

Summary of Hearings on Hurricane Katrina (2-8-06)

- [February 2, 2006](#): Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: The Role of the Governors in Managing the Catastrophe"
- [January 24, 2006](#): Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise"
- [December 8, 2005](#): Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: Perspectives of FEMA's Operations Professionals"
- [November 17, 2005](#): Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Hearing to Evaluate the Degree to which the Preliminary Findings on the Failure of the Levees are Being Incorporated into the Restoration of Hurricane Protection
- [November 9, 2005](#): Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Hearing on a Comprehensive and Integrated Approach to meet the Water Resources Needs in the Wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
- [November 3, 2005](#): Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: Why Did the Levees Fail?"
- [November 2, 2005](#): Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Hearing on Hurricane Katrina Response
- [October 27, 2005](#): House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Hearing on "Expert Views On Hurricane And Flood Protection And Water Resources Planning For A Rebuilt Gulf Coast" Part II
- [October 20, 2005](#): House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment, Hearing on "Expert Views On Hurricane And Flood Protection And Water Resources Planning For A Rebuilt Gulf Coast" Part I
- [October 19, 2005](#): House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina, Hearing to review hurricane relief response, focusing on the role of the Homeland Security Department
- [October 18, 2005](#): House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittees on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, and on Water Resources and Environment, Joint Hearing on "A Vision and Strategy for Rebuilding New Orleans".
- [October 7, 2005](#): House Science Committee, Hearing on NOAA Hurricane Forecasting
- [October 6, 2005](#): Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: How is FEMA performing its mission at this stage of recovery"
- [September 29, 2005](#): House Energy and Commerce Committee, Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: Assessing the Current Environmental Status."
- [September 27, 2005](#): House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina, Hearing on "Katrina: The Role of the Federal Emergency Management Agency."

- [September 20, 2005](#): Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, Disaster Prevention and Prediction Subcommittee, Hearing on "The Lifesaving Role of Accurate Hurricane Prediction"
- [September 22, 2005](#): House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina, Hearing on "Predicting Hurricanes: What We Knew About Katrina and When"
- [September 15, 2005](#): House Government Reform Committee, Hearing on "Back to the Drawing Board: A First Look at Lessons Learned From Katrina."
- [September 14, 2005](#): Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, Hearing on "Recovering from Katrina: The Next Phase"

Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: The Role of the Governors in Managing the Catastrophe"

February 2, 2006

Witnesses:

The Honorable Haley Barbour, Governor, State of Mississippi

The Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Governor, State of Louisiana

On February 2, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee continued its series of hearings on Hurricane Katrina with an investigation of the responsibilities of the Louisiana and Mississippi governors before, during, and after the disaster. Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) opened the hearing by commenting on the critical role of state governors as a "bridge between local knowledge and needs, and federal expertise and resources." "The Governor's influence cannot be overestimated in times of catastrophe," she said. Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) cited "failures of government at all levels" in his opening statement.

In their testimony, both Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour and Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco urged Congress to focus on improvements to temporary housing problems. "The current near-sole reliance on travel trailers is inadequate for meeting a huge need such as Katrina created," Barbour stated. Governor Blanco also focused on statewide reforms currently being undertaken to prepare for the upcoming hurricane season. "We did the best we could under the circumstances. We have to do better," she said.

The senators raised difficult questions for Governor Blanco about the evacuation of hospitals and nursing homes. Senator Collins cited an earlier statement by the Louisiana Secretary of Transportation that "we have done nothing to fulfill this responsibility" of ensuring transportation for hospital residents. "How can you say this morning, 'We did the best we can?'" Collins asked. Blanco responded that "the nursing homes all had evacuation plans that they were expected to follow." She also commented on the time and difficulty involved in evacuating "this delicate population." When asked how Mississippi dealt with this problem, Governor Barbour responded frankly, saying "We just make them evacuate."

The hearing ended with the two governors agreeing that the most important reform to be tackled at the state level was the development of an interoperable communication system that could survive a storm of Katrina's magnitude. "If you can't communicate, you can't coordinate," Blanco said.

