to anyone we though that could get the busses we needed to evacuate people.

Little help had arrived as the day turned to night and you could feel the heaviness of the aftermath. Imagine the nights -- pitch black, no power, intense heat and people crying for help. It was a horrible situation and Wednesday night was touch and go for the City.

On Thursday, conditions continued to deteriorate. I received word from the National Guard and New Orleans police that the suffering in the Superdome and Convention Center was becoming in humane, there was increasing pressure to leave the buildings and incidents of violence were escalating. As the day passed, I sent out more urgent pleas for help.

Finally, on Friday afternoon we began to see passengers loading into busses. Late Friday night, I watched the last bus leave the Convention Center.
Saturday, the final bus left the Superdome. Many people had been there for 7 full days.

I should point out that at the Superdome, the New Orleans Police Department and the National Guard held security intact. That Guard unit and those officers were heroes. People could not leave the Dome as it was surrounded by water and there were no busses. The rations were stretched. There was no power and sanitation. Good people suffered needlessly.

In the end, it was a horrible lesson but one that I am hopeful we will learn from. By far, most of the people showed tremendous compassion for their fellow man and heroism existed in the waters, at the Dome, at the Convention Center, on the bridges and on the streets.

Since then, we are a financial crippled municipality struggling to bring our city back. Hurricane Katrina, like 9-11 and other disasters before, has taught us that improvements must be made at all levels of government. Our plans for the future include enhanced evacuation routes, staging necessary resources outside of the City and not being as dependent on the rescue efforts of other levels of government. This storm has challenged us and we are responding.

Before I conclude, I need to recognize our emergency response team, led by Col. Ebbert. Their work has gone largely unnoticed. Despite tremendous personal loss, police officers, fire fighters, National Guard and EMS workers experienced horrific tragedy and stayed true to their tasks. They are our heroes.

I want to thank you again for allowing me to be here with you today. I am confident that by working together, we can achieve a common vision: a vibrant New Orleans with a thriving economy, prosperous citizens, and the chance to once again contribute to our great nation.

Thank you.
Statement

I am Col. Terry J. Ebbert, USMC (Ret) and I currently serve as the Director of Homeland Security & Public Safety for the City of New Orleans. In this position I have the leadership responsibility for the Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Medical Service and the Office of Emergency Management. I have spent my adult life serving the citizens of our nation and the City of New Orleans. I want to thank you for the invitation to testify before the Select Bipartisan Committee investigating the Preparation and Response to Hurricane Katrina.

I also want to give public thanks to General Russell Honore, Vice Admiral Thad Allen, Admiral Robert Duncan, Captain Tom Atkin, General William Caldwell and his magnificent warriors from the 82nd Airborne Division as well as the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the other Federal Law Enforcement officials. The only question they ever asked was, “What do you need and want?” America is blessed and lucky to have such leadership and I am privileged to have been given the opportunity to have walked beside them.

Hurricane Katrina was an unprecedented natural disaster which overwhelmed operational capabilities, resources and civil infrastructure at the Local, State and Federal level and decimated homes, businesses, lives, and the unique lifestyle of Southeast Louisiana. Left behind to build the foundation for a future New Orleans is a city with no money or revenue, a crippled criminal justice system, a faulty levee protection system, lack of housing for fifty percent (50%) of its citizens, and healthcare system clinging to life. I have lived in the belly of the beast Katrina for the last three months and have been blessed with the opportunity to work with many of the finest first responders anywhere in the world.

Given our location on the gulf coast and being extremely vulnerable to water threats, New Orleans, and our surrounding partners, has dedicated great time and effort in planning for Hurricanes. The basis of our efforts has been to develop effective evacuation plans. This is a challenge due to the limited time we have after a storm enters the Gulf, limited highways and a large population with an anti-evacuation mentality. Driven by model predictions of potential deaths well over 10-12,000, we worked hard with our regional and state partners to develop a plan and educate our citizens on its execution. We worked to refine this plan after storms over the last two years. One of the lost success stories is the evacuation in advance of Katrina. This highly complex joint plan moved over 1 million people and saved over 10,000 lives. This was a two state, eight parish effort, which included multiple law enforcement agencies, emergency planning offices, local media and volunteer organizations. The continued improvement of this plan is the foundation of future Hurricane planning in New Orleans.

