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“2011 Severe Spring Storms: Picking up the pieces and building back stronger.”

**Testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery & Intergovernmental Affairs
U.S. Senate Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs Committee**

Good afternoon Chairman Pryor and Ranking Member Paul and distinguished members of the committee. My name is Mike Womack and I am the executive director of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency. I have been a senior employee of the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency since 2002 and have observed the progression of my state’s ability to respond to large scale events as well as the development of the federal government’s response capability.

As you are well aware, the state of Mississippi was greatly impacted by tornadoes, severe storms and flooding that occurred in April and Mississippi River flooding that occurred in May. Mississippi received two federal major disaster declarations and an emergency declaration for those events. Nearly 11,500 households requested assistance from FEMA; more than 2,750 families received housing assistance grants and more than 300 homes were deemed destroyed by FEMA Individual Assistance inspections. Individual assistance grants for both disasters total more than \$18.8 million.

I will briefly summarize the response to these events and primarily, my focus will be on how Mississippi has and continues to reduce property damage and reduce the risk to the lives of our citizens.

FEDERAL PREPAREDNESS GRANTS HAVE BEEN EFFECTIVE

First, I believe much of the Homeland Security and Emergency Management grant funds provided to state and local governments have been well spent as demonstrated by the excellent response to the recent storms and tornadoes. I personally have observed the deployment of responders trained and equipped by both the State Homeland Security Program and the Emergency Management Performance Grant in Mississippi. I have read reports and discussed with other state directors of emergency management concerning how well the teams of state and local responders met the challenges during the last four months.

The concepts of the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System have consistently proven to be an excellent framework for managing emergencies involving governments at all levels as well as the private sector. Let me emphasize that the response to all of these events this spring went well because of the funding sources and training that were made available to state and local first responders. Anyone who says that grant funds should not be

provided to rural areas or states need to study just how these areas were able to handle their response activities and save lives due to grant funding.

Second, the work of FEMA during the response was exceptional. Due to the devastation in the state of Alabama and ongoing disasters in Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina, FEMA Region X, from the Pacific Northwest, was tasked with supporting Mississippi. FEMA Region IV Federal Officer Terry Quarles led the group and provided strong leadership and showed a complete understanding of FEMA's role in support of state and local governments. The coordination between key federal agencies, FEMA, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Weather Service and U.S. Geological Survey was also outstanding.

RECOVERY EFFORTS THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT

The recovery efforts lead by FEMA have been very good overall, but I do feel that there are some areas that need improvement.

The Individual Assistance Preliminary Damage Assessment process was swift and efficient and showed great flexibility by the FEMA staff. The home inspection and Individual Assistance grant disbursement process for the vast majority of the disaster survivors was excellent as well.

However, I feel that an area that can be improved is coordination between the Individual Assistance program, the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program and the National Flood Insurance Program's Substantial Damage Estimation program.

By better coordination between these programs, disaster survivors can be much better served and overall disaster cost can be reduced by eliminating repetitive flood loss structures. I have addressed my ideas to key members of FEMA's leadership: Associate Administrator, Response and Recovery – William “Bill” L. Carwile, III, Deputy Associate Administrator, Response and Recovery - Elizabeth Zimmerman, and Assistant Administrator, Recovery - Deborah Ingram and have scheduled follow up meetings to communicate my thoughts. I want to emphasize that all three of these senior FEMA leaders have been very receptive and open to my suggestions and I commend them for their willingness to listen to suggestions on ways to potentially improve the disaster assistance process. I will note, however, that some of the proposals would require changes to current laws or regulations.

MITIGATION FUNDS HELP PREPARE OUR COMMUNITIES

In the last 10 years, Mississippi has received 21 federal disaster declarations including Hurricane Katrina. Thanks to the leadership of both Governor Haley Barbour and our local elected officials, we have truly rebuilt devastated areas both better and safer. We in Mississippi have learned the importance of using Hazard Mitigation Grant Program funds to help prepare our residents for the potential impact that future storms and disasters may have on their lives.

