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**STATEMENT OF
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

**Before the U.S. Senate, Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs Committee
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Good morning, Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman, and other distinguished members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today, and for your ongoing support to the Department of Homeland Security and its operations. I am honored and pleased to come before you to discuss the activities of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) relating to the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina.

Currently, I am the Director for Operations at the Department of Homeland Security, but to be clear, at the time of Hurricane Katrina, I held the position of Director of the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC). By way of background, I am a retired Brigadier General in the U.S. Marine Corps after serving for 30 years. During this time, when not in command, I was in charge of operations centers at all levels of the Marine Corps, including battalion, regiment, brigade, division and later, as the Deputy Director of Operations at the Marine Corps Headquarters, I was in charge of the Marine Corps National Command Center in Washington DC.

Following my career with the Marine Corps, I served for three and one half years as a Regional Vice President of Operations for an international corporation and then as

an adjunct consultant for the Institute for Defense Analysis working on command and control and situational awareness systems and on projects aiming to standardize and modernize joint deployable operations centers for the Department of Defense.

Office of Operations Coordination and the Homeland Security Operations Center

In May 2003, I was asked by the Department of Homeland Security to help improve the then-fledgling Homeland Security Operations Center. At that time, the operations center consisted of five or six DHS headquarters employees and approximately 100+ detailees working in austere conditions with limited capabilities. Since that time, the center has grown into one of the largest 24/7 operations centers in the United States, with about 45 Federal, State and Local agencies represented, approximately 300 personnel. Last October, the Secretary, following his Second Stage Review (2SR) of the Department and in consultation with Congress, established the Office of Operations Coordination, of which the HSOC is a core part of that organization.

The Office of Operations Coordination is responsible for coordinating operations across all DHS organizational components, for coordinating activities related to incident management, for collection and dissemination of terrorist related threat information and for providing domestic situational awareness on a daily basis. Its major components are the HSOC, future operations, current operations and incident management operations. This was an important step within the Department because it consolidated the operational efforts of what were previously shared by other DHS components. It is also important to point out that the Headquarters focus of the Office of Operations Coordination, both during Hurricane Katrina and now, is at the strategic level and therefore acts in a supporting role to assist with additional national assets, as required.

The HSOC is the primary, national-level nerve center and conduit for information flowing into and out of these events. However, it does not become decisively engaged with any single event or incident so that it might monitor several different events at one time. In the case of an incident like Hurricane Katrina, the HSOC continues to provide situational awareness to the Interagency Incident Management Group (IIMG), while the Incident Management Division (IMD), a component of the IIMG, assumes responsibility for coordinating Federal response specific to the incident.

Activities in Preparation for Hurricane Katrina

The HSOC began its involvement with Hurricane Katrina prior to the first landfall in Florida, on about August 24, 2005. About that time, the HSOC started issuing Daily Situation Reports, and we were closely monitoring the latest developments relating to the storm, especially the meteorological reports from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Over the course of Friday, August 26, the hurricane shifted its directional path and its intensity. There was a level of uncertainty as to where the storm's eye would make landfall, as well as its intensity, magnitude, and impact.

The Department knew that a significant hurricane could cause potentially grave damage to the Gulf Coast. Various reports forewarned of an impending disaster and suggested the possibility of a storm surge from Lake Pontchartrain and an overtopping of the levees.

As a result, we began to take appropriate actions. The Secretary had dispatched the FEMA Director to the area on Sunday, August 28. The President made Emergency Declarations for Louisiana (August 27), Mississippi (August 28), and Alabama (August 28), and the Interagency Incident Management Group was advised to maintain readiness

over the ensuing weekend. The HSOC was on high alert as well and was carefully monitoring the approaching storm. The Incident Management Division was also focused intently on the storm's development, in the event that the IIMG needed to be activated. The IMD's function is to coordinate the Federal response to a specific event, when an incident reaches national significance, and in that case, the IMD helps guide the efforts of the IIMG. In addition, DHS/FEMA had tactically pre-positioned significant assets in critical locations outside but near the intended areas of impact and it had initiated their National Response Coordinating Center (NRCC).

