

**RECOVERING FROM HURRICANE KATRINA: RE-  
SPONDING TO THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF  
ITS VICTIMS**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON  
HOMELAND SECURITY AND  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS  
UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED NINTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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SEPTEMBER 28, 2005

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## **RECOVERING FROM HURRICANE KATRINA: RESPONDING TO THE IMMEDIATE NEEDS OF ITS VICTIMS**

**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28, 2005**

U.S. SENATE,  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:36 a.m., in room SD-342, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Susan M. Collins, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

Present: Senators Collins, Voinovich, Coleman, Warner, Lieberman, Levin, Akaka, Carper, and Pryor.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN COLLINS**

Chairman COLLINS. The Committee will come to order.

Good morning. Today this Committee holds its second hearing on what is being done to meet the immediate needs of the people of the Gulf Coast whose lives have been devastated by Hurricane Katrina. This Committee is undertaking an in-depth investigation into the inadequate preparedness and response to the hurricane, but our immediate focus is on ensuring that bureaucratic roadblocks, inflexible policies, outdated laws, and wasteful practices do not impede the prompt and compassionate delivery of needed assistance.

On September 16, I joined a group of Senators, including Senator Lieberman and Senator Warner from this Committee, on a tour of the stricken region. The scenes of destruction that we have all seen on television only hint at the reality. Tragically, our first look at the wreckage Katrina left in its wake coincided with the first look many people of the region got of their destroyed homes and communities some 2 weeks after the storm had hit. For many, a water-stained family photograph, a mud-caked Bible, or a cherished heirloom unearthed from the rubble is all that is left. For others, there is not even that.

In Pass Christian, Mississippi, Mayor Malcolm Jones, walked with us through the rubble of his community. I did not see a single undamaged home. Reopening the schools and restoring water and sewer services are but a few of the massive challenges that must be met for Pass Christian to emerge from the rubble and again become the pretty community it once was.

Today the Gulf Coast is at once a region of tears and a region of great determination. It is also a region that needs help and has

encountered frustration in getting answers and assistance. Rebuilding homes, jobs, schools, utilities, and everything else that make a community are urgent priorities. But as the rebuilding for tomorrow proceeds, we must meet the immediate needs of today. Mayor Jones expressed to us his frustration in trying to get permission from FEMA to proceed with urgent infrastructure repairs. Senator Trent Lott has told me that FEMA has been far too slow in distributing basic supplies, even food.

Throughout the country, and especially throughout the South, communities have shown great compassion in taking in hundreds of thousands of Americans who have been displaced. This compassion carries a great cost. Communities that have provided shelter, schools, and medical care to displaced families wonder if they will receive any financial relief anytime soon.

Our witnesses today represent four of these generous communities. Harris County, Texas, which includes the City of Houston, had at one point some 27,000 evacuees in such facilities as the Astrodome, the Houston Arena, and the Expo Center. It is essential that these thousands of people be moved from such mass shelters to more suitable housing. This process is underway, but the pressure on local resources is great and made even greater by Hurricane Rita.

The population of Baton Rouge has exploded by 50 percent since Katrina. It is now the largest city in Louisiana. The city continues to grow daily, and some of this growth may be permanent. The demands this unexpected growth has imposed on police, fire, and EMS personnel, on schools, hospitals, utilities, and every other aspect of community life are enormous.

Just 130 miles from New Orleans, Brookhaven, Mississippi, suffered major damage from Katrina. It is now on the front lines of the recovery effort as a major relief center, including as the Red Cross staging area. Despite their own needs, the people of Brookhaven have opened their homes, their churches, their schools, and their stores to others in even greater need. Brookhaven is clearly a town of very special people.

Arkansas has received more Katrina evacuees per capita than any other State, in excess of 75,000 at the peak, primarily in Fayetteville and the surrounding area. Today as many as 50,000 remain, a great many in private homes, church camps, and even a vacated jail. These displaced families are being cared for by one of the poorest States in the Nation. Schools are stressed beyond capacity, yet they are committed to educating these thousands of new students.

The communities represented by our panel today have been shining examples of generosity and caring. As I said at our first hearing, Hurricane Katrina was a natural disaster followed by a man-made debacle. It is essential that we first concentrate on overcoming that initial failure and providing effective, efficient, and speedy relief for the victims of Katrina. Once that is done, we must learn what went wrong, why it went wrong, and what we can do to fix the problems.

Meeting the needs of the victims is our first priority, but we are also concerned about protecting against waste, fraud, and abuse. We need to make sure that resources are not squandered when the

needs are so great. This concern about wasteful spending is not merely hypothetical. Last week, for example, dozens of truckloads of ice ordered by the Federal Government for Katrina victims at great cost arrived in the Gulf Coast region, only to be diverted more than 1,600 miles away, where they ended up, in all places, in my home State of Maine, a State that is not short of ice.

The American taxpayers, and especially the Katrina victims, cannot endure this kind of wasteful spending. With billions of dollars being appropriated for recovery efforts, we must ensure that the money is spent wisely. Creating a chief financial officer and establishing a special Inspector General are essential safeguards that cannot wait.

Before calling on our witnesses, I want to provide a brief update on our investigation. Today we will send the first document requests to Federal and State entities. They are extensive. We are also working closely with the Government Accountability Office and the Inspectors General. Next week our investigators will be on site in Louisiana, and also next week the Acting FEMA Director, David Paulison, will testify before our Committee.

I very much appreciate our witnesses joining us today, and it is now my pleasure to call upon the Committee's Ranking Member, Senator Lieberman.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LIEBERMAN**

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Madam Chairman. Thanks to the witnesses for being here. It strikes me that I no longer have to use the overworn metaphor, "carrying coal to Newcastle." From now on I can say it is like "carrying ice to Maine."

Chairman COLLINS. That is right.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I thank you for your leadership in convening this second hearing of the Committee's efforts to improve the government's preparation and response to natural disasters.

In the time since our last hearing, as we well know, parts of the Gulf Coast and Texas were hit and hurt by Hurricane Rita, although Rita, fortunately, was less powerful than Katrina was. It does appear that State, Federal, and local governments performed better the second time around. Nonetheless, we clearly still have much work to do to fully restore the public's confidence in the ability of their government to protect them in time of disaster.

Texas officials appear to have moved quickly to start evacuating before Hurricane Rita hit and then worked to get many people without means of transportation out of the danger zone. Hospitals were apparently better prepared for power outages and flooding, and New Orleans wisely halted the flow of people back into the city until after the danger from Rita had passed.

The Federal Government also appears to have been better prepared and responded more quickly than to Katrina. National Guard troops were prepositioned early. The Defense Department was on alert to provide humanitarian aid, medical care, and logistical support, to distribute food and water. Communications teams were deployed with satellite capabilities, clearly missing in those desperate first days after Katrina struck. This preparation paid off during and after the storm, but unfortunately there were still problems and lessons that we all have to learn from Rita for the future. And

clearly one of them was the challenges of evacuating a major city in a very short period of time—nonetheless, a period of time in which there was a warning, as compared to a circumstance, God forbid, where there was an unexpected terrorist attack.

As we all know, gasoline supplies ran out, stranding motorists on roadways and creating unnavigable traffic jams. Airport evacuations were handicapped by the sheer volume of travelers and because some airport employees just couldn't get to work. Had this storm been larger and more powerful, had it hit Houston and Galveston head on, I fear that some of the suffering that we saw with Katrina would have been repeated.

While we were better prepared for Rita than for Katrina, I say, in sum, that our emergency preparedness and response system is not what it has to be. We have a lot of work to do, and in this Committee we are going to try our best to do it together. For our Committee, that work, as Chairman Collins has just indicated, has now moved into higher gear with the issuance of document and information requests to Federal and State emergency management agencies, with further document requests and information requests to follow to heads of government at all levels of government, and with the dispatch of Committee investigators first to Louisiana.

We follow the work of our colleagues in the House and the testimony of Mr. Brown yesterday. There is something to learn from it. It seemed to me that Mr. Brown blamed the governor. I expect today the governor will blame Mr. Brown. And what is necessary is the kind of thorough and very comprehensive building of a factual record, which we on this Committee intend to do, and then go to a hearing stage. You have to know what happened before we can conclude how to fix it, and I know under your leadership, Madam Chairman, that is exactly what we intend to do.

As you indicated, today our attention turns from the response and preparation for Katrina to the efforts at relief and recovery. And this is also a very important responsibility we have as an oversight Committee, particularly the Committee that has jurisdiction over the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA.

There are several Federal agencies that have a role to play in the Gulf Coast recovery, but, clearly, the one that is most directly involved is FEMA. Our Committee's staff investigations have, unfortunately, uncovered reports that indicate that the relief and recovery effort has not been adequately or effectively carried out and coordinated thus far. In cases that are too frequent, promised assistance has not arrived or arrived at the wrong place, or as the Chairman just indicated in the ice story, frustrated volunteers or, in fact, contract employees have tried to help but got caught up in webs of red tape and bureaucracy, and help did not arrive.

Weeks now after Katrina, there are many communities affected that we gather have still not been contacted by FEMA representatives. Inspectors have not yet assessed the damage to a large number of homes, and thousands of evacuees have been unable to get through to the FEMA help lines. Our staff had, for instance, conversations with officials from East Biloxi, Mississippi, where we found that residents are trying to survive in houses that were flooded, full of mold, mildew, and bacteria, without power or tele-



phones. They have no jobs, no means of income, and no way to call for help.

These are communities of mostly poor, minority residents, and it is very troubling that they have still not received the help that we believe they deserve and need at this time.

The real problem continues to be—and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on this—housing for the evacuees. And there is no easy answer here. I was troubled when I heard of the enormous sums of money that FEMA was planning to spend on temporary dwellings, trailers, perhaps RVs. I also am troubled now in a different way to find how little has been done to provide for temporary housing for the evacuees, but I welcome the input of the local officials here today on this and other matters before us.

We had originally hoped to have the Acting Director of FEMA here today. He is in the region so he could not be here, but I am glad that he has said that he will be here next week to respond to some of the concerns and complaints that our staff has found from local officials and others in the affected region, and perhaps from some of the reports that the distinguished panel before us will bring to us today.

I thank you all very much for taking the time to be here, and I very much look forward to your testimony. Thank you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Senator, and I welcome all of the Committee Members who have joined us here today.

We are now going to turn to our panel. Judge Robert Eckels is the presiding officer of the Harris County Commissioners Court, the governing body for Harris County, Texas.

For those of us who are less familiar with the Texas system, from what I understand, Judge Eckels' position is the equivalent of what in Maine we would call the Chairman of the County Commissioners, just to give some context here.

With a population of 3.6 million in 34 municipalities, including the City of Houston, Harris County is the third most populous county in the United States.

Our second witness will be Mayor Melvin "Kip" Holden. He is the mayor of the City of Baton Rouge and the president of the East Baton Rouge Parish, which includes the city.

Our third witness is Robert Massengill. He is a native and the mayor of Brookhaven, Mississippi. Brookhaven, located in the northern evacuation route from New Orleans, has received, sheltered, and fed thousands of evacuees from Louisiana.

And our final witness this morning will be Mayor Dan Coody of Fayetteville, Arkansas. The Arkansas area also has taken in thousands of people displaced by the hurricane, and I would note that the mayor and his wife themselves have taken in a couple from New Orleans.

I welcome you all to the hearing today and thank you for joining us, and we are going to begin with you, Judge Eckels.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. ROBERT A. ECKELS,<sup>1</sup> COUNTY JUDGE,  
HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS**

Judge ECKELS. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate your clarification of my role in what the judge does. People often ask, "Why is that judge here talking about these things?" We do have judicial responsibilities, but my primary role is that of the Chairman of the supervisors, or county executives in some other parts of the country. Perhaps it is our size, too, as Harris County is 3.6 million people, somewhat larger than 23 States in the Nation. That enabled us to absorb more folks than some other communities.

As judge, I am charged by statute with the responsibility for emergency management and planning operations for Harris County. That comes through the President to the governor of the county judge and also the mayor. Most of the departments in our community have emergency management functions in addition to their normal duties, and they play key roles in our emergency operations strategy. All of these departments work together to coordinate services and prepare for an emergency or disaster.

I do want to thank this Committee for asking me to testify on the role that Harris County played in providing shelter and comfort to the Hurricane Katrina victims in what became at that time the largest mass evacuation in U.S. history. I would say that it almost became a mass exodus, and I will get into some of the details of how that worked. More than 373,000 evacuees came to Texas with more than 150,000 in the Houston area alone, largely in Harris County. Our response was an unprecedented coalition of the Harris County Government, the City of Houston, the State of Texas, the Federal Government, the private sector, nonprofit organizations, and citizen volunteers.

The mission of the coalition was to provide temporary shelter, social services, and relocation services for the citizens displaced by Katrina. In less than a day, a city was created that, at its peak, offered 27,000 people shelter, health care, mental health services, housing assistance, travel vouchers, employment, and much more. We had our zip code. But even with that zip code, people could not find each other as the shelters were not linked around the Nation. There was no single national database for people to find friends and family who had been separated in the disaster.

As we seek to make our communities more prepared for any kind of disaster and resilient to those disasters, it is clear from our experiences that all government relations functions are interrelated. A healthy and robust community is better prepared for emergencies, and I believe that local governments that work well together and work well with State and Federal Governments in day-to-day operations will be much better prepared for types of stress.

A number of issues stand out as we look at Katrina and, more recently, Hurricane Rita that hit the Texas and Louisiana coasts just this past weekend. I will cover a few of those in this oral testimony, but I go into much more detail in the written testimony I previously submitted that was prepared largely before Rita came in east of Houston.

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<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Judge Eckels with attachments appears in the Appendix on page 49.

First I will tell you that Harris County and the Houston area are a very caring community. We welcomed our neighbors in need where they had nowhere else to turn, and Harris County, through its Reliant Astrodome, provided the shelter, and later expansions into those related venues absorbed the sudden shock of these evacuees, as they came in from Louisiana and provided a couple of days for the rest of the country to start putting in shelters as well.

We had a plan that we executed. It was not a plan for the Dome. People said, "How did you plan to do the Astrodome?" It was just a plan of action. We could have set that up in any facility. It was just a plan of action, and we learned from it as we went along. But the structure of that plan was sound and our people knew their roles and responsibilities.

We dealt with the problems and forces beyond our control and kept a giving spirit. I believe that the Katrina victims were a blessing to our city and that today our community is stronger for our service to our neighbors. That said, there are many lessons to be learned from our experiences.

First, in health care. At more than \$1 billion, Harris County's single largest budget item is health care. The Houston region's health care surge capacity is today at its absolute limits. Louisiana and, to a lesser extent, Alabama and Mississippi, through their Katrina evacuees, and now Beaumont, Port Arthur, and East Texas through the Rita evacuees, sent their most medically dependent to Houston. The ability to respond to a disaster depends upon a robust system, and America does not have a robust health care system. The reasons are many and subject to another hearing, but the Harris County Hospital District and the health care providers of our community were stressed before these disasters with high numbers of uninsured patients and uncompensated care. Short-term needs are addressed in my written comments, but in the long term, Katrina evacuees will continue to stress our over-burdened system. A sustainable system to deal with the long-term needs in future disasters will require at least a state-wide initiative—probably logically a state-wide initiative, but Federal programs that support long-term solutions. Our hospital district spent more than \$4.5 million at the Reliant Arena Astrodome shelter system. We treated 15,000 patients and provided thousands of inoculations and prescriptions. We operated a full-scale hospital with orthopedic, mental health, obstetric, pediatric, and internal medicine. The full extent of our operations are discussed again in the written testimony, but it is an incredible story of dedicated professional staff, volunteers from across the community, from around the Nation and from around the world.

Critical infrastructure needs in our community—that includes locally critical infrastructures such as water, power, transportation, and communications, the things you normally think of, but also national strategic infrastructure, such as in Houston our refining and petrochemical complex, which represents as much as 15 percent of the Nation's capacity. These interests can coincide with each other.

After Hurricane Rita passed through, Baytown lost power to its water treatment and distribution system. Its primary power supply was struck by lightning, and its back-up generator caught fire. That problem was well on its way to being solved, but they still

had only 4 more days of water in the system. It turned out that the pumps for the canal that carried 12 million gallons of water each day for Baytown had also lost their power supply in the hurricane. Upon further inquiry, I learned that the canal supplied 80 million gallons a day to the Houston ship channel refining industries for industrial processing. Without the processed water, the refineries cannot produce gasoline for Maine, Connecticut, Michigan, or California. That canal also supplies drinking water to Houston and other cities in the area.

The Nation was faced with the possibility of severe strain on refined petroleum production, and over 600,000 people were faced with the loss of their primary water supply because of a power outage at a single pumping station. Though the problem does appear to be resolved, and I want to tell you I particularly thank the Departments of Energy, Homeland Security, and the Corps of Engineers, who are all engaged in that, but it reinforces the need to identify potential single points of failure and build redundancy into the systems. It also shows why a Senator from the East Coast should care about Houston's request for security and resilience in our critical infrastructure needs. And I am sure you have some examples in your part of the country, Madam Chairman.

Increased funding and relaxed regulations for flood control projects. Again, in my written comments there is extensive talk about flood control issues and lessons from Tropical Storm Allison in 2001. It is important that Congress continue to provide more funding to operate and maintain those flood control systems as well as to deal with the regulatory scheme that comes in there. Often with the Corps of Engineers and our Federal partners, the process delays action, the methods of allocating funds and the cost/benefit analysis should take in, as well, not just pure dollar values, which tend to favor more affluent areas, but also the impact and the agony caused to people that are involved in floods.

The gridlock, as Senator Lieberman mentioned as we were talking at the beginning of this, that was caused in the evacuation of Houston was totally unacceptable. My wife, Jet, and our daughter, Kirby, were caught in a traffic jam that was 20 miles long because a subcontractor had not received the word that there was no construction on the road that day. The next day, the contractor was gone, but the traffic jam was much worse, largely because of little things well beyond our control, like a traffic light in a small town a hundred miles outside of the city.

Yesterday, our medical examiner released a list of 31 people who died during the evacuation. Now, most of these folks had underlying medical conditions, and it is not clear that they died as a result of the evacuation, but they were the very people that needed to be evacuated the most, the very people that we see stories of in New Orleans and other areas where they stay behind in a nursing home, and without power and without food and water, they wound up in much worse shape than had they been on the road.

Our transportation infrastructure, again, must be robust. In Texas, evacuations occur over a long distance. Dallas is 220 miles away from Houston; San Antonio and Austin likewise. We do need support for the Interstate 69 corridor and for the I-35 and I-45 corridors running north out of our coastal areas. They are part of

Governor Rick Perry's Trans-Texas Corridor plan to finance new highway construction and rail capacity. We also need help with the Texas High-Speed Rail Coalition that I chair that links the East Coast through Atlanta and New Orleans with Beaumont, Houston, Dallas, Austin, and San Antonio. This project takes on a new significant importance as we look at our experiences in Katrina and later Rita.

The same problems occurred in Louisiana. Evacuees coming into the Astrodome took 17 hours or more. After spending days on the roof of a house or in the Superdome in New Orleans, those folks arrived in bad shape. They were standing up. They had had no water. They were dehydrated. They had serious medical problems, largely as a result of that evacuation.

To close, and touch a little bit on the Citizens Corps, President Bush's Freedom Corps efforts calling on citizens to spend 4,000 hours in service to others. Through that program, we launched one in Harris County in 2002. Our CERT team had folks from around the country, Community Emergency Response Team. We had CERT volunteers from Mr. Voinovich's State that because we were on a national plan, could drop directly into our local response. There are tens of thousands of volunteers—in the end we had 60,000 volunteers through the relief efforts.

There are a few areas where the rules actually discourage us from doing our job. One of those rules is that FEMA does not reimburse us for our everyday expenses. The logic is that the normal operating expenses of the county for regular time pay for police officers, fire fighters, EMS technicians, and other first responders who normally work within our community should not be reimbursed because they would be providing those services whether there was a disaster or not. The services we are providing today are not for people within our community. They are being provided for people outside the region, and so it's more or less like being a contractor for the national system. So these first responders are being taken away from the people in our community who would otherwise be served. It is a strong disincentive for communities to accept evacuees, that we will not be reimbursed for the regular time of our employees that are out there doing their jobs.

The second key area is a lack of reimbursement for revenue lost at places like our convention center. Harris County opened the Reliant Center, which is a convention center complex. The City of Houston opened the George R. Brown Convention Center. San Antonio and other cities did not open their convention centers because they could not afford to. They found other locations, but there are many places, large convention center-type facilities that could very well be opened as a shelter for evacuees, but again there is no reason for a municipality to do so if it is not their residents who are being served, and if it is a financial loss to their local taxpayers.

Finally, FEMA has been a great partner. Interestingly, I have watched, as people around the country have had problems. Tom Costello and the Houston FEMA operation understands what it takes to be helpful and responsive. Perhaps it is our long-term relationship with them and our experiences in Tropical Storm Allison that have provided guidance and assistance to let us transport and shelter folks through local contracting. They have been very flexi-

ble in hotel reimbursement and apartments for families that have been disclosed and worked with our Harris County and Houston Housing Departments. While both Mayor Bill White and I would like to see direct funding of local governments that experience these type of events, Governor Perry and the Texas Emergency Management Office have been helpful and understand how to make the system work, and we already have obligated funds to reimburse us for those costs.

It is all part of the National Response Plan to build capacity for State and local levels in partnership with the Federal Government, and I can only re-emphasize the importance of that national plan. I do see reports of an effort to have a Federal plan of first response, and there are places where that would work where locals are overwhelmed. I could have used that in our evacuation when I was trying to get gasoline to folks on the road. I needed someone to help direct traffic 100 miles away from the city where I could not project our local forces.

But any Federal response play needs to be in connection with that National Response Plan that continues to build capacity for local officials and local communities. The first responder on the street may not even be the police or fire, it is the guy who is there when the incident occurs. The Citizens Corps, followed by the local first responders, followed then by the national officials, can make a real difference in our community.

Thanks again for giving me the opportunity to be here today. We had a great story in Harris County, as I know you have here, and I am sure you will see stories of heroism and sacrifice as this story unfolds of all of the folks throughout Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama in Katrina.

Thank you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Judge Eckels. Mayor Holden, you may begin.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. MELVIN L. HOLDEN,<sup>1</sup> MAYOR-  
PRESIDENT, BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA**

Mr. HOLDEN. Thank you, Madam Chairman, Senator Lieberman, and Members of this Committee. My name is Melvin L. "Kip" Holden. I serve as mayor-president of the City of Baton Rouge and the parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

It has been estimated that approximately 45 percent of the survivors of the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina relocated to the Greater Baton Rouge Metropolitan Area.

With Hurricane Rita devastating parts of South Louisiana and causing additional flooding to the City of New Orleans, our emergency response systems have been strained yet again.

Our citizens have opened their hearts and homes to those who suffered great loss, and we are working with FEMA to expedite temporary housing for displaced families who are living in shelters, churches, and homes throughout the city.

The City of Baton Rouge dodged the bullet of major devastation, the most serious being over 600 downed trees. This exceeded our

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<sup>1</sup> The prepared statement of Mr. Holden appears in the Appendix on page 84.

losses by Hurricane Andrew and damaged homes and power lines, making our streets impassable.

We remain severely impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

We have sharp increases in enrollment of students into the public and private child care centers, Head Start, schools, colleges, and universities throughout Baton Rouge. Our education officials have worked around the clock to get children back in school as quickly as possible.

Our city-parish is also experiencing increases in requests for economic assistance through our Division of Human Development and Services. This office is working to assist families, process emergency unemployment claims, and recruit workers for FEMA to assist with the needs assessments of hurricane survivors.

One of the most obvious impacts of the displacement of people from New Orleans and South Louisiana to Baton Rouge has been our increase in traffic. We estimate more than 250,000 additional people in Baton Rouge based on formulas for traffic counts that have shown a 35- to 40-percent increase in traffic on our streets, causing frequent gridlock on surface streets. As a matter of fact, in 2 weeks we experienced a 25-year projection already in the amount of traffic that we have.

Additionally, with the interstate system used as a major evacuation route, our parish is seriously impacted by that traffic as well.

Despite the increased population, many small businesses report a negative impact on sales as a result of traffic, interruption of supplies, and loss of customers from the most seriously impacted areas.

Our airport, which usually serves 700,000 passengers annually, expects to see an increase of upward to 3 million people. For the past few weeks, with constant relief and recovery flights in and out, it has remained the second busiest airport behind JFK International. And for those of you who have never flown into Baton Rouge, we only have ten gates, so we are considerably smaller.

The public service providers within our community are overloaded, and with your help and support we can address some of our most critical needs: additional police officers, firefighters, emergency medical service providers, and public works employees as a start.

Our police have been working double shifts, leaving vulnerable areas that require regular patrols. The strain of accommodating the rapid influx of people into a large shelter in our governmental complex at one point led to a government shutdown in order to assure the safety and accommodation of both evacuees and city-parish employees. Emergency circumstances such as this indicate a necessity to streamline and expedite National Guard for law enforcement patrols and crime prevention.

Our city-parish infrastructure was already in serious need of improvements, and I am currently seeking voter approval of a proposition to extend a half-cent sales tax, over one-half billion dollars, to allow us to bond revenue and jump-start projects immediately.

