

**Hurricane Katrina: Recommendations for Reform
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Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman and distinguished members of the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. The Committee is to be commended for its comprehensive, in-depth, and bipartisan series of hearings held over the past six months. We have learned a great deal from both the public and private sector responses to Hurricane Katrina through these insightful hearings that are vital to informing the debate and even more importantly, the development of the nation's preparedness and response policies. The work done by this Committee and staff should serve as a model for others in addressing the tough, cross-cutting issues encompassed in homeland security and, in particular, emergency preparedness and response. We look forward to the Committee's forthcoming report on the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Once again we find ourselves evaluating and debating national preparedness policies through the lens of the most recent catastrophe. The pendulum has swung from a post 9/11 focus on terrorist attacks back to natural disasters. For months, the hearts and minds of Americans have been focused on the initial impact and tragic aftermath of Katrina in an attempt to fully understand why events unfolded as they did, and how we might avoid a repeat of this sort of scenario in the future. On the one hand, it is easy to appreciate why we are where we are: Katrina caused enormous damage to life and property and, as an enterprising and resilient people, our reaction was to channel our considerable creative energy into preventing, to the extent possible, a repeat of events. The same was true of 9/11, when we harnessed our national grief and targeted it to constructive ends, seeking to bolster our defenses against terrorism. This sense of mission was embedded into the very DNA of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

The fulcrum has shifted, and what was primarily a focus on preventing and preparing for terrorism, has given way to an equally intense focus on catastrophic natural disasters. While perfectly understandable, this is not an ideal posture for the country. To the contrary, it is an unbalanced stance and, therefore, an unstable one. What must be done at this time is to rebalance the scales, and foster a culture of preparedness that is truly all hazards and risk-based in nature.

Our national emergency response system cannot focus on one threat to the exclusion of the other. "Preparedness today will save lives tomorrow."¹ A national emergency response system that will save lives tomorrow is not an either/or proposition – either

¹ U. S. White House. *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned* (Washington, DC: 2006) p. 80, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/reports/Katrina-lessons-learned.pdf>.

natural disaster or terrorist threat. It is a system that prepares to effectively respond to the full spectrum of threats – from recurring seasonal events such as floods, hurricanes and tornadoes, to contagious disease to the multitude of CBRNE threats. We need to plan and prepare for all hazards, and build our capabilities to respond to the widest range of possible threats. Indeed, our most fundamental mission – a national duty, in fact – is to be able to act when action is needed.

To accomplish this lifesaving mission, Congress, the Administration, state and local governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector need to start with the following questions: what are the end state capabilities and capacities needed to meet the needs of their particular “customers” and how is success measured and defined? Whether it is a no-notice event or a fierce hurricane with a forty-eight hour warning of landfall, the need for robust, sustainable, scalable and agile response is a constant. The decision-making structure must not be paralyzed and, if the President or a governor turns to the cupboard in a time of crisis, he or she must not find it bare. Response is response is response is response. At the end of the day we are talking about execution and enabling those on the front lines to respond effectively. What matters is saving lives, not the color of the uniform of the men and women doing so.

The Committee has requested my thoughts on the U.S. House of Representatives Select Bipartisan Committee report² and “Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina Lessons Learned” recently released by the White House.³ In a valuable and earnest attempt to learn from past mistakes, significant time and effort has been invested in identifying what went wrong during the preparations for and response to Hurricane Katrina. Both present thoughtful analyses of the federal response effort, enumerating multiple points where the coordination and delivery of assistance either worked well or broke down. Both reports offer substantive insights for future action, which is as it should be – we can’t fight yesterday’s wars alone.

Let me take a moment to address the issue of where the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) needs to fit into this effort. There has been ongoing debate on the issue of where FEMA sits on the federal government’s organizational chart. The politically expedient “out” is to focus on FEMA at the expense of the real issues. In my humble opinion, to pull FEMA out of the DHS now and re-create it as an independent agency further obfuscates an already complicated system. It is in direct opposition to developing the all hazards emergency response system envisioned by Congress in the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-296). To have state and local governments and first responders plug into one system to respond to “bad weather” one day and another system to respond to “bad guys” the next is unrealistic and ultimately counterproductive. There is no reason to have competing systems in an environment of limited resources when capabilities and needs are the same.

² U.S. House of Representatives. Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina, *A Failure of Initiative: The Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina*. 109th Cong., 2nd sess. February 15, 2006.

³ White House. *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina Lessons Learned*.

