

**Opening Remarks of Patrick J. Rhode, former FEMA Chief of Staff,
Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee,
February 10, 2006**

Good morning, Senators. I would like to make a very brief opening statement.

My name is Patrick Rhode. I served as Chief of Staff at the Federal Emergency Management Agency, part of the Department of Homeland Security, from April of 2003 until January of 2006. I served under both former Director Brown and the current Acting Director David Paulison.

I am happy to be appearing before you today voluntarily as you continue your important work in reviewing the collective governmental response to Hurricane Katrina and assessing possible changes in emergency management.

At the outset, I would like to observe, if I could, that Hurricane Katrina was a truly catastrophic event. It was an American tragedy, on numerous levels. The magnitude of the disaster was unlike anything we had previously faced as a nation. The storm compromised 90,000 square miles of the United States gulf coast, an area almost the size of Great Britain. On the professional level of emergency management, it was unprecedented. On the personal level, my heart went out to those

who were suffering and in need, and my heart still goes out to those who continue to deal with the aftermath of Katrina.

Many people in the emergency management community, including myself, tried to do the best they could under difficult circumstances.

The dedicated public servants working on this issue, at the federal, state, and local level, were doing their level best to help as many people as they could under the existing framework for emergency management.

As in all things, there are lessons to be learned from this experience. I hope that these hearings will produce just such learning, and lead to the creation of new legislation that can improve on the current system of disaster management. If we can apply those lessons so as to make things better for the next emergency situation, I want to do all that I can to contribute appropriately to that effort. As you know, in addition to appearing here today voluntarily, I have fully cooperated with your staffs by participating willingly in several interviews with them.

In addition, I would like respectfully to note that any statements I offer today in response to questions about how to improve the emergency management system are the opinions of one private citizen. As I sit

before you today, I am no longer a government employee but have returned to private life, with my wife and six-month old daughter. I do not, and cannot, speak for FEMA. Anything I have to offer is my own personal opinion -- for whatever the Committee may deem it to be worth -- and I want to take care to be clear that it does not reflect the official views of the agency or the federal government.

In short, I applaud the Committee for taking on the challenges of assessing what kind of support is needed for, and what changes should be made to, the country's emergency management system. I am hopeful that together we can contribute to enhancements and improvements that best assist disaster victims in the future.

With that, I welcome any questions or comments you might have.