Faced with the knowledge that we would be left with citizens without the ability to evacuate, we worked to develop a “Refuge of Last Resort” for both citizens with special needs, citizens without transportation, and for those who recognized too late the serious nature of the storm. This phase was designed to begin once Contaflow was discontinued
and a dusk curfew was to be implemented. The plan utilized RTA buses, moving throughout the city, picking up citizens at preestablished checkpoints and transporting them to the Superdome. All citizens were thoroughly searched by National Guard troops upon entering the dome. Security was provided by both the National Guard and the New Orleans Police Department. This refuge was not intended to be a shelter, but it was created to ensure that citizens lived through the storm with basic necessities provided. As planners we recognized that further evacuation with federal assets would be required. The planning window for this relief was response within 48 hours. For all the difficulties, this plan was a success. Many of the citizens in the dome would have become the predicted 12,000 deaths.

There are two particular areas that need to be addressed if we are to be prepared for a disaster, both natural and man made.

Funding Allocation from Department of Homeland Security

The Urban Area Security Initiative, conceived in the aftermath of 9-11, was enacted as a mechanism to provide Federal funding to specific metropolitan areas having a disproportionate share of the Nation’s critical infrastructure and, therefore, at greater risk to attack. The intent of the program was and is to enhance the capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks employing weapons of mass destruction.

The four parishes of Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Bernard have been formed into Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Region One for joint planning, training, and exercising of the Department of Homeland Security defined events. This includes WMD, all acts of terrorism and natural disasters.

Executing the intent of Congress in the program, the Office of Domestic Preparedness restricted any use of grant funds for planning, equipping, training, and exercise to enhancing the preparedness of first responders operating in a potential WMD environment. Most allowable expenditures under the UASI program remained closely linked to the WMD threat to the exclusion of other forms of enhanced readiness. As late as summer 2005, ODP Training authorities rejected applications for reimbursement that would have supported a request for funding to pay for Urban Search and Rescue Water training for our Police, Fire, and Emergency Medical personnel because the curriculum for the training, though nationally recognized, did not include a WMD component. A request to purchase a number of inexpensive, flat-bottomed, aluminum boats to equip our Fire and Police Departments, with the intent of having them available to rescue people trapped by flooding, was denied.

The rules on what is permitted and reimbursable are unaltered while the newly stated focus on an “All Hazards” approach to preparedness remains illusive. In recognition of the truth that the consequences of any large scale disaster are remarkably similar. The existing limitations imposed on the availability of federal preparedness funding should be broadened.
One other area that significantly impacts the ability of any UASI region to implement its Homeland Security strategy is the cumbersome bureaucratic layers in the funding approval process. Although the UASI grant is awarded directly to the selected metropolitan area, 20% of the funding is dedicated to the state and approval for reimbursement of expenditures deemed necessary to achieve the objectives rests with the State Administrative Agent, subject to the concurrence if the ODP Federal Preparedness Officer who supervises the grant. This ensures that the decisions will be made by officials far removed from the local officials required to carry out the millions.

Although The Urban Area Security Initiative program provides a desperately needed and long overdue source of critical funding whereby economically challenged metropolitan areas can substantially increase the level of protection, it is in great need of changes to provide increased flexibility to the local UASI regions so that they can properly cope with future natural disaster like Katrina.