For the full text of statements made at the hearing, [click here](#).

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Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise"

January 24, 2006

Witnesses:

Wayne Fairley, Chief, Response Operation Branch, Response and Recovery Division, FEMA Region VI
Sean E. Fontenot, Former Chief, Planning Division, Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Jesse St. Amant, Director, Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, Plaquemines Parish, Louisiana

Madhu Beriwal, President and CEO, Innovative Emergency Management, Inc., Baton Rouge, Louisiana

On January 24, 2006, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee held a hearing to investigate the state of emergency preparation in Louisiana before and after the 2004 [Hurricane Pam emergency preparation exercise](#). The federally-funded Pam exercise was designed to coordinate local, state, and federal responses to a catastrophic hurricane. Pam was conceived as a slow-moving, Category 3 hurricane in which the eye of the storm passes directly over New Orleans and officials must consider the worst-case scenarios from such a simulation. The simulated storm caused extensive mock damage throughout 13 Louisiana parishes, including 10 to 20 feet of flooding in New Orleans. In Pam's fictional aftermath, over a million people were evacuated, 175,000 were injured, and 60,000 died. The exercise also predicted overcrowded shelters and hospitals, food and water shortages and flooded highways.

Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) opened the hearing by discussing Hurricane Pam and its "eerie accuracy" in predicting the problems of Katrina. She acknowledged that the results of Pam improved somewhat the response to Katrina but felt that "too few of those issues were ever addressed, and too many plans were not fully implemented or even understood." Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) agreed that "despite these dire warnings from Pam, preparations for Katrina were shockingly poor." He also expressed displeasure with the White House's response to the Committee's investigation.

The four witnesses confirmed that local, state, and federal emergency plans were already in place before the Pam exercise, and that the ultimate goal of the exercise was to create a "bridging document" between these various plans. State and local officials focused their opening testimony on the post-exercise planning, complaining of a lack of funding. "During this whole process, there were many delays in the execution of the follow-on planning exercises due to funding issues. These issues were mainly dealing with federal funding," said Sean Fontenot, former Chief of the [Louisiana Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness](#) Planning Division. Jesse St. Amant, Director of the [Plaquemines Parish Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness](#), agreed, citing a need for continued support from the federal government. The other witnesses took a more optimistic view of the results of the exercise. "Hurricane Pam helped save lives and reduce suffering after the massive catastrophe of Hurricane Katrina," said Madhu Beriwal, President and CEO of [Innovative Emergency Management](#), the contractor for the Hurricane Pam simulation, detailing the numerous changes implemented in the Katrina response. Wayne Fairley, Chief of the [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(FEMA\) Region VI](#), agreed that the planning sessions were "beneficial," and "[they] laid the ground work for future detailed subject plans." Nonetheless, Beriwal and Fairley consented that the plans were incomplete at the time of Hurricane Katrina.

The senators' questions focused on plans for pre-landfall evacuation. Witnesses disagreed on the role of the federal government. "The Federal Government is not (and in my opinion should not be) a first responder," said Fontenot. Fairley agreed, explaining that the responsibility for emergency evacuation lies first with local and state governments, and that FEMA steps in only if federal aid is requested. In spite of this, St. Amant stressed that the Pam exercise had demonstrated that a hurricane of Katrina's magnitude was "beyond the state and local capability," and that "FEMA should have been prepared to support them."

Senator Thomas Carper (D-DE), appearing briefly at the hearing, asked the witnesses what should be done to ensure the lessons of future disaster exercises like Pam are better implemented in agency plans. Fairley and Fontenot stressed the need for local, state, and federal officials to work together to allocate responsibility for emergency response. St. Amant spoke of using Homeland Security funds to increase the awareness of individual citizens, citing a citizen's awareness guide distributed in the Plaquemines Parish. Beriwal advocated integrating science and technology into all levels of planning and focusing on an outcome-based approach to planning exercises.

For the full text of statements made at the hearing, [click here](#).

