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THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

February 23, 2006

The President of the United States
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Pursuant to your direction, I most respectfully submit for your consideration: *The Federal Response to Hurricane Katrina: Lessons Learned*.

You often remind us that your most solemn obligation as President is to protect the American people. And every day and night, millions of men and women throughout the Federal government—both civilian and military—work to achieve that objective. Given the dangerous world in which we live, they do an outstanding job.

Despite all we do, however, Hurricane Katrina was a deadly reminder that we can and must do better, and we will. This is the first and foremost lesson we learned from the death and devastation caused by our country's most destructive natural disaster: No matter how prepared we think we are, we must work every day to improve.

When you addressed the Nation from Jackson Square, New Orleans, on the evening of September 15, 2005, you ordered a comprehensive review of the Federal response to Hurricane Katrina so we as a Nation could make the necessary changes to be "better prepared for any challenge of nature or act of evil men that could threaten our people." At your direction, we assembled a team of experienced professionals dedicated to this mission. In addition, we enjoyed a tremendous partnership with each of your Cabinet Secretaries; without their commitment to this process the Report would not have been possible.

As part of the review, we visited the hurricane-ravaged Gulf Coast during mid November 2005. We met with government officials, business and community leaders, and volunteers amidst the rubble of what had been their homes, schools, and places of worship. Their courage and fortitude in the face of tragedy was inspirational. And while we were determined to learn the lessons to improve our future disaster response, it was clear that for residents of the Gulf Coast, survival and hope still came a day at a time. We were struck by the decency and compassion of those we met and moved by their continuing emotion and pain. As you know, it is hard for those who have not witnessed first hand the hurricane's destruction and its human toll to fully comprehend the importance of your charge that we prepare to respond more effectively to our fellow citizens in their times of greatest need.

This Report then is a tribute to those who have served and those who have suffered. We remember those who lost their lives and all still affected by this tragedy. Though we can never replace their unfathomable losses, we have an obligation to continue helping those still suffering to recover and rebuild their lives.

Though there will be tragedies we cannot prevent, we can improve our preparedness and response to reduce future loss and preserve life. And while we will work diligently to implement immediate improvements, it is important to recognize that the true transformation envisioned in this Report will require a sustained commitment over time by the Federal government as well as by State and local governments that have essential duties in responding to disasters. The Report and recommendations are submitted in the hope of ensuring that the harsh lessons of Hurricane Katrina need never be learned again.

Thank you for the privilege and the honor of leading this review.

Sincerely,

Frances Fragos Townsend
Assistant to the President for Homeland Security
and Counterterrorism