We have welcomed the local governments of Jefferson, St. Bernard, Orleans, and Plaquemines Parishes to operate in our facilities, holding council meetings as well in our council chambers to assist them in re-establishing local government authority quickly.

Additionally, we are providing logistical support to the many Federal agencies, like FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Transportation Safety Administration, staged in our community.

I am especially proud and grateful to our first responders of East Baton Rouge Parish—our police officers, firefighters, EMS, and the staff at our Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

The professionalism and compassion shown by the men and women who responded to two hurricanes on behalf of our community was exemplary.

Our parish has many heroes, among them an urban search and rescue team that went into New Orleans the day following Hurricane Katrina and rescued over 1,000 trapped victims. Working by boat, they were in areas where no other rescue teams were working at the time.

For many people, we are a shelter from the storm. For some, we represent a new beginning. With a rapidly changing population and serious infrastructure needs to meet pre-Katrina growth, our administration is now seeking relief to accommodate our increased population.

We are also beginning to study our records of emergency response to determine areas we need to improve. There is no question that one of the major factors frustrating and delaying those who were responding to Hurricane Katrina in Baton Rouge was difficulty with communications.

Regional, State, interstate, and Federal communications must be improved, and there must be clear lines of authority as to who is in charge of various operations. These individuals must be accessible to local officials.

At every step of our response efforts, a breakdown in communications hindered our abilities to respond more effectively and efficiently.

Our parish, with a need to communicate with multiple first responders, labors under incompatible communications systems and insufficient technology and software to provide seamless information flow in times of emergency.

Our communications systems broke down when cell phones became inoperable due to network congestion and downed towers. Satellite phones are too expensive and also failed during Katrina. Software programs and Web-based programs should be made available to local agencies and hospitals, including such software which tracks beds and hospital resources.

With standardization, these programs can be implemented locally and statewide. In disasters such as Katrina and Rita, these programs could be utilized for tracking patients and coordinating triage from ground zero to the staging area.

Equally frustrating were the communications breakdowns due to burdensome red tape.

Because of our location and relative efficiency, East Baton Rouge Parish in many cases served as a State agency for inquiries, guidance, and resources for other jurisdictions within Louisiana.

The National Incident Management System was established by the Federal Government as the standard line of communication. A



lack of knowledge and understanding by many agencies paralyzed the efforts to facilitate order and efficiency in response efforts. Further requirements for paperwork and form completions hindered immediate action and deployment of people and materials to assist in rescue and recovery efforts.

Our parish also lacked sufficient communications with Federal authorities, and we were unsuccessful in establishing early communications with FEMA representatives despite their actions impacting our local operations.

East Baton Rouge Parish created its own internal systems to coordinate sheltering, medical care, triage, mental health services, mortuary, family assistance information, and help for evacuees with addictive disorders and other needs to quickly fill the void created by the constant influx of evacuees from South Louisiana.

As of this week, we still do not have a designated FEMA contact for individual assistance for those seeking help.

We have an immediate need for a FEMA coordinator to be located within our Emergency Operations Center to expedite available resources and alleviate some of the ongoing issues our city-parish is currently facing.

Poor communications also affected our ability to deliver medical treatment to Hurricane Katrina victims in Baton Rouge. While the volunteer medical response to Katrina's victims was unprecedented in Red Cross history, they were severely hindered by inadequate communications, limited resources, and red tape.

Medical volunteers from all over the world began arriving in our city because of an inability to get through to anyone to determine our needs and a lack of a system for deploying medical volunteers and much needed supplies.

Prepositioned Federal assets critical to the operations of our area hospitals were never received. Resources from the Strategic National Stockpile, despite requests, were never locally deployed and were derailed due to paperwork issues. Area hospitals are faced with serious reimbursement needs for their depleted resources.

I know I am out of time, so I will just skip a little bit and just say we need to understand that the financial drain on all of our resources is enormous. Many of the patients who received treatment are uninsured or underinsured, and it will be costly for the six area hospitals that are already overwhelmed. Displaced persons in shelters need access to medical care, counseling, and privacy. Our superintendent of schools shared my concern that children who have seen things no child should witness desperately need a quiet place to heal.

Decisions based on shelters were made by the American Red Cross based on numbers and not the conditions of the shelter. The River Center in Baton Rouge, operated by the city, has a major roof leak that curtailed space available for evacuees.

I am working closely with FEMA and HUD to provide temporary housing arrangements for families to at least get them some privacy, a place to reunite families, a quiet place for children to study.

We seriously need to focus on the creation of satellite clinics in areas that will now serve as housing for these evacuated families and areas where we anticipate growth.

The quickest route to privacy for these families may not be permanent housing, but it will be private. It will provide the privacy they miss, the privacy to protect dignity, the privacy to begin having those quiet moments families need in order to heal from a traumatic event.

These living arrangements are not a solution. A travel trailer does not solve anyone's housing needs, but at least they allow us to begin moving toward a better environment for restoring families. Short term, we should also look at parallel tracks for housing, including rehabilitation of existing housing stock, putting adjudicated property back into commerce, mixed-use development, restoring rundown apartment complexes, and prefab housing.

To those who have relocated to Baton Rouge from hurricane devastation, our message has been this: You are our family now. Our hearts go out to you, our homes are open to you, our businesses will serve you, our city will care for you.

We are Baton Rouge. And this is the way we respond to neighbors in need.

I have come to ask you for your help. The devastation of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita was too much for one community, too much for one parish, too much for one State.

America always responds when her people are hurting and suffering. Senators, the good people of Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama are hurting. We need you.

God bless you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Mayor Holden. Mayor Massengill.

**TESTIMONY OF HON. ROBERT V. MASSENGILL,<sup>1</sup> MAYOR,  
BROOKHAVEN, MISSISSIPPI**

Mr. MASSENGILL. Madam Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, let me give you a brief background about our community and how we were affected.

As was mentioned earlier, we are 130 miles north of New Orleans. We are a small community of 13,000. We are located on Interstate 55. Prior to Katrina, we had only experienced minimal damages from hurricanes in the past, such as Camille in 1969. We met prior to the hurricane with city and county officials and with the civil defense director so that we were somewhat prepared for the events, and by Sunday afternoon, evacuees had begun arriving in our community. All motels were immediately filled, and the churches, which served as shelters, were beginning to be filled.

Bear in mind that we are town of 13,000, and yet we had 1,600 evacuees in six shelters. We had another 1,200 to 1,500 who stayed in the motels and stayed with family and friends. So we had a 20- to 25-percent increase in our population in just a few short days.

But all the evacuees were signed in by Red Cross personnel at the various shelters and received some—and I emphasize “some”—personal care and assistance. But all of the meals that have been prepared for these individuals have been prepared by the churches in our community. On some occasions, the restaurants have been helpful in preparing the meals, but the churches have been the

<sup>1</sup> The prepared statement of Mr. Massengill appears in the Appendix on page 95.

ones that have fed the evacuees and have housed the evacuees. They have made them feel welcome.

The Brookhaven Recreation Department building was used for shelter for the power company people because on Monday, August 29, the community received winds of in excess of 85 miles an hour and sustained winds of greater than 50 miles an hour for several hours. And so power was lost throughout the community. Numerous trees fell throughout the community, and I would say somewhere between 750 and 1,000 trees. So every street was closed.

Approximately 25 homes were hit, with at least half of those receiving considerable damage. Six or eight were totally destroyed.

No lives were lost, nor was there any serious injury due to the hurricane. So we are indeed thankful for that.

We were unable to obtain much outside information with no power, so we did not know the severity of what was going on around us. But we knew immediately that we needed to begin doing things, and so the city and county officials met with civil defense, and we knew first of all we had to restore power. The energy people and I met, and we prioritized our top four needs. First was a hospital. Second were the streets on which the major retail stores are located and those streets on which the shelters are located. The third was the city's water wells because we only had two generators that worked. Nevertheless, we did prioritize. We began getting power back to the people on Tuesday and Wednesday.

We knew having water for the individuals was key, and I learned a valuable lesson. Don't go on the radio when you can and say conserve water. That means everybody goes home and fills their bathtub. [Laughter.]

Don't do that one. I did learn that.

But we did not lose our water, nor did anyone have to boil water. We knew that safety was a key. We never had to impose a curfew, and our chief of police was certainly in control of that.

We knew that safe travel was important, so Monday evening, the day of the hurricane, we had people out—when it became safe, we had people out to begin cutting trees. We opened up the streets so that by the weekend people were able to travel all through the community.

Garbage collection was another major problem, so we arranged to have Waste Management trucks in central locations for people to bring their garbage, which was excessive and considerable due to the fact they had lost their freezers and coolers. And then by the following week, they began making their regular routes.

We went on the radio and we went to the newspaper to keep people informed because the rumors were rampant. By the third week, things were basically back to normal.

Let me mention several other things that I think you need to know. Let's get to the evacuees for a bit. The evacuees, many of whom have left our shelters, some to return home, while others have found local residences, either apartments or mobile homes or something to live in locally. Some have moved to family in other parts of the country, but at the present time, we have approximately 220 evacuees still in our community in these shelters. We have consolidated into four shelters at this time. These shelters

had never housed anyone for more than 4 days at a time, and they are now into their fifth week.

I talked to the individuals in the shelters. I went to each shelter and talked to individuals. There are 71 family units still in our community; 35 of those could move back to Slidell or to their home if they had a trailer or a camper in which to stay. They want to get back into their communities so that they can begin working on their house. That is the main and really the primary concern that they have. They want to be able to get back home, and in Slidell, they can do so, but their homes have been flooded with 6 feet of water so that at this point they really cannot go back into their home. They need a place in which to stay while they repair their home.

The other thing that they are concerned about primarily is employment. They do not know where to go employment-wise. For many of them, their company has been wiped out. They do not know when that company will open or if it will open. So the two primary needs they have—they have had their basic needs taken care of. They have a roof over their heads. They have meals, three good meals a day. I know at our church, for instance, we fed over 700 meals a day to people. But they need a place to go. They need to know something about employment. Where can they go for employment?

Let me move to another area that I want to touch on for just a minute. We know a lot of attention needs to be given to how the efforts can best be coordinated for a future event. There will be another event. It may not be a hurricane. It may be a terrorist attack. But there will be other events, and we need to have coordinated efforts, and we need to have checks and balances to ensure that the funds and goods that are being distributed are done on a most-needed basis.

Obviously, I have had a firsthand experience with the hurricane, and I am thankful for the caring people of our community—a community that was affected somewhat—that have opened their churches, have opened their homes, have opened their pocketbooks, and especially have opened their hearts, because these people that still needed help themselves, these people that had no power themselves, went out of their way to make our visitors feel at home and to take care of them.

Our community has responded well, but there are several things that we must recognize as the keys to seeing that this type of disaster can be dealt with in the future. The first of those is proper planning ahead of time. The second of those is open lines of communication. And the third of those is leadership. And my suggestion is that we have task forces formed in each of the 12 Federal Reserve districts or in some other division of the country so that we have experts in the area of food distribution, communications, banking—because these people lost their ability to do banking—utility companies, medical and health care, transportation, fuel distribution, and perhaps others, but task forces in each of these areas planning for events. It is so much better to plan and not need the plan than to never plan at all.

Thank you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Mayor.

### OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR PRYOR

Senator PRYOR. Madam Chairman, may I have a moment here?

Chairman COLLINS. Absolutely, Senator Pryor. I should acknowledge that you were the one who recommended the mayor to the Committee, and we appreciate that.

Senator PRYOR. Well, thank you, and Madam Chairman, let me thank you and Senator Lieberman for your leadership after Katrina and leadership of this Committee generally. Once again, the Committee is demonstrating how it can function in a very non-partisan way, and I think that is what we need after Katrina.

A couple of weeks ago, when I was home in Arkansas, I did what we called a “find and fix tour” of the State after all the evacuees had arrived in Arkansas, and estimates were we had around 75,000. I went around and talked to various people about what happened after Katrina and how we could do things better next time.

One of the real all-stars—even though I saw churches, community leaders, businesses, nonprofits, State Government, the National Guard, everybody working together and really doing some great things—one of the real all-stars was Mayor Dan Coody of Fayetteville. Fayetteville has about 58,000 people. Its claim to fame is it is the home of the Razorbacks. It is where the University of Arkansas is. The first time I ever heard of Mayor Coody was several years ago when he ran for mayor, and I was over at my aunt and uncle’s house, and I noticed that my uncle had put his “Dan Coody for Mayor” bumper sticker on his canoe. I knew if he had done that on his canoe, Dan Coody must be a pretty good guy. And he is a good guy, and one of his great strengths is he brings people together, and certainly he did that after Katrina, and he really pulled Fayetteville and that region of the State together and really did some great things.

So, Mayor Coody, thank you. Thanks for being here.

### TESTIMONY OF HON. DAN COODY,<sup>1</sup> MAYOR, FAYETTEVILLE, ARKANSAS

Mr. COODY. Thank you very much, and I appreciate the Committee’s willingness to invite us here to hear all we have to say, because we all appreciate your efforts in fixing these problems that we have all experienced. And, Senator Pryor, thank you for your kind words. I appreciate it.

I want to first say that I am humbled as mayor of Fayetteville. We have a wonderful community. But we were relatively unscathed compared to the scope and magnitude of the damage and disaster that my colleagues here experienced. I do not have the stories to tell about the wind damage, the influx of such huge numbers of folks coming to town unexpectedly, and the infrastructure problems that have precipitated the reason that my colleagues are here today.

What I have to offer is how Fayetteville responded in the hopes that we can take this experience and make this a national model for other small communities in regions across the country.

<sup>1</sup>The prepared statement of Mr. Coody appears in the Appendix on page 100.

As the crisis unfolded with Katrina, I instructed my staff to assess our resources and coordinate with local emergency efforts to develop and implement a response plan as soon as possible. Earlier this year, Fayetteville had purchased a 126,000-square-foot industrial building to convert into a joint police department, fire department, and emergency response center. The closed and empty facility offered tremendous warehouse space with loading docks useful for regional collection, handling, and distribution center. It also contained plenty of office space where local nonprofits could assist survivors of the hurricane that had made their way to Fayetteville. We felt this would be an ideal site to coordinate local response efforts.

Even though the communication and information systems established by Federal and State emergency plans were not functioning, and in some cases being abandoned altogether, we had to move forward and prepare for an influx of evacuees and assure that our local communications were strong and sustainable. After all, we would ultimately be responsible for evacuees in our area.

County and City officials met with emergency responders, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, local churches and church camps, regional transportation officials, local media, and everyone else we could think of. While county officials tried to establish communication lines with State and Federal officials, our city staff worked to prepare the industrial facility for occupation. The entire abandoned building was cleaned, electrical transformers and phone lines were reinstalled, office equipment and furnishings were brought in, as were forklifts and pallets. Two days later, the facility was prepared to ship and receive, house local nonprofits, or be utilized for any other activity that was needed in the region.

Coordinating with Congressman John Boozman's office as well as Senator Pryor's office, several tractor-trailers that had been strategically located throughout the region by various officials and organizations to collect local contributions were sent to our warehouse for collection and distribution. However, a clear plan for the organized collection of such a huge volume of goods, in addition to the sorting, storing, and distributing to the local shelters or to the Gulf Coast was not in place.

When the first of 14 packed trailer-loads arrived at our facility, we unloaded the first two and quickly realized that much more assistance was needed to efficiently process the donations and prepare them for distribution. We requested assistance from Wal-Mart, and they immediately responded by sending two engineers to create a warehouse system for our facility, a distribution center supervisor, and two additional employees to oversee the operation. During peak hours, we had over 100 volunteers, city employees, Wal-Mart employees and county laborers working side by side to organize the donations. The trailers were unloaded by Saturday, September 10, and the donations were completely sorted by sex, by size, by quality, and ready for shipment 5 days later.

Survivors that had made their way to Fayetteville to stay with family or friends began to stop by the distribution center in search of financial aid, food, clothes, and other assistance. We had not anticipated receiving evacuees at the distribution center.

We were not sure how to provide appropriate assistance. One by one we heard the stories of survivors being bounced from place to place and from town to town, so we took it upon ourselves to find answers, information, and assistance for everyone who needed it. We pulled boxes off pallets and made food and clothes available to these individuals and moved all the relief agencies in the offices to create a one-stop location where evacuees could access various types of assistance and support. Distribution center staff were instructed the next morning to begin setting up a store environment where people could “shop” for what they needed—free, of course.

In addition to food and clothing, many of the evacuees still needed to register with the Red Cross and other agencies. Others looked for possible housing options.

We made office space, tables, chairs, copy and fax machines, telephones, and Internet access available to organizations such as the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the Department of Human Services, the Health Department, and FEMA. The city also staffed a front office Help Desk to help direct over 400 to 500 evacuees—we are not sure—to the right place and provide information as needed. FEMA maintained a presence and assisted people in the center for 2 days. A local volunteer provided ongoing assistance with this endeavor after FEMA left. OpenYourHome.com also works from an office at the center. This local organization is operating nationally now and has matched over 3,100 survivors with housing opportunities in desired locations.

We shipped material to the Salvation Army staging warehouse in Corsicana, Texas, to the stricken areas of Louisiana and Mississippi. Many of these shipments were sponsored by local businesses and churches and were arranged by making direct contact with community members in the affected areas. One example of city-to-city communications occurred when the City of Fayetteville connected with Louisiana State Senator Ben Nevers. We established what supplies were needed at which locations, arranged the transportation, and shipped supplies directly to that location. We learned many of the rural areas were not receiving adequate support and were still in desperate need of various items that we had in stock. So we focused our large-scale distribution efforts on the more rural areas of Louisiana. While we had food, water, wheelchairs, baby supplies, and about everything else you can imagine palletized and ready to go, our efforts to communicate and coordinate the movement of our supplies to those areas that needed them the most was our biggest challenge.

The center has experienced many great success stories, and I believe this is due to the fact that all of the leaders at the local level cooperated, communicated, and responded to the needs that were presented to us.

It is our obligation as government officials to provide the leadership and resources needed to reinforce the approaches that worked and reinvent those approaches that failed. These lessons learned must be clearly articulated, incorporated into our local, regional, and State emergency response plans, and implemented in the event of another disaster. As Fayetteville continues its plan to build a state-of-the-art police, fire, and emergency response center, we will incorporate what we learned from this experience. We will preserve

in our facility the capacity to ship and receive large quantities of material when necessary. These warehousing areas can be used for a variety of community functions and city operations in such a way that they could be quickly prepared for disaster relief. The county and the city will be partners in an emergency operations and communications command center.

But no matter how hard we work, we will not be as effective as we could be without direct communication and information between all levels of government. If the established, practiced, and well-funded statewide emergency response system is circumvented so that local governments, emergency managers, and agencies are left to rely on guesswork, we will again witness unnecessary suffering, confusion, and frustration. City and county governments all across America stand willing and able to do whatever is necessary to help our neighbors in crisis. Those of us in local government will not stand idly by as tragedy unfolds simply because we were not told what to do. We will act. We will focus our resources and we will figure out what needs to be done and how we need to do it. But without coordination with our State and Federal Governments, our effectiveness will be limited and the suffering of our friends, our neighbors, and our families will be prolonged for no reason.

The Fayetteville Disaster Relief Center could serve as a model for coordinating local resources. Centers such as ours could be strategically located, grounded in public-private partnerships, and be ready for activation on a moment's notice. This center would not have been possible without the influx of city resources, the logistical assistance from the private sector, the dedication of our local volunteers, and the strong positive relationship between county and city officials. It is also important to recognize that such a system should already exist within the established emergency response infrastructure.

Our efforts were successful for three reasons: First, we had a facility in which to work and coordinate the movement of goods and services; second, our local leaders, agencies, and nonprofits communicated well; third, our community pulled together to help our neighbors in need.

I would like to thank Fayetteville and Washington County residents for opening their homes and checkbooks and giving their very important time. Without dedicated volunteer help, unconditional support from our community, and tireless work from our staffs, local officials, and first responders, none of our efforts would have succeeded. Our goal was to create an operation that would provide as much benefit as possible very quickly. My hope is that all government officials share that same goal, as I know you do.

Thank you all very much for having us out here today.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you very much, Mayor.

I am struck, as I listened to your testimony, that the experience that at least two of you have had with FEMA has been very different, and this is typical of what I am hearing when I talk to State and local officials throughout the region. Some communities have had a very positive experience with FEMA, have found the agency to be responsive, prompt, and effective, while other communities have had exactly the opposite experience. They have found that



FEMA officials have been inaccessible, slow to respond, and difficult to deal with.

This is a key issue for this Committee, and it is helpful to get your firsthand experience as communities who have taken in a large number of victims of Katrina, but also in some cases as communities who have been directly affected by Katrina's winds or rains.

I want to ask each of you to give me a better understanding of your experience in dealing with FEMA so that I can try to identify why various communities have such different experiences. In the case of Judge Eckels, I would also like you to let us know whether you had communication from FEMA prior to Hurricane Rita, giving you advice, asking you whether you needed help in evacuating Houston and other areas. So, Judge Eckels, I will start with you. You in some ways answered my question in your testimony. But what about prior to Hurricane Rita? What was the communication like from FEMA? And were you satisfied with it?

Judge ECKELS. Well, as I mentioned earlier, FEMA has been engaged in our community very actively. We had some miscommunications between the local officials and the Washington officials. In fact, the problems that we had in our shelter operations would probably have been tracked back to decisions made in a vacuum, not responding to the needs of the folks at the local community.

Tom Costello and his FEMA crew in Houston have been wonderful to work with. We have established programs where the county can contract for shelter space with various churches and the faith-based community, and the faith-based community has been really stepping into the breach in dealing with the evacuees in our region. We have great relationships with FEMA and the Federal housing officials. In fact, we have a virtual office from New Orleans. Their housing office director was bused into Houston as part of the evacuation, so we've set up with our folks as well. So between the HUD Section 8 and FEMA assistance, housing has worked very well.

We had an issue with the initial evacuation where we had no communications. We have heard some discussion about communications, not just the interoperable communication systems I think the mayor here mentioned between radios and other issues, but the communications coming from Louisiana and from the FEMA presence in Louisiana were seriously lacking. Whether it was FEMA or the State of Louisiana, I don't know, but as the evacuation proceeded, we had no clue to what was going on. We were expecting to have buses relocating people from the Superdome to the Astrodome. That did not happen. Our Texas State troopers showed up in Louisiana and there was no escort nor troopers from Louisiana to guide them to get to the Superdome. When they got to the Superdome there were no buses. Where that failure occurred, I do not know.

Once they got to Houston though, we had ultimately geared up to process close to 40,000 people through our shelters. Many would be reunited with family and others would backfill into that space. Things worked pretty smoothly with our FEMA folks. They had set up, prior to Rita, the first disaster recovery center. They partnered with Houston and Harris County, largely because we had been

through this in Tropical Storm Allison before. We had a good working relationship. We know what to expect from FEMA.

I had a lady on the radio yesterday calling in that had a tree on her house, and she was upset. "Where is FEMA? They are not taking care of me." Well, first where is your insurance company? It is a disaster to her, but it is not really where you need those FEMA assets, and people do not really understand FEMA. I was listening to a sheriff in Louisiana who was complaining that FEMA had sent no money. At the same time I had just received an allocation of committed funds from our State Emergency Management Office for \$9.7 million that we could directly draw down to pay for Katrina expenses. It was because we had understood the system. We had worked the system. We had drilled and trained on the system. Was it Lee Trevino who said, "your luck follows upon how much you practice." So we got lucky with FEMA. We practice with them and we drill continuously so we know what to expect from them. They know what capacity we can deliver. The warehouse that was mentioned here, the City of Houston delivered the warehouse, but FEMA set up the Disaster Recovery Center.

As we get into Rita and the issues with Rita coming in, yes, we were in contact with FEMA because they were already there dealing with Katrina, so their officials were there. The Astrodome had since been emptied as a shelter space. It now served as the pre-positioning location for the Texas Task Force One, FEMA Search and Recovery, the Coast Guard, all of the officials to then project into East Texas and Louisiana.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you.

Mayor Holden, it is troubling to me that 3 weeks after Hurricane Katrina, you are still unable to get the name of a point person from FEMA for individual assistance, as well as you pointed out the immediate need for a FEMA coordinator to be located within your emergency operation center. So it sounds like you have had a different experience. Could you elaborate on it?

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, I have. I have had a different experience, but let me tell you, for the first time last night I got a call—I do not know whether they knew I was testifying before you— [Laughter.]

Chairman COLLINS. I suspect that might have something to do with it. We have found that before when we have held hearings.

Mr. HOLDEN. Let me go and say that the point person is needed because our office actually became an arm of the State, and that is not said lightly. Many people could not get through to the State's Office of Emergency Preparedness, and so when they looked for the office, then virtually they called our office, so thank God we have a staff and all of the players located there, including State Police, State services, the local communities, Red Cross, you name it, everybody is there.

But when those phone calls started coming in, for example, Chalmette, Louisiana, which would have normally gone to the State, and they are saying, "Hello, we have people trapped in our school building. Can you send somebody to help us?" Well, that call should have gone to the State, but the call came to us, and we therefore had to fill in the void to try to get somebody to save the people trapped in the building.