Interoperable Communications

The State of Louisiana has for some time recognized the need for statewide communications interoperability; however, the austere fiscal environment, the challenges of getting “buy-in” from local governments and support through the legislative process prevented any real progress toward interoperability. Regionally, the City of New Orleans and the parishes of Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines have undertaken a project, supported by a Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant, to establish communications interoperability within the region; however, the project was eighteen months from completion when Hurricane Katrina struck. Pre-Katrina, the New Orleans Maritime Interoperable Committee (NOMIC), which was an outgrowth from the federally funded PSWN project, was the primary means to accomplish interoperability. The project connected seventeen local, state and federal agencies through ACU 1000 bridging technology. Direct console patches linked the Jefferson Parish Sheriff’s Office and the New Orleans Police Department. Regionally, the City of New Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes were attempting to leverage all available federal and local funds to eliminate the number of disparate voice radio systems and upgrade others to improve day to day operability and build interoperability; however, the funding was not there to support the requirement.

During Hurricane Katrina, the City of New Orleans lost two primary tower sites and had to evacuate the police and fire communications centers because of flooding. Associated with the loss of the communications centers was the loss of all 911 capabilities and the NOMIC interoperable bridging capability. Over 2000 police, fire and EMS personnel were forced to communicate in a single channel mode, between radios, utilizing three mutual aid frequencies. There was no voice radio contact with surrounding parishes or state and federal agencies. Lives were put at risk and it created a direct operational impact on their ability to maintain control of the rapidly deteriorating situation within the city, carry out rescue efforts and control the evacuation of those people who had failed to heed the call for evacuation.
Though we are working diligently to restore voice radio communications, it has not been fully restored to pre-storm levels. Attempting to move toward regional and statewide interoperability, the State has installed 700 MHz antennas and repeaters; however, FEMA has denied funding for subscriber radios, which are needed in order to take advantage of the state architecture and tower sites. FEMA has provided St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes with 700 MHz subscriber radios, yet they can not talk to the 800 MHz systems in New Orleans and Jefferson. From an interoperability perspective, we are worse today than we were before the storm. The storm has left New Orleans and the parishes of St. Bernard and Plaquemines without funding. The parishes are unable to meet the cash match requirements for the COPS Grant and will ask for a waiver to the requirement but the overall value of the grant will be reduced by $1.8 million and this will further impact our ability to establish interoperability. FEMA funding and the COPS grant provide the only funding source for restoration of our communications system and for interoperability at this time. Based on our Regional Plan, we are moving forward but, from an interoperability perspective, we will be less prepared for the 2006 hurricane season unless we receive immediate funding support from outside sources.

Much has been discussed about relief response after the storm. I can assure you this was a very difficult seven days. I witnessed the best of human valor and the worst of human nature, but I want to state that I find no fault with any official, but rather a National Response Plan and a FEMA organization totally overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster. This storm did not fit into the nice little neat book of administrative regulations during a huge time sensitive operational response. I believe we must:

1. Recognize that an administrative organization (FEMA) built around contractors, has no operational capability to control large scale emergency response. It needs to concentrate on recovery operations.
2. Find a way to immediately utilize the only organization with the leadership, command and control capability, equipment and training to accomplish large scale response—The Department of Defense.
3. Develop prepackaged capability for communication, food, water, fuel, medical and other vital supplies.
4. Ensure early relief efforts are PUSH rather than PULL.

This is the greatest nation on earth and I know we can do better. I am dedicated to working together with our state and federal partners to ensure that we do get better.

It is clear the nation needs to review Katrina planning, response and recovery at every level to look at our organizations with intent to increase capability and compatibility. Katrina was an act of nature and the impact, this time, was the Gulf Coast Region of the United States. The next act could be a manmade act of terrorism and could happen anywhere in our country. I believe we have been given a warning shot—our preparation and integrated responses at every level must improve.

I can only reflect on Katrina and her destruction. My concern is to the future and my responsibility to the Mayor and citizens of New Orleans. We are currently looking down the gun barrel of the 2006 Hurricane season due to begin 1 June. With another projected
“Super Storm” season ahead we need your support to insure the survival of our great city. Thank you very much Mr. Chairman and Committee members.
Good morning, Chairman Davis and members of the Committee. I am William M. Lokey. Thank you for inviting me to testify today and speak about my experiences in Louisiana leading up to and following Hurricane Katrina. The views expressed in my testimony are my own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Homeland Security.