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**Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina:
Perspectives of FEMA's Operations Professionals"**
December 8, 2005

Witnesses:

Scott Wells, Federal Coordinating Officer, FEMA Joint Field Office, Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Philip Parr, Deputy Federal Coordinating Officer, FEMA Joint Field Office, Austin, Texas
William Carwile, Former Federal Coordinating Officer, FEMA Joint Field Office, Biloxi, Mississippi

On December 8, 2005 the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee met to hear perspectives on Hurricane Katrina from three Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) operations professionals. Only Committee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) were present for much of the hearing, since the Senate was still officially on recess, but they appeared to take the hearing very seriously. Both Senators were anxious to learn more about how government officials had mismanaged the response to Katrina, and how these mistakes could be prevented in the future. Referring to the actions of private sector responders Senator Collins said "their outstanding performance stands in stark contrast to the inability of government at all levels to plan and execute." Senator Lieberman was even harsher, saying that FEMA was "a troubled agency that failed in its prime mission." He also thanked the witnesses for not being defensive, however, and the senators made it clear that they did not blame the witnesses for the failure of the agency they worked for.

In their opening testimony all three witnesses defended FEMA's overall response to Hurricane Katrina, but also acknowledged that that response was in many respects not adequate. "Much has been said about the slow federal response," said Scott Wells, the FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer (FCO) in Louisiana for Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "Nothing could be further from the truth. It may not have been enough, but it was fast." Philip Parr, who is currently the deputy FCO for the Gulf Region, agreed with this assessment, saying that FEMA was not slow to respond, but that it was simply overwhelmed. The witnesses also offered criticism of current emergency management policies, which they said were not effective in catastrophic situations. William Carwile, who served as the FCO in the region immediately following the hurricane, discussed the problems of the "bottoms up" approach, in which local incident commanders create plans and request resources from state and federal officials. "In a catastrophic event this is very difficult if the people at the "bottom" are overwhelmed and unable to fully form coherent response organizations," he said.

The two senators present focused their questions on problems within FEMA and how the agency could be improved to better handle disasters. Following a question about funding for training exercises, and Carwile said that "the longer after 9/11, the less funding we had for training." Carwile also told the committee that he had sent a memo to FEMA headquarters in Washington prior to Katrina detailing the unprepared state of the agency's response teams, but never received any feedback. Wells had similar comments about how the lack of personnel prevented FEMA from performing essential duties. "We do not have enough people. We have had to rob Peter to pay Paul," he said.

Not all of the hearing's criticism was reserved for FEMA, however. Carwile told the committee that the Department of Defense (DOD), unlike any other federal agency, requires that requests from FEMA be approved by the Secretary of Defense, which leads to unnecessary delays and confusion. "You can't have two federal agencies operating independently," he said. "But the DOD takes exception to even the term 'mission assignments'." Local and state officials also received their share of blame for mismanagement of the disaster. Parr detailed how he and other FEMA officials had created a plan to evacuate the Superdome by helicopter on Wednesday August 31, but that once Lieutenant General Russell Honoré took over the Louisiana National Guard all plans were put on hold to await his orders. This delayed the evacuation by over 24 hours. Wells discussed how following the Hurricane Pam exercise in the summer of 2004, a senior Louisiana emergency

manager made the decision not to work with FEMA on an evacuation plan. Additionally, Wells said, FEMA received no pre-landfall requests for evacuation assistance from state governments.

While the hearing offered many examples of failure by both federal and local officials, it did not offer a clear direction that Congress should take to improve FEMA and disaster response in general. All of the witnesses mentioned that the National Incident Command System needs to be modified so that it would be adequate for large catastrophic emergencies, particularly by reducing reliance on the "bottoms up" system, but no one offered a concrete way in which to do this. Overall the witnesses gave the impression that as an agency FEMA is still unprepared for major disasters, and that it would take a major effort by both Congress and the Department of Homeland Security in order to make it work.

For the full text of statements made at the hearing, [click here](#).