What you saw was just government that was really management by crisis would be the best way I could put it. So you saw, for example, the second night after the levy broke or the breach, then we started receiving these calls from the State, "I need 66 buses right away. Can you round up these buses to send to New Orleans in order to get people evacuated?" Well, there was a problem because some rescuers were taking fire, I mean gunfire. So I said to the gentleman in the governor's office, "I cannot in good conscience send a bus down to New Orleans unless at some checkpoint you put an armed guard on that bus to protect these people" because I had firefighters willing to volunteer in order to drive the buses and help in the evacuation. They waffled on it unfortunately, but later they brought in our head of our transportation system to then manage the whole bus system.

Let me go back to FEMA. There were two people initially that dealt with FEMA housing, a guy named Brad Gair and Walter Melnick. For 2 weeks we met, including up until midnight on the Sunday after the storm, thought we had an agreement worked out on four proposed sites. None of those sites have been open as of yet.

In the meantime, Mr. Gair has been relieved of his duties. Now here is the guy who worked out the agreement with the parish, and all of a sudden FEMA takes this guy out of the picture, and then appoints a new guy a week and a half ago, so you do not have any communication that is continuous. So you have the other partner that is out there trying to put this together, but in light of that fact, we got one community where they are putting in infrastructure this week. In that community they are saying, "We are providing transportation, food, and we will provide security." Well, the little community that it is in in our parish, nobody has thoroughly communicated with the police chief of the small community or the mayor or the fire department, to talk about, well, what happens if a fire breaks out in this area, which is just outside of their border? Who is going to take care of that? What dollars are you going to give us to maybe look at more personnel when you are talking about maybe 1,000 or 1,500 more people moving into your community? What are you going to do about police protection when individuals go outside of that confined property? I mean all of those things are going on.

Distribution of dollars. If you looked at the paper last week, yes, FEMA gave away a lot of money, but then we have our State Department of Health and Hospitals saying, "Whoa, you know, you have given us all of this money. We cannot spend all of this money." Then you have us saying, "Well, can we just have this little piece here," that is much less than what they gave, "Can we have this little piece because we have some critical infrastructure needs because somebody has to begin to not only look at the point of impact where the hurricane hits, but they have to look down the line to see what else is happening." They did not look far enough down the line to look at the impact on other cities.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Mayor.

My time has expired, so in the second round I will ask the two remaining mayors to respond to my question as well.

Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Madam Chairman.

Thanks to the witnesses, very helpful testimony. It strikes me that part of what we are going to find out in our deliberations and want to help clarify is something that Judge Eckels said, which is that there is a lot of confusion about what FEMA can and cannot do. We have a lot of concerns about what they should have done and did not do, but as in your story, there are some things that people should not be turning to FEMA for. They should turn to their insurance companies, for instance, or themselves.

I must admit that I share Senator Collins' concern in Baton Rouge, so obviously the recipient of an enormous number of evacuees from New Orleans, that with this period of time up until last week that you did not have a designated FEMA contact. I wonder if part of the problem here—Judge Eckels, if I get it correctly you have a FEMA regional headquarters in Houston or am I wrong?

Judge ECKELS. I do not know the regional headquarters. I know Tom Costello shares our Emergency Operations Center at Tran-Star.

Senator LIEBERMAN. So he is right there.

Judge ECKELS. He would drill and practice in the offices with our folks, and anything that comes up—

Senator LIEBERMAN. All the time.

Judge ECKELS. Not all the time, but when we have an emergency they are there.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Not true in Baton Rouge?

Mr. HOLDEN. No, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I thought I heard you say, Mayor Holden, that there was a point at which you were dealing with somebody from FEMA, Mr. Gair, on housing sites, and that began before Katrina hit?

Mr. HOLDEN. No, sir, after.

Senator LIEBERMAN. After.

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. But he was not the designated contact for individual assistance that you just got last night or at least—

Mr. HOLDEN. That is correct, he was not. All they dealt with was housing. They primarily said, OK, we will go out and evaluate sites. They began to sit with us and say, well, what are some potential sites? We talked about the potential sites, brought ministers in in the areas affected so they too could be a part of it. And they made commitments to us including—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Yes, but nothing has happened.

Mr. HOLDEN. No, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Just to clarify it for the record and maybe for all of us, on the question of the designated FEMA representative for individual assistance, you really mean that, that there is no single FEMA person in Baton Rouge for the—how many is it, 200,000 evacuees?

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Do the 200,000 evacuees know where to go to find out what FEMA can do for them?

Mr. HOLDEN. And that is where the other breakdown came. They did not know where to go. It was not communicated to people who were living with other families. It was not communicated in the shelters. So when they said, "OK, we will open a disaster recovery

center,” what they did was virtually almost start a riot because there is no contact with law enforcement to say, OK we will be opening up this recovery center, and therefore we will need X amount of law enforcement there. But then if it would just go to a system, maybe the first 3 days, just do A–B in the alphabet or give some people a numbering system, because what you have are elderly people, people with young children, and all of these people standing out in lines all day.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right. So that the 200,000 evacuees, if they want to figure out, totally dislocated from their homes presumably, most of them from New Orleans, what kind of help FEMA could give them, there is no central place that they go to, so what, they call the FEMA line?

Mr. HOLDEN. And that is where the problems continue to mount because nobody can get through.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Heard about that too. I am interested—correct me if these numbers are not right—what I have heard is that you have 200,000 additional people, evacuees in Baton Rouge on top of a previous population of about 400,000?

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I am really struck that of that number only 8,000 to 11,000 were initially living in shelters, and that is now down to about 7,200. Is that correct?

Mr. HOLDEN. That is correct, because some people now—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Where did everybody else go?

Mr. HOLDEN. Well, some relatives have come in and found their loved ones, and we have had some people now that have also migrated to other shelters. We have had people trying to send us people, but people who also have gone to other shelters. So you have a decrease in the number of people actually in the shelters because even in the faith-based community where they had shelters, they also began to place people, but some people actually took up employers on the job opportunities to go to other States, and we do not know exactly what that number is.

But now what we are watching is people are now trying to bring people closer to New Orleans. The closest big point to New Orleans is Baton Rouge, so they are bringing people back into Baton Rouge even today.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Judge Eckels, on this specific point which is—because you are the head of the two areas that have the largest number of evacuees—

Judge ECKELS. We had about 200,000 as well in the Houston area.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I know you have had cooperation and coordination with FEMA on different parts of preparation and response, but is there, to your knowledge, a designated FEMA representative for the evacuees, displaced people to go to to figure out—

Judge ECKELS. FEMA has opened a disaster recovery center. It was opened much more quickly this time than it was in the previous Tropical Storm Allison experience. We went in—the mayor actually seized a facility. Later it was released through the State, and it had several hundred thousand square feet. We have park and ride service, but we only had one central location. Ultimately

we would like to see more store front offices around as well, but people can go to that location. They know where to go. We had similar issues during some of the shelter operations with FEMA announcing, mostly from Washington programs, and causing concern, such as crowd control issues because we were not able to meet those expectations. But, yes, we do have a big center in Houston.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Let me ask you this final question. You talked about one of the reasons Houston did well is that you had a plan. Was it a plan that was constructed in the immediate time before Rita hit or Katrina hit, or was this a longer-term plan, and if it was longer term, to what extent did FEMA or any other Federal agency help you construct the plan?

Judge ECKELS. The plan started in 1995, shortly after I was elected as county judge, working with now three different mayors going through the process.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Was it in response to a particular crisis or were you just—

Judge ECKELS. I could not get to a speech during my campaign in 1994 because we did not know what the roadway conditions were, but ultimately it was Hurricane Mitch going through the Yucatan, Andrew coming through Florida, and we modeled what those would do in our community.

As we looked at those various issues and what impact that would have, we started developing this plan. After September 11, substantial Federal funds were put into the National Plan Model to beef up local capacity, to increase our ability to deal with the surge, to deal with the training. In fact, our county is about the same population as Connecticut, so we have the resources and ability to absorb some folks. But it is still building that plan substance with the local officials so that we can deal with that, and the county, the 34 cities in our county, the eight-county region, we practice every year for this, as part of that national plan and with those training dollars that come in.

Now, what we do when we practice for a hurricane coming in, we throw a WMD in the ship channel so we can get some extra funding for it, but we do plan and practice every year.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I hear you. Thank you. I want to come back to that. My time is up.

Thanks, Madam Chairman.

Chairman COLLINS. Senator Carper.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARPER**

Senator CARPER. Thanks, Madam Chairman.

Let me say to our witnesses, we have a lot of hearings here on Capitol Hill during the course of the year, and occasionally have witnesses who just do an exceptionally great job in presenting information we need to know. This is about as impressive a group as I have seen and heard. We thank you for being here. We thank you for your testimony. We really thank the folks that you are here representing for the extraordinary good work that they have done in their communities, for a lot of people that they in many cases never knew and otherwise would not have known but for these tragedies.

Each of you have covered a whole lot of territory. I read through part of your testimony as you were going along and tried to listen to it. In terms of what we need to do, it is not overwhelming, but there is a lot to digest and to understand and to assimilate and to try to put into some kind of plan of action.

You have all been working and dealing with these issues for weeks now. I am going to ask you to put yourself in our shoes for a moment, take off your hats, put on our hats, and be thinking as what you have each presented to us is what needs to be done, and if you were in our shoes, what are some of the things that you would put at the top of our to-do list?

Judge ECKELS. Specifically directed?

Senator CARPER. That is for anyone who would like to lead on. Can be a judge or not.

Judge ECKELS. Senator, the mayors here from the other jurisdictions that have been more directly affected might have some specific interests.

Again, as we look at the healthcare issues, it is developing short-term solutions to reimburse our immediate costs. FEMA has told us they will do that, but some of the costs we are not sure of is the impact that we have from the Katrina evacuees on our community. We have had, again, several hundred thousand come into an overly stressed system already, one that has a large population of uninsured, uncompensated care, undocumented immigrant population in the Houston area. So there is a lot of stress on the system already.

When you add in the most medically needy populations from Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama coming on through into the Houston area as well, people who may have had no one to help them at home, we see a tremendous increase in mental health cases, substance abuse cases, folks who have chronic illnesses such as diabetes and other chronic illnesses. Of the chronic illnesses, we had one gentleman I was talking to about needing a kidney transplant. He was on the list in New Orleans, now in our community. So disproportionately we will have received a large number of folks coming into the community.

We need additional assistance for things like our federally qualified health centers, the other clinic operations, the hospital district and the way funds are allocated to pay for uncompensated care. The key is that in these areas there will be many folks who will relocate. They have over a year, as Mayor Holden, or Mayor Massengill mentioned, looking for shelters, perhaps they are talking about trailers to get back into Louisiana. A lot of folks are not going to do that. There are no jobs. There may be nothing to go home to.

The *Washington Post* poll recently showed that close to half of the folks were going to stay in Texas and the majority of those were going to stay in Houston. So there will be tens of thousands of new residents. Not all of them will be healthy. They will be the medically needy who are there. So we have a huge issue with healthcare.

I think in the longer term you have an issue of transportation and infrastructure on how you move people around, and I am thinking in terms of the interstate system. We are celebrating next

year the 50th anniversary of the interstate system. We ought to look at how we make that a more robust system to be able to handle these kind of mass evacuations, not so much in massive capacity, but something that makes economic sense as you link the major economic and population centers along the Gulf Coast so that we can move more easily between them in those mass evacuation types of instances.

FEMA is probably more of an administrative issue, and you will get into what failures might have occurred around the country, but the structure is there. The key I think from your perspective is to not fall into the trap of building a Federal first response that says you are going to come in here and solve the problems. The key is to have Baton Rouge and the other cities robust and strong and well coordinated so that they can respond. And then you can come in with your assets so you do not get failures in some spots.

The President's national plan that they came up with working together with the Congress on homeland security, as it was created, was a good plan and I believe it will be something that should be strengthened and supported with the overlay of the national assets. The Army coming in with traffic direction, with fuel trucks, with water, a quick response when a local community such as Baton Rouge or New Orleans is overwhelmed, even Houston could be overwhelmed. Had that storm hit Houston, it would have been massive. We had 700,000 customers lose power, probably a million and a half people without power just in the gale force winds coming through from Rita. It would have been much more dramatic had we had a direct hit.

Senator CARPER. Thanks. Mayor Holden.

Mr. HOLDEN. Thank you, Senator, and thank you for your remarks as well. I hope they are listening back home.

Senator CARPER. I bet they are.

Mr. HOLDEN. Let me just say that there are a number of things. From the medical perspective, we found an active case of tuberculosis in one of the centers. That person may have been there 2 weeks. We do not know how many people have been exposed. So there is a medical side that has to be looked at somewhere down the line even if it is like the medical alert bracelet, or something needs to be set up that if a person is undergoing some type of treatment, we need to be able to identify what has to be done to make sure that person is not integrated into a population that could spread a disease.

The second thing is that when you are doing evacuation, there has to be a system set up whereby you cannot put people who have to have medical assistance on the same bus as people who need to go into a main shelter. There has to be some way of separation. Right now, I think as far as our area, we are going to go back and do an assessment of the vulnerable population through census tracks, find out who are people in nursing homes, where the hospitals are, and then from there we will begin to look at maybe can we set up a shelter that is closer to the census track, rather than taking people across town. We are working on that.

We have a problem in our school system. A couple of weeks ago, again, a child shows up at school. That child, nobody knew that child's medical record. The child shows up at school, you have a



nurse that is there, but a lot of those nurses go from one school to another. There has to be some check and balance as to the medical records of those children, again, before they enter that population.

The transportation aspect, as Judge Eckels has mentioned, you have to look at mass transit, how we can move people around. You have to look at the evacuation routes and what else can be done in order to enhance moving people from Point A to Point B quicker.

Then the other part is this: We have talked about communications. Communications is a must, compatible systems, that is a must, nonnegotiable to any of us because of the necessity. From there, it is then, how do I go in—as I walked in the shelters people are asking the question, “When am I going to be able to move out of here into some temporary shelter?” There has to be some clear and defined timeline to tell people when they can look to be moved out of those shelters because the other thing that is happening is whereas you do not see a lot of people complaining, but the longer people stay in the shelters, the less patient they become. We have to begin to look at those needs and address them, and then see what else you can do while they are in the shelter to make sure that they are comfortable.

Senator CARPER. My time has expired. I am going to ask, if I could, for Mayor Massengill and Mayor Coody, if you would not mind responding for the record, I would very much appreciate that.

I would just say to my colleagues, I am struck again, especially listening to the comments of Mayor Holden talking about the medical issues that were faced, and comparing the situation that we had with veterans who were being treated by the VA. For almost every one of them we had an electronic medical record, and as they were moved from facility to facility, from State to State, wherever they went we knew what medicines they were taking, we knew what their MRIs, their lab tests were, their x-rays, and we had just a much better opportunity, as they were received at a new location, how to treat them appropriately. I think Secretary Leavitt has said if we ever needed a demonstration as to why information technology needs to be harnessed and implemented in the provision of health care, we have seen it right here. And I am just reminded of that, particularly in the comments of Mayor Holden.

Judge ECKELS. Senator, Secretary Leavitt came to Houston. In my written testimony we talk about them and some of the things they did. They did a great job for us there. I would like also to submit to you in written form from the National Association of Counties (NACo) who has gone through these issues and asked for specific items. They asked for \$300 billion, and I will not personally vouch for that number because I do not know where that came from, but I am on the NACo Homeland Security Task Force Committee and operationally I will give this to the Committee as well as part of our written comment.<sup>1</sup>

Chairman COLLINS. Without objection, it will be included in the record, as will your full written statement.

Senator CARPER. Our thanks again to each of you.

<sup>1</sup>The information from NACo submitted by Judge Eckels appears in the Appendix on page 80.

Chairman COLLINS. Senator Pryor.

Senator PRYOR. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Mayor Coody, I know that in your testimony a few moments ago you mentioned the city and the surrounding area took in a lot of evacuees, but also you set up a center there in Fayetteville, and I would like to ask you about the Fayetteville Distribution Center, and first why you did that, and then how you did that.

Mr. COODY. Thank you very much. As soon as the disaster started to become apparent, and we saw what it was that everyone was having to deal with, we in Fayetteville knew that we needed to do whatever we could to help alleviate as much suffering as possible. We looked at all of our assets, and the best asset we had was this giant defunct warehouse that we knew we could turn into a really productive center for collection, distribution, and for offices. Whatever we needed to use it for, it was at our disposal. Of course it had been completely shut down. The electricity had been completely gutted from it, and we had to work with the utility companies, Ozarks Electric, the phone companies, to reinstall electricity and phones and all of that during the holiday weekend, which was not easy, but they worked with us, and we got it done.

We wanted to do everything we could, and that was the best tool we had at our disposal. I would like to, if I could—I know that Senator Collins had a question about FEMA, and also Senator Carper had a question about what we think an appropriate response would be. Would it be OK to answer that as well?

Senator PRYOR. Sure, please do.

Mr. COODY. Thank you. These gentlemen have been able to discuss FEMA on the macro level. In Fayetteville I would like to discuss just for one minute FEMA on the micro level.

What we experienced, even from our small perspective—we did not have the big needs that Baton Rouge, Houston, Mississippi, and Louisiana had. We did not have the tremendous influx. We had a lot of folks around Fayetteville, and they used Fayetteville as a hub. Fayetteville is the largest city in Northwest Arkansas, and we had a lot of church camps in our region that took in a lot of folks.

It was 2½ weeks before we ever heard from FEMA. We kept hearing rumors that they were in the area, but we never heard from them, a county judge and myself, we never heard from FEMA at all. We knew they were around because we kept getting little snippets of information that they had gone here and they had done this over there, but we could not communicate.

Senator LIEBERMAN. What were they doing? In other words, what did the rumors suggest the FEMA folks were doing?

Mr. COODY. Well, one of our largest encampments is at Siloam Springs, 30 miles west of Fayetteville. And we understood that FEMA had gone over there to register people, but for some reason had been turned away, and we were not quite sure if that could possibly be true. So when we finally did get with FEMA, they came to our facility well after it was established. Five or six FEMA people came in, good folks. They were firemen. They really want to do a good job. They were completely out of the loop, and they were as frustrated as anybody else I have ever seen in the whole process.

I asked was it true that—was this the team? Were you the guys who got turned away at Siloam Springs? If so, what happened? The leader of that team said, “We do not know. We do not know who that team is. It is a different team.” I said, “Can you call them to see who, what happened?” He said, “We do not know who they are or how to get in touch with them.” This was the second FEMA team in our area.

These gentlemen had been sent here from Rhode Island. Most of the team was from Rhode Island, firemen from Rhode Island. They complained that they had been in Atlanta for 3 or 4 days with sensitivity training, when they really wanted to go out and do their jobs.

So we visited about that for a while. It was clear that while they were being sent from Rhode Island down to Fayetteville to basically hand out pamphlets and do a little bit of paperwork, which our Red Cross folks essentially did as well, we had firemen in Fayetteville that could have done that job just as easily and they were already there on site. It only took one person to do it, not 5 or 6. Whereas a lot of these gentlemen had too little FEMA response too late, we almost had too much too late because these gentlemen did not need to be in Fayetteville. They were great guys, but we had people on the ground that could have done the job for them. They should have been sent to the regions that needed them the most, and they should have been able to communicate between teams. That was one thing that was kind of bothersome to us.

As far as what we could do—what my perspective is that I think FEMA could do to make its job more effective is that I have always believed that any program or process will succeed or fail based on the leadership in that program. I think that from the very top to the very bottom, speaking of the micro level, there needs to be a system put in place where we hire the most qualified, most knowledgeable people for the job that want to do the job and put them in a position where they can lead, and to work closely with local municipalities and the counties because we are where a lot of the rubber met the road in this whole disaster, and for the localities to be left out of the loop, I think, is a major oversight that could have avoided a lot of suffering from folks.

Senator PRYOR. Thank you. Mayor Coody, one of the things you did in setting up this center, this distribution center, is you reached out to the community and to the resources in the community, and given the fact that Wal-Mart is some 15 miles from the city courthouse, you talked to Wal-Mart and they helped you organize this distribution center. Then how did you use the distribution center? How was that actually used?

Mr. COODY. Well, there were huge loading dock areas and big storage areas because it had been a big food processing factory, the Tyson Corporation. Once we started seeing that we were going to have this enormous influx of material, we knew that there was no one better in the world for distribution and collection than Wal-Mart Corporation. So we made some calls and they immediately sent down some folks, and they showed us how to arrange a warehouse and they made it spin like a top. So we called on our private partners, private business partners in the region to help us do this.

And with their help and the volunteers that we called in, we were able to have a lot of volunteers unload these semis that were pulling up. They sorted all this material that came in, and it was a broad range of material, from microwaves to baby clothes to wheelchairs, you name it, we had it. It was all sorted by gender, by size, by function. We threw about 6 percent of it away because a lot of people just cleaned out their closets and cleaned out their garages. Those we took to the dumpster, but 94 percent of pretty much everything we got is usable and folded, and it is palletized, and it is labeled to where when you get a pallet of material, you know that it is a boy's baby clothes, or it is medium size women's wear. It is all folded, ready to go. It is water, it is baby food.

We were able to work with—we did not get much help. Now, Congressman Boozman, you have been very helpful with this, but we have not had any communications from the State or Federal level about the needs in these areas. I would love to send what remains of our product—it is good material—to these areas that need it in Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. But for us to actually communicate with these folks because communication lines have been down, to find out what their needs are and how we can get it there is a problem.

We asked J.B. Hunt and other trucking firms, can you please donate your time and some drivers to load up this trailer that we have loaded up and ready to go, and take it to a particular town in Louisiana? And they said, sure, they would come pick them up, and they dropped them off.

There was one gentleman who came in from Kansas City. He had a semi-load of water and baby food, and we got a call from Bogalusa, Mississippi, that said, "We need water and we need baby food." And Susan Thomas, who ran a spectacular program, was about to go to Wal-Mart to buy some stuff out of her own paycheck to send down there because the stories were so heart-rending. As she was leaving this semi pulled in, said, "I have a load of baby food and water, and I am told to get off the road because I am overloaded. Everybody was telling me I cannot park there. They said try you guys." Soon as we saw what we had, we gave him a map and we said, "This is where you need to go," and we sent them on their way.

As they pulled into Bogalusa and off-loaded food, baby food, adult food, and everything else, people started opening packages and eating food directly off the truck because they had not had any food in 3 days.

To know that we had material sitting there ready to go and no knowledge of how to get it there and no real infrastructure to get it there, it broke our hearts.

Senator PRYOR. Thank you, Mayor.

Mr. COODY. I hope I answered your question.

Senator PRYOR. You did. It was fantastic. I need to mention that Congressman Boozman, who is from the 3rd District in Arkansas and represents this area, was here a few moments ago, but he had to go to one of his committee hearings.

Also, Senator Lieberman, to follow up on what you said, when I was touring the camps, and other places in Arkansas, I heard that story more than once, where mostly firemen from other States had

gone through some FEMA training for maybe 3 days in Atlanta, if I remember correctly. Then they came to Arkansas, and they wanted to volunteer, they wanted to help, they wanted to be hands on. And all they were allowed to do is go around and hand out flyers with a toll free number and a website.

In fact, in one camp in the other part of the State, they told me that when FEMA finally did show up, everybody was angry because that is all they had to offer: A website and a flyer. They did not have any real resources that they could give, so clearly we need to look at that and continue to work through that. Thank you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you.

Mayor, thank you for answering my question so well. And thank you for doing it on Senator Pryor's time. [Laughter.]

I particularly appreciated that also. Senator Akaka.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR AKAKA**

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Mayor Coody, I thank you for your testimony, and all of you, welcome to the Committee.

Mayor Coody, you talked about the importance of strong and sustainable communications—all of you did—in your response to the emergency. This was a major problem on the Federal level, but it appears you had some communication problems at the local level, as you have stated. I would appreciate it, Mayor, if you could explain how you solved this issue at the local level, and also ask the others to make comments about that.

Mr. COODY. How we solved it on the local level was that I had the phone number for the county judge and the local emergency responder, John Luther, for the county. And we just stayed in contact. We also knew the local folks that worked with the Red Cross and the Salvation Army. Department of Human Services, all the county agencies were under the county judge and the nonprofits and the service organizations. We had access to everybody because we had each other's phone numbers, and we were able to communicate with the town through the media. Of course since we were not damaged by the storm, all of our telephone communications infrastructure was still in place.

But it was as if there was a wall around Washington County in Fayetteville from the outside world. We did not hear anything, and that was the most disturbing thing to us because we had to keep our knees flexed and just prepare for the unknown. We had no idea what was coming our way, what was happening. We would hear, "Well, there are 9,000 more people coming in," and they would not show up, and then all of a sudden we would look up and there would be people coming from a direction we had not expected. We just never got any solid information. And that continues to this day. We still are not in the loop on what exactly is going on. It has been almost a month now.

We have had plenty of opportunities to fine tune our own internal services communications, but we still have a lot of work to do outside our locality about how we can better communicate.

Senator AKAKA. Mayor Massengill.

Mr. MASSENGILL. We had a meeting every morning. We had the supervisors from the county. We had the city officials that would

meet. We had the department heads. We would then try to get the word out to the people as best we could. When we got electricity, which began coming back late Tuesday, and on Wednesday after the hurricane we went on the radio every opportunity we could to let people know what to expect. We tried to keep people well informed. We had trouble with the phone. Our cell phones, it is unreal how many calls—I know on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, for instance, normally they will have probably several hundred thousand calls in a day, and they had 5 million during this particular time. So they were overworked. But we did try to communicate by cell phone as much as possible, and got on the radio as soon as we could.