My current position is the Chief of the Operations Branch in the Response Division at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I was assigned as the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) for the response to Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana. I served in that position until Admiral Thad Allen was appointed FCO for all of the Gulf Coast operations and I became the Deputy FCO for Louisiana. I arrived in Baton Rouge on the evening of Saturday, August 27, 2005, and served in the field for 35 days. My tour ended
on September 30, 2005, when my Deputy Scott Wells assumed the position of Deputy FCO.

Allow me to provide some information about my background and my work experience. I have been in Emergency Management for over 30 years, starting in the early 1970s as a Mountain Rescue volunteer. I worked for the Washington State Department of Emergency Management from 1977 until 1986, the last four years as the Assistant Director for Operations. I was involved in the response to the eruption of Mt. St. Helens in 1980 and managed the long term recovery efforts until 1986. I managed several Presidentially declared disasters and was also the State Search and Rescue coordinator.

In 1986, I became the Director of Emergency Management for Pierce County, Washington, where I worked for 11 years in local disaster planning, preparedness and response. I also managed the 911 administration, the EMS administration, the Fire Prevention bureau and the county radio communications. During this time my department was the sponsor of the Washington Urban Search and Rescue (US&R) Task Force, one of FEMA’s 28 national US&R teams. I responded as a Task Force Leader to the Northridge earthquake in 1994 and the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995.
In October of 1997, I left Pierce County to become an Assistant Chief for Special Operations for the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services. My responsibilities there included training and administration of California’s eight Urban Search and Rescue Task Forces and the development of the Regional Special Rescue Training Center in Sacramento.

I was hired by James Lee Witt in April 1999, as a FEMA FCO. I have served as a FCO for 18 Presidentially-declared major disasters. I also worked on a variety of special assignments, including two weeks at “Ground Zero” at the World Trade Center in New York as part of FEMA’s Forward Coordinating Team following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In addition I served as an Area Manager for the FEMA response to Hurricane Ivan in Pensacola, Florida, during the 2004 Hurricanes.

In April 2005, I became the Operations Branch Chief in the Response Division at FEMA headquarters in Washington, DC. I was appointed by Michael D. Brown as FCO for one of the two National Emergency Response Teams (ERT-N). On Saturday morning, August 27, 2005, I was assigned to respond with the ERT-N to Louisiana as FCO for Katrina Operations. I arrived in Baton Rouge
late in the afternoon. After checking in with FEMA staff who had been working in New Orleans on a previously declared disaster and who had evacuated to Baton Rouge, I went to the Louisiana State Emergency Operations Center. There, I met with FEMA staff from Region VI that had responded as the Advance Emergency Response Team (ERT-A), other members of the ERT-N who were arriving, and Colonel Jeff Smith, my primary counterpart for State of Louisiana operations.

My first priority was to work with Jeff Smith to identify the State’s priorities, then to organize my staff to start planning and working with our State counterparts to identify tasks and objectives to meet those priorities. The State was heavily involved in the ongoing evacuation efforts but did begin working with us on such issues as search and rescue, commodity distribution, and medical needs. We worked late into the night and began again early on Sunday morning.

We worked on plans to protect FEMA staff when the storm came through; coordinated with our FEMA Headquarters on the pre-positioning of emergency response teams and commodities; requested additional Federal teams be activated and made ready to respond; and continued to work on planning in
critical areas. Other ERT members from the Emergency Support Functions (ESF) had arrived and began discussions with their counterparts. These included but were not limited to people from ESF-1 Transportation, ESF-8 Health and Medical, and the Defense Coordinating Officer. We worked on identifying distribution sites; sending food and water to the Superdome; coordinating with health officials in New Orleans and the State; and planning with State and Federal agencies on potential search and rescue efforts. I also activated contractors who had worked on the Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Planning Project (i.e. Hurricane Pam Exercise) to come to the State EOC as well as the National Response Coordination Center in Washington to help with our planning.