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Senate Environment and Public Works Committee
Hearing to Evaluate the Degree to which the Preliminary Findings on the Failure of the Levees
are Being Incorporated into the Restoration of Hurricane Protection
November 17, 2005

Witnesses:

Panel I:

Dan Hitchings, Director, Task Force HOPE, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

Panel II:

Thomas Zimmie, Professor of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Sherwood Gagliano, President, Coastal Environments, Inc.

Larry Roth, Deputy Executive Director, American Society of Civil Engineers

Joseph Suhayda, Emeritus Engineering Professor, Louisiana State University

Robert Verchik, Professor, Loyola University Law School

On November 17, 2005 the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing to examine how findings on levee failures during hurricane Katrina are being used to improve the design of New Orleans' hurricane protection system. From the beginning of the hearing, Senator David Vitter (R-LA), who has taken a lead on this issue, expressed his strong concerns that the levee reconstruction be comprehensive. "We must not rebuild only in areas that had failure," he said, raising a subject that would be prominent throughout the hearing.

Testimony began with Dan Hitchings, the Director of the Army Corps of Engineers post-Katrina recovery task force. Hitchings said the Corps was "working round the clock" to upgrade levees by the start of the next hurricane season, and that construction would be informed continually by interim findings on what caused the levee failures. Hitchings also said that while he could not explain exactly why the levees failed at this point, two independent panels are in the process of investigating the levee failures and are expected to produce final reports by June 2006. These final reports would provide definitive answers as to what caused the multiple breaches in the levee system and would be available to the public. Vitter responded bluntly to Hitchings testimony, saying "I find your testimony frustrating and inadequate." This frustration was due to Hitchings failure to provide details about the cause of the levee failures, which Vitter had specifically asked for. Vitter also said it was not satisfactory to have to wait until the beginning of the next hurricane season before the reports would be available.

Using a map, Vitter then went from west to east across the New Orleans area, asking Hitchings to explain what caused the failure at each individual breach. Hitchings explained that at the 17th Street and London Avenue canals water came from underneath the levee, though he said the exact mechanism was still uncertain. Hitchings admitted that the sheet piling only went to about 10 feet, even though it was designed to go to 17 feet. At the Industrial canal and in East New Orleans levees were overtopped, and subsequent scouring likely

caused the levees to breach. Hitchings also said that sheet piling would be driven down to 60 feet in areas where water infiltrated from underneath the levee, but not necessarily in other areas. Vitter replied that only using a better design in areas where breaches have occurred would not adequately protect New Orleans in the future.

The second panel featured engineers, geologists, and a lawyer with expertise in hurricane protection for New Orleans. Geologist Sherwood Gagliano testified that several active faults underneath New Orleans were contributing to subsidence, and that these faults played a role in the levee failures. "This is the root cause of the disease eating away at New Orleans," he said. Gagliano also pointed out that there was significant resistance among those responsible for flood control in the city to consider the role of faults in mitigation efforts.

Joseph Suhayda, an engineering professor from Louisiana State University, said Congress should authorize the Corps to build a category 5 hurricane protection system, but also that the Corps needed to stop focusing solely on levees. Robert Verchik, a law professor at Loyola University, echoed that sentiment, saying "focusing on levees is a fools gamble" and urging a more holistic approach similar to systems used in the Netherlands. Larry Roth from the American Society of Civil Engineers, argued that ultimately no system could completely protect New Orleans and other areas from hurricanes. He urged that Congress act to discourage new development on Gulf Coast floodplains, and recommended the creation of an independent panel to consider the future land use in the region. Senator Vitter assured the panel that the Environment and Public Works Committee would soon report a bill authorizing a category 5 hurricane protection system for New Orleans; later in the day, the committee did approve [S. 2006](#), "a bill to provide for recovery efforts relating to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita for Corps of Engineers projects."

For the full text of statements made at the hearing, [click here](#).