Senator AKAKA. Mayor Holden.

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir. We basically had to take the situation into our own hands, and we went in and took the calls. We had all agencies around the table in our Office of Emergency Preparedness. We do hourly briefings when we are in the crisis mode, try to find out exactly what is going on from each agency, get their report, and then map out an orderly response to that. Where we found a lot of problems, again, came on the medical side, whereby at LSU they set up a center to triage patients, and let me commend the Army staff and the medical staff from the Federal Government and LSU, working together to try to take care of a number of people whereby they converted the Pete Maravich Center into a hospital.

All of these individuals worked well together, but again, the communication came the same as the gentleman here, is, OK, there is a bus load of people that just showed up, and how do you actually get those people in without any notification of what you will need in order to take care of patients, some who have been virtually starving for 3 and 4 days, many elderly. What do you do? So that communication there was really a major problem. So what you had were professionals making the assessment on the spot, in spite of line or breakdown in communications, they made very good moves on the spot and were able to save a lot of people based on their wisdom and their efficiency.

Senator AKAKA. Judge Eckels.

Judge ECKELS. Two things that we did in Houston, maybe, a little different. We were operating a joint emergency management center through our TranStar operation. It is a joint project of Harris County, the City of Houston, Texas Department of Transportation, and the Harris County Metropolitan Transit Authority. We do traffic management daily in that facility, and in emergency situations we also had representatives from FEMA. During Rita we also had a representative from the U.S. Army and from the State's Division of Emergency Management. We have all of those folks in that office.

During Katrina we had a meeting every morning at 8 a.m. at the Reliant Park Complex with the mayor and I together with the various providers such as Guy Rankin and John Walsh from the housing departments, Harris County and the City of Houston, respectively. On the medical side, Dr. Palacio from the Harris County Health Department from our hospital district, Dr. Maddox of Ben Taub Hospital, and Dr. Persse from the City of Houston. We had interfaith ministries, Catholic charities through Archbishop

Fiorenza from Houston. We had representatives from the Second Baptist Church, and from various African-American coalitions of churches from the faith-based community that provided a lot of services. And Senators Cornyn and Hutchison both had representatives there to meet every morning at 8 o'clock throughout the disaster to avoid exactly the problems that are here. Just a communication fusion center, if you will, where we could help each other and share the information.

The one thing that you could probably do here more than anything else to help with some of the technical sides of the communication from our side is to provide funding for our Harris County Communication Radio System. It is an 800-megahertz trunk system. It is a "Smart Zone" Motorola system. It has over 700 entities participating so we can share and build a dynamic communication system for the community, with one exception—the City of Houston. Their airport system is on, but we could use some grant funding to help them get their police and fire departments on the system. It is expensive to move tens of thousands of radios from the police and fire onto our regional system. We need grant funding for the City of Houston, it would also be very helpful to open up those 700-megahertz channels so we can get the digital and streaming video as well, it would be very helpful. From a Federal perspective, those two areas are things you could do to help us. But the mechanisms are in place for these joint centers for communications among jurisdictions. And the FEMA representative that had my cell number called me yesterday morning to give me an update.

Senator AKAKA. Madam Chairman, let me ask one question just to finish this with Mayor Coody.

You talked about FEMA, but a question in my mind is, if you could answer briefly, why did FEMA leave after 2 days at your relief center?

Mr. COODY. I can answer that briefly. I do not know the answer to that question. [Laughter.]

Senator AKAKA. Thank you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Senator. Senator Levin

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR LEVIN**

Senator LEVIN. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

First going back to your description of the needs in the communication area, Judge Eckels, would those needs be there with or without this current situation?

Judge ECKELS. Yes.

Senator LEVIN. So that is an ongoing—

Judge ECKELS. We have built a system that can be scaled up and respond to other disasters. When the Shuttle Columbia crashed and during the recovery efforts in East Texas, we projected our communication system up there and worked with NASA to use our system for helping that recovery effort. So, yes, we do use this on a daily basis, and it improves not only our capacity but our potential as well. You cannot build a system for a disaster that might come once every 10 or 20 or 40 years. You can build a sustainable system that works every day and can be scaled up and respond when you have this kind of mass disaster.

Senator LEVIN. The effort to get what is called interoperable communications around here, which is being led by this Committee under the leadership of our Chairman and Ranking Member, is a major initiative that is going on here, and I think that would be true in all your communities, that there is the need for that kind of communications equipment, which is obviously more desperately needed in a situation where there is an emergency, but is needed on a day-to-day basis.

Judge ECKELS. We have today, Senator, over 700 agencies that have joined together. It is not just Harris County. We form the backbone for a 15 county regional communication system now. They are all on the system. If we need to set up special talk groups, we can do that dynamically through our central locations. The only hole in it right now is the big hole of the City of Houston. They are patched into the system, but that is a big expense for the city, and on their behalf I would mention that.

Senator LEVIN. This testimony hopefully will help us get this Committee's initiative acted upon.

Let me ask each of you the question about what the expectation is in terms of reimbursement, if you have not covered that area already. Are you given a description of precisely what expenditures will be reimbursed and which ones will not? Do you have that in writing or is that on a website somewhere?

Judge ECKELS. We have a list that we got from FEMA on that, and when there are questions, they have been very flexible on how we can deal with those issues. They have been very clear on what is reimbursable and what is not.

We did accelerate the housing issues, for example. The city went forward and issued housing vouchers, assuming the paperwork would catch up.

Senator LEVIN. There is no ambiguity in your mind as to what you are reimbursed for and what you are not?

Judge ECKELS. Small ambiguities but not serious.

Senator LEVIN. Mayor Holden.

Mr. HOLDEN. We have submitted the early documentation behind Hurricane Katrina, have not received a dollar as of yet.

Senator LEVIN. In addition to not receiving the money is there any ambiguity as to what you are eligible for reimbursement for?

Mr. HOLDEN. I think the judge brought it out earlier, in regards to people who now would be performing one task, but due to the influx of people coming in, they have to do multi-tasking, as to whether or not some of those charges should be taken care of as well.

Senator LEVIN. Is there any other ambiguity other than that one?

Mr. MASSENGILL. There is some ambiguity. The city cleaned up a tremendous amount of debris. We cleaned up in excess of 10,000 cubic yards of debris. We are told that we will only be paid for overtime hours for that, yet we needed to get that cleaned up so that school buses could travel the streets, so that the streets could be made two-lane rather than one lane. We now have FEMA and the Corps of Engineers—and by the way, the Corps of Engineers has been extremely professional in the way they have approached this.



They have come in to handle the overall cleanup of the remainder of the debris, which is over 10 times what we have. But we cannot understand why we are only being reimbursed for overtime hours when we have put in a tremendous amount of effort to get our city operable.

Senator LEVIN. We can forward these ambiguities to FEMA and ask for clarification and get you their answers so we can carry on that dialogue with them.

Mayor Coody.

Mr. COODY. I have the same response.

Senator LEVIN. We read that there are—I do not know how many thousand adults who are—the number we have been given is that people are looking for 4,300 children. We are trying to figure out how many children are out there—I am trying to figure out anyway—the number of children who do not have a guardian with them or a parent with them or somebody with them who can identify them, who knows who they are. In your communities, are there children who are not with a parent or a guardian or some adult who knows who they are?

Let me start, Judge, with you, just kind of a yes or no, and if so, how many.

Judge ECKELS. I cannot answer. I know that we did initially have that problem. In New Orleans, as they were leaving, they were splitting families up and putting them on buses, which was very traumatic. I have no idea why that loading was done in that method. I cannot tell you any numbers that we do have now, but I will get that information for you. We have done that match, and I will check and see if there are any left.

Senator LEVIN. It is amazing to me that we cannot get this information yet.

Judge ECKELS. There needs to be a single point to have all that gathered, and there is no single national point for that.

Senator LEVIN. We have tried to find that point, and it is hard for us to imagine why there is not a point. We know how many adults there are that say they are missing children, but we cannot find how many children there are that are not connected to an adult.

Mayor Holden.

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir, my response is the same as the judge. We know that there are some, especially in the Red Cross shelters at Southern University and at the River Center, but again, the numbers, because you have the faith-based shelters as well, so we do not know exactly how many children are without a parent at those shelters.

Senator LEVIN. That are unidentified.

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir.

Senator LEVIN. So you have unidentified children in your community.

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir.

Senator LEVIN. OK.

Mr. MASSENGILL. We do not have.

Senator LEVIN. Mayor Coody.

Mr. COODY. Not that I know of.

Senator LEVIN. So there in those two communities at least, if you could get us those numbers.

Judge ECKELS. We will look into that. Our Children's Protective Services office is getting that.

Senator LEVIN. We have tried to get this from the Missing Children Office as well, and they do not have——

Judge ECKELS. There may be some that have not been identified, but I will find out for you, Senator.

Senator LEVIN. All right, that will be helpful. I am out of time, thank you.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Senator. Senator Warner.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR WARNER**

Senator WARNER. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

My deep respects to each of you for your public service, some of you under most extraordinary circumstances. By coincidence, the four of us here are on the Senate Armed Services Committee. The government, our government, the Federal Government, is currently reviewing the framework of laws that enable our President, at times, to exercise authority with the Federal forces at his disposal, namely, the regular Army as opposed to the National Guard, to assist and give support when crisis situations descend upon our Nation. The study embraces the concept of use of weapons of mass destruction, which we all pray will never occur, but we must be prepared, to situations not unlike what we experienced with Katrina, where local law enforcement is simply overwhelmed or the chain of command in local law enforcement breaks down, and whether or not to provide clarity of law, Federal, to give our President, whoever it might be, the authority to utilize the military in what we call law enforcement roles.

I am not a proponent of any particular move at the moment, but I have undertaken to encourage that we study it. But we need the input from persons like yourself as to what you have experienced in terms of the breakdown of law enforcement, usually in the immediate aftermath of whatever tragedy occurs, and whether or not the ability of the regular military, should they be brought to bear in a crisis situation, should have or have not the ability to work with local law enforcement in actually the arrest, detention, and otherwise of those who have the terrific misfortune of trying to engage in crime in the wake of such situations.

Now, among you, anyone who would like to volunteer an opinion? We have a great respect for sovereignty of a governor, the local governments, State and local governments, and this is a question of the sovereign jurisdiction of the State. But there are situations in which that authority might have to be exercised, and it indeed could be some of your fellow office holders in other areas of the country or your area might wish it to be there.

Judge ECKELS. Senator, I have had some chance to comment on this in the past, only to say that I think that there may be a role for that, but you should guard that it is not a trigger pulled by DOD, but by the President or Homeland Security. The key is still that the officials on the ground need to know and need to be built into a more robust system. The National Response Plan can work unless it is an overriding disaster and that plan is gone. When it

comes to the issue of sovereignty, that is something that endangers other folks.

We have, again, potential for Federal assistance in our evacuation plans, which occurs over vast distances, when you are going hundreds of miles, and a small-town police officer or the mayor decides he does not want all those folks from Houston coming through his town, and tries to route them around or just to the traffic light. In theory, the State could over-ride that decision, but if it was across the border, in Louisiana or Arkansas, they could still be backing up people for hundreds of miles.

I could have used a Federal support for a situation like that, and we did in fact have the Army in our emergency operations center.

Senator WARNER. Is that National Guard or regular force?

Judge ECKELS. Regular Army. And we brought in fuel trucks and support for our office operations from the regular Army refueling trucks that were available at one of the bases in our community.

At the same time, we also had National Guard presence as well, but it was U.S. Army personnel that were in our building. We had a 2-star, I think, in the building initially and a 3-star came in eventually.

But ultimately I share your concerns about sovereignty and the ability of local officials to control the situation.

Senator WARNER. No, sovereignty of the States.

Judge ECKELS. Yes, sovereignty of the States, over how we operate. But at the same time, in an overwhelming natural disaster or terrorist attack, there may well be a place for Federal assistance. I would just encourage you, as you are doing so, to have controls in place so that you are not having people who think they know better what to do locally than the people locally might know to do in dealing with their particular situations.

Senator WARNER. The input from people who have had the experience, such as each of you, is very important as this decision is being made in our Committee. Should the Administration come forward with some revisions to—they are very old laws, one called Posse Comitatus, which is from the 1870s, and the other is the Insurrection Act. At least we ought to rename that, that is at a minimum.

Judge ECKELS. I have had a few of those on the Commissioners Court. [Laughter.]

Senator WARNER. I just think that we have to be prudent in this country and recognize there could be situations.

Now, those two framework of laws—Insurrection Act also is in the late 1800s—has served America well because the men and women in the armed forces essentially are not for law enforcement domestically, and historically there has been sound reasons why they should not be employed.

Now, on occasions Presidents have exercised under the Insurrection Act the right for our troops to go in and participate in the law enforcement, but it should be very limited and only in extraordinary circumstances. I think what you are saying is that to the extent there is some residual of local, State authority, from the governor on down to the county commissioners and mayors, they should have a voice if they are able to function still under that situation.

Judge ECKELS. Yes, sir, a strong voice, that the main place we need the Army is not for law enforcements but logistical support. They have tremendous capacity——

Senator WARNER. No question about it.

Judge ECKELS. Logistical support, supplies for troops. Those supplies can supply the local community.

Senator WARNER. And the lift capacity with its helicopters, or air or truck or so forth. Someone else have a view on our panel?

Mr. HOLDEN. We actually asked for military police to come in and be a part of our operation because we had police officers working double shifts, so primarily many of the personnel were deployed at one of the major evacuation centers, and that is the one that is our convention center, and that worked out fine.

Senator WARNER. Were they Federal regular troops or National Guard?

Mr. HOLDEN. They were Federal regular troops.

Senator WARNER. And they did supply then some trained individuals to work with the police?

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir. Let me back up. We had National Guard from different States, so they were probably National Guard.

Senator WARNER. They, under law, have the right of law enforcement.

Mr. HOLDEN. Yes, sir.

Senator WARNER. That is one of the reasons it is so confusing. They are both wearing the same uniform, the fatigues, the standard Army, in most instances, fatigues, and the system does not know which to say, "Come help me because I am suffering from criminality over here."

Mr. HOLDEN. That is what I would suggest. There has to be some integration of the services, and look to see what laws need to be tweaked to allow them to have the same power, but again, with the caveat that the judge mentioned, there has to be coordination with the local people as well, including law enforcement, but if you started with our National Guard, since they are stationed in Louisiana or whatever State, they can best say that we need the following resources in Area X, Y, Z. Then allow them to position the people out of the regular Army to supplant the additional personnel that they would need in order to carry out a detail.

Senator WARNER. Madam Chairman, my time is over. Should the other witnesses be afforded an opportunity, that they——

Chairman COLLINS. Certainly.

Mr. MASSENGILL. No real comment on that, other than the National Guard did work very well with our local folks, and at this point that was satisfactory. I really have no other point other than what has been made.

Mr. COODY. I would think that if the National Guard could work well, if FEMA could work well, we might not have to go to the measure of changing the way we react with the military in the country.

I think the first option and first priority should be making the system that we have in place work.

Senator WARNER. Good. I have looked into it and had the opportunity with my colleagues right here, a week or 10 days ago to go down, and I asked this question of a number of our military people,

and they said the situation worked this time, but there could be another situation. I think all of us wish to commend the men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces whether they were regular or Guard or Coast Guard. There was a magnificent chapter in the history of our uniform people that we turned to to help out.

I thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you, Senator.

Mayor Massengill, you have had a long time now to think about the question that I posed to you about your relationship with FEMA. Your response is from an interesting perspective because you are mayor of a community that was hit by the hurricane and also took in a large number of evacuees. So I am interested in your experience in dealing with FEMA from both perspectives.

Mr. MASSENGILL. I would like to give you that. First of all, let me tell you that I went to the shelters, as I mentioned earlier, I talked with the people, and I said, "Tell me your thoughts about FEMA and the way you have been treated and the response you have had to your needs."

The people feel they had been forgotten or ignored, as they felt more attention was given to areas that had been struck harder. Yet they were in our community, and they had been struck as hard as anybody, yet they felt they were ignored. They felt the government, i.e., FEMA, has been slow to respond. They further felt that a FEMA representative, if they told them they would be back with them tomorrow with an answer, that they may hear back in a week if at all. So they felt—they were told they would be back with them, but did not get back with them.

So I asked them on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest score, where would you rate FEMA? And it came out slightly below 2 on the average, slightly below 2.

However, now, as far as the city's relationship with FEMA—let me say this: The evacuees are terribly disappointed in the response that they received.

We had a public assistance meeting 10 days after the hurricane. We were told what to expect as far as public assistance was concerned. We talked with FEMA representatives several times about the cleanup, the debris cleanup. Finally the Corps came in. And then 3 weeks after—I think after it was known that I was going to be testifying last Friday and it got delayed—last Thursday I had a representative from the Intergovernmental Affairs Office of FEMA stop by to make a—as he put it, courtesy call. We are still waiting on an individual assistance office to be set up in our community. We did make available to the citizens of our community—we had the library available to them so that they could go online and sign up for an IA number.

We also had a computer lab set up in a mobile home so that we had 11 computers available to them with help, so that people could go on and sign up for their individual assistance number, which we understand by hearsay, that they have to have before they can go in and talk with FEMA. I now understand that an individual office is to be set up because I know the gentleman that is renting them the building, but we do not know when it is going to be set up.

So we have not been overly satisfied.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you.

Judge Eckels, my final question—although I could go on forever actually asking all of your questions—but my final question is for you. When FEMA announced its ill conceived and short-lived debit card, I read press reports that it created a real problem in Houston in terms of crowd control. I am curious whether FEMA officials called you and told you of their plan to distribute the debit cards prior to doing so?

Judge ECKELS. No.

Chairman COLLINS. No.

Judge ECKELS. Briefly, the local FEMA officials were very cooperative working with us. They did talk to us about the debit card program, and actually I think it was a very compassionate program and one that made sense. In retrospect it is one that was a classic Federal system where they came in and were going to do it their way with a bunch of Federal personnel to issue the cards. I think it probably should have been done through the banks, which would have created both the cash in the people's hands, but given them a bank account that they perhaps never would have had otherwise.

That said, when it came up, our local FEMA officials were in a meeting with me talking logistics about how we were going to do this. They had the capacity to issue about 50 per hour. They received orders from Washington to begin issuing them, which was ill conceived. While we were meeting, there was a strike force that came in from Washington and began moving our housing officials out of some of the shelter areas that they were using to set up their debit card operation.

We did get that solved. Our local FEMA representatives were unaware of what was happening. It was the same problem the mayor mentioned down here, with different FEMA teams not being aware of each other's activities.

We were able to the next day set up that card operation, and we processed 500 per hour, that's families not individuals, and we were able to handle the entire population in the Astrodome complex in 1 day by about 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

The problem we faced was that the national office, through their press releases, announced this program and caused an expectation within the community that was not there. I had to go out in the middle of a crowd of 2,000 angry folks and say, "I am in charge. It is not happening. Let me explain to you why. You are going to get your money, you will get your benefits." It was not that they were mad or afraid they were not getting their benefits, they just were mad because it was not happening as they were told because that was done out of a press release out of Washington, DC, not in coordination with the local officials.

The next day, on instructions from Washington, we announced that it would be open to the public and they should come at 10 o'clock in the morning. That night they changed their mind and canceled the program once again that was working smoothly in Houston.

So through that process I had to once again go outside. We put every highway sign available in the city out on the street saying "No FEMA cards." We put them up in the freeway system, our information signs through our TranStar system to let people know there were no debit cards, and we were able to get the message out

and avoid that confusion. It was not so much that the cards were a problem. It was the unmet expectations, and if there is anything you get from all of us here today, communications is the key. Whether it is our evacuation plan of people having to sit for 20 hours, where it's clear we had a failure there, or the debit cards coming out of Washington. It is people's expectations being met and knowing when to expect help.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you. Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks again, Madam Chairman.

I want to tell you all, your stories will stick with us because you have been out there on the front lines. Some of them are encouraging. Your work sounds like it was exemplary. But the stories of the way in which FEMA was not ready to give you help, was not ready—not for prime time, but for crisis time really will stick with us. We have got to convey them back to Mr. Paulson, Acting Director, next week, so that we can improve their performance.

One of the shining stars here was the Coast Guard, and the Coast Guard actually does not—as you know they prepare for rescue over water. They were suddenly drawn in in Katrina to do a lot of the stuff they normally do in New Orleans particularly, but throughout the Gulf Coast. And they were ready. It just appears in so many ways that one would hope an emergency management agency would anticipate that FEMA was not ready.

So we have a lot of work to do with them. Again, this is not pointing fingers of blame. It is just getting our act together so we can be there for you as local officials.

Judge Eckels, you had a better experience, which is encouraging, but—

Judge ECKELS. I would mention the image of the Coast Guard. Lieutenant General Leonard was appointed by the mayor and me—he is a Coast Guard Lieutenant out of Galveston—but from Houston to head our joint unified command structure. We started it from Harris County's Emergency Management Office. As it grew and we needed our folks doing other things, the Coast Guard lieutenant came in and did an excellent job. I would hope he would get some kind of recognition at some point.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Well, they just got it.

Judge, I am interested in terms of lessons learned. Did the plan for evacuation, plans for emergency response include the prospect of what you had to implement in response to Rita, which was a mass evacuation?

Judge ECKELS. It included a mass evacuation of the coastal surge zones of that 1.2 million people. What we had not anticipated was the number of folks who would flee outside of those zones. It is understanding that they would in the sight on television of what we have described as the giant Pac Man coming up, these big red blobs getting ready to overwhelm the city. People were scared and they left. I do not blame them. If they had stayed, they would have faced the same things that you are and seeing in these other areas, where there was no power, no water, uncomfortable conditions.

But we anticipated about 1.2 million coming out of the coastal zones.

Senator LIEBERMAN. And ended up with—

Judge ECKELS. We wound up with probably over 2.5 million, and that overwhelmed our plans. We will be better prepared next time. We have learned from that.

Senator LIEBERMAN. What will you do differently? In other words—because this is a problem that most any American city would face. We know that road systems—I can tell you in Connecticut, we do not have large cities. We have cities. The roads are congested at the commuter hours every day. If you suddenly said, “Evacuate Hartford,” it would be——

Judge ECKELS. Well, in Connecticut you do have a strong rail system to move people out of those cities——

Senator LIEBERMAN. We do, right.

Judge ECKELS. And you do not have as far to go to reach a major population center.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Judge ECKELS. With that kind of a number you have to go to Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, maybe even up to Oklahoma or Little Rock to get out of harm’s way—you would want to go far enough to find hotels and other services for folks.

So first thing we would do is probably use contra-flow lanes earlier to keep from blocking the limited access highways. It is not available on all roadways, but Interstate 45 and Interstate 10 would be opened as contra-flow lanes much earlier. We will use a much stronger effort on our communication and education campaign on the staging of the evacuation. By the time the mandatory order was called, when we would have otherwise closed those routes down for the people in the surge areas, they were locked down with traffic from everyone else trying to leave.

We are going through that now, but the mayor, the governor, and I are appointing a blue ribbon commission to work with our transportation planners on an evacuation plan. They will be folks who are not the elected officials in charge but community folks who have some business sense and a background in these areas, to review our entire planning operation. Governor Perry did a great job of building a better plan than was on the ground before. This year was the first time anybody had looked at an evacuation plan. He had a great plan, but we have learned a lot from Rita, both in terms of logistical support along the route, and choke points along the route, such as bottlenecks at small towns from evacuation route mergers.

Another problem we had in this case was that not only was Houston evacuated, but the entire upper Texas coast from Corpus Christi, and some of those plans conflicted with each other and created more problems.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Let me give you a chance to respond to some stories in the media nationally that I have seen, that in the evacuation of Houston, there were not announcements made of shelters of last resort. Are you familiar with those? Just give us a quick response. Obviously, the concern is that you were worried about the chaos that occurred at some of the unprepared centers in New Orleans.

Judge ECKELS. Well, the Astrodome was the staging area for the recovery efforts in New Orleans and East Texas, so it was filled at this time before the storm with ambulances and fire trucks, and



the Coast Guard was in there with the boats in the Reliant Center. All of our staging for the relief was done from the Astrodome.

The people in the low-lying coastal areas that the local governments brought their facilities—their cars and their police cars and their school buses—to the Astrodome to get them out of the flood zones. So it was filled.

The City of Houston is typically not a shelter city. We try to move people through the city and on out. The city, through the mayor's office, set up through the various high schools some shelter areas. The key for that was it was for special needs folks. It was for people who were in buildings, mobile homes, and other buildings that might not have held up to the storm and who had not left earlier. They were not designed to be a shelter for the other 2 million folks who lived in the Greater Houston area.

What was needed was an education campaign. I went door to door in some of the neighborhoods talking, like you, to get the sense of what people were thinking. They were afraid that they were going to be overwhelmed by a tidal wave in areas well outside the coastal surge zone, from the Gulf of Mexico. They did not need a shelter. Yet they were seeking a shelter.