Our problem is not one of organizational design – the requisite policy and law exists. The challenge is one of management and leadership. The future leadership of FEMA must understand that they are part of an all hazards preparedness team – that response and recovery complement preparedness and protection. FEMA supports a system of systems – our focus must be on fixing what is wrong with the four major functions originally housed within FEMA: preparedness, response, recovery, and hazard mitigation. Therefore, the debate should not center on FEMA – it must be focused on what’s needed from the perspective of the “customer” – those on the frontlines charged with the awesome responsibility of turning victims into patients and survivors. There are numerous customers with different needs: disaster victims, first responders (Emergency Medical Services (EMS), law enforcement, fire suppression, health officials, nurses, and others to name a few), state and local governments, the faith-based community, and the private sector. What they have in common is the need to receive the right “thing” (service, equipment, personnel, or relief supply) at the right time and in the right place. This requires inter- and intra-agency coordination among all levels of government and the private sector. Therefore form must follow function, with a clear chain of command, unencumbered by bureaucratic obstacles and based upon timely and effective supply chains enabling the response effort. Over the longer term, consideration might be given to integrating the response and recovery missions into the newly established Preparedness Directorate.

Recommendation #1: The national preparedness and response system must be based on end state capabilities and outcomes to support state, local, and nongovernmental and private sector customers on the front lines. The system must be driven by a culture of cooperation and coherence rather than competing equities.

As then General Dwight Eisenhower once said, “In preparation for battle I have often found plans to be useless, but planning indispensable.” That is not to say that there shouldn’t be plans – the challenge is to turn those plans (the National Response Plan (NRP), National Preparedness Goal (NPG), and corresponding state plans) into living documents. Only through unified planning, training, and exercising can the requisite capabilities and capacities be identified and developed. The NRP must be scalable, as well as flexible and agile, able to morph and adapt to new technologies, new threats, and new scenarios. We need to remember that disaster response is primarily a state and local responsibility. We need to empower those on the frontlines – state and local government officials and first responders – and translate this strategy from the 10,000 foot level all the way down to the ground. To this end and over the longer term, we should also bolster our capabilities through a National Homeland Security University as recommended in the White House report. This will foster the growth of a cadre of homeland security professionals among senior level officials within federal, state and local government, both elected and appointed.

All levels of government and private sector partners need to learn the “language” of the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and be able to be not only conversant, but fluent in NIMS. It’s not enough to be able to check off the box and say we are NIMS

compliant – we must all be speaking the same language. The bottom-line is the understanding of who has authority: where, when and to what extent. Also, there are technical challenges, pointing to the need for a robust, redundant and reliable communications infrastructure. We need to have operability, a dial tone if you will, before we can move to interoperability, a dialogue.

This Committee has also recognized the tremendous importance of integrating the private sector, its sophisticated supply chains and extensive resources, into national preparedness and response. Following Katrina, government at all levels had tremendous difficulty incorporating donations, personnel and technical expertise graciously offered, by domestic and international sources, into response efforts. As written, the NRP and NPG recognize the need to coordinate with the private sector; however, we must refocus efforts to facilitate and integrate private sector resources. Notably, the Business Roundtable has created an innovative Partnership for Disaster Relief that matches donations of personnel, technical expertise, equipment and funds to both domestic and international relief efforts. Business Executives for National Security has also undertaken efforts in this area.

Hurricane Katrina reminded us that, in the eyes of the American people, the key performance measure for emergency response is what is referred to in business as customer wait time – the length of time it takes to get the right resource to the right customer. When resources (food, housing, evacuation assistance, medical care, financial assistance, transportation, information, etc) do not reach disaster victims promptly the response mission is viewed as less than successful. We need to take a page from the private-sector playbook when it comes to designing timely and effective supply chains. Fed Ex, UPS, Wal-Mart and DHL all have nimble systems and processes in place for deploying assets quickly to meet ever-changing needs.

Similarly, the military model offers us a number of applicable operating principles. First, underlying the capability/outcomes approach, there needs to be a system based on identifying the need rather than specifying the request. Instead of asking for 30,000 MRE's to feed 10,000 people three meals a day, pursuant to the military's way of doing business, a requirements based-request would state the need to feed, however possible, those individuals. It allows for a flexible, creative response drawing on whatever assets are close at hand to extend far beyond those of governments.

A stellar performer during Hurricane Katrina response was the U.S. Coast Guard. A review of why this agency stood out as a success story provides us with a model for interagency coordination. The Coast Guard functions on a daily basis as a true, interagency joint asset – the Coast Guard “thinks purple” every day of the year.

