

Lieutenant Governor Mitch Landrieu

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Testimony before the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery

Washington, DC

At the request of Governor Bobby Jindal, I have come to Washington, along with a bipartisan delegation from Louisiana, to advocate for a fair disaster recovery package in the aftermath of Hurricanes Ike and Gustav.

When it comes to disaster preparedness and recovery, we can all agree that partisanship and divisive politics have no place in the discussion. We come before this committee unified and speaking with one voice. This is one team, one fight.

For the second time in three years, the State of Louisiana has been devastated by back-to-back natural disasters. As Hurricanes Gustav and Ike struck, our state was still in the midst of ongoing recovery efforts from two of the largest disasters in U.S. history – Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Gustav and Ike served as the first real tests of Louisiana's readiness to handle major disasters since the storms of 2005.

Our response to these storms has reflected many of the lessons we learned after Katrina and Rita. Local, state, and federal partners worked closely together to prepare and respond to the challenges of the day.

In the days prior Hurricane Gustav's landfall, the state successfully led the largest evacuation in Louisiana's history. For the first time, the whole of coastal

Louisiana was evacuated. Over 1.9 million people left their homes by car, bus, rail, and air to escape Gustav's wrath. We also managed the largest medical evacuation in U.S. history: over 10,400 patients were moved out of harm's way as the storm approached.

The state worked well with the federal government in three key areas.

First, the FEMA regional office worked well with the state in developing emergency plans over the past three years. The coordination and collaboration here paid off.

Second, FEMA supported our efforts for emergency transportation during Gustav, specifically the AMTRAK rail and contract plane capability that assisted us in evacuating approximately 7500 citizens. We also received great support in transporting the critical medical evacuees.

Third, the on-site event assistance that FEMA and the Incident Management Assistance Team provided for both Gustav and Ike was strong.

There are three key areas that need improvement.

First, the flow of basic commodities, such as water, ice, food and tarps, from FEMA to the ground after landfall was inadequate. I would be happy to expound on this and our issues with generators during the question and answer session.

Second, the delay in approval of our request for a pre-landfall declaration delayed some assistance we wanted to EMAC in because some States would not commit resources until we had that presidential declaration.

Third, the delay in approval of our 100% cost share request has hindered our recovery efforts.

Hurricane Gustav made landfall in Terrebonne Parish, Louisiana on September 1, 2008. Gustav brought high winds and storm surges as high as 20 feet to Louisiana's coast, overtopping levees and knocking out power. The storm caused major wind and flood damage throughout the state, from the southern coastal parishes through central and north Louisiana, prompting all 64 parishes in Louisiana to declare a state of emergency.

Many Louisiana citizens were still without electricity when Hurricane Ike struck south and southwest Louisiana just under two weeks later. On September 12, 2008, Ike made landfall in Galveston County, Texas, sending devastating tidal surges across the southern coastal communities, in some cases exceeding historic storm surges caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

During these storms, 443 people were pulled from the floodwaters during search and rescue operations. We grieve for the 51 Louisiana citizens who lost their lives during these powerful storms. Our thoughts and prayers are with those who lost loved ones.

Nearly 25,000 homes flooded in Louisiana, and many more suffered severe wind damage.

Between the two storms, over 1.5 million customers - about 70% of Louisiana's homes and businesses - lost power. The electrical infrastructure in the state was heavily damaged, leading to unprecedented outages that hindered recovery.

The economic impact on Louisiana's businesses and industries has been massive – initial estimates are as high as \$20 billion. About 80 percent of total employers in the state suffered business losses.

Damage estimates to public infrastructure, including damage to roads, schools and hospitals, are currently at more than \$1 billion.

Louisiana produces over 20% of domestic oil and over 10 percent of our country's natural gas. An early analysis estimates that eight to ten billion dollars was lost in gas and oil production in the Gulf of Mexico, and damage to oil and gas infrastructure in Louisiana has further hampered production capacity.

Louisiana's farmers and fishermen put food on the tables of families across our nation. We are one of the top producers of sugarcane and rice in the United States. We grow significant amounts of soybeans and corn. And, we produce over a quarter of our country's seafood harvests. Gustav and Ike crippled all segments of agriculture throughout Louisiana. Many of our farmers sustained uninsured losses and will not be eligible for federal aid. Our state's cattle industry, still recovering from losing over 20,000 head in 2005, suffered major wind and water damage. Our agriculture and fisheries took a major hit from these storms – at the worst time imaginable – at or near harvest for many farmers.