After the storm, had there been a need such as in New Orleans, a post-event shelter need, there were many locations that we could have done, including the Reliant Convention Center and the George R. Brown, which ultimately served as a shelter. Those were not widely circulated publicly because we did not want—I think in the mayor's mind he did not want thousands of people showing up at a shelter who really did not need the shelter just because they were afraid of the storm.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I have a few seconds left and a big question. Since you are all here, maybe give me a quick response. I think one of the things a lot of us here are struggling with, as we watch their recovery, is what is the best way to try to rehouse the evacuees? Of course, as I said in my opening statement, a lot of skepticism about FEMA spending all the money on trailers or RVs. I read a story in the paper again today about the cruise ships bobbing—

Judge ECKELS. I have that sign in my office as a reminder of the following—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Which one?

Judge ECKELS. Senator, the housing in Houston, we are going to be different than the other areas. We have apartments. We have capacity.

Senator LIEBERMAN. In other words there are available apartments?

Judge ECKELS. We have a large housing stock. We have run short of the housing stock that falls in the HUD Section 8 housing with FEMA reimbursement, at \$600 a month, which is reasonable for a basic apartment in Houston for some of these folks in the shelter.

Our experience in Tropical Storm Allison—which is the closest thing that we had—with 70,000 homes flooded, people wanted to be in a trailer, a mobile home by their house so they could work on repairing their house. That was not offensive to them. It is not comfortable if FEMA's role is to provide shelter, a place to live, just a roof over your head and a place that is safe from the elements,

it works fine for a limited period. Some of them were there up to a year living in mobile homes in their driveways while their own home was being rebuilt.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Did you say that, mayor, earlier in your opening statement?

Mr. MASSENGILL. Right. That is what the people that I talked to in our shelters want. If they could go back to Slidell, for instance—and I just use that as an example; there are other areas as well—most of the evacuees could go back home. They could work on their homes. They could try to get their lives back together. They realize, matter of fact, several of them have said, “We would even pay rent for those. We just do not have access to those.” They just want to be able to get back home.

Senator LIEBERMAN. That is an important distinction because I think the vision on the other side is the worry about a trailer park set up of evacuees away from where they normally lived, away from job opportunities. We know some of those set up after earlier hurricanes in Florida still exist, so that is not what we want.

Judge ECKELS. Except that would be closer. If many of those people want to be closer than Houston, and we have, again, tens of thousands living in apartments in Houston today. It is a great place. They have schools. They may decide to stay there. But for those who want to go home, they are still a long way from home.

Senator LIEBERMAN. I hear you. When conditions are such back home that they cannot move a trailer onto the lot where they used to have a house.

Judge ECKELS. The question is whether they stay in Houston or they stay in a large FEMA-ville somewhere out there closer to their home. But then they have to ensure jobs and schools and everything else that you have to set up, so it is probably easier to absorb them in our system.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank you very much. You have been extremely helpful witnesses.

Chairman COLLINS. Thank you all for your testimony. It has been excellent and once again confirmed my belief that local government is often far better in touch with the needs of the individuals than those that are in Washington.

I think one of the most interesting impressions that I take from this hearing is the importance of communication, not only among the various levels of government, but within FEMA itself. It is extraordinary that there were decisions made in Washington that were not communicated to FEMA officials who were on the ground, to local and regional FEMA officials, and that is a very important insight that you have given us today.

I also want to conclude this hearing by again asking you to thank the citizens of your communities for taking in people who have been displaced, whose lives have been devastated by the hurricane. I think it is an extraordinary example of generosity, resilience, and caring that defines the American people. So thank you for the good work that you are doing and for sharing your experiences and insight with the Committee today.

The hearing record will remain open for 15 additional days for the submission of any additional questions for the record.

And I want to thank our staff also for working very hard to put this excellent hearing together.

Thank you. This hearing is now adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 12:02 p.m., the Committee was adjourned.]



## A P P E N D I X

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**STATEMENT OF ROBERT A. ECKELS,  
COUNTY JUDGE, HARRIS COUNTY, TEXAS  
BEFORE THE  
SENATE HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE  
HEARING ON RECOVERING FROM HURRICANE KATRINA:  
RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE DISPLACED, TODAY AND TOMORROW  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
SEPTEMBER 28, 2005**

Madam Chairman and members of the Committee, I am Robert Eckels, and I serve as the County Judge of Harris County, Texas. To clarify my role, a County Judge in Texas is the presiding officer of the Commissioners Court, the governing body of the county. I represent all the citizens of the third most populous county in the United States.

Harris County is 1,756 square miles in area and home to 3.6 million residents, making it more populous than 23 states. There are 34 municipalities within the county, including the City of Houston, the fourth largest city in the country. More than 1.2 million people live in unincorporated Harris County and rely on the county to be the primary provider of basic government services.

As County Judge, I am charged by statute with the responsibility for emergency management planning and operations for Harris County. Most departments within Harris County have emergency functions in addition to their normal duties and play key roles in our emergency operations strategy. All departments work together to coordinate services and prepare for an emergency or disaster.

I want to thank the Committee for inviting me to testify on the role that Harris County played in providing shelter and comfort to Hurricane Katrina victims in what became the largest mass evacuation in US History at that a time. It is estimated that more than 373,000 evacuees came to Texas and more than 150,000 came to Harris County alone. Our response was an unprecedented coalition of the Harris County

government as well as the City of Houston, the State of Texas, the Federal government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, and citizen volunteers. The mission of the coalition was to provide temporary shelter, social services and relocation options for the citizens displaced by Hurricane Katrina. In less than a day a city was created which, at its peak, offered more than 27,000 people shelter, health care, child care, mental health services, housing assistance, travel vouchers, employment services, and much more. The population eventually became so large at the Reliant Park Complex that the US Postal Service assigned the complex its own zip code.

### **THE IMPACT ON HARRIS COUNTY FROM THE INFLUX OF PERSONS DISPLACED BY HURRICANE KATRINA**

While it will be some time before we can fully assess the entire financial impact of our initial mission of sheltering Hurricane victims, I have asked all our county departments, and Mayor Bill White has asked his departments in the City of Houston, to keep an accurate accounting of expenses that are directly related to this mission. We should be able to know within a few months the extent of these expenses. I have been assured that FEMA will pay for most of our expenses, but there will be a number of expenses that will not be reimbursed. I will try to point those out today.

There are two cost centers upon which we are concentrating. One is the cost of sheltering evacuees, and those expenses will be relatively straightforward and quantifiable. We are also trying to predict the long-term impact on our county of absorbing the cost of a sudden spike in population of individuals who have sustained such severe losses and who trying to start their lives over while living in our area. We also question the consequences of evacuees who choose to remain long-term or permanently in our county and our state. According to the Washington Post, a poll conducted by the Post, the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and the Harvard School of Public Health that was released September 15, 2005, shows that fewer than half of all New Orleans evacuees living in emergency shelters in Houston say they will move back home, while two-thirds of those who want to relocate plan to settle permanently in the Houston area.

**Hurricane Katrina Houston Response Unified Command**

As we watched Hurricane Katrina intensify in the Gulf of Mexico after passing over Florida and approach New Orleans, it became clear that the threat was serious and growing. On Sunday, August 28, 2005, I visited with Jack Colley, the State Coordinator of Governor Rick Perry's Division of Emergency Management (GDEM). He asked if the Reliant Astrodome was capable of housing potentially as many as 2,000 evacuees, should the need arise. I assured him that we would do whatever necessary to make our facilities available.

When the levees breached on August 30 and New Orleans began to flood, it forced the evacuation of the Superdome, where residents had gone for initial sheltering. I received a call at 3:00 a.m. on Wednesday, August 31, from Jack Colley asking me to implement our plan to open the Reliant Astrodome to evacuees who would be coming to us from the Superdome that night. The number of evacuees he expected grew to 23,750.

At approximately 6:00 a.m. on August 31, 2005 we began to organize the Hurricane Katrina Houston Response Unified Command under the Harris County Emergency Management Basic Plan. We created a relatively flat unified incident command center in accordance with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) at the Reliant Park Complex composed of the Federal government, the State of Texas, Harris County, the City of Houston, and non-governmental organizations. The Reliant Park Complex which includes the Reliant Astrodome, the Reliant Arena, and the Reliant Center is managed by SMG Management. Other non-governmental organizations include Aramark Food Services, which provided all food services in the Reliant Park Complex; Contemporary Services Corporation (CSC), which provided security; the Red Cross which provided shelter operations; and numerous other charitable organizations.

We also recognized that with such a large number of evacuees, we would need to have a strong and unified communication to those housed in our facilities, to those

evacuees in other shelters and motel and hotels in Harris County and in other parts of Texas and other states, to our volunteers, to our citizens, and to the news media covering the event. The Joint Information Center (JIC) was established in the Reliant Astrodome headed by a Public Information Officer who was responsible for unified coordinated communications, both internally to the unified command and externally. We established an extensive telephone system and created an Internet Web page at [www.hcjic.org](http://www.hcjic.org) that contained situation reports, press releases, media alerts, and other critical command announcements. We had frequent press conferences each day and media updates to keep the public informed about developments and to share information.

Another element of the JIC that gave us greater communication opportunities was the interoperable communication system that we have been developing in Harris and surrounding counties over the past 8 to 10 years. With a price tag in excess of \$250 million, neither Harris County, nor most counties around the country, are capable of purchasing such a system as a replacement for existing systems. What we have done is to develop our communication system in stages to give us the ability to communicate across jurisdictional and disciplinary lines. We are currently working to expand our system geographically and to have more mobile communication devices and lap top computers/ personal data assistants (PDA) with text and file transfer capabilities in the hands of our first responders. Our objective is to have streaming video capability so that first responders can send live video from the field back to incident command and better tactical decision-making can be done with real time information. With our system in the Reliant Park Complex we were able to respond to developing situations and bring in the correct professional and voluntary assistance to resolve problems as quickly as possible.

It is very important for Congress to continue to fund state and local government efforts to evolve or transform existing system capabilities to achieve interoperability. I know that in our situation we can't afford the downtime required to learn how to operate a new system, so we have chosen to make improvements in manageable bites that enhance rather than disrupt our capabilities. Congress and the federal agencies should create rules that set



minimum standards but allow local government the flexibility to work within their means to achieve those standards.

On September 20, 2005, at approximately 7:00 p.m. we announced that our mission had been completed and our unified command at the Reliant Park Complex was standing down after 21 days of around-the-clock operation. Lt. Joe Leonard of the US Coast Guard, who led the operation, said, "Our success is directly attributable to the strong personal relationships developed long before the Hurricane in Louisiana."

Many members of the Hurricane Katrina Houston Response Unified Command staff first worked as a team during the Tropical Storm Allison disaster that hit our community in June 2001. We learned a lot from responding to this disaster and then rebuilding our own community. We also developed those relationships over time by developing a coordinated emergency preparedness and response plan and then having serious and frequent training exercises to enable us to work the plan when incidents occur. These relationships were absolutely critical to the success of our mission.

Developing and working a plan requires complete communication, coordination, cooperation, and even friendships between emergency managers and professionals at all levels of government.

I urge Congress to continue to provide adequate funding to assist the funding provided by state and local governments as well as to provide incentives for thorough training and exercises. Lee Trevino, the great golfer, said it best, "The more you practice the luckier you get."

Based upon the risks facing a community, preparedness is ultimately defined differently in different areas of the country. Local leaders must determine the level of faith that their constituency have in their emergency response plan and improve it until citizens will follow the plan with the highest degree of confidence when an emergency arises.

The current model of a national plan with uniform standards for training, equipment, and procedures among state and local governments can work well. In extraordinary circumstances, such as those experienced during Hurricane Katrina, local first responders may be overwhelmed and an appropriate federal response should be developed to provide both emergency response and support for recovery efforts.

**Sheltering/Food**

We began housing evacuees in the Reliant Astrodome. It became apparent as the population grew that we could not safely house all of the evacuees that we expected in the Astrodome. The City of Houston's fire marshal ordered us to cap the evacuee population in the Astrodome at 8,000. Houston's mayor overrode his fire marshal and authorized up to 12,000 evacuees. Eventually the population inside the Astrodome would reach 17,500. As additional evacuees came in we included the Reliant Arena that housed 4,500 evacuees, while 2,300 were housed in the Reliant Center. The City of Houston opened the George R. Brown Convention Center downtown in order to handle 2,800 more.

Evacuees received hot meals and plenty of liquids and were able to sleep on cots with blankets and pillows. They were given comfort packages that included basic toiletry needs and, importantly, they were able to take a hot shower for the first time in several days. They were comforted by volunteers and were able for the first time to begin to have a feeling that they were finally in a secure location.

Not everything went as smoothly as I would have liked, but we were able to quickly adapt. Emergency planning coordinators in our Homeland Security & Emergency Management division had to learn on the fly what worked and what didn't work. Our plan was evolving continuously. Our Unified Command and the Joint Information Center allowed us to reach decisions more easily and to communicate changes and adaptations more quickly. We arranged communications between evacuees not only within our compound, but also in the various centers around the country to expedite reunification of families. We accomplished this by establishing television viewing

areas, telephone service areas, and Internet service areas. We also worked with airlines and bus companies to arrange tickets for travel to help families reunite.

Because the county is the landlord of the Reliant Park Complex and we have an ongoing relationship with SMG Management who manages the complex, we were able to get the lights and air conditioning turned on immediately so we could begin operations. The management team, with security assistance provided by CSC, was able to prepare various buildings within the complex and secure sensitive areas. Aramark, who already had the concession contract for the complex to provide food service, hired an additional 800 food service professionals in order to prepare meals to feed the masses when they arrived. We began food service on September 1 and continued until the mission was completed, having served some 450,000 meals.

#### **Public Safety**

As the buses started to arrive and the crowds grew, we had to add increasing numbers of law enforcement officers and fire safety crews to provide a safe environment for evacuees, workers and volunteers with tens of thousands of people in the controlled chaos that the complex became. We had to secure roadways, parking lots, and walk ways between all of the buildings in the complex as well as secure all of the buildings and protect evacuees and volunteers inside. We usually had at least 500 law enforcement and 50 EMS and fire safety personnel on site. Unlike the operating expenses for the complex and food service, the increased cost of public safety did not cease when the Hurricane Katrina Houston Response ended its mission.

As evacuees move to other shelters and find housing in our community, the sudden increased population of 150,000 will create increased and permanent demands for an immediate and proportional increase in public safety services. This sudden significant expansion of services will require an increased number of personnel and cause increased equipment costs. I urge Congress and the appropriate federal agencies to set aside a source of sustainable grant funding to allow us to pay for

these needs for at least a two-year period of time while our revenues from property taxes catch up with these increased needs.

#### **Public Health**

Harris County Public Health and Environmental Services (HCPHES) is responsible for promoting the health and safety of our county by preventing illness and injury. In a county of our size, that in itself is a large undertaking, but I am particularly proud of the accomplishments of HCPHES when I considering the enormous number of evacuees that arrived seeking relief in a highly vulnerable state. These evacuees were exposed to harsh conditions while awaiting transportation away from New Orleans, having already suffered in the worst possible living conditions, tightly packed together and highly susceptible to the spread of disease and infection.

Dr. Herminia Palacio, the HCPHES Executive, and Dr. Umair Shah, HCPHES Deputy Director, coordinated all medical operations conducted at the Reliant Park Complex. An additional 500 HCPHES staff performed approximately 15,000 Katrina-related hours of service for many critical duties at the Reliant Park Complex around the clock.

HCPHES professional staff participated in a wide variety of critically important activities such as immunization operations. They conducted a mass immunization clinic for evacuees and conducted epidemiological surveillance activities in order to detect and prevent disease outbreaks. They also conducted health assessments, syndromic surveillance among patients of the on-site medical facility, daily "cot checks" to assess reported health status, and monitored clinical data to identify any disease trends. They identified gastrointestinal illness and a number of infection-control measures were recommended and implemented. Other epidemiological surveillance activities are targeted to area hospitals, schools, other local shelters and the community at large.

Our HCPHES staff professionals conducted daily food safety, sanitation, and environmental health assessments at the Reliant Park Complex as well as among other area shelters housing evacuees. These assessments resulted in a number of

recommendations that were implemented regarding housekeeping practices, safe food handling procedures, and sanitation measures. They provided and continue to provide Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition services to almost 600 eligible evacuees at HCPHES WIC clinics. Our animal control officers, veterinarians, and zoonosis epidemiology personnel participated in Katrina-related animal control/veterinary public health services, and HCPHES continue to assist the Houston SPCA with the handling of the pets of evacuees.

**Future Demands on HCPHES because of Displaced Katrina Victims**

In addition, HCPHES must address the medium- to long-term impacts on the public health infrastructure if an estimated 150,000 evacuees - many of whom have medical needs, may be uninsured, and do not have medical homes- elect to remain in Harris County. For example, this surge in the area's population may result in the following:

- Immunizations - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to coordinate with the Harris County Department of Education and the Department of State Health Services to ensure that all evacuee children enrolling in area schools are up-to-date on their immunizations. In the long-term, HCPHES will need to ensure access to immunization services for new residents, including both adults and children. For example, HCPHES will need to acquire additional influenza vaccine for the upcoming flu season and expand its capacity to provide influenza vaccine to at-risk persons.
- Epidemiology - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to conduct epidemiological surveillance activities among evacuee populations in area shelters, hospitals, schools, and the community at large. In the long-term, the anticipated population surge will impact day-to-day epidemiological surveillance activities, thus requiring HCPHES to increase its capacity to monitor relevant disease trends and ensure appropriate outbreak investigation.
- Environmental Health - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to conduct inspections at area shelters housing evacuees. In the long-term, the anticipated environmental impacts of a sudden increase in population will

require HCPHES to increase its capacity to assure water quality and food safety and to provide nuisance abatement services.

- **Health Education** - In the short term, HCPHES will continue to conduct activities to identify and prioritize acute public health issues of evacuee populations as they settle in the Harris County area. In the long term, issues of special concern may include child health, mental health, substance abuse, and violence. HCPHES will need to expand its capacity to provide population-based health education to communities at risk.
- **Clinics** - HCPHES operates five preventive health clinics throughout the community, providing immunizations, maternal and child health care, TB control, and preventive dental services. The anticipated population surge will result in an increased number of clients at HCPHES clinics, requiring HCPHES to expand its nursing, clerical, and managerial capacity.

I urge Congress to help us with these increased public health costs by creating a grant program that will supply us with funds as our needs are quantified. Without assistance with these increased costs our ability to protect our community from health risks may be seriously jeopardized.

#### **Health Care**

It had been only about 19 hours since the governor called and we had gone into action, when evacuees began arriving at 10:30 p.m. on August 31. As they arrived they were greeted by volunteers on the buses and briefed on what they could expect. Medical personnel triaged them for medical needs, and those needs were treated in a 100,000- square-foot, 2,500-bed state-of-the-art health center created in 18 hours that day with a comprehensive lab, X-ray and pharmacy capabilities, and dental and mental health services available onsite.

The overall health care operation was managed by the executive director of the Harris County Public Health & Environmental Services (HCPHES). This leadership was coupled with resources from Baylor College of Medicine and the Harris County Hospital District, the Harris County Children's Assessment Center, the Harris County Children's Protective Services, and the Mental Health and Mental Retardation

Authority of Harris County. Additionally, retired physicians from the Harris County Medical Society offered their services as did a host of other community health volunteers from various area hospitals, from around the country, and from around the world.

Ninety exam rooms were augmented with full triage and electronic patient registration. Field medical records were created for every patient. Comprehensive lab, pharmacy, and x-ray capability were available on site. Approximately 900 patients were triaged and treated at the clinic with subsequent transfer to area hospitals. Ten percent of these patients were admitted.

This extraordinary and, in many ways, unprecedented effort was led by Dr. Kenneth L. Mattox, Chief of the Medical Staff for Ben Taub General Hospital; Mr. George Masi, Chief Operating Officer for the Harris County Hospital District; and Dr. Thomas Gavagan and Mrs. Alicia Reyes from the Hospital District's Community Health Program.

Our medical teams administered 10,000 tetanus shots and other inoculations as well as filling more than 15,000 prescriptions. The 2,700 volunteer doctors and other medical professionals examined some 4,000 patients in the Reliant Arena between opening on Thursday morning, September 1, and mid-afternoon on September 2, and at one point they evaluated 749 patients in one three-hour period. There were 570 mental health clinicians who volunteered and treated more than 4,300 individuals with mental health concerns. There were 14 hospitalized with psychiatric needs. There were 80 patients on first day of operation, many of whom were diabetics who'd gone without insulin for days and who were sent to the Ben Taub General Hospital for more extensive treatment. Ultimately we saw 15,000 patients in the medical clinic at a cost of more than \$4 million in the 15 days we were operational at the Reliant Arena Clinic.

When evacuees continued to arrive and we ran out of space at the Reliant Park Complex, we began to shelter in the George R. Brown Convention Center, which is

about 10 miles from the complex. There we opened a second clinic staffed by physicians from the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston, aided by federalized physicians under the public health service, where we saw 500 to 700 patients per day and ultimately saw more than 10,000 patients including shelter residents and evacuees living in the community.

These totals from the Reliant Arena Clinic and the Brown Center Clinic do not include all of those patients that were sent to hospitals and trauma centers in our Hospital District due to more serious needs. I cannot stress enough the magnitude of this accomplishment and the number of lives saved of those who arrived in Houston under the direst circumstances. We are tremendously proud of the efforts of our health care professionals and volunteers in this endeavor.

**Future Demands on The Harris County Hospital District and the Harris County Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA)**

We anticipate a severe local impact on our Hospital District from evacuees that remain in our county for some time into the future and a large number who remain permanently and have little or no means to pay for medical service or health care. Considering the trauma these evacuees have been through they are a particularly vulnerable population. Our Hospital District, like most safety net providers around the country, is highly vulnerable to spikes in costs and operating expenses. We have been very efficient and have worked hard to provide health care delivery to our neediest population.

With this concern in mind, I was extremely pleased Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt proposed and Mark McClellan, Administrator of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, finalized on September 17, 2005, an agreement that the federal government will pay the full costs for out-of-state residents who qualify for Medicaid, mainly children and low-income elderly and disabled adults. Other evacuees not eligible for Medicaid will be able to visit doctors and receive prescriptions through an uncompensated care pool, with the federal government fully reimbursing the state. Additionally, Administrator McClellan will also monitor the potential for continuing costs for Texas and Harris County after the



program runs out in January 2006. This will help us through the initial period of absorbing this population into our community and allow us to determine what future demands may be as a result of the new population.

Another concern we have is whether we can meet the long-term needs of a significant number of patients who are in crisis mode from substance abuse withdrawal. Our physicians from MHMRA determined that somewhere between 30 percent and 50 percent of patients in the Reliant Complex have needed substance-abuse treatment. With this jump in case load, our substance-abuse treatment community will be asked to handle the potential long-term workload and the increase in treatment expenses. Congress should be prepared to provide funds to help us get through this sudden increased cost in serving this population as we work in coalition with other agencies and organizations to curtail this problem.

**Other County Departments Response to the Katrina Disaster**

This was truly an all county effort, and most of our county departments participated in the relief operation by assisting evacuees directly or supporting those that did. We are still assessing the expenses that were incurred and will know the extent of the reimbursement we will be seeking, but our estimates total more than \$1 million for these departments in just the first two weeks of the operation.

- **Children's Assessment Center** --This agency supported the mental health needs of children at the Reliant Complex. Expenses include salaries, contract therapists and supplies.
- **Commissioners Precincts**-- Commissioner Pct .1, El Franco Lee; Commissioner Pct. 2, Sylvia Garcia; Commissioner Pct. 3, Steve Radack; and Commissioner Pct. 4, Jerry Eversole provided buses for various purposes including medical transport and taking individuals from shelters to other temporary housing. Pct. 1 supported various community-based shelter operations and also opened and operates two temporary shelters for evacuees having their own transportation.
- **Constables**-- All Constable Precincts provided security and related services for shelter operations that were not at the Reliant Park Complex.

- **County Attorney**, Mike Stafford-- Advised various agencies and officials on legal matters related to the operation.
- **County Library**-- The library system made computers available primarily for Internet access for evacuees seeking assistance and locating lost relatives. The library also provided library services to evacuees at the Reliant Center.
- **District Clerk**, Charles Bacarisse-- Assisted child support activities for evacuees by helping them get child support payments forwarded to the right location.
- **Domestic Relations**-- The Family Court Services Division has provided mental health assistance at the Reliant complex in partnership with Youth and Family Services.
- **Fire and Emergency Service**-- Provided fire protection services and fire prevention advice related to shelter operations. The Harris County Fire Marshal's office was part of the operation command staff.
- **Housing and Community Development**-- Provided food, temporary shelter and related services to evacuees.
- **Information Technology Center**-- Provided support for computer and communications for shelter operations.
- **Juvenile Probation**-- 95 staff members provided services for juveniles in the shelter effort
- **Medical Examiner**-- Provided services related to deceased evacuees.
- **Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management**-- Initially established operations and continued support service for incident command.
- **Sheriff**, Tommy Thomas-- Coordinated security and provided law enforcement protection for the Reliant Park Complex.
- **Social Services**-- Provided transportation to and from the shelters at the Reliant Park Complex to the Harris County Housing Authority at Lantern Point for voucher applicants and then transported applicants to housing developments around the county.

- **Tax Assessor Collector**, Paul Bettencourt-- Provided personnel to the emergency management center, the County Judge's office, the joint information center and other operations so service levels could be maintained.