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**Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, Hearing on a Comprehensive and Integrated
Approach to meet the Water Resources Needs in the Wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**
November 9, 2005

Witnesses:

Panel I

George Dunlop, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Civil Works, U.S. Army
Major General Don Riley, Director of Civil Works, Army Corps of Engineers
Anu Mittal, Director, Natural Resources and Environment, U.S. General Accountability Office

Panel II

Windell Curole, General Manager, South LaFourche Levee District
Peter Brink, Senior Vice President for Programs, The National Trust for Historic Preservation
Scott Faber, Water Resources Specialist, Environmental Defense
Stephen Ellis, Vice President, Taxpayers for Common Sense

On November 9, 2005 the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held the latest in a series of hearings examining flood and hurricane protection in the Gulf coast region. Senators on the committee made it clear that they wanted to hear about integrated and comprehensive approaches for ensuring the security of New Orleans and other areas. "Piecemeal solutions will not solve the problem," said Ranking Member Jim Jeffords (I-VT). Senator David Vitter (R-LA), who chaired the hearing, made it very clear that he wanted to know why the Army Corps of Engineers would take eight months, until the beginning of the next hurricane season, to finish a forensic report on why the levees in New Orleans failed.

The first witness panel featured two Army Corps of Engineers Officials, both of whom stressed that the Corps would be working with state and local officials as they repaired and improved levee systems, and that integrating coastal wetlands restoration with engineering projects was a high Corps priority. Army Deputy

Assistant Secretary George Dunlop attempted to address Senator Vitter's concerns, saying that although the final report on the levees would not be available until June, the information collected in the interim would be used by engineers much sooner. Vitter was not satisfied, however, saying, "I respectfully disagree- we should have definitive findings before June." Major General Don Riley, the Corps' Director of Civil Works, acknowledged that breaches at the 17th Street and London Avenue canals were caused by seepage, and said the Corps would place deeper sheet piling in these locations to prevent future flooding.

A third witness on the panel, Anu Mittal from the General Accountability Office, provided a brief history of the Corps' Lake Ponchartrain System, including the coastal barrier plan that some politicians have claimed could have protected New Orleans but was blocked by environmentalists. Mittal said that local opposition was part of the reason the Corps ultimately did not pursue that plan, but that high costs and assessments of damage from Hurricane Betsy in 1965 also played a role. She also pointed out that the current levee system was only scheduled to be completed in 2015, and was estimated to be 60 to 90% completed when Katrina struck. When asked her opinion on what should be done in the future, Mittal said, "Engineering solutions may not be the best solution for New Orleans," and suggested a whole watershed approach was necessary for protecting the city.

The second panel featured witnesses with a variety of interests in levee restoration. Windell Curole from the South LaFourche Levee District, offered his hope that Katrina would prompt the Corps and local officials to create a working storm protection system that included wetlands restoration. "The mule has been hit in the head by a two by four," he said. Scott Faber from Environmental Defense suggested the creation of an independent commission of experts that would be given a lump sum of federal money to create a comprehensive protection plan. Steve Ellis from Taxpayers for Common Sense, however, urged greater fiscal restraint, saying he had concerns about allocating a lump sum to an independent commission. Both Faber and Ellis agreed that Congress needed to do more to encourage people to leave high-risk areas. Ellis said, "If people rebuild in high-risk areas we want them to do it without the aid of Uncle Sam," while Faber asked the Senators to amend the Stafford Act in order to make it easier for flooded communities to relocate.

For the full text of statements made at the hearing, [click here](#).

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**Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee,
Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: Why Did the Levees Fail?"
November 3, 2005**

Witnesses:

Ivor van Heerden, Louisiana Team Leader, Louisiana State University Hurricane Center
Paul Mlakar, Senior Research Scientist, U.S. Army Engineer Research and Development Center
Raymond B. Seed, Team Leader, National Science Foundation
Peter Nicholson, Team Leader, American Society of Civil Engineers

On November 3, 2005 the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee met to hear testimony about levee failures during and after Hurricane Katrina. The four witnesses represented four teams that were formed to investigate the levee failure, one each from the state of Louisiana, the Army Corps of Engineers, the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). The hearing came after a report in the [Washington Post](#) on October 24, 2005 that publicized preliminary findings attributing levee failures to human error. Ranking Member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT) emphasized the importance of the testimony, saying "I want to stress that these are expert witnesses. The collected weight of their testimony makes this a very important hearing." It was also clear from the outset of the hearing that the Army Corps of Engineers would be criticized heavily. Chairwoman Susan Collins (R-ME) in her opening statement said, "These failures were not solely the result of mother nature. They were the result of human error and the delayed response to the collapse of the levee system."

