

## TESTIMONY

Testimony of the

### **Honorable Nickie Monica, Parish President St. John the Baptist Parish, Louisiana**

Joint Committee Hearing

Senate Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management,  
Restructuring and District of Columbia and the

Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee

September 24, 2002

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. I am Nickie Monica, Parish President of St. John the Baptist Parish, a residential suburb of the New Orleans Metropolitan Area. St. John Parish's population is nearing fifty thousand residents and it is one of the fastest growing areas of Louisiana. St. John Parish is located on the Mississippi River which has a substantial industrial job base that has brought significant economic development and higher than average wages for its residents.

It is indeed a pleasure to appear before your subcommittee to shed some light on a growing local problem that has national implications. Just a short time ago, mosquitoes, like any other insect, were just another nuisance that interrupted the outdoor life of residents who live a tropical climate. Unfortunately, it has now been thrust into the national media because it has become a serious health hazard with devastating consequences to many families around this country, including those in my state of Louisiana. Fortunately, Mr. Chairman, St. John Parish has not yet experienced a human fatality--something I believe is due to our proactive measures to combat this growing public menace. However, if a more prominent effort is not put forth, I am fearful that it is just a matter of time before tragedy strikes home.

St. John the Baptist Parish instituted its own regimented mosquito program over a decade ago as an added quality of life issue for its residents. The program is run by professional and licensed entomologists who are experienced in the field of surveillance and treatment. Our spraying and treatment program experienced no problems until the West Nile Virus began approaching Louisiana from the East Coast states. We immediately allocated thirty percent more funding to the spraying program without additional surveillance. We also began a public awareness campaign to encourage residents to minimize the threat of larvae hatchings around homes and businesses. Additionally, the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals instituted statewide Public Service Announcements reminding all residents to be vigilant and lessen the threat of infection. In my opinion, this has been effective in itself.

Even though St. John the Baptist Parish has an adequate control program in place, our financial ability to continue to fight over a sustained period of time is practically exhausted. We all know this problem is not going away. The question is how best to "fight and fund" an effective program. The fact that parishes and cities that do have programs also have West Nile virus is of a great concern. Mr. Chairman, I know my own parish and state best and have thoughts on how to provide a remedy and abate danger. We now have to look to the experts to tell us what is the best protocol that can be implemented statewide. It is definitely more than a local problem. It is a national and state health concern, and the federal government does need to play a major role in "fighting and funding." Of course, any federal program must be consistent statewide in

order to maximize effective abatement efforts.

Mr. Chairman, I also, want to thank the Louisiana Congressional Delegation and the United States Congress for their efforts to assist Louisiana and the rest of the affected areas of the country in this effort. For example, further federal assistance should immediately begin to provide rapid processing of bird and mosquito specimens submitted for virus testing, and that would be made possible by the Mosquito Abatement for Safety and Health Act (S.2935) as introduced by Senators Breaux and Landrieu. The legislation could allow state and local governments to react more rapidly by providing funding to existing programs and states. Too much time has been lost in reporting results that could further direct control efforts. The point of surveillance is to detect the virus before it spreads to the human population; when weeks are required to report results the advantage of an early warning system is lost. Consequently, immediate preparation and funding are needed to allow state laboratories to continue testing dead birds submitted by citizens even after the virus activity has been detected in a particular parish. The additional data is vital in determining the exact location of the virus, which, in turn, allows a more direct assignment of abatement resources.

The Congress should also continue emergency funding for expanded surveillance, for testing and for state laboratories, which will play a role in early detection of the virus. My parish needs assurances that emergency supplemental funds will be available for additional mosquito control efforts should West Nile or any other mosquito-borne disease require a response beyond our local capabilities. This becomes particularly important when the disease is coupled with storms or man-made catastrophes that stretch available resources beyond their limits.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, this concludes my testimony. It was indeed a pleasure to be able to convey my thoughts on an important issue and a growing national health problem that will require a unified effort to combat. I want to thank each of you for your participation and am available to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

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