#### **The Role of the Harris County Citizen Corps**

After the September 11 terrorist attack, President Bush called upon all Americans to dedicate at least two years of their lives – the equivalent of 4,000 hours – in service to others. He launched the USA Freedom Corps initiative to inspire and enable all Americans to find ways to serve their community and country. The Citizen Corps is a component of the Freedom Corps. In August 2002, I launched the Harris County Citizen Corps to create opportunities for individuals to volunteer to help their neighborhoods prepare for and respond to emergencies by bringing together local leaders, citizen volunteers, and the network of first responder organizations, such as fire and police departments. The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Program is a subset of the Citizen Corps. This program educates people about disaster preparedness and trains them in basic disaster response skills such as fire safety, light search and rescue, and disaster medical operations. Using their training, CERT members can assist others in their neighborhood or workplace following an event and can take a more active role in preparing their community.

The program is administered by the US Department of Homeland Security as part of the National Plan for community preparedness. It was the Citizen Corps with some 7,000 volunteers, including more than 1,200 CERT members, that made our relief efforts possible. Our volunteers came from all walks of life and disciplinary backgrounds. They were organized, trained, and had already volunteered collectively more than 200,000 hours of community service.

We realized that we were going to need at least as many, if not more, volunteers than the number of evacuees we were going to shelter. Estimates were enormous not only for Harris County but for the entire State of Texas. When the initial e-mail was sent out to the Citizen Corps seeking volunteers at about 9:00 a.m. on August 31, we

were overjoyed when we had 1,000 volunteers in the first hour and more coming in continuously.

I can assure you that without these volunteers and tens of thousands more who came forward through the organization of Citizens Corps, we could not have responded to the disaster as we did. Volunteers were organized into teams, and the newly recruited volunteers were given orientation upon arrival and then assignments in all areas of service to the evacuees. I am particularly proud to report that our citizens in Harris County acted with courage, compassion, and unity. We had more than 60,000 volunteers come forward, and they were absolutely essential to the success of this operation.

I have spoken to many volunteers who said that they experienced something during this operation that brought personal rewards far beyond their expectations. They accomplished the near impossible with kindness and compassion in a situation unparalleled in anyone's experience. In the future I envision taking our Citizen Corps and CERT members to the next level by organizing them within many more neighborhoods so they are capable of being truly the first responders to an incident, while they await the arrival of professional first responders. In the role of neighbor helping neighbor, our CERT members and Citizen Corps volunteers will be able to communicate with incident command regarding situation reports on the ground and be prepared to assist neighbors who need help. I can see the Citizen Corps volunteers being able to assess the capabilities and needs of their neighbors in the event of a needed evacuation and being able to communicate those needs to the incident command to expedite evacuations more smoothly. A network like this could also provide a head-count and location of those who refuse to evacuate.

I urge Congress to continue to provide the funding necessary to help us further develop our Citizen Corps, to develop Citizen Corps in more communities around the country, and to provide the funding for training of CERT members. Training and organization will be the key to our success. I would like to invite each of you to come

to Harris County to see first hand how our Citizen Corps operates and to see where we are in our development and where we plan to be.

#### **The Role of the Faith Based Community**

Organized through Houston's Second Baptist Church ([www.second.org](http://www.second.org)) and its pastor, Dr. Ed Young, an interfaith ministry made up of a dozen denominations came together for Operation Compassion. Collectively they organized and provided Red Cross training for 43,500 additional volunteers. Of these, 17,300 volunteers served 109,613 meals in the George R. Brown Convention Center to the evacuees there. They also produced nearly 90,000 personal hygiene kits.

Another organization, Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, ([www.imgh.org](http://www.imgh.org)) has organized a program called Neighbors 2 Neighbors ([www.neighbors2neighbors.org](http://www.neighbors2neighbors.org)), where volunteers are matched with evacuees who have found housing. Most of these people have no transportation, don't know their neighborhoods or the city, and don't know how to get their services started. The objective is to help them adjust to life in Harris County and their new surroundings.

The Houston Area Pastors Council, Catholic Charities, and many other faith based organizations provided countless hours of service and opened their homes and places of worship to evacuees. This outpouring of volunteerism made it possible to serve evacuees at the Convention Center and to make them more comfortable as they worked through the process of seeking more permanent housing.

#### **Corporate Community**

Many Houston area corporations, from Fortune 500 to smaller regional companies, stepped into the forefront to support the Katrina relief effort. CenterPoint Energy provided IT support for the GRB Shelter operations, built showers for the George R. Brown Shelter, and helped start the transitional housing Task Force. Jim MacIngvale of Gallery Furniture provided the "Town Center" with recreational facilities from the YMCA for the Reliant Park shelters as well as thousands of cans of baby formula and other support. Tilman J. Fertitta of Landry's Restaurants loaned helicopter support to

supplement Houston Police Department aerial surveys. Continental Airlines offered air transport to reunite families. John Nau and Silver Eagle Distributing Co. provided thousands of cans of water for Katrina evacuees in Houston and in the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama disaster zone.

Maintaining support for a response infrastructure is difficult for local and state governments. For future events, the corporate community has business continuation plans and resources beyond those of local governments. Emergency preparedness is a high priority for the Houston area today, but that commitment could fall through the cracks as political leadership and priorities change. A "virtual organization" with a sustainable response capability could be built around the corporate community in Harris County and the greater Houston region. Future plans should include these community resources. Congress should look for ways to encourage corporate support for community preparedness.

#### **Charitable Giving**

In addition to providing volunteers, faith based organizations, corporations and individuals contributed more than \$7 million to help Katrina victims. Those contributions made it possible to provide comfort to the victims and help them begin the long road of recovery. Houstonians and residents of Harris County brought, literally, mountains of clothes to help victims and brought toys and books for children. When volunteers got to know the victims better, they would bring some of their favorite things like cookies and other favorite dishes.

Volunteers worked endless hours to help victims find family members and get information on the Red Cross and FEMA Debit Cards and other benefits. It was the volunteers and those who made contributions to Katrina victims who defined the character of our community, and I am overwhelmed with our spirit of caring and giving.

City of Houston Mayor Bill White and I have established the Houston Katrina Relief Fund ([www.houstonkatrinarelief.org](http://www.houstonkatrinarelief.org)) that will raise money to help evacuees and to transition them from shelters into the community.

## **Current and Future Needs of Katrina Evacuees**

### **Current and Future Housing Needs**

City of Houston Mayor Bill White sent a letter to our congressional delegation on September 7, 2005, that describes our combined housing needs. We are working closely to solve our housing shortages and to find new housing for Katrina victims, while not overlooking the needs of our citizens. I concur with his requests for our needs to address this concern.

Our community wants to give our new residents, survivors of Katrina, the opportunity to get out of shelters and into suitable housing, so they can begin taking responsibility for rebuilding their own futures with dignity and respect. Our goal is to provide the opportunity and the tools to do so. I urge Congress and the appropriate federal agencies to work with us to reach this goal.

1. Housing Vouchers. We have integrated the Harris County Housing Authority, the Houston Housing Authority, the New Orleans Housing Authority, the local personnel of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the private sector into a regional organization. This organization has moved several thousand people into apartments and other housing, but we need authority for up to 125,000 more housing vouchers. These should be available for 6 to 18 months and should have the same financial terms for monthly payments as do Section 8 HUD Housing for the relevant square foot categories. We urge that a local HUD representative be given the power to create emergency rules and procedures concerning the standards and suitability of housing, so that we can provide suitable facilities and as soon as possible. We will create extraordinary local permitting and inspection procedures to complement this federal authority.

2. Reimbursement for Furnishings. We need express authority for FEMA to supersede normal criteria to allow for reimbursement for furnishings of new housing units. Hundreds of rental units have been renovated and furnished and put on the market, as well as spaces in abandoned nursing facilities which have been renovated and furnished. This process will continue. There need to be general guidelines of reasonableness and efficiency, but we simply cannot lease a sufficient volume of furnishings to get people back on their feet quickly.

3. Grants and Credit Enhancements for New Housing Stock.

More than 200 owners of apartment facilities with rooms available have signed master agreements for running the terms and conditions for suitable vacant apartment units. Several thousand are available and we have added to this inventory every day. This should include suitable housing stock from outside this region. The victims will be provided this information as soon as possible, and will not be "pushed out" or "pulled in." Nonetheless, we need an immediate and major expansion of the suitable stock for housing for this metropolitan area. Residents of this region, who have taken in far, far more of the victims than any other community, should not feel that we have compromised the availability of affordable housing of Houston residents and businesses.

For this reason, we are asking for a grant of \$48 million, made in equal parts to the Harris County Housing Authority, the Houston Housing Authority, and the Houston Housing Finance Corporation, to provide equity financing or credit enhancement to accelerate existing federal programs for multi-family housing. For each of these public housing agencies, we have approved a plan for the use of these funds for project development, single-family assistance, down payment assistance, and credit-enhancement mechanisms. Eligibility should not be confined to Katrina victims so long as they are located in heavy impact areas. Moving existing residents of a multi-family facility into a single family or duplex residence is the fastest and most efficient means of expanding the amount of apartment units available to Katrina victims and containing rent inflation.



We need credit enhancement by FHA for multi-family new construction and permanent loans. We need to modify the 221(d)3 program to provide bona fide commitments within 60 days of application so that developers have predictability for their financing. We need to modify HUD mortgage insurance premiums to be "paid as you" go rather than in advance and lower premiums from 50 basis points to 25 basis points. We need to enhance tax credit programs for affordable housing to the Qualified Tax Credit bonus (a 30% step up in basis for calculating the amount of credits) to include the entire Houston MSA (not limited to Qualified Census Tracts). We need to modify the tax credit rules to allow taxation of income eligibility requirements in the first year tax credit period and not only subsequent years. Areas of heavy impact should receive a larger allocation of tax credits for the next two years. Allocations to states are based on a per capita formula.

4. Local Administrative infrastructure and Support. We must receive direct grants for reimbursement for any reasonable direct administrative costs for the implementation of the Katrina Housing Program. We cannot cannibalize the resources available to the tens of thousands of the Houston region who are served by these existing agencies. We are already drawing in the resources of the remnants of the New Orleans Housing Authority and need the ability to hire professionals for this undertaking. These funds should be allocated directly to Harris County and Houston in proportion to the existing budgets of their housing agencies. Ten million dollars (\$10 million) should be set aside for this purpose. An amount should be provided for the reconstitution of the New Orleans and other Louisiana housing Authorities based upon their budgets before the Katrina disaster.

#### **Jobs/Job Training**

Katrina victims won't begin to recover their losses and their lives until they are able to find suitable employment and begin earning income. The Texas Workforce Commission, The Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Louisiana Department of Labor, The Work Source, and other groups have been

working hard to help Katrina victims receive Disaster Unemployment Assistance and other benefits until jobs become available. While Houston and Harris County are very capable of creating jobs for those who wish to work, I think we need to create incentives for private employers to provide jobs and job training.

I urge Congress and the appropriate federal agencies to create incentives for training by creating special grants on a per capita basis for job training for new hires. Impact areas should be defined by the size of the population of evacuees. We should not, however, create a system which creates an employment opportunity bias for Katrina victims compared to other residents. Employers who hire Katrina victims that do not need job training should be afforded the opportunity for tax credits that encourage job creation. This program should not unfairly favor Katrina victims over residents in competing for existing jobs.

#### **Childrens Issues**

The Harris County Youth and Family Services Division was a first responder to the social and emotional needs of Katrina victims evacuated to the Reliant Park Complex. Harris County Protective Services for Children and Adults (HCPS), a member agency of the Youth and Family Services Division, immediately responded to the needs of Katrina evacuees under the leadership of George Ford, Executive Director. Counseling services at the Mental Health area at Reliant Arena were coordinated by the Children's Assessment Center, a member agency at the Youth and Family Service Division. Thirty of our clinical staff provided mental health and other social services at the Reliant Park Complex. The critical needs of more than 15,000 Katrina victims were addressed within the first week of the operation.

#### **Schools**

Public school systems in the State of Texas responded rapidly to the needs of more than 41,000 school-age children who were evacuated as a result of Katrina. More than 15,000 of these children that were in the Greater Harris County Area were able to begin classes on September 6, 2005, the Tuesday after Labor Day. Four of the largest school districts in Harris and Fort Bend Counties have the following Katrina related enrollment:

Fort Bend Independent School District : 2,300

Alief Independent School District: 2,400

Aldine Independent School District: 1,000

Houston Independent School District: 5,100

Early in the transition, the Houston Independent School District opened the Fleming, Ryan, and Douglas Elementary Schools specifically for the children housed in the Reliant Park Complex. As families leave the Reliant Park Complex and move into the community the children will attend the public schools nearest their residences.

#### **Help Needed for our Public Schools**

This sudden increase of students in our area school districts could ultimately be a serious financial problem in the short term as well in the long term if a majority of students remain in our area as permanent residents. I am grateful to our senior Senator, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, for her quick recognition and response to this potential crisis in our public school system. Her bill, S. 1764, which provides for the continued education of students affected by Hurricane Katrina, passed the Senate on September 22, 2005, by unanimous consent. I am hopeful that the House of Representatives will pass this measure quickly so our school districts can continue to operate smoothly without compromising the quality of education for our existing students.

#### **Youth Services**

HCPS Community Youth Services (CYS) school-based youth specialists are located in secondary schools in 18 school districts. They have provided social services to hundreds of Katrina evacuee youth newly enrolled in local schools. These services include grief crisis counseling, information and referral services for ongoing therapy and social services, and assistance in obtaining immediate family needs.

A team of multi-disciplinary clinical HCPS staff at the Children's Crisis Care Center provided initial developmental and psychological evaluations of the children taken into the custody of the Texas Department of Family Protective Services (TDFPS) from Katrina shelters and then provided findings within a short time to the state

Permanency Planning Team charged with planning for children's needs while in protective custody.

The Harris County Protective Services for Children and Adults worked closely with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Region 6 to lead the Harris County region's state child welfare response and staffed the "Lost Children's Area" at the Reliant Park Complex. Thus far the state of Texas DFPS has taken 14 children into protective custody in Region 6 as a result of Katrina, mainly because parents or relatives of these young children have not been located to care for them. Most of these children have been returned to parents/caregivers. However, we anticipate a significant increase in the number of Katrina evacuee children entering protective custody as a result of abuse and neglect. Some parents will exhibit decompensation of coping skills leading to exacerbation of pre-existing psychiatric and substance abuse conditions. These parents may require psychiatric hospitalizations and/or substance abuse treatment.

**Future Demands on HCPS because of Displaced Katrina Victims**

Harris County has responded with concern and immediate services to the victims of Katrina, however, we are very aware that there are many thousands of evacuees that we have not served, as they are staying in hotels, motels, other shelters, or with family or friends in the area. An estimated 25,000 persons are now living in the Harris County and surrounding area due to the Katrina evacuation. As Texas, and especially Houston, transitions from immediate response to long-term planning we must develop a team effort to ensure that evacuees find more permanent housing, good jobs and the assistance needed to get back on their feet and promote good mental health.

Two specific areas of concern for the mental health needs of children and families in the aftermath of Katrina are evident. They include:

1. Increased children entering foster care: Many parents under tremendous stress after the devastating losses they experienced as a result of Hurricane Katrina will be overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. These

stressors will lead to some parents abusing, neglecting and/or abandoning children. These children may ultimately come into protective custody and live in temporary emergency youth shelters or foster homes. They will experience significant loss and anxiety, combined with post-traumatic stress symptoms related to Katrina events. Anticipated child mental health needs include:

- a. Child and Family assessments, counseling, substance abuse screenings and social service assistance to stabilize Katrina-affected families whose children will return to them in the future.
- b. Grief and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder counseling: Individual and group counseling for the children in foster care related to Katrina.
- c. Education for foster parents regarding children's reaction to trauma and how to intervene
- d. Substance abuse assessments, referrals, and treatment for parents or caregivers

2. School-age children's mental health: All evacuee school-age children are being integrated into our local school districts, and their mental health needs will most likely be evident through school-related incidents. Although not all of the children and youth experienced the devastating events like those that were initially housed in the New Orleans Superdome and evacuated to Houston's Astrodome/Reliant Center shelters, it is certain that ALL children experienced significant losses including their homes, schools, friends, family, and supports such as churches. We anticipate that many of them will experience stress-related physical illnesses (examples: increased asthma episodes, sleep disorders, stomach disorders, headaches), and many will exhibit behavioral changes inconsistent with their pre-Katrina lives. These changes will include sadness, anxiety, inability to sleep well, irritability, displaced anger and aggression, decreased ability to concentrate on schoolwork, hypervigilance, and other post-traumatic stress related behaviors. We anticipate the following needs:

- Training of school personnel, childcare staff, and mental health professionals regarding how to help children cope with their significant losses.
- Additional CYS school-based youth service staff to augment the current counseling/social work staff available to Katrina victims already in Harris County schools. We need to place CYS workers in pre-K and elementary schools, as well as Head Start and other childcare facilities.
- Additional counseling and support services (grief counseling, PTSD-related counseling, group counseling, family counseling, family supports, non-custodial shelter needs of students and their families)
- Increased psychiatric services for those children with severe emotional disturbances (SED) who may need psychiatric hospitalization for stabilization, short-term residential treatment, and on-going psychiatric/medical management.
- System-of-care wraparound services for Katrina-affected children and youth with moderate to severe mental health issues and their families.

I urge Congress to appropriate funds necessary to support and the appropriate federal agency to create and administer a grant program that will allow us to address these future demands placed on HCPS to work with the future mental health needs of children families in their healing process.

### **Lessons Learned/How Can We Become Better Prepared**

#### **Pay for Regular Time for Reassigned Employees**

There are two strong disincentives for communities to accept evacuees that should be addressed and rectified. The typical disaster declaration will pay only for overtime for qualified first responders and other professionals. This is because the community where the disaster is declared would have normally paid the regular time of these workers and the overtime is *extraordinary* time caused by the disaster. In accommodating evacuees from another community our citizens had to forego the

services of these qualified workers and yet pay for those services even though they were reassigned to serve the evacuee population.

The Executive Director of the HCPHES demonstrated quite well what this means to our constituents. In a press release dated September 5, 2005 she informed the public that there would be delays in service while she and another 500 HCPHES professional staff members provided public health services to the evacuees at the Reliant Park Complex. She also advised the public that there would be a temporarily reduced staff at each of our five health clinics and that she anticipated there would be an increased number of individuals accessing the WIC program. She warned that residents who utilize our public health services may experience a longer than normal "wait-time" while staff responded to this relief effort, and she asked for patience while this inconvenience lasted.

This concern applies not only to our public health workers, but also to all of our employees who participated in this operation. They were reassigned from normal duties, and those duties went unfulfilled, yet we still have to pay for that regular time. For example, the Harris County Sheriff's Office incurred expenses for a little more than \$1 million during the sheltering operation. Of that, about 80% or \$800,000 was regular time that was paid by Harris County taxpayers even though these officers were not performing their regularly assigned duties. This is blatantly unfair to our citizens and is a serious disincentive to local governments to accept a request to host evacuees. I urge Congress and FEMA to recognize the need for an exception to existing policy and for Congress to provide sufficient funding to pay for regular time for reassigned workers.

**Pay for Lost Revenue from Cancelled Programs at Public Facilities**

It is also a strong disincentive for local governments to use their convention centers and other public facilities for evacuee shelters, because FEMA will not reimburse for lost income. Harris County, the City of Houston, and our enterprise funds lost millions of dollars in revenue that is needed to meet debt service schedules. Millions of dollars will be lost due to canceled events in the Reliant Park Complex and the

George R. Brown Convention Center. Harris County's convention center and sports venues are not supported by property or sales taxes. Our reimbursement schedules have been thrown off, and we may face penalties and additional interest. I urge Congress and FEMA to reimburse this loss of income.

**Increase Funding and Relax Regulations for Flood Control Projects**

In witnessing the catastrophic consequences of Hurricane Katrina to our neighbors to the east, it is natural to reflect on how a similar event would affect Harris County and to evaluate our strategies and tactics in dealing with our natural risk of flooding. While many lessons will be learned about emergency management and response, there are also lessons to be learned about approaches to flood management and communicating risk.

All things carefully considered, Katrina, as well as Tropical Storm Allison, have reinforced the flood damage reduction strategies and tactics used in Harris County. We build projects to reduce the risk, we buy out homes hopelessly deep in the flood plain, and we communicate the remaining risk to the public. We also take very good care of what is built so it functions to its full capacity when needed.

Devising and implementing flood damage reduction projects takes time and money. Adequate funding from all levels of government is the key to making continued and measured progress to reduce the risk. We will all be judged by how much is built between flood events.

It is important that Congress provide more funding to operate and maintain existing flood control structures in our country and to build new and improved flood control structures for higher levels of protection. Congress must address these concerns with increased funding and more relaxed regulations to speed the completion of projects that protect our citizens and communities. It is clear that the cost of response to and recovery from disasters is far greater than the cost of projects designed to provide protection.



The Corps of Engineers must be able to use endangerment and suffering in the calculation of the benefit of a project in order to justify it. Many good projects with a benefit/cost ratio greater than 1 to 1 remain unfunded because of reduced funding. The higher the property values that are calculated into the project benefit, the easier it is to get the 3 to 1 ratio currently required to justify a project. This unfairly penalizes areas of lower economic status and must be changed.

Tropical Storm Allison was the costliest tropical storm in U.S. history at that time. We had 72,000 homes flooded when we received rains of about 28 inches in 12 hours. The Texas Medical Center alone sustained more than \$2.0 billion in damages, with property damage countywide at more than \$5.0 billion. But we have managed to make it through that disaster and are rebuilding our community with federal assistance, working hard to protect ourselves from future disasters.

We still have several flood control projects in various stages of completion, but funding levels are low while requirements and regulations are increasing. This causes delays in project completion that keeps us at risk longer. I believe that we learned a lot from Katrina, but adequate funding for flood control may be the first step in preventing the next similar disaster.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I want to thank you again for allowing me to discuss our experience in this operation and for taking the time to study the response to this disaster. I hope our experience can be helpful to other communities if they are called upon to respond to a disaster in this way. I hope those communities will benefit from the things that worked for us and that they can improve upon those things that did not. I also hope that Congress will not leave us out alone on the financial ledge and will be responsive when we come back to tell you that we need reimbursement for Katrina-related expenses.

**COASTAL WATER AUTHORITY  
Trinity River Pump Station**

*Example of Single Point of  
Failure hazard for  
Naturally Critical Infrastructure  
PWR & Seals*

- Owned and operated by the Coastal Water Authority, a conservation and reclamation district of the State of Texas created in 1967.
- Constructed early 1970s, pump station is a vital link in supplying water from the Trinity River to industrial and municipal users
- Station capacity is 800 million gallons per day (mgd) provided by 12 pumps
- Primary power supply to station is by Entergy
- Pump Station conveys water via a 22-mile canal to the Lynchburg Reservoir, a 1.5 billion gallon facility (current contents approximately 1 billion gallons)
- Water from the Lynchburg Reservoir is provided to a number of municipal and industrial users (total usage 300 to 400 million gallons per day). Users include:
  - City of Houston (East and Southeast Water Plants) approx. 250,000
  - City of Pasadena (through Southeast Plant) approx 140,000
  - City of LaPorte (through Southeast Plant) approx 30,000
  - City of Friendswood (through Southeast Plant) approx 30,000
  - City of League City (through Southeast Plant) approx 45,000
  - City of Webster (through Southeast Water Plant) approx 9,000
  - City of South Houston (through Southeast Water Plant) approx 15,000
  - City of Nassau Bay (through Southeast Water Plant) approx 4,000
  - Baytown Area Water Authority approx 85,000
  - City of Deer Park approx 30,000
  - Six other districts and entities (including NASA/JSC)
- Total population dependent on this water supply: 600,000+
  - Air Liquide America Corp (Bayport)
  - American Acryl, LP (Bayport)
  - FMC Corporation (Bayport)
  - Hoescht Celanese (Bayport)
  - Nova Chemicals (USA) (Bayport)
  - Zeneca (Bayport)
  - AES Deepwater, Inc. (225 Area)
  - Air Products LP (225 Area)
  - Chevron Phillips Chemical Co. (225 Area)
  - Crown Central Petroleum (225 Area)
  - E.I. DuPont De Nemours (225 Area)
  - Equistar Chemicals LP (225 Area)
  - Lyondell – Citgo (225 Area)
  - Mobil Chemical (225 Area)
  - Occidental Chemical (225 Area)
  - Pasadena Paper Company LP (225 Area)
  - Shell Oil – Deer Park (225 Area)
  - Texas Petrochemical (225 Area)
  - Total Petrochemicals USA (FINA) (225 Area)
  - Valero Refining Company – Texas (225 Area)
- In total, over 75 different industrial/manufacturing customers



*Submitted by:  
Judge Robert Eckel  
Harris County Texas  
on behalf of NACo  
w/o information to support  
\$300 billion Federal request*



## Agenda for Immediate Gulf Coast Relief

In light of the widespread devastation in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Texas, the National Association of Counties (NACo) joins our nation's commitment to rebuilding the Gulf Coast communities affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The federal government should provide assistance to counties for enhancing critical infrastructure and key resources in the affected areas. No less than \$300 billion should be allocated to restore the areas infrastructure. Enhanced coordination between local governments and the private sector is critical for ensuring the preparedness of States and localities and for protecting vital physical and economic infrastructure.