The testimony from the leaders of the Louisiana, NSF, and ASCE teams were similar, with power point presentations detailing evidence about the causes of the many different levee failures around New Orleans. These presentations can be viewed on the [committee webpage](#). One of the major conclusions of their studies was that two of the major levee breaches, at the 17th Street and London Avenue canals, were not caused by overtopping storm surge, but instead by water flowing underneath the levee through permeable peat or sand layers. Ivor van Heerden, from the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center, demonstrated that the intensity of the storm in the area of these canals was equivalent to a category one hurricane, and that therefore the breaches were due to design flaws more than the strength of Hurricane Katrina. Army Corps of Engineers research scientist Paul Mlakar presented a somewhat defensive testimony, emphasizing the Corps' cooperation with other investigators and pointing out that uncertainty remained about the levee failures. "I want to caution against reaching conclusions to your very important questions before appropriate analysis is accomplished. Speculation concerning observed damage will not help us protect New Orleans," he said. Mlakar also said that the Corps would finish its study by July 1, 2006, which is one month after the beginning of the next hurricane season.

Many questions for the panel focused on the notion that the levee failures should not have occurred with a storm of Katrina's intensity. Collins asked whether it was fair to say that the levees to the west of Lake Ponchartrain should have survived, to which Von Heerden, Raymond Seed from the NSF team, and Peter Nicholson from the ASCE team all answered yes. Seed went on to suggest that the failures "may not be just due to human error, there may have been some malfeasance." He went on to explain that in some cases it appeared that the actual levee construction was not consistent with the design standards. Criticism for the Corps of Engineers was not limited to problems with levee design and construction. Senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI) asked about reports in the media that the Corps had prevented investigative teams from meeting with key employees. Seed answered diplomatically, saying that in many cases the Corps had been very helpful, but also that "we were promised that we would meet with local representatives from the Louisiana District- we never met any of those people." In addition, Van Heerden made the point that the Corps did not do a sufficient job of warning people about flooding once the levee breaches occurred.

Other questions for the panel regarded what should be done to enhance future hurricane protection. Senator George Voinovich (R-OH) asked about the possibility of upgrading levees to protect against category 5 storms, instead of the category 3 protection that the Corps is currently planning to reestablish. Mlakar, in one of his few substantive responses, said that to go directly to category 5 protection would be a different process than first building for category 3 protection and then upgrading to category 5 protection. Van Heerden endorsed building stronger protections, saying "I respectfully encourage the federal government to go to five from the start. We have a unique opportunity to reconstruct levees and get the wetlands restoration program going." Seed, however, cautioned that "there is no way to do a five quickly." There was also discussion on the idea of reorganizing the administration of flood protection infrastructure in New Orleans, a topic that was prompted by Senator Norm Coleman (R-OK) questioning whether throwing money at the problem would solve anything. "More money won't solve the problem," said Seed, "We need a fundamental change in how the levee system is built, managed, and maintained." Van Heerden agreed with the need for a change in levee management, saying "I believe we should have one levee board," an idea that he acknowledged is politically controversial in Louisiana.