Despite all of our efforts and despite the fact that we pre-positioned more commodities and staged more rescue and medical teams than ever in our history, as a result of the catastrophic size and scope of Katrina, our initial response was overwhelmed. Through your questions, we will be examining that response. There is no question that many things went wrong. We have learned many hard lessons, both as agencies and as individuals. However, there are many things that went right. I would like to take the opportunity to put some of them on the
record now, and acknowledge the hard work of the FEMA staff who worked for me, and our Federal and State partners with whom we worked..

The breakdown of the levee system surrounding New Orleans is the major event that made this disaster truly catastrophic. Without that, it would have been a terrible hurricane, but not the catastrophe it became. Hundreds of FEMA Urban Search and Rescue personnel took an active part in the largest water rescue operation in history, even though water rescue was not part of their mission. The U.S. Coast Guard as part of its historical mission undertook numerous water rescues and FEMA worked side by side with the Coast Guard, and personnel from State Wildlife and Fisheries, Louisiana National Guard, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Defense and others in a true cooperative interagency effort to help the citizens of New Orleans and Louisiana. FEMA teams are credited with rescuing 6,582 persons.

The situation that developed at the Superdome was a terrible tragedy. There is no question about that. Despite what food and water we were able to get there before Hurricane Katrina’s landfall, and the supplies that we gave to the State for airlift to the Superdome before we could gain access again, and the food and water we were able to get there before the evacuation, the supplies were insufficient for the number of people there. Although there has been previous
testimony that food and water were sparse at times, food and water were available throughout the ordeal. We pushed our logistics capabilities and in the first 6 days after Katrina’s landfall, FEMA sent more trucks of supplies for Katrina victims than were delivered in Florida the entire 7 weeks of the response to the four hurricanes last year. We exceeded that amount in support of the citizens of Louisiana in less than two weeks.

When the State asked FEMA to help with the evacuation of citizens from New Orleans, specifically the Superdome and the Convention Center, FEMA launched a multi-agency effort lead by the U.S. Army and Department of Transportation that started at 2:00am in the morning on Wednesday, August 31, 2005. In 96 hours we built a transportation system equal to the capability of the Greyhound bus company. Over 1,000 buses were chartered coming from as far away as Washington and Maine; 49% of them coming from the Gulf Coast States. Within 4 days of getting started, including an air evacuation that we had arranged, we had evacuated over 67,000 Louisiana victims to safe and secure shelters around the country.

The National Disaster Medical System (NDMS) was activated and accomplished the largest response in its history. Our teams were at the
Superdome/Ice Arena, at the New Orleans Airport, at Louisiana State University, and other locations treating Louisiana citizens. To date, NDMS has treated and immunized over 160,000 citizens. NDMS teams were an integral part of providing care for more than 2,500 patients, who were evacuated from the horrible conditions that developed at New Orleans hospitals to medical care centers and hospitals around the country. When the media was having a field day with the problems and politics of the mortuary operations, NDMS personnel from the Disaster Mortuary Operations Response Team operation at Saint Gabriel volunteered to work in the field so that we could continue to support the State with the recovery of remains of Louisiana storm victims.

We have a lot to do as an Agency. We have a lot to do as a Nation. Members of the committee, I am ready for your questions.
Good morning, Chairman Davis and members of the Committee.

My name is Phil Parr and I want to thank you for the opportunity of testifying before you about my experiences and the response to Hurricane Katrina. The views expressed in my testimony are my own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Department of Homeland Security.

Presently, my position with FEMA is that of Federal Coordinating Officer. I have been involved with response and emergency management for the past 26 plus years. I was sworn in as a member of the New York City Fire Department in 1979 and rose through the ranks to attain the level of Chief Officer in 1999. During my tenure with the FDNY and particularly during my tenure as a Chief Officer I served in many capacities including but not limited to: fire and emergency ground commander, operations, planning for Y2K scenarios, and as a Deputy Director in the NYC Office of Emergency Management. I have played
an active role in countless disasters and crisis situations, to include the 9/11 attack at the WTC where I was on scene prior to the towers collapse.