The challenge of successfully executing interagency coordination is age-old. Although we probably should never transpose a military model into the civilian context, at least not wholesale, there is to my mind substantial merit in looking to the military context in this case. Here I refer specifically to the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 which reorganized the Department of Defense (DoD) and constituted its most significant organizational

change since the National Security Act of 1947. In essence, Goldwater-Nichols institutionalized the concept of “jointness” in the military context. From an operational and organizational perspective, the defense structure was streamlined and unified, and budgets were realigned accordingly. Over time, the positive ripple effects have been impressive as greater cohesion has yielded fruit in the form of heightened effectiveness measured, for instance, in terms of agility and responsiveness. More recently, in terms of civil support and in the spirit of an efficient and coordinated response, Northern Command (NORTHCOM) was stood up as a combatant command with operational responsibility for the Continental United States.

It seems to me that we may need a Goldwater-Nichols equivalent for the homeland context – and not only at the federal level, but also between and among the States themselves. While I would not go so far as to suggest that such change be mandated at the State level, I do think that we need to get our house in order at the federal level, so as to serve as an example for partners at the State level and beyond. Put bluntly, to the extent that the various moving parts in preparedness and response are either not working well together or are not doing so in an optimal way, we need to remedy that, because the price to be paid for not doing so is simply too high (and the costs are not simply monetary).

Recommendation #2: Regionalizing DHS in a robust way would further the twin purposes of empowering those on the front lines to act, while reserving a role for the federal government in appropriate circumstances.

Experience has shown us, time and again, that effective response cannot be micromanaged from Washington. As a practical matter the vast majority of disasters will be responded to by state and local governments, with the federal government stepping in to provide support only in unique circumstances. Therefore, it only makes sense to push decisions to the frontlines, where situational awareness is most acute and local knowledge in the broader sense is greatest. Only by marrying up that consciousness and expertise with the authority to act, do we create a solid foundation upon which to build a truly effective and integrated national system of response.

Nor should we be exchanging business cards on game day. This structure needs to be in place now, before another event, so that working relationships have not only been forged but cemented, trust has been built, and plans have been exercised, tested, and revamped according to lessons learned. A regional approach best serves these ends.

There need to be some fundamental tenets or principles guiding us as we move forward in this regard. Under a regional framework, all parties play to their strengths – and outcomes should be affected accordingly. Washington has a clear and critical role to play. When parties in the field are taking or requesting diametrically opposed measures, for instance, the matter must plainly be elevated in order to “de-conflict” plans and chart a coherent course forward. The federal presence, in the form of headquarters, is invoked for functional reasons in this system, and serves as an arbiter of last resort, just as the Founding Fathers intended.

In fact, regionalizing our national preparedness system is the very linchpin that connects all of the elements of our preparedness and response. Involvement of state and local officials and entities in the regionalization process, engages them as true partners, not simply outsiders trying to access the system.⁴ Robust regionalization works in the best interests of the States and their governors, by providing the latter with “one-stop shopping” or, if you will, a federal “bellybutton.” Not only does it offer States an all-purpose federal access point close to home, that federal point of contact is also steeped, and therefore well-versed, in the specifics and particularities of the relevant area. A federal leader in the field, with authority to access federal interagency resources to support preparedness and response capacities at the state and local levels, provides distinct advantages. First, this individual would be a known quantity to state and local officials. He or she could provide the DHS Secretary with important feedback and insight into the progress being made to advance preparedness efforts. They would be able to draw not only upon DHS-wide assets during a heightened alert or response, but to also access federal government wide resources. Additionally, this pool of key officials would provide knowledgeable and experienced candidates to serve as the Principal Federal Official (PFO) during future crises.

As Congress and the Administration consider regionalization, strong consideration needs to be given to how these regions link to DoD and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) assets. Consideration should be given to co-locating field components of DoD with regional components of DHS, or that DoD always have designated a “ready brigade” within each DHS region that can assist with response. I am not suggesting that DHS regional offices control DoD assets, but that they forge strong partnerships at the regional level before disaster strikes. Given DoD’s planning, logistical and transportation experience, there is much that DHS, and state and local governments can learn and incorporate from the DoD culture. With regard to HHS, consideration should also be given to co-locating Regional Health Administrators with DoD and DHS. This example is only illustrative, but is particularly important as it pertains to the management and deployment of the Strategic National Stockpile and the National Disaster Medical System (NDMS).