After Hurricane Katrina, Governor Barbour established the following priorities and funding levels for Hazard Mitigation projects resulting from that disaster. Funding levels fluctuated as jurisdictions established their critical needs and submitted applications based upon those needs:

- Hazard Mitigation Planning: \$2.6 million.
- Retrofit of critical and essential facilities: \$55.5 million.
 - Upgrade critical and essential public facilities to IBC 2003 or to FEMA 361 standards.
- Flood damaged structures in SFHA: \$21 million.
 - Acquisition and demolition, relocation, elevation, mitigation reconstruction and drainage improvements.
- Codes and standards: \$1 million.
 - Adopt or upgrade building codes, hire building officials & inspectors, and training & certification.
- Group and individual shelters (FEMA 320): \$32 million.
- General population safe rooms and upgrades (FEMA 361): \$150 million.
- Warning systems: \$5 million.
- Generators for critical facilities: \$24 million
 - Dedicated generators for large facilities such as general population shelters and emergency operation centers.
 - Trailer-mounted generators for use at multiple locations when larger units are not required.
- Coastal wind retrofit for residential structures: \$20 million.

Type of Safe Room	Structure Standards	Number of Projects Funded	Shelter Capacities
Residential <i>Built into a home's structure; interior or exterior above or in ground.</i>	FEMA 320	6,422	16 or fewer persons per shelter
Small Community	FEMA 320	236	16 or fewer per shelter
Large Community	FEMA 361	3 completed	8,213 among the three completed shelters.
		44 in progress	30,450 among the 44 shelters when completed.

Large Community First Responder <i>Designated for use by first responders.</i>	FEMA 361	2 completed 7 in progress	630 between the two completed shelters. 860 in the seven shelters.
Large Special Medical Needs	FEMA 361	1 in progress	400 when completed.

One of these programs that we are extremely proud of in Mississippi is our “A Safe Place To Go” initiative that reimburses residents or local governments for a portion of costs to install a safe room or storm shelter. This program began after a series of tornadoes struck the state in 2001 that killed eight people. Since 2001, MEMA has administered HMPG funds to partially reimburse installation costs for more than 6,400 safe rooms or storm shelters for residential structures. The program has become so popular, that since it was announced following our tornado this spring, more than 5,500 people have applied.

Senators, this program saves lives. Take the story of Reverend Coy Fulgham of Eupora, Mississippi who installed a safe room near his family home in November of 2010 through the “A Safe Place to Go” program. Just six months later on April 26, an EF 2 tornado with winds of 120 miles per hour tore through his neighborhood damaging his home and destroying his son’s home. Thanks to the family heeding weather warnings, seven members of the Fulgham family took refuge in their new safe room. Thanks to their participation in “A Safe Place to Go,” not one member of the Fulgham family was injured.

While the use of HMGP funds were a major focus of the state’s mitigation efforts, allocation of other federal grant funds tied to stronger standards as well as increased adoption of codes have also made Mississippi safer and more resilient. All construction of new government facilities utilizing Community Development Block Grant funds required that jurisdictions adopt International Building Code standards.

Many county and municipal governments have adopted IBC standards without receiving supplemental federal funding. Recently, I discussed the adoption of building codes with a local official representing a northwest Mississippi county that has a high potential to receive damage from an earthquake. He was proud of his county for adopting IBC 2006 standards because a few years earlier, the leadership of that particular jurisdiction was, unfortunately, not willing to even acknowledge the potential of earthquake damage.

While we plan for repairing and rebuilding following our current disasters, we have already begun to incorporate the lessons from previous disasters to rebuild better. Already, we have offered our safe room grants program to the counties impacted by the recent tornadoes and severe storms, with priority going to those households that had homes destroyed. In the counties impacted by the record flooding on the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers, we have begun the process

of helping families elevate their homes as they rebuild, if practical, and if not, help them relocate with acquisition projects. The local officials have demonstrated the willingness to enforce flood plain ordinances, therefore making their communities safer.

As I have previously stated, Mississippi has seen many disasters in the last decade - some catastrophic on the local level and one catastrophic to the state, region and nation. We Mississippians are proud to say that we have used our resources and those provided to us by the nation to rebuild by using proven mitigation and stringent code standard measures to build a much safer and resilient state.