Since January 2004, I have been a member of the Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) program assigned to FEMA Region 1, New England. In this role I have served in various capacities including FCO for three Presidentially declared disasters.

Before I continue with my testimony I think it important to mention that I’ve always taken great pride in my years of service as a member of the NYC Fire Department. I could not imagine serving in any other position in which I would serve with the same feeling and pride. However, during my tenure with FEMA, the dedication to service as displayed by its members and their care for disaster victims has allowed me to serve with the same pride and satisfaction that I experienced in my previous 25 years of public service. So it is with that passion that I speak before this committee and I thank you again for the opportunity to do so.

On Saturday August 27th I was informed that I would be the Emergency Response Team Advance Element team leader for the State of Texas. My team was composed of personnel from FEMA, Region 1 (New England), and we were instructed to rendezvous in the Region 6, Regional Response Coordination Center in Denton, TX. Sunday August 28th. Soon it became clear that Texas was
not in the path of Hurricane Katrina and that members of my team and I would be
assigned as the lead element in New Orleans, La.

I flew into Louisiana, immediately following the hurricane passing Monday 29th of
August with a contingent of my team, and Tuesday morning on the 30th we
helicoptered into the Superdome. Our mission was three fold: (1) form a unified
command with the State (as represented by the Louisiana National Guard), and
the City of New Orleans; (2) maintain visibility of commodities ordered; and (3)
build out a base from which FEMA teams could be formed to locate and assist in
the hardest hit Parishes.

To accomplish these goals we were to meet a Mobile Emergency Operations and
Communications Vehicle and use that as a base of operations and
communication. Due to extensive flooding in the City our communications
vehicle was unable to enter the Dome and this severely hampered our
operations. Despite this, and while working under the most difficult of
circumstances, we were able to assist the National Guard in maintaining a supply
of food and water to Superdome evacuees, all were fed and provided water, and
even with limited communications, facilitate the arrival of what was to become
over the next four days, a thousand bus convoy to evacuate the City of New
Orleans to start the day after our arrival.
The FEMA Disaster Medical Assistance Teams treated hundreds, and identified seriously injured and special needs patients who were evacuated via air and ground assets throughout the operation. In addition, several meetings were held with the Mayor and his staff, ranking National Guard Officers on scene, and other Federal Officials to include DOD and the USCG, this facilitated the initiation of a unified command structure. Due to the enormity of the event, not all of our initial goals were met, and a delay ensued in placing teams into other hard hit parishes, which I believe took place that Friday/Saturday.

I have been asked whether FEMA was overwhelmed and could our response be considered slow. To consider the latter first, I must say in my opinion No. FEMA teams (response, management, medical, and Urban Search and Rescue) were in position in four States pre-land fall. Commodities were staged close to the impacted areas and in some cases the hand-off to the State had already taken place. In addition and as previously mentioned, FEMA mission assigned Emergency Support Function (ESF) 1, the Department of Transportation, and they verified that by 3 September 990 busses were in service performing evacuations and it is estimated that 66,825 persons were transported by that date. The number of buses grew to over 1100 in the next two days. Also, we pushed our logistics capabilities and in the first 6 days after Katrina’s landfall, FEMA sent more trucks of supplies for Katrina victims than were delivered in Florida the entire 7 weeks of the response to the four hurricanes last year.
Were we overwhelmed? The simple answer is, Yes. But what needs to be understood is that at any disaster the initial response always feels overwhelmed. I must draw on my experience as a local responder to give you an example on a small scale of what I mean, and then a larger one. The police officer who pulls up to a two car accident with severe injuries while he operates alone waiting for help is overwhelmed. The fire officer who pulls up to a burning structure with people trapped inside is overwhelmed. But the true professional while responding and operating knows that he is constantly sizing up the situation, gaining intelligence, shifting strategies, modifying plans, and calling for assistance where needed to meet unfulfilled needs whether expected or unexpected.