In order to operationalize a muscular regionalized system, however, we need a comprehensive inventory of assets at all levels of government as well as regionally. Without that, we will not achieve lift-off. All capacities must be accounted for, including equipment and personnel. Moreover, interstate agreements must be developed and concluded ahead of time, to ensure access to these assets (both at the level of principle and in terms of the actual mechanics), in time of need. Such a framework institutionalizes, and has embedded in it, the sound logic and practice that States and regional assets be marshaled and mobilized efficiently, at least to the extent possible in a given scenario, before drawing down on the federal stock.

Placing such a system in larger context, we must also have the ability to prioritize funding across multiple jurisdictions. Not every jurisdiction will require all of the same

⁴ Major Chris Hornbarger, Combating Terrorism Center, United States Military Academy.

“hardware.” To succeed, the prevailing mindset in the Nation must be one of cooperation and complementarity, rather than contest and competition between and among jurisdictions. Undoubtedly, tough choices will arise as we try, through the Office of Grants and Training, to put our money – finite financial resources, after all – where our mouth is. But we cannot allow parochialism to trump here. The mission is simply too important to allow that to happen. And there is reason for encouragement: we have done it before. In fighting wildfires in the West, for example, the federal and State levels have worked together virtually seamlessly, with impressive results. I am confident that we can, and will, transpose that model to the challenging context before us today. No further reminders of the fact that we are all in this together are necessary. Neither hurricanes nor terrorists know respect for State borders. Accordingly we must think of our assets, infrastructure, and vulnerabilities and so on, as shared elements – across State lines, into regions, and beyond.

Recommendation #3: Building a culture of preparedness starts with individuals and communities.

The White House plans to undertake 11 specific activities before June 1st and the start of hurricane season. Notably, there is no activity to engage the public in hurricane-prone states in these efforts. Time and again, research has confirmed that only a fraction of the American public has taken the basic steps to prepare themselves and their families to be independent of community and local government help for the first few days following a disaster or attack. Timing is everything – with the impact of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma fresh in the minds of Gulf Coast families, the willingness to take action may be greater than before.

Experience indicates that empowering the public to know how to care for themselves and their families in the first few days following disaster will lessen the burdens upon a first response community and the 9-1-1 system. Consistent with these efforts, government officials at all levels need to recalibrate and manage public expectations about what can realistically be expected in terms of services and support during the immediate hours and days following a catastrophic disaster.

The recommendations included in the White House report concerning Citizen and Community Preparedness⁵ are, for the most part, commendable, especially the efforts to build a baseline of needed skills, capabilities and tools to train, exercise and engage the public and their communities in local preparedness efforts. We would caution however, against interpreting the lesson learned on Citizen and Community Preparedness to mean that it is necessary to focus limited time and resources on combining existing private and public sector campaigns into a “single national campaign.”⁶ Research done to better understand the barriers to public action and to identify strategies to motivate citizens to become better prepared, indicates that if these messages are to be effective they need to be conveyed by trusted messengers targeted to reach different communities – it is not a matter of “one size fits all.” This is especially true when it comes to vulnerable

⁵ White House. *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*.

⁶ Ibid, p. 80

populations including the disabled and lower income families who are at greater risk and may not have the necessary wherewithal to prepare. The National Organization on Disabilities is doing excellent work through its “Emergency Preparedness Initiative,” targeted to meeting the needs of the disabled community.

At the same time, innovation and best practices should be recognized and rewarded. Consideration should be given to establishing a Baldrige-like award to commend States, localities, NGOs and private sector entities. Recommended by the DHS Homeland Security Advisory Council, such an award would also serve as an incentive to encourage others to adopt similar exemplary practices and processes.

Conclusion

Policy and strategy without resources is rhetoric. The process of building capabilities and capacities at all levels will require sustained funding, leadership and political will to provide the requisite funding. Congress should act to make regions a reality by amending the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (P.L. 107-296). Even with resolve, we cannot accomplish everything overnight. We will have to prioritize our aims and objectives over the shorter and longer term, bearing in mind the nature and probability of the threats at hand, using an all hazards, risk-based approach. As we move forward, we must further define how we measure success, remembering that what gets measured gets done. We will need to keep our eye on the ball and make sure that we are measuring what matters.

In closing, I would like to recognize the Committee and their staff for their professionalism, and The George Washington University Homeland Security Policy Institute extend an open offer to continue to work closely with them. Thank you and I would be pleased to try to answer any questions you may have.