

STATEMENT OF **JOE M. ALLBAUGH**,
NOMINATED TO BE DIRECTOR,
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIR'S,
UNITED STATES SENATE

February 13, 2001

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your gracious introduction, as well as Senator Gramm and Senator Hutchison for their kind words on my behalf.

Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, I appreciate the time that you and your staffs have spent with me in preparation for this hearing. I am pleased that we are developing working relationships that will serve the country well, both in dealing with future emergencies and in setting emergency management policies.

I am deeply honored and privileged by the President's nomination of me to be the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. I will do my best to justify the trust that he placed in me to lead an agency of such importance to the health and safety of our fellow citizens. This opportunity I which represents the best in America's tradition of helping others in need -- is especially humbling for me. To join ranks with the thousands of FEMA employees and reservists, and the countless State and local emergency response professionals and volunteers, is an honor and a privilege. There can be no higher calling than providing speedy, appropriate help to our fellow citizens in their times of need.

I plan to work closely with the President and his staff to ensure that Federal response to natural and national disasters is always quick and sure, and that FEMA has the resources it needs to meet its challenges.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my predecessor, James Lee Witt, for his dedication and tireless work at FEMA.

I have seen the work of FEMA first hand. During my entire tenure as then_ Governor Bush's Chief of Staff, I kept a close watch on disasters and emergencies within the State of Texas, helped coordinate relief efforts for nine Presidential disaster or emergency declarations, and also worked to ensure that the State was prepared to respond to disasters. My number one priority during that time was to manage and monitor the State's rapid response to disasters and emergencies. For example, the devastating floods in October-November 1998 caused nearly thirty deaths and an estimated \$500 million of property damage in south Texas. Thirty-four hundred homes were completely destroyed, and another 13,000 homes were damaged. I remember spending an entire Sunday flying over the flooded Guadalupe, San Antonio, and San Marcos rivers to assess the damage. The normally tranquil Guadalupe River had spread from its usual width of 150 feet to become six miles wide at some points. I worked with the Texas Emergency Management Council at the state Emergency Operations Center to determine the extent of the destruction and respond to this disaster. The Federal and State governments

ultimately provided over \$160 million in disaster relief assistance. But the true measure of the response was in the grateful eyes and words of those Texans affected by this disaster.

Another disaster that had a profound effect on me was the May 1997 tornado that struck the town of Jarrell, Texas. This tornado was among the top one percent of tornadoes in strength and had effects similar to an atomic blast, with winds above 300 miles per hour. It killed 27 people, leveled 50 homes, and even scraped asphalt off the roadway, ultimately causing between ten and twenty million dollars in damage. I was involved in coordinating Texas' efforts to respond to the tornado, including those of the National Guard. As always, volunteer groups - including the Salvation Army, the Red Cross, church groups, and local businesses and neighbors--played a key relief role.

As a result of these and other disasters and emergencies we addressed while I was Chief of Staff, I learned the importance of getting assistance in as quickly as possible, and responding with all available government and community resources. In Texas, I played a role as a 'consumer' of FEMA's emergency management programs, and I have a special understanding of the importance of close coordination between Federal and State governments. If confirmed, I will work hard to strengthen the relationships between FEMA and State and local governments.

I know from personal experience the particularly central role Governors play in emergency management efforts, and I was fortunate to develop close relationships with the vast majority of our country's governors during my time as then-Governor Bush's Chief of Staff. Among my most important goals at FEMA will be to enhance its responsiveness to governors and local leaders, because I know and understand the critical importance of proper, immediate response in such times of need.

If I am confirmed, I will pay special attention to volunteers and non-governmental organizations responding to disasters. Fire fighters are frequently the first to respond to a disaster. Faith-based groups like the Salvation Army play critical roles in disaster relief, as does the American Red Cross. And the individual actions of neighbors helping neighbors by donating time, food, and clothing should never be underestimated. These are the people who make a vital difference, without any expectation of thanks or recognition.

Taking my lead from Congress' enactment of the 2000 Stafford Act amendments, I plan to focus on implementing pre-disaster mitigation programs that encourage the building of disaster resistant communities. FEMA has made solid progress in this area, but more can be done to limit the human and financial toll of disasters. I intend to place special emphasis on enhancing the capabilities of the U.S. Fire Administration, which I believe has a new opportunity to make a real difference in the firefighting community. I will also work with the Federal Insurance Administration, which is the single national source of flood insurance, to implement policies that will both encourage the purchase of flood insurance and reduce the costs of flood-related disasters.

I want to assure the Committee that, if confirmed, I will take great care to foster and support the professional, experienced workforce at FEMA. FEMA has many dedicated, long-term employees, who perform their duties day-in and day-out, steadily and competently. They are truly the "Cal Ripkens" of the Federal Government who get the job done when it matters.

If I am confirmed as Director, with your support I will make FEMA an even more vital national resource in preparing for and responding to all types of disasters, and an agency that will be an international model for disaster response, mitigation, and recovery. I consider myself a "doer," and I view FEMA as a "doing" agency. I think the fit is a good one. I look forward to the opportunity to work with you and other Members of Congress on the many issues of concern to you and your constituents.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and for the time you have given me. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.