Louisiana's coast has been in danger for years. Between Katrina and Rita, 217 square miles of our coast was lost – an area about three times the size of Washington, DC washed away. Countless more was lost during Ike and Gustav. In addition to the rich natural environment of our wetlands, our coast protects us from the waters of the Gulf. In short, the loss of our wetlands makes us more vulnerable to storm surge.

Based on our experience during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the people of Louisiana understand that smart investments on the front end, pay huge dividends on the back end. The basic principle being, “pay me now or pay me later.”

This concept comes to life when you compare the cost to shore up our levees versus the cost to repair flood damages when inadequate levees fail. In the aftermath of Katrina and Rita, the federal government reacted by spending billions of dollars responding to these storms. A fraction of that investment in proactive initiatives would have prevented over 80 percent of the loss of life and damages associated with Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. A FEMA study concluded that every one dollar in mitigation provides four dollars in benefits.

Our state has submitted a targeted and conservative request for federal recovery funding, focused on six key areas. I have submitted the details of this request for the record, but here is a summary.

One, declaration of 100% federal cost share of all FEMA categories of assistance.

This is our state's top priority. Collectively, it is clear that costs associated with Hurricanes Gustav and Ike will exceed the 90/10 cost share threshold in Louisiana.

Two, infrastructure repair and coastal restoration.

Funding is needed to repair critical roads and bridges, to dredge navigation channels, to address housing shortages and to fund coastal restoration.

Three, agriculture and fisheries assistance.

Funding is needed to offset agriculture and fisheries products, increased production costs and damage to storage and fishing facilities.

Four, economic recovery.

To prevent long-term economic impact, Louisiana requests business recovery bridge loans; an extension of the existing GO Zone and additional allocation of GO Zone bonds; and an extension of employee retention tax credits.

Five, emergency preparedness and readiness.

To enhance disaster preparedness, local governments have prioritized prisoner transportation and evacuation planning, watercraft accessibility, enhanced mobile generator support and communications. In addition, the state is requesting funding for law enforcement equipment and infrastructure repairs.

Six, healthcare and social services disaster assistance.

Finally, our experience after Katrina and Rita tell us that Gustav and Ike victims will require special medical assistance. Louisiana seeks additional funding for Social Services Block Grants to extend programs developed for victims of the 2005 storms.

It is my hope that our requests for emergency federal assistance will be fulfilled because Americans have a stake in Louisiana's recovery. In a measurable way the strength of our nation's economy depends on it.

Domestic oil and gas that is so critical to America's energy independence is buried deep beneath the surface of the Gulf's waters off the coast of Louisiana. An intricate network of offshore oil rigs, pipelines, and refineries deliver that energy through the soft marshes of Louisiana to the American people. As harbor for three-quarters of American offshore oil and gas production, we contribute more to the nation's energy supply than Saudi Arabia. We keep the lights on across this country.

Louisiana is also home to four of the eleven busiest ports in the United States. We are the gateway -- with America's goods shipped down the Mississippi River to the world and moved up the river into the heartland.

But beyond dollars and cents, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and now Gustav and Ike provide powerful learning moments for our country. Our message is clear: we ignore these lessons at America's peril.

These storms exposed the greatest challenges our country faces on a wide range of issues.

In Louisiana, we know all too well the catastrophic consequences of neglecting our roads and bridges, coastlines and pipelines. The impact of Katrina led the Army Corps of Engineers to analyze the soundness of our nation's levees. They found that 146 levees were compromised. But they were not in Louisiana. They were all over this country -- from California to Connecticut. Louisiana, you see, is the canary in the coalmine.

In a recent analysis, reporter Steven Pearlstein compared Hurricane Katrina with the current financial crisis. He wrote:

“When we look back, we may find that this financial crisis, like Katrina, was a turning point in public perceptions and expectations of government - - about its competence in dealing with the inevitable crises that occur and its ability to take steps ahead of time to assure that the damage is limited and the most vulnerable are protected.”

When the next disaster strikes, we must be prepared with strong infrastructure and effective response. The next disaster may strike anywhere in this country.

Thank you.