Activities in Response to Hurricane Katrina

As the eye of the storm made landfall on Monday, August 29, 2005, information from the area was understandably sparse. At that time, it was difficult to ascertain accurate ground-truth as to the extent of the damage. Our standard operating procedure is not to disturb the operations of field commander in the middle of a crisis. Instead, we relied, in large part, on the good judgment of the information-providers in the field and the NRCC to "push" relevant, pertinent information to the HSOC as things become clear.

As the day wore on, the HSOC began to receive information from a number of sources, and began to gather, sort, and verify information and reports. There were many inconsistent and uncertain reports about the extent of flooding in New Orleans and the status of the levee system. We knew a certain amount of flooding can be expected in almost any hurricane situation. Nevertheless, the HSOC alerted others to these possibilities and potential occurrences, while we were making our best efforts to verify the accuracy. We were desperately pursuing all avenues in an effort to obtain confirmed reports from knowledgeable, objective sources. It is our job at the HSOC to distill and

confirm reports. Based upon my years of experience, we should not help spread rumors or innuendo, nor should we rely on speculation or hype, and we should not react to initial or unconfirmed reports which are almost invariably lacking or incomplete.

Activities Following Landfall of Hurricane Katrina

Prior experience had shown that as the storm cleared over the next day or two, the ground-truth would begin to crystallize, and a common operational picture and more frequent and accurate reporting would emerge. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

At about this time, it became clear that the Department needed to call upon significant additional Federal resources to respond to this event. As a result, the Department began to consider a greater role for the Department of Defense (DOD). Lieutenant General Russell Honore was already “leaning forward” pro-actively and moving assets and personnel into the region. The HSOC began receiving regular situation reports from the U.S. Northern Command (NorthCom) regarding DOD’s specific deployment activities responding to Hurricane Katrina.

While the military was providing this ongoing support, the two Departments were working to ascertain the precise language of what additional support could be requested and what could be provided. DOD needed to consider and balance these priority missions in light of their other military responsibilities and also needed a clearer understanding of exactly what was being requested. This effort was an example of excellent inter-agency coordination between two large agencies working collaboratively under significant pressure.

In addition, the Secretary deployed U.S. Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen as the Deputy Principal Federal Official in New Orleans. The situational awareness and reporting vastly improved, and the response efforts began to stabilize.

Areas for Improvement

The Secretary has stated on several occasions that one of his primary goals is to improve situational awareness for such incident response efforts, and the Office of Operations Coordination, established under 2SR, is one way to foster and promote this worthy goal. Since the early days following Hurricane Katrina, the Department continues to review the things that went well and the things that warrant improvement. I am proud to report that DHS has made great strides towards improving the information flow and situational awareness for incident management.

In particular, as the Secretary noted previously, DHS has established a 6-person national reconnaissance team that can be deployed in the immediate aftermath of an incident. In this way, the Department can receive real-time reporting of the facts on the ground, and the team can help us understand the priority concerns and allocate resources accordingly. A prototype of this concept was tested during the past Super Bowl with excellent results.

In addition, Immigration and Customs Enforcement has provided 26 two-person teams from offices throughout the country which can be deployed immediately to an incident anywhere within their region and use assets to report situational awareness directly back to the HSOC. They will begin their initial training next month.

Another step is the Secretary's designation of "Principal Federal Officials in waiting." The idea is that these Principal Federal Officials will have an opportunity to

work cooperatively with State and local officials on an ongoing basis to plan and train together. In this way, we can develop and build the kinds of relationships that one needs to rely upon when an emergency strikes.

These are just some initial changes to begin to address some of the lessons we learned from Hurricane Katrina. We continue to develop our comprehensive recommendations for the Secretary, and the Department looks forward to continuing its cooperative relationship with this Committee and other stakeholders.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today, and I would be happy to answer any questions.