Since these hurricanes ravaged the Gulf Coast, NACo has continued our efforts to assist counties in these troubling times. In light of the critical role that counties play on the front lines of disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, NACo has created a Policy Agenda for Immediate Gulf Coast Relief. These recommendations are outlined on the following pages. Many of them are intended to assist the President and other federal agencies as they continue to make investments and decisions in their wake and aftermath. As we offer these suggestions, Counties look forward to a sustained partnership with the federal government and our state and other local partners.

### Strengthening Critical Infrastructure

#### **Expediting Assistance at all Levels of Government**

Federal and state assistance for natural and man made disasters must reach first responders in an expedited fashion. As a result, all levels of government should work together to ensure the timely distribution of assistance to first responders. Reimbursements should at least cover all costs incurred in responding and recovering from these Hurricanes. Furthermore, in the event that Federal, State and local government legal, procedural and/or procurements processes delay the expenditure of funds; efforts must be made to establish an expedited authorization and appropriation process.

#### **Strengthen Transportation Infrastructure**

Substantial funds will be needed to repair and rebuild highways and bridges, transit systems and airports damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and Rita. Although it may be some time before the full need is determined, Congress must continue to invest in the transportation infrastructure of this embattled region. The Emergency Relief Highway Program has \$100 million for FY05 and another \$100 million for FY06 beginning October 1. However, this funding is likely to be totally inadequate to address the ongoing needs throughout the Gulf Coast. Additional funds may also be needed for the Federal Bridge Program because many bridges have been damaged or totally destroyed. Once a determination has been made as to the damage sustained by transit systems in the affected region, the federal government must also appropriate additional funds as no emergency program exists for transit. Furthermore, although the larger commercial airports seem to be up and operating in the region hit by the hurricane, additional

airports will need assistance. As a result, Counties urge the federal government to provide additional assistance to the Airport Improvement Program.

#### **Enhancing Critical Infrastructure**

The federal government should provide assistance to counties for enhancing critical infrastructure and key resources in the affected areas. No less than \$300 billion should be allocated to restore the areas infrastructure. Enhanced coordination between local governments and the private sector is critical for ensuring the preparedness of States and localities and for protecting vital physical and economic infrastructure.

#### **Drinking Water and Wastewater Infrastructure**

Both Katrina and Rita negatively impacted the Gulf Coast region in the realm of drinking water and sanitation service, around 1,000 systems were affected. Even though most of the systems are "operational," according to the Environmental Protection Agency "operational" systems may still need repair and/or reconstruction. Additionally, full restoration will be delayed by the many breaks in the distribution and collection systems and by the need for upgrade and repairs in older systems. Without clean drinking water and wastewater services, citizens of the Gulf Coast face even more hazards on their road to cleanup. NACo urges Congress to appropriate needed funds to address these shortages.

### **Aid to Citizens**

#### **Investing in CDBG and HOME for Short-Term and Long-Term Recovery**

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME) are two critical resources for providing housing and services to areas damaged by natural, and other catastrophic disasters. As a result, Counties urge Congress to provide at least \$1.5 billion for these programs. Both programs have a long history in providing assistance to communities with their housing and community development needs in times of disasters. Communities assisting the citizens displaced by Hurricanes Katrina are using CDBG funds to develop public facilities to provide temporary housing to disaster victims, and rehabilitate units within the community to house evacuees, provide much needed services, including food, child care, health care, case management and temporary shelter. In addition, CDBG funds can provide rehabilitation assistance to homes and businesses damaged by the natural disasters, build new ownership and rental housing, and provide improvements to local infrastructure. The HOME Program can provide tenant-based rental assistance to people displaced by catastrophic disasters, and be used to rehabilitate and construct new housing for low- and moderate-income people.

#### **Enhance Post-Hurricane Public Health Response**

Additional federal funding is essential to establish a robust system to enable counties with evacuees to assess and address the ongoing physical and mental health effects of the Katrina and Rita disasters on persons who endured the disaster or who were exposed to toxic contaminants during flooding. Medicaid Assistance as proposed in S. 1716 by Senators Grassley and Baucus should also be enacted.

#### **Additional Funding and Flexibility for Social Services Block Grant Program**

The federal government must provide an additional \$1.1 billion to the Social Service Block Grant Program (SSBG) and restore it to the 1996 level. SSBG allocates funds to States to support social services programs for adults and children. During times of disaster, SSBG can provide various services to children and the elderly, and be the conduit for other funds as it was after September 11. Additionally, funds that have been or will be transferred from TANF to SSBG should be available for any hurricane victims. Currently the law restricts the use of the transferred funds and they cannot be used for single adults.

#### **Increase Funding for the National Emergency Grants Program**

An additional \$500 million should be provided for the Department of Labor's National Emergency Grant (NEG) program which assists displaced/dislocated workers with temporary jobs for clean-up and restoration purposes as well as training. According to the Labor Department (DOL), 214,000 job losses can be directly attributed to Hurricane Katrina. DOL has already allotted \$191 million to the Hurricane Katrina impacted Gulf Coast states, which now exceeds current funding levels available for the NEG program. The federal government should cover current NEG allocations and be prepared for future emergency needs by adding \$500 million to the NEG program.

### **Assistance to County, State and the Federal Government**

#### **Reimburse Counties and States for their Foster Care Expenses**

States and counties should receive 100% reimbursement for all their expenses in foster care. Many of the counties and states that have taken in victims of Hurricane Katrina and/or Rita have higher payment rates. It is unfair to expect either the host or the home states to bear this financial burden.

#### **Reimburse Counties and States for their Food Stamps Administrative Expenses**

The federal government moved very quickly to ensure that the hurricane victims receive nutritional assistance through the food stamps electronic benefit transfer system. However, there are additional state administrative expenses associated with the increased payments that should be reimbursed.

#### **County/Municipal Debt Relief**

Counties continue to urge the federal government to provide simpler and more flexible criteria to determine whether arbitrage has been earned in using tax-exempt proceeds and to otherwise simplify current rules and statutes related to tax-exempt bonds. While these rules are complicated and burdensome for all state and local governments, they impose particularly difficult, or even impossible, requirements on a jurisdiction that has lost access to offices, records or employees. The federal government must immediately provide such flexibility to jurisdictions that are affected by a major disaster. Credit assistance should be automatically applicable to all legitimate state and local borrowing and should not be subject to elaborate administrative procedures. In addition, NACo supports providing an additional advance refunding of outstanding tax-exempt bonds as was provided to New York City in the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

#### **Provide Immunity to Encourage Mutual Aid and Support**

The federal government and state governments, where applicable, should provide legal immunity from civil liability for counties and other local governments responding collaboratively to emergencies outside their primary jurisdiction. Also, the federal and state governments should allow reimbursement under public assistance for assistance rendered by mutual aid partners.

#### **Sustained Funding for the Army Corps of Engineers**

Substantial funds will be needed to repair/rebuild the levee system around New Orleans. Hazards to navigation need to be removed in the Mississippi and other affected rivers so that goods can move safely and efficiently on these inland waterways and so that Port of New Orleans and other ports along the Gulf Coast can return to full operations. Additionally, the federal government must work with state and local governments to address beach erosion and damage to wetlands.

September 26, 2005  
 Health and Medical Needs of Houston Region  
 Elena Marks

Immediate and Short Term Health and Medical Needs

1. Medical staffing for special needs people housed at GRB who are in transit from shelters to appropriate settings. Time: immediately for up to 14 days.
2. Process for movement of displaced persons with acute medical and/or skilled nursing needs must be in place. Two options: (1) ensure they are transferred out of Ellington to well-resourced locations OR (2) provide resources (personnel, equipment, supplies) to Houston to accommodate those persons at GRB or other site. Time: immediately for up to 30 days.
3. Return of Kaiser and Scripps medical personnel to staff community clinics serving Katrina and Rita evacuees. Time: Report to work by Wednesday, 9/28
4. Mobile hospital to provide relief to 9 county hospital network which is overburdened in general (2.1 beds:1000 residents vs. national standard of 4:1,000) and particularly burdened now due to closures of facilities in affected areas and influx of Katrina and Rita evacuees into Houston area.

Intermediate and Long Term Needs

1. More Federally Qualified Health Centers for our region—we have only 11 FQHCs in the Houston area, while cities like Chicago, with a similar population, have 80.
2. Specialty care: Ten to thirty percent of all primary care visits result in specialty referrals. As we increase access to primary care, we must also increase access to outpatient specialty care. At this time, virtually the only source of such care for low income residents is the Harris County Hospital District, where wait times for appointments exceed 6 months. We need a program modeled on the FQHC program to support the development of another outpatient specialty clinic to supplement the work of the Hospital District.
3. Our health care system, which is underpinned by the 100+ hospitals in our region, is in a financial crisis due to the large number of uninsured people in the system. Because these people lack access to health care, particularly preventive, primary and outpatient specialty care, they access the system at higher levels of acuity, often through hospital emergency rooms, which only drives up the cost of care. The system—including providers and public and private payers—can no longer absorb those costs. The best evidence of this is the fact that two hospitals have closed in the past 18 months and St. Joseph's is up for sale. Part of the solution to this problem lies in creating a financing mechanism, with the participation of the public and private sector, including the federal government, that encourages cost-effective use of health care resources. Dr. Mark McClellan challenged the Houston community to develop such a plan, which we are doing, and we need the support of our senators and representatives in Washington to realize the plan.

*Submitted by Judy Roberts  
 Harris County  
 supporting this subcommittee from  
 Elena Marks representing  
 Houston Mayor Bill White*

**SENATE HEARING  
HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA  
MAYOR-PRESIDENT MELVIN L. "KIP" HOLDEN  
CITY OF BATON ROUGE  
PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE**

My name is Melvin L. "Kip" Holden. I serve as Mayor-President of the City of Baton Rouge and the Parish of East Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

It has been estimated that approximately 45% of the survivors of the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina relocated to the Greater Baton Rouge Metropolitan Area.

With Hurricane Rita devastating parts of South Louisiana and causing additional flooding to the City of New Orleans, our emergency response systems have been strained yet again.

Our citizens have opened their hearts and homes to those who suffered great loss, and we are working with FEMA to expedite temporary housing for displaced families who are living in shelters, churches and homes throughout our city.

The City of Baton Rouge dodged the bullet of major devastation, the most serious being over 600 downed trees. This exceeded our losses by Hurricane Andrew, and damaged homes and power lines...making our streets impassable.

We remain severely impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.



We have sharp increases in enrollment of students into the public and private child care centers, Head Start, schools, colleges and universities throughout Baton Rouge. Our education officials have worked around the clock to get children back in school as quickly as possible.

Our city-parish is also experiencing increases in requests for economic assistance through our Division of Human Development and Services. This office is working to assist families, process emergency unemployment claims and recruit workers for FEMA to assist with the needs assessments of hurricane survivors.

One of the most obvious impacts of the displacement of people from New Orleans and South Louisiana to Baton Rouge has been our increase in traffic. We estimate more than 250,000 additional people in Baton Rouge based on formulas for traffic counts that have shown a 35-40% increase in traffic on our streets, causing frequent gridlock on surface streets.

Additionally, with the interstate system used as a major evacuation route, our parish is seriously impacted by that traffic as well.

Despite the increased population, many small businesses report a negative impact on sales as a result of traffic, interruption of supplies and loss of customers from the most seriously impacted areas.

Our airport, which usually serves 700,000 passengers annually, expects to see an increase of upwards to three million. For the past few weeks, with constant relief and recovery flights in and out, it has remained the second busiest airport in America, behind JFK International.

And for those of you who have never flown into Baton Rouge, we only have 10 gates, so we are considerably smaller.

The public service providers within our community are overloaded and with your help and support we can address some of our most critical needs: additional police officers, firefighters, emergency medical service providers and public works employees.

Our police have been working double shifts, leaving vulnerable areas that require regular patrols. The strain of accommodating the rapid influx of people into a large shelter in our governmental complex at one point lead to a government shutdown in order to assure the safety and accommodation of both evacuees and city-parish employees. Emergency circumstances such as this indicate a necessity to streamline and expedite National Guard for law enforcement patrols and crime prevention.

Our city-parish infrastructure was already in serious need of improvements, and I am currently seeking voter approval of a proposition to extend a half-cent sales tax, over one half billion dollars, to allow us to bond revenue and jump-start projects immediately.

We have welcomed the local governments of Jefferson, St. Bernard, Orleans and Plaquemines Parishes to operate in our facilities, including holding Council meetings in our Council Chambers to assist them in re-establishing local government authority quickly.

Additionally, we are providing logistical support to the many federal agencies, like FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security and the Transportation Safety Administration staged in our community.

I am especially proud and grateful to the first responders of East Baton Rouge Parish – our police offices, fire fighters, EMS and the staff at our Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness.

The professionalism and compassion shown by the men and women who responded to two hurricanes on behalf of our community was exemplary.

Our parish has many heroes – among them, an Urban Search and Rescue team that went into New Orleans the day following Hurricane Katrina and rescued over 1,000 trapped victims. Working by boat, they were in areas where no other rescue teams were working at the time.

For many people, we are a shelter from the storm. For some, we represent a new beginning. With a rapidly changing population, and serious infrastructure needs to meet pre-Katrina growth, our administration is now seeking relief to accommodate our increased population.

We are also beginning to study our records of emergency response to determine areas we need to improve. There is no question that one of the major factors frustrating and delaying those who were responding to Hurricane Katrina in Baton Rouge was difficulty with communications.

Regional, state, interstate and federal communications must be improved and there must be clear lines of authority as to who is in charge of various operations.

These individuals must be accessible to local authorities.

At every step of our response efforts, a breakdown in communications hindered our abilities to respond more effectively and efficiently.

Our parish, with a need to communicate with multiple first responders, labors under incompatible communications systems and insufficient technology and software to provide seamless information flow in times of emergency.

Our communications systems broke down when cell phones became inoperable due to network congestion and downed towers. Satellite phones are too expensive and also failed during Katrina. Software programs and web based programs should be made available to local agencies and hospitals. One such software is EMSsystems which tracks beds and hospital resources.

With standardization, these programs can be implemented locally and statewide. In disasters such as Katrina and Rita, these programs could be utilized for tracking patients and coordinating triage from ground zero to the staging arena.

Equally frustrating were the communications breakdowns due to burdensome red tape.

Because of our location and relative efficiency, East Baton Rouge Parish in many cases served as a state agency for inquiries, guidance and resources for other jurisdictions within Louisiana.

The National Incident Management System (NIMS) was established by the federal government as the standard line of communication. A lack of knowledge and understanding

by many agencies paralyzed the efforts to facilitate order and efficiency in response efforts. Further requirements for paper work and form completions hindered immediate action and deployment of people and materials to assist in rescue and recovery efforts.

Our parish also lacked sufficient communications with federal authorities and was unsuccessful in establishing early communications with FEMA representatives despite their actions impacting our local operations.

East Baton Rouge Parish created its own internal systems to coordinate sheltering, medical care, triage, mental health services, mortuary, family assistance information and help for evacuees with addictive disorders and other needs to quickly fill the void created by the constant influx of evacuees from South Louisiana.

As of this week, we still do not have a designated FEMA contact for individual assistance for those seeking help.

We have an immediate need for a FEMA coordinator to be located within our Emergency Operations Center to expedite available resources and alleviate some of the ongoing issues our city-parish is currently facing.

Poor communications also affected our ability to deliver medical treatment to Hurricane Katrina victims in Baton Rouge. While the volunteer medical response to Katrina's victims was unprecedented in Red Cross history, they were severely hindered by inadequate communications, limited resources and red tape.

Medical volunteers from all over the world began arriving in our city because of an inability to get through to anyone to determine our needs, and a lack of a system for deploying medical volunteers and much needed supplies.

Pre-positioned federal assets critical to the operations of our area hospitals were never received. Resources from the Strategic National Stockpile -- despite requests -- were never locally deployed and were derailed due to paperwork issues. Area hospitals are faced with serious reimbursement needs for their depleted resources.

While the state has begun immunizing responders working in New Orleans, mass immunization of those sheltered in Baton Rouge has not occurred. This should happen sooner for rescuers and those being rescued. Tetanus vaccinations are specifically needed as current supplies have been depleted. Also, Influenza vaccinations need to be given to these shelters ahead of the general population.

This past week an active case of pulmonary tuberculosis was found among the sheltered at the River Center. It is imperative that those people who are in shelters or who have been in shelters should be screened and tracked in the coming 12 to 18 months in order to identify others who convert or become active tuberculosis cases.

We are experiencing a severe shortage of psychiatric resources, having lost 900 of the state's 2,100 licensed beds when New Orleans was evacuated. We have a shortage of professionals to deal with the displaced, the responders and the mentally ill who have been in many cases without their medication for weeks now.

We will need to formalize a process to address long term mental health issues, including crisis counseling services for both evacuees and responders.

We need better preplanning between the state and local government to address the medical triage issues, and the isolation of patients from those who can be housed in general population shelters.

The state has the authority to open special needs shelters. Throughout Katrina and now on the heels of Rita, our regional hospitals have had to deal day to day with concerns about the longevity and viability of this shelter. Without this shelter, disposition from the hospitals for patients without a place to go becomes very difficult.

This past week, the US Public Health Service took over the shelter. New missions and processes have been developed based on federal standards, rather than a manner which would continue to support the local needs.

The financial drain on all of our resources is enormous. Many of the patients who received treatment are uninsured or underinsured...and will be costly to our six area hospitals that are already overwhelmed.

Displaced persons in shelters need access to medical care, counseling and privacy. Our Superintendent of Schools shared my concern that children, who have seen things no child should witness, desperately need a quiet place to heal.

Decisions based on shelters were made by the American Red Cross based on numbers and not the conditions of the shelter. The River Center in Baton Rouge, operated by the City, has a major roof leak that curtailed space available for

evacuees. Additionally, a decision was made to limit the amount of space per person, putting people even closer in already cramped quarters. These decisions must be made not by numbers but by common sense.

I am working closely with FEMA and HUD to provide temporary housing arrangements for families to at least get them some privacy...a place to reunite families...a quiet place for children to study.

We seriously need to focus on the creation of satellite clinics in areas which will now serve as housing for these evacuated families, and areas where we anticipate future growth.

The quickest route to privacy for these families may not be permanent housing, but it will be private. It will provide the privacy they miss...the privacy to protect dignity...the privacy to begin having those quiet moments families need in order to heal from a traumatic event.

These living arrangements are not a solution – a travel trailer does not solve anyone's housing needs – but at least they allow us to begin moving toward a better environment for restoring families. Short term, we should also look at parallel tracks for housing, including rehabilitation of existing housing stock, putting adjudicated property back into commerce, mixed use development, restoring rundown apartment complexes and prefab housing.

East Baton Rouge Parish continues to operate under a local and state "State of Emergency" and a "Presidential Disaster Declaration." The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) continues to operate and is staffed seven days a week from 7:00 a.m. until 7:00 p.m. with responders on 24 hour call.



Since August 29<sup>th</sup>, the good people of New Orleans, South Louisiana and Baton Rouge have shared experiences we will never, ever forget.

Since arriving in Baton Rouge, people who have lost everything and are in many cases still searching for family members, have experienced births...deaths...and we've even had a few weddings.

Just last week, a couple married in a shelter's chapel, forgetting for a few minutes that they are homeless, penniless and living in a shelter with hundreds of other evacuees. The ceremony was planned by Red Cross volunteers, who also served as their attendants. The community came together and cooked jambalaya for their reception. And the couple plans to build a new life in a community located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

To those who have relocated to Baton Rouge from hurricane devastation, our message has been this: You are our family now. Our hearts go out to you....our homes are open to you...our businesses will serve you....our city will care for you.

We are Baton Rouge. And this is the way we respond to neighbors in need.

None of this has been easy. None of it will be easy in the months to come.

We desperately need help from the federal government to restore families...rebuild lives...cope...and heal.

It's hard to know when one's finest hour arrives. My City of Baton Rouge will be remembered in history for its ability to

become America's next great city while also reaching out to our neighbors in their greatest hour of need.

I have come to Washington this week for the third time since the largest national disaster in our nation's history brought so much destruction to my state – and so many devastated lives to my city.

I have come to ask for your help. The devastation of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita was too much for one community...too much for one parish....too much for one state.

America always responds when her people are hurting.

Senators, the good people of Louisiana are hurting.

God bless you all.

**Testimony of Hon. Robert V. Massengill****Mayor, Brookhaven, Mississippi****Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs****September 28, 2005****Testimony Regarding Impact from Hurricane Katrina on our Community**

The City of Brookhaven, Mississippi (population 13,000) is located on Interstate 55 and U. S. Highways 84 and 51, 123 miles north of New Orleans and 135 miles northwest of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Brookhaven had experienced only minimal damage from hurricanes, such as Camille in 1969. On Saturday, August 27, 2005, City and Lincoln County officials met with the local Civil Defense Director to discuss the tracking of Katrina and the likelihood that the community would be affected.

By early Sunday afternoon, August 28<sup>th</sup> evacuees had begun arriving in the city. All motels were immediately filled and churches, which served as shelters, were beginning to be filled. Six such shelters were set up in the city and another two in the surrounding area. The shelters accommodated up to 1600 evacuees at the peak while another 1200-1500 people stayed in motels or with family or friends. All evacuees at church shelters were signed in by Red Cross personnel upon arrival. Red Cross provided some personnel and assistance, but meals have been prepared and served by church members. Local restaurants have been extremely generous in helping provide meals as have other churches not serving as shelters. Other churches not serving as shelters have been gracious in also preparing meals.

All evacuees were welcomed by church members and were made as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. Most of these evacuees were from the greater New Orleans area, due in a large part to the fact that I-55, a major route out of that city, was converted into four-lane north-bound traffic during evacuation. Brookhaven Recreation Department's main building was made into a shelter for power company personnel. The city and county Multi-Use Building housed similar personnel.

During the day Monday, August 29<sup>th</sup> the community received wind gusts of up to 85 MPH and had several hours of sustained winds of 50+ MPH. Power was lost throughout the entire community by mid-morning, as several hundred trees fell throughout the day. (My personal estimate is that over 750 trees were down throughout the city.) Approximately 20-25 homes were struck by trees with at least one-half of these receiving

considerable damage, including 6-8 being totally destroyed. Brookhaven and Lincoln County, which also sustained a complete loss of power due to fallen trees, were both indeed fortunate, as there were no lives lost nor were there any serious injuries due to the hurricane.

With no power, evacuees and residents were unable to obtain much outside information; thus the severity of the damage to other areas was not known until later that week. Recognizing the need, the city workers began opening streets and roads late Monday, as nearly all were closed due to fallen trees. They continued this function throughout the day Tuesday and Wednesday. By the weekend traffic was able to travel throughout the community. I met with the power company to help determine priorities within the city and they began working to restore power almost immediately. The following priorities received prompt attention:

- First, the local hospital.
- Second, the streets on which major retail stores are located.
- Third, the city's water wells.

The hospital operated by generator power Monday and part of Tuesday, but had power restored by late Tuesday. U. S. Highway 51 and Brookway Boulevard also received power by late Tuesday. This enabled consumers to shop at the Wal-Mart SuperCenter, Home Depot, and other retail stores, including convenience stores and other gas retailers. The city's water supply is obtained from eight water wells, four of which are located in a relatively small geographic area. All eight wells lost power on Monday morning, but two continued to operate on generator power. These ancient generators were "nursed" throughout the day and night by the city's committed Water Department personnel. Funds to purchase new generators for the wells and lift station will be a priority.

By mid-day Wednesday, August 31<sup>st</sup> power was restored to four wells and by late Thursday power had been restored to all eight wells. I went on the radio to advise the people that our water supply was safe and kept people informed periodically throughout the week. My intent was not only to inform but to calm the fears of the community and evacuees. Water was never lost for city residents nor were they required to boil water.

City, county, law enforcement, utility company, and civil defense personnel met daily for three weeks for updates, which enabled us to have an area-wide perspective of needs. National Guard troops were brought in to help distribute ice, water and meals and to work with law enforcement personnel in primarily directing heavy traffic caused by extremely long lines at gas pumps. At no time was a curfew imposed due to the commitment and capability of the city's police force.

Within two weeks of the hurricane, power was restored to all residences and businesses in the city. All within the county received power within two-and-a-half weeks. Obviously, most families lost the contents of their refrigerator and freezer.

During the past three weeks the city crews picked up approximately 10,000 cubic yards of vegetative debris (trees, limbs, etc.). The Corp of Engineers currently is overseeing the pickup of the remainder, which will amount to at least 100,000 additional cubic yards. The Corp has been extremely competent and professional in their approach to the removal of debris.

Many of the evacuees have left the shelters, some to return home while others have found local residences. Still others have relocated elsewhere to be with family or friends. Presently there are approximately 200 evacuees from Katrina still in shelters. The six local shelters have been consolidated into four and were to be reduced to two or three within the next week. However, these shelters all have new evacuees due to Hurricane Rita. No area church had ever served as a shelter for more than three or four days, but the ones still functioning are now into their fifth week. The volunteers involved are to be truly commended for this showing of love, concern, and compassion.

Outside volunteers have flooded our area with the desire to help and to serve others. I have met and talked with Red Cross volunteers from at least fifteen states. I have talked with medical support personnel from Indiana and New York State. Brookhaven has become the "sister city" of Park City, Illinois, whose mayor accompanied five others in bringing funds and goods to us. The ambulance service of Brookhaven, NY adopted our community, arriving two weeks ago with the willingness to do whatever was needed.

