

Prepared Statement of Colonel Terry Ebbert
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As an introduction, I am Col. Terry J. Ebbert, USMC (Ret) and I currently serve as the Director of Homeland Security & Public Safety for the City of New Orleans. In this position I have the leadership responsibility for the Police Department, Fire Department, Emergency Medical Service and the Office of Emergency Management. I have spent my adult life serving the citizens of our nation and the City of New Orleans. I want to thank you for the invitation to testify before the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the opportunity to assist your committee and the nation in improving our capability to respond to catastrophic incidents. Katrina was a natural disaster which overwhelmed operational capabilities, resources and civil infrastructure at the Local, State and Federal level. Gone are homes, families, businesses, lives, and the unique lifestyle of Southeast Louisiana. Left behind to build the foundation for a future New Orleans is a city with little money or revenue, a crippled criminal justice system, an impaired levee protection system, lack of housing for fifty percent (50%) of its citizens, and healthcare system clinging to life. I have lived with the beast Katrina for the last five months, but I have also been blessed with the opportunity to work with many of the finest first responders anywhere in the world.

It is clear the nation needs to review Katrina planning, response and recovery at every level to look at our organizations with intent to increase capability and compatibility. Katrina was an act of nature and the impact was localized to a small population region of the United States. The next act could be a manmade act of

terrorism. I believe our preparation and integrated joint responses at must improve.

The four parishes of Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines and St. Bernard have been formed into Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) Region One for joint planning, training and exercising of the Department of Homeland Security defined events. This includes WMD, all acts of terrorism and natural disasters. Given the facts of our location on the gulf coast and being an island completely surrounded by water, and limited egress routes New Orleans, and our surrounding partners, dedicated extensive time and effort in planning for Hurricanes. The foundation of our efforts has been to develop effective evacuation plans. This is a challenge due to the limited time we have after a storm enters the Gulf, limited highways and a large population with an anti-evacuation mentality. Driven by model predictions of potential deaths in excess of 12,000, we worked hard with our regional and state partners to develop a plan and educate our citizens on its execution. We worked to refine this plan after storms over the last two years. One of the lost success stories is the evacuation in advance of Katrina. This highly complex joint plan moved over 1.2 million people and saved over 10,000 lives. This was a two state, eight parish effort, which included multiple law enforcement agencies, emergency planning offices, local media and volunteer organizations. The continued improvement of this plan is the foundation of future Hurricane planning in New Orleans. We are currently reviewing the lessons learned and will update our plans and educate our citizens:

Goal 1: Is to provide greater support to citizens who need special assistance.

Goal 2: Create and maintain an environment where the decision to evacuate becomes more desirable than remaining behind.

Goal 3: Implement measures to greatly enhance the security of city resources.

I have two specific recommendations for federal action which would improve the National capability for mass evacuation and sheltering:

1. Task AMTRAK to develop and maintain the capability to evacuate 5,000 special needs citizens from any metropolitan area in the case of a declared National Emergency.
2. Identify regional military bases undergoing BRAC closure and convert them to National Shelters capable of housing at least 200,000 citizens. They could be activated through a joint USNORTHCOM and FEMA command.

Faced with the knowledge that we would be left with citizens without the ability to evacuate we worked to develop a “Refuge of Last Resort” for both citizens with special needs, citizens without transportation, and for those who recognized the serious nature of the storm. This plan was designed to begin after contra flow evacuation was shut down and curfew imposed on the city. Our plan utilized Regional Transit Authority (RTA) buses, moving throughout the city, picking up citizens at preestablished checkpoints and transporting them to the Superdome. All citizens were thoroughly searched by National Guard troops upon entering the dome. Security was provided by both the National Guard and the New Orleans Police Department. The command of the Superdome remained with the NOPD. This refuge was not designed or intended to be a shelter, but it was created to ensure that citizens lived through the storm. As planners we recognized that in a major CAT 4/5 storm we would lose power, sewer/water, and further evacuation with federal assets would be required. The planning window for this relief was response within 48 hours. For all the difficulties, this plan was a success. Many of the citizens in the dome would have become the predicted 12,000 deaths.

Much has been discussed about relief response after the storm. I can assure you this was a very difficult seven days. I witnessed the best of human valor and the worst of human nature, but I want to state that I find no fault with any official, but rather a National Response Plan and a FEMA organization totally overwhelmed by the magnitude of the disaster. This storm did not fit into the nice little neat book of administrative regulations during a huge time sensitive operational response. I believe we must:

1. Recognize that an administrative organization (FEMA), built around part time contractors, has no operational capability to control large scale emergency response. It needs to concentrate on recovery operations.
2. Find a way to immediately utilize the only organization with the leadership, command and control capability, logistics movement centers, equipment and training to accomplish large scale response—The Department of Defense. A standing joint staff should be established as a mission of USNORTHCOM.
3. Develop prepackaged capability for communication, food, water, fuel, medical and other vital supplies.
4. Ensure early relief efforts are PUSH rather than PULL.

This is the greatest nation on earth and I know we can do better. I am dedicated to working together with our state and federal partners to ensure that we do get better.

Interoperable Communications

The State of Louisiana has for some time recognized the need for statewide communications interoperability; however, the austere fiscal environment, the challenges of multiple technologies and support through the legislative process has prevented real progress toward interoperability. Regionally, the City of New Orleans and the parishes of Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines have undertaken a project, supported by a Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Grant, to establish communications

interoperability within the region; however, the project was eighteen months from completion when Hurricane Katrina struck.

Though we are working diligently to restore voice radio communications, it has not been fully restored to pre-storm levels. Attempting to move toward regional and statewide interoperability, the State has installed 700 MHz antennas and repeaters; however, FEMA has denied \$25 million funding required for subscriber radios, which are needed in order to take advantage of the state architecture and tower sites. From an interoperability perspective, we are worse today than we were before the storm.

The multiple communications and communications interoperability problems encountered during and after Hurricane Katrina, demonstrate the absolute necessity for the establishment of national standards for public safety radio systems, the streamlining of their acquisition and federal funding to acquire those systems. Experience has shown that, in a catastrophic event of this magnitude, not only must you be totally prepared to communicate at the regional level but you must also be capable of communicating with agencies providing mutual aid from across the entire county. Standardization must apply not only to the spectrum and type radio but also to the types of batteries and other associated collateral equipment. The acquisition of communications equipment should be streamlined so that local agencies can purchase equipment directly from predetermined sources or schedules similar to those currently used by the General Services Administration or Defense Logistics Agency.

As a comparison, company commanders in Iraq are not responsible for research and development of their radio system. They are responsible for training, maintaining, and operating their system. Communications for local first responders needs to be

handled in the same manner. We need Congressional assistance to ensure we receive the \$25 million needed for Region 1 interoperability prior to 1 June.

I want to give public thanks to Admiral Thad Allen, General Russell Honore, Admiral Robert Duncan, Captain Tom Atkin, General William Caldwell and his magnificent warriors from the 82nd Airborne Division and the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) and the other Federal Law Enforcement officials. The only question they ever asked was, “What do you need and want?” America is blessed and lucky to have such leadership and I am privileged to have been given the opportunity to have walked beside them.

I can only reflect on Katrina and her destruction. My concern is to the future and my responsibility to the Mayor and citizens of New Orleans. I must continue to learn and hold myself accountable. We are currently looking down the gun barrel of the 2006 Hurricane season due to begin 1 June. With another projected “Super Storm” season ahead we need your support to insure the survival of our great city. Thank you very much Madam Chairman and Committee members.