I would like to refer back to the disaster of 9/11 and its effect on the emergency personnel operating at the WTC. First, it must be remembered that within the 369 square miles of NYC are the resources of a State with a strong central government. There are over 35,000 NYC police officers, about 13,000 firefighters and emergency medical personal, and these numbers only begin to enumerate the assets available to the City. No other city in the country can begin to come close to the responders contained within the City of New York. The response to the attacks on the towers was immediate; the enormity of the task at hand was overwhelming. Then with the collapse of the towers it was chaos. Emergency services within NYC regrouped almost immediately and restarted
operations, but a full coordinated plan took days. The WTC complex was thirteen acres. The landfall of Hurricane Katrina affected four States and covered an area of some 90,000 square miles, an area the size of Great Britain and it affected millions of persons. Effectively Louisiana was hit by two disasters, first a devastating hurricane along with its associated blast damage, and second a catastrophic flooding event caused by levee failures. Hurricane Katrina was the most devastating disaster to hit our country. We were all overwhelmed, the City, affected Parishes, the State, and the Federal Government.

What can FEMA, individuals, local government and States do to be more prepared? First, it must be realized that response to any crisis or disaster is the responsibility of every individual and form of government in this country. Emergency Management is more than just coordination. It is about partnership with all entities previously mentioned. Each of us plays a vital part and any one of us who fails in our part fails in that partnership. That failed responsibility must be picked up by one of their partners and that causes delay, confusion and lack of coordination.

For FEMA’s part it is my belief we have not done what is needed to get that message across to individuals, locals and States. We’ve worked to create an image that Uncle Sam will be on your doorstep with Meals Ready to Eat (MREs), water and ice before the winds subside. We’ve created an expectation that in a large or no-notice event (such as, a terrorist attack or earthquake) we can never
hope to meet. As an agency we must help our partners understand their role in the emergency management cycle (as many States and locals do now). To this end I believe we can do much with conditional and competitive grants to State and local governments to achieve this.

Generally, because response is immediate and local, FEMA’s primary role in disaster is recovery. With some notable exceptions, what is described at the Federal level as response is in actuality “response support” (i.e. supplying life saving and life sustaining commodities such as food, water, ice, generation etc.) with local and State responders performing what we traditionally call response but as an agency we can do better in the response role. Primarily, I believe this can be accomplished by a shift in attitude and training by some in management and decision making roles in this agency. I believe since the 2004 hurricane season this was recognized and initiated under our previous Director (FIRST TEAMS and Type 1 or Response FCOs) and I believe this will be ably continued by the now Acting Director Chief David Paulson.

In another area of improvement, FEMA has initiated a total asset visibility system whereby truck loads of commodities can be located via satellite transponder and tracked more closely. This system must be put fully online before our next hurricane season. But more is still needed. While knowing where our trucks are is important, but if they do not have the ability to get to the impacted area with their lifesaving material due to storm damage or hostile environment their value is
diminished. Preplanning and providing force protection in coordination with State and local officials must be considered in providing critical deliverables to impacted areas.

We should also recognize that FEMA is a small agency, especially when compared with other Federal agencies, but its strength lies in the fact that the National Response Plan (NRP) identifies it as the coordinating agency for the entire Federal Response. I believe more drills (familiarization, table top, and other) are necessary between FEMA and other Federal Agencies to help clarify roles and responsibilities under the NRP and in their critical ESFs. Understanding their contribution and role in the Emergency Response Team structure is essential for effective response. These crucial elements must be established and become routine to help ensure a better coordinated Federal package can be delivered to the States to assist them in their response.

Additional standardized and practical training must be provided to personnel who may be asked to serve on response teams at the county or local level. Training programs and expectations that build on practical experience from this and previous operations, with input from States, must be provided to FEMA staff who may be needed to assist at the local level in response operations.

As with any operation I hope that as an agency we can make changes based on lessons learned, both positive and negative. I would also hope that State and
local officials will review their emergency management procedures and also adopt necessary changes to make their response to disasters more effective. Finally, each citizen has a personal responsibility to be prepared and follow warnings from their local officials.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on this subject. I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.