While Brookhaven was hit harder than ever before and while some in our community suffered a significant loss, most of us were merely inconvenienced. We soon realized that most of those not far from us had their lives changed. Needless to say, I am extremely proud of the people of Brookhaven for helping out like we did during this almost overwhelming crisis.

#### **Current & Future Needs of the Survivors and Plans for the Future for Them and for Our Community:**

First of all, let me say that the survivors (or evacuees) were overwhelmed with the love they were shown, primarily by the members of churches which served as shelters. Their physical needs were met and it has been heartwarming to see how they have responded by cleaning, by cooking, and by handling other daily tasks at the shelters. They wanted to show their appreciation for what has been done for them by helping out in anyway they could. For instance, this past week a Jordanian family who owned a taxi service in New Orleans prepared the meal for all evacuees at Faith Presbyterian Church.

The most pressing physical needs of the evacuees have been met as they have reasonably good accommodations, three good meals a day, cash from the Red Cross, and hope of soon having individual assistance from FEMA. I have been to each shelter regularly and have talked with families and individuals. The following is a summary of the thoughts of most of the evacuees:

- They feel that they have been forgotten or ignored as more attention has been given to those nearer the harder struck areas.
- They feel the government has been slow to respond.
- They feel that FEMA's representatives who tell them they will hear back from them the next day, don't give them a response for over a week, if at all.
- Prior to the new evacuees entering the shelters due to Hurricane Rita, only 220 Katrina evacuees remain. This represents 71 family units. Of these 71 families 35 could return to their homes if they had a trailer or camper in which to stay while working on their damaged home. This is their main need and primary request. Actually, it is the only request of one-half of the families.
- Still other concerns and needs revolve around employment. Many questions are unanswered regarding jobs, as some of their employers have been wiped out.

Plans for the future needs for the evacuees deal with the above and with the following, as well:

- How can disastrous situations such as this best be dealt with in the future? If we fail to learn lessons from Katrina and Rita we are indeed poor planners.
- Should evacuees be allowed to return to areas that are still unsafe? To me this is a "no brainer", as they should not be allowed in unsafe areas, especially areas without safe streets, water, sewer, power and police protection.
- What can be expected regarding employment in areas destroyed by catastrophes such as this?
- The list of unanswered questions goes on and on.

Plans for the communities involved include the following:

- How can smaller communities such as ours best prepare for future events such as this? Obviously we should learn from this catastrophe and have more detailed plans for future events such as this.
- How can FEMA be more readily accessible to communities struck by disasters? It is easy to criticize FEMA, but this organization is understaffed for an event of this magnitude.
- How can evacuees be best housed, fed, and cared for, both for the short-term and the long-term? Locally the responsibility is handled by the area churches, but better coordination efforts are an absolute necessity.
- Federal funds will be made available for the areas hardest hit, but will Federal funds be made available for communities not as devastated, but which still suffered loss? Since we have been declared a disaster area funds have been made available, but no individual assistance office has been set up locally so the evacuees and local residents who suffered a loss are concerned.
- How can efforts best be coordinated (FEMA, Red Cross, other relief efforts) to insure that the "most bang for the buck" is received on a timely basis? This is one of the most pressing needs and concerns as failures abound. This will be a portion of our city's plan for the future.

- Are there checks and balances to insure that funds are properly distributed and on a most-needed basis? The distribution of Red Cross checks was handled poorly. While not a government operation improvements definitely are needed.
- How much of the relief effort is to be funded by local or national charities or by individuals, compared with how much is to be funded by Federal, State, and local governments? I don't propose to have a quick, easy answer to this complex question.

Part of my job is to help answer questions such as these in greater detail for my community.

Obviously, I have a first-hand perspective of the recent hurricane. I have seen how the caring people of a community which has been somewhat affected have opened their churches, their homes, their pocket books, and especially their hearts to those less fortunate. Even with a loss of power as well as damage and debris throughout the city, our local people still helped those whose need was greater than their own. Our community has responded well to this challenge. We have learned valuable lessons that should serve us well in the future. The following are key elements to handling the next challenge even better than this one:

- **Proper planning ahead of time**
- **Open lines of communication**
- **Leadership**

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to be with you. Thank you for your concern, your interest, and your desire to develop ways to better handle disasters such as this in the future.

Testimony of Mayor Dan Coody  
Mayor, City of Fayetteville, Arkansas  
United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs  
September 28, 2005

**Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman, and members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for your kind invitation to testify before your committee this morning, and I would like to thank Senator Pryor for his gracious introduction. As a local official who has been involved in relief efforts from this terrible tragedy, I appreciate the committee's willingness to hear our testimony. I also commend my fellow officials that are testifying here today. I know they have borne much more of the brunt of the disaster than we have. Our hearts and prayers go out to all of the victims of Hurricane Katrina, and we stand ready to continue our assistance to all the affected communities and persons displaced by this national tragedy.**

**Because of the proximity of our two states, the people of the Arkansas consider the people of Louisiana and Mississippi to be our neighbors. Many Arkansans travel to and through Louisiana and Mississippi; the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville has students from both states; and many of us have ties to friends and family in the Gulf Coast. When Hurricane Katrina struck, Arkansans responded as you would hope a good neighbor would in a crisis-with open arms and no questions asked.**



As the crisis unfolded, I instructed my staff to assess our resources and coordinate with local emergency efforts to develop and implement a response plan as soon as possible. Key city staff, including Susan Thomas who was tasked to run the operation, met to ensure this plan would best utilize city resources in relief efforts. Earlier this year, Fayetteville had purchased a 126,000 sq. ft. industrial building to convert into a joint police department, fire department and emergency response center. The closed and empty facility offered tremendous warehouse space with loading docks useful for a regional collection, handling, and distribution center. It also contained plenty of office space where local non-profits could assist survivors of the hurricane that had made their way to Fayetteville. We felt this would be an ideal site to coordinate local response efforts.

Based on the small amount of information available from federal and state sources, city and county officials concluded the best course of action would be to coordinate our efforts on the local level. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, city and county officials met and decided to use the empty city warehouse for the response center.

After our meeting, it was evident that the information and communication failures at the federal level had extended to the state and local levels. Even though communication and information systems established by federal and state emergency plans were not functioning, and in some cases being abandoned altogether, we had to move forward and prepare for an influx of evacuees and ensure that our local communications were strong

and sustainable. After all, we would ultimately be responsible for evacuees in our area.

Later on September 4<sup>th</sup>, County and City officials met with emergency responders, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army, local churches and church camps that had been called to shelter survivors, regional transportation officials, local media, and others. Without any real communication or coordination from outside the local level we all knew we had to use whatever information we could get from television reports, informal lines of communication and rumors. The failure of our formalized emergency communication system and lack of solid information required the County and the City to insist that, at least at the local level, communication and information would be shared and utilized to the best of our ability.

While county officials worked to establish communication lines with state and federal officials, our city staff worked to prepare the industrial facility for occupation. The entire abandoned building was cleaned and electrical transformers and phone lines were re-installed. Office equipment and furnishings were brought in, as were forklifts and pallets. Two days later, on Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup>, the facility was prepared to ship and receive, house local non-profits, or be utilized for any other activity that was needed in the region.

On Monday, Sept. 5<sup>th</sup>, working on coordination with Congressman John Boozman's office as well as with Senator Pryor's office, several tractor trailers that had been strategically located throughout the region by

various officials and organizations to collect contributions from the citizens of Northwest Arkansas were sent to our warehouse for collection and distribution. However, a clear plan for the organized collection of such a huge volume of goods, in addition to the sorting, storing and distributing to local shelters or to the Gulf Coast was not in place.

In the process of collecting goods, no restrictions were placed on what was collected on the trailers. When the first of fourteen packed trailer loads arrived at our facility, we unloaded the first two and immediately filled three warehouse rooms full of bags and boxes that needed to be sorted, re-boxed, labeled, and palletized. Knowing there were many more trailers to come, we realized that much more assistance was needed to efficiently process the donations and prepare them for distribution.

We requested assistance from Wal-Mart Corporate Headquarters, located in nearby Bentonville, and they immediately responded by sending two engineers to create a warehouse system for our facility, a distribution center supervisor and two additional employees to implement the plan and oversee the operation. In addition, Wal-Mart and other businesses contributed warehouse supplies such as pallets, pallet jacks, boxes, tape, and other items that were needed for the processing of goods. I made a city wide call for volunteers help sort, box, and palletize the goods, and the County provided daily work release inmates for additional labor. During peak hours we had over one hundred volunteers, city employees, Wal-Mart

employees, and work release inmates working side by side to organize the donations. The trailers were unloaded by Saturday, September 10th and the donations were ready for shipment by September 15.

On Thursday, September 8th, survivors that had made their way to Fayetteville to stay with family or friends began to stop by the distribution center in search of financial aid, food, clothes, and other assistance. Other individuals who had been on the road for days stopped at the center in search of help and information. Many of these folks were still in shock, had been living in their cars, and for whatever reason had not been able to locate assistance in various other towns between the affected areas and Northwest Arkansas.

We had not anticipated receiving evacuees at the distribution center; no one had been in touch with the city or county to tell us to expect evacuees. We were not sure how to provide appropriate assistance. One by one we heard the story of survivors being bounced from place to place and town to town, so we made the decision not to send these folks back out into town searching for different agencies or sources of support. We took it upon ourselves to find answers, information, and assistance for these evacuees. We pulled boxes off pallets and made food and clothes available to these individuals. As I witnessed this event and watched my staff help people dig through boxes trying to find a shirt that fit or a pair of shoes in the right size, I realized that we needed to modify our operation to include not only large scale distribution of goods but small scale as well. It was clear that this first wave of individuals would not

be the last, and that we needed to set up an environment that preserved the evacuees' dignity and made it easy for them to find the items they needed. Distribution Center staff were instructed the next morning to begin setting up a store environment where people could "shop" for what they needed. Because of the large amount of space available in the facility, we were able to split the operation into three primary areas: small scale receiving and distribution for individual donations and assistance, large scale receiving and distribution for collection and distribution to affected areas, as well as a staging/sorting/storage area for material.

In addition to food and clothing, many of the evacuees still needed to register with the Red Cross and other agencies. Others looked for possible housing options. From September 4<sup>th</sup> through the 10<sup>th</sup>, each of these relief organizations and services were located at the County Sheriff's Office, about 3 miles from our facility. However, it became clear that since food and clothing were located at the distribution center, most evacuees would make their way to the Center first, and common sense dictated that we should locate all available assistance in one location. On Friday, September 9, the County Judge and I held a press conference to announce that the relief agencies would be moving their assistance efforts from the County facility to our distribution center. On Monday, September 12, the Center offered a "one-stop" location where evacuees could access various types of assistance and support.

We made office space, tables, chairs, copy and fax machines, telephones, and internet access available to

organizations such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Department of Human Services, Health Department, and FEMA. The City also staffed a front office “help” desk to help direct over 400 evacuees to the right place and provide information as needed. The Red Cross provided financial assistance and coordinated housing to local hotels. The Salvation Army provided assistance in getting people to the local shelter. Arkansas’ Department of Human Services assisted with food stamps. FEMA maintained a presence and assisted people in the Center for two days. A local volunteer provided ongoing assistance with this endeavor after FEMA left. Still, as of today there is no FEMA Recovery Center located in Fayetteville to assist individual evacuees in getting help from the federal government. A local organization, OpenYourHome.com also works from an office at the Center. This local organization is operating nationally and has matched over 3,100 survivors with housing opportunities in desired locations.

Since September 6<sup>th</sup>, the City has received over 500 pallets of food, clothes, water, toiletries, household products, baby food, formula, diapers, and other incidentals. About half of those items have been sent to the affected areas including shipments to the cities of Harvey, Varnado, and Angie, LA, and Jackson, Gulfport, and Laurel, MS. Still, half remains, and it continues to be an ongoing frustration for all involved that these resources aren’t getting to places where people need help. I attribute this to a continuing lack of information, communication, and coordination among and between the various levels of government. I feel that

**these supplies and the help we can provide are needed now more than ever in the aftermath of another devastating storm in the Gulf.**

**Three tractor trailers of sorted, folded, and labeled clothing items were shipped to the Salvation Army staging warehouse in Corsicana, TX. Many of these shipments were sponsored by local businesses and churches and were arranged by making direct contact with community members in the affected areas. One example of this city-to-city communication occurred when the City of Fayetteville connected with Louisiana State Senator Ben Nevers. We established what supplies were needed at which locations, arranged the transportation, and shipped supplies directly to that location. We learned many of the rural areas were not receiving adequate support and were still in desperate need of various items that we had in stock. This information encouraged us to focus our large scale distribution efforts on the more rural areas of Louisiana. While we had pallets of everything from food, water, wheelchairs, and baby supplies palletized and ready to go, our efforts to communicate and coordinate the movement of our supplies to those areas that needed them the most was and continues to be our biggest challenge.**

**The Center has experienced many great success stories, and I believe this is due to the fact that all of the leaders at the local level cooperated, communicated and responded to the needs that were presented to us. The lack of information and direction from the national and state emergency response systems continues to cause**

**strain on local efforts. However, our county and city governments, local chapters of national relief organizations, local corporations and businesses, churches, and our grassroots relief organizations are staying in direct contact with one another and collaborating on our continued response to Hurricane Katrina and now Hurricane Rita. This collaboration extends to our efforts to plan not only for future expected demands placed on us by emergencies in other areas of the country, but also for future disasters that may strike closer to home.**

**It is our obligation as government officials to provide the leadership and resources needed to reinforce the approaches that worked and reinvent the approaches that failed. These lessons learned must be clearly articulated, incorporated into our local, regional, and state emergency response plans, and implemented in the event of another disaster. As Fayetteville continues its plan to build a state-of-the-art police, fire, and emergency response center, we will incorporate what we learned from experience. We will preserve in our facility the capacity to ship and receive large quantities of material when necessary. These warehousing areas can be used for a variety of community functions and city operations in such a way that they could be quickly prepared for disaster relief. The County and the City will be partners in an emergency operations and communications command center to be completed in 2006. As we continue to assess our potential for improvement we will find more ways to respond efficiently to future disasters.**



**But no matter how hard we work, we will not be as effective as we could be without direct communication and information between all levels of government. If the established, practiced, and well-funded state-wide emergency response system is circumvented so that local governments, emergency managers, and agencies are left to rely on guesswork, we will again witness unnecessary suffering, confusion, and frustration. There must be a clear chain of command. There must be clear and open lines of communication on all levels for the quick sharing of information. The overall state-wide emergency response system which includes municipal and county governments, related state agencies, and non-profits must be activated and coordinated in a crisis. City and County governments all across America stand willing and able to do whatever is necessary to help our neighbors in crisis. Federal, state and local governments exist to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of our citizens. Those of us in local government will not stand idly by as tragedy unfolds simply because we are not told what to do. We will act. We will focus our resources and we will figure out what needs to be done and how to do it. But without coordination with our state and federal governments, our effectiveness will be limited and the suffering of our friends, our neighbors, and our families will be prolonged for no reason.**

**The Fayetteville Disaster Relief Center could serve as a model for coordinating local resources. Centers such as ours could be strategically located, grounded in public-private partnerships, and be ready for activation on a moment's notice. This Center would not have been**

possible without the influx of city resources, the logistical assistance from the private sector, the dedication of our local volunteers, and the strong positive relationship between County and City officials. It is also important to recognize that such a system should already exist within the established emergency response infrastructure. The simple truth is that without implementation of an established plan, relief efforts are unlikely to work. Washington County, the City of Fayetteville, and our local relief organizations responded to this crisis to the very best of our ability.

Our efforts were successful for three reasons. First, we had a facility in which to work and coordinate the movement of goods and services. Second, our local leaders, agencies, and non-profits communicated well. Third, our community pulled together to help our neighbors in need. I would like to thank Fayetteville and Washington County residents for opening their homes and checkbooks and giving their time. Without dedicated volunteer help, unconditional support from our community, and tireless work from our staffs, local officials, and first responders, none of our efforts would have been possible. Our goal was to create an operation that would provide as much benefit as possible very quickly. We feel like we succeeded. My hope is that all government officials share that goal.

I thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for the opportunity to appear this morning, and I look forward to your questions.

**Testimony of  
George Rupp  
President, International Rescue Committee**

**To**

**Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs Committee**

**September 28, 2005**  
*Submitted for the Record*

Recently, the Parker family of devastated Orleans Parish found refuge in Atlanta with help from the International Rescue Committee. Upon arrival in their new city, they were met by a woman named Elhamijah Kadic, who brought them to a furnished apartment, helped their children enroll in school, informed them about available social services and put the couple in touch with a job specialist. What makes this story remarkable is that Elhamijah Kadic, now a U.S. citizen, was once herself a newcomer to Atlanta, in search of safety, home and a new start. As a refugee from Bosnia, she escaped ethnic cleansing and knows all too well what it is like to suffer the kind of loss and displacement now being experienced by families like the Parkers. For the past six years, she's worked for the IRC helping other refugees from war-torn countries resettle and integrate, and never would have imagined that one day she would be coming to the aid of America's displaced.

While the IRC typically focuses on humanitarian aid for victims of war and persecution, for the first time we are responding to a natural disaster in America. At the request of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, we dispatched an Emergency Response Team to Louisiana to provide support to local organizations in the areas of public health, emergency education, and mental health counseling for children and adults.

In addition, the IRC's nationwide network of 22 resettlement offices is preparing to offer the same kind of relocation assistance to Hurricane Katrina evacuees as we normally provide to refugees from war-torn countries: linking uprooted people to available housing and social services; providing such basic necessities as food, furnishings, and clothing; and helping with counseling, community orientation, job placement, and school enrollment. In addition to Atlanta, IRC resettlement offices in cities including Dallas, Miami and San Diego are already helping evacuees.

Federal government agencies could learn from relief efforts overseas and refugee resettlement programs in the US and apply these lessons to the response to Hurricane Katrina. Based on IRC's involvement to date helping evacuees in Baton Rouge and other affected American cities, and drawing on our lessons learned from our programs for refugees, I would like to make several recommendations regarding coordination, support and protection of children, shelter, and community integration. I would also urge

Committee members to engage with the Administration on the need for a federally sponsored program to help relocate evacuees.

### **Background**

Discussions with the Baton Rouge Area Foundation were initiated on Wednesday, August 30. The IRC's seven member emergency team arrived in Baton Rouge and met with the leadership of the Foundation by the weekend after the hurricane – September 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. Team members included crisis coordinators and specialists in health, water, sanitation, emergency education and child trauma and refugee resettlement. After an initial assessment, the team's focus narrowed to provide support to local organizations in the areas of public health, emergency education and counseling for children and adults.

### **Need for Coordination**

One member of the team has been particularly focused on issues of information sharing and coordination. The disaster relief plans of both FEMA and the State of Louisiana lack sufficient mechanisms to promote the efficient collection and dissemination of information at the nongovernmental and community based level. It has become apparent that coordination problems also exist at the federal/state level. Without a centralized information collection and dissemination platform, relief workers are hindered by duplication, gaps in services, and lost capacity. Nongovernmental and community groups responding to the disaster are without access to the critical data that has been collected. As a result, agencies lack the data necessary to make the most efficient decisions. In addition, much time and energy is lost in the search for answers to simple questions.

Over decades, international aid agencies, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the U.S. Government's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and the U.S. military have developed best practices for coordination and information sharing during crises in order to effectively assist large displacements of people. It is alarming that a recognized and comprehensive model for the critical elements of coordination and information sharing is not prescribed in state and federal plans. We urge you to help bring this capacity to bear in the current and future disasters.

### **Supporting and Protecting Children**

As families struggle to find missing relatives, adequate shelter and a sense of stability, it is imperative that a support system for children and youth is created and maintained. With the hurricane coming at the beginning of the academic year, the education system is struggling to meet the needs of both local and displaced students. The IRC conducted a two-week assessment of shelters in and around Baton Rouge. Information gathered through this assessment indicates that many displaced children have not yet registered for school for a number of reasons. These reasons include: distress at being separated from family, expectation of returning home as soon as possible, an unwillingness on the parents' part to register their children because they expect to move out of the shelter soon, and resistance from overburdened school districts. Many of the displaced and local

students were classified by the state as “at risk” prior to the hurricane and there is an opportunity amid this crisis to ensure that these children do not “fall through the cracks” and lose out again. In addition to the more obvious issues regarding formal education, serious attention needs to be given to the emotional wellbeing of children and youth as they cope with these traumatic events and continued instability during relocation/resettlement. The assessment found that the vast majority of shelters did not have structured activities for children where they can express themselves through play and receive counseling and academic enrichment. These types of activities are crucial to provide in the immediate aftermath of traumatic events in order to help children cope and eventually flourish in their new environment.

Children who are separated from their family members are also at greater risk of being exploited or abused. The assessment showed that there is no coordinated system in place to ensure that these children are properly registered, tracked, and helped to reunite with their family members. A key part of a coordinated system is the verification process, which ensures that children are indeed reunited with their family members and not child predators posing as family members.

#### **Shelter**

The IRC’s two-week assessment in Baton Rouge discovered that hundreds of mostly unregistered people were housed in seventeen “spontaneous” shelters and surrounding neighborhoods. This hidden population of displaced people is living in churches, motels, and private homes. Conditions in these shelters in many instances fall below the minimum standards agreed to by humanitarian experts for international crises (the SPHERE standards). While food and clean water were adequate, many of these facilities lacked appropriate infrastructure such as showers and toilet facilities necessary to sustain the numbers of evacuees they were hosting. Additionally, a small number of the shelters were poorly run with uncollected garbage and human wastes presenting a significant risk for disease transmission.

Even in the most well-run shelters, conditions are not conducive to long-term habitation. The larger Red Cross shelters are often public buildings (such as the River Center in Baton Rouge) that offer no privacy and where evacuees are subjected to bright, stadium style lighting. While significant efforts are being made to prevent disease transmission, when people are living in such close quarters the risk grows exponentially, as does the risk of security-related problems.

The near-term solution is to offer evacuees transitional housing opportunities as soon as possible. FEMA is in the process of procuring 50,000 trailers/campers for this purpose. How these communities are established and integrated into local communities will be key to their success.

IRC's experiences overseas have taught us that living in temporary housing can be demoralizing and difficult if care is not taken in the design of sites to ensure that they are humane, healthy and safe. Shelter not only provides physical protection from the elements, but also privacy, dignity and peace of mind. Our shelter programs incorporate best practices principles -- such as designing the decision-making process to be transparent and impartial and soliciting input from members of the affected community. Shelter projects should focus on the empowerment of the displaced by encouraging engagement in self-help activities and discouraging dependency. IRC strives for a sense of ownership and "pride in place" as a vital principle in all our shelter interventions from tents in Darfur to concrete houses in Azerbaijan.

There is a great deal of initiative on the part of the federal and state government and community-based organizations to deal with shelter needs. Here, too, there is a need for better coordination and information sharing. There is concern among some that there could be significant social unrest if the needs of those now in shelters are not appropriately met. Also, a second wave of evacuees requiring shelter may result when people run out of funds to stay in hotels and move out of housing arrangements that have become untenable. Better options for getting evacuees out of shelters and into communities need to be developed quickly with input from the evacuees themselves,

### **Community Integration: The Right Approach**

Emergency assistance tends towards paternalism and treats survivors as passive victims, which can lead to resentment and dissatisfaction. Community leaders should be invited to work on the same design committees as engineers and officials, and community participation must occur at all levels of decision-making. They should be involved not only in selection of the types of shelter but also the layout and design of the settlement. Communal spaces for recreation and sports, social gathering, and religious practice must be allowed.

The workforce that rebuilds affected communities will be constituted largely of citizens from those communities who have lost their homes and livelihoods. Non governmental agencies and the affected states are preparing massive vocational training programs with an emphasis on construction. It is critical that this workforce receive just compensation for their labor. IRC is alarmed that President Bush moved quickly to issue an Executive Order waiving the prevailing wage applicable for federal contracts in areas affected by the Hurricane. We are concerned that this Executive Order invites Federal contractors to exploit disaster victims when these workers should be moving to rebuild their lives and retake their place in society.

### **IRC work in Other US Cities**

In the Atlanta area, the IRC's resettlement team is coordinating with other service providers to interview evacuees to assess and respond to their immediate needs. IRC

staff and volunteers, some of them refugees themselves, are also locating temporary housing for some of the displaced.

In Dallas, which is hosting 15,000 evacuees, IRC staff members are helping displaced residents temporarily housed in shelters to apply for eligible services, including food stamps and Medicaid.

The IRC is also coming to the aid of refugees from conflict nations who were resettled in New Orleans and have become uprooted once again. These families, from Bosnia, Vietnam and Cuba, are now under the care of the IRC's San Diego and Atlanta resettlement offices.

All of the IRC's 22 regional resettlement offices, which have helped thousands of refugees rebuild their lives in the United States, are also ready to respond should the Federal Government initiate a large-scale program to provide relocation services to evacuees. Several offices within the Executive Branch have discussed launching a program sponsored by the Federal government to help evacuees by using the existing network of refugee resettlement agencies. A final decision appears close but is pending. We would urge the Committee to raise creation of this new program with the Administration and to push for quick and decisive action on this issue.

I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide this testimony for the record and am especially grateful for the Chair's and Ranking Minority Member's interest in these issues. As always, the International Rescue Committee is ready to provide whatever support we can to assist in this crisis.