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**Senate Environment and Public Works Committee,
Hearing on Hurricane Katrina Response
November 2, 2005**

Witnesses:

Panel I

Nils Diaz, Chairman, Nuclear Regulatory Commission

Sandy Baruah, Acting Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Economic Development Administration

Dale Hall, Director, Fish and Wildlife Service
David L. Winstead, Commissioner, Public Buildings Service, General Service Administration

Panel II
Ray Nagin, Mayor, New Orleans

Panel II
Kim Dunn Chapital, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
William H. Hines, Board Member, Greater New Orleans Inc

On November 2, 2005 the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee heard testimony from New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and federal government officials as it continued its ongoing investigation into the federal and local response to Hurricane Katrina. Committee Chairman James Inhofe (R-OK) began by stating that the Environment and Public Works Committee has technically more jurisdiction on hurricane restoration issues than any other committee, emphasizing the importance of their involvement. Senator David Vitter (R-LA) made it clear that he intended to focus on ensuring the future protection of New Orleans and other areas threatened by hurricanes. "Many businesses are still deciding whether or not to come back," he said. "The key factor is strong hurricane protection- they don't want to relive this catastrophic experience."

The first panel of witnesses came from several different federal agencies that fall under the committee's jurisdiction, including the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Economic Development Administration, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Public Buildings Service. Each witness related how their agencies have reacted to the disaster in the Gulf and how they plan to help with redevelopment and the prevention of hurricane damage. Dale Hall, the director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, spoke about the need to stop further coastal wetland loss and the role his agency could play in that effort. Much of the questioning for this group focused on how agencies would cooperate and work with Don Powell, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) Chairman who President Bush has recently appointed to coordinate recovery efforts. All of the witnesses ensured the committee that they were already working cooperatively and would continue to do so.

Mayor Nagin, who was next to testify, focused his testimony on his own priorities for revitalizing the city. These include restoring structural and non-structural flood control systems, using tax breaks to help reestablish businesses, and upgrading transport systems, in particular by building a light rail system that could help with evacuation. While Nagin's testimony was focused on plans for the future, many of the committee's questions dealt with the events immediately before and after the hurricane. "I don't get the Giuliani pass," Nagin said, and it was clear that he was frustrated with criticisms of his response to the hurricane. When asked by Ranking Member Jim Jeffords (I-VT) about the federal response, however, Nagin said, "That's a loaded question, right?" The mayor answered diplomatically, saying he deserved a portion of the blame along with state and federal officials. Nagin did say, however, that "the FEMA support system was not adequate." Senators also asked Nagin about land-use planning for New Orleans, to which Nagin replied that the city commission dealing with that issue was "making the fundamental assumption that the Army Corps of Engineers will figure out a way to provide adequate storm protection for a Category 3." Nagin said he had looked at storm protection systems from Europe and declared, "we can do much better."

The final panel featured New Orleanians concerned about the environmental and economic legacies of rebuilding the city. Kim Dunn Chapital, from the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, said the people of New Orleans would reject any attempt to weaken or waive environmental regulations as the city was rebuilt. William Hines, the former chair of the private-public partnership group New Orleans Inc., spoke of the need to help business groups that had relatively low profiles in the city, including the biomedical sector.

For the full text of statements made at the hearing, [click here](#).

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment

Hearing on "Expert Views On Hurricane And Flood Protection And Water Resources Planning For A

Rebuilt Gulf Coast"

October 27, 2005

Witnesses:

Peter Rabbon, General Manager of the California Reclamation Board and President of the National Association of Flood & Stormwater Management Agencies

Rod Emmer, Executive Director of the Louisiana Floodplain Management Association and member of the Association of State Floodplain Managers, Inc.

Edward Dickey, Affiliate Professor of Economics, Loyola College in Maryland

Gerald Galloway, Glenn L. Martin Institute Professor of Engineering, University of Maryland

On October 27, 2005, the House Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee received testimony from national flood damage reduction and floodplain management experts regarding their recommendations for reducing flood risk. After receiving testimony one week earlier on levee repairs and coastal restoration in the Gulf Coast, the subcommittee broadened its focus to assess nationwide flood protection planning and infrastructure. As subcommittee Chairman John Duncan (R-TN) noted in his opening statement, rapidly increasing coastal populations coupled with aging and non-standard levee systems necessitate a more comprehensive national flood protection plan.

"Too often there is a tendency to do things the way we do them because that is the way we have always done them," said the subcommittee's ranking member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX), "I fear that the federal, state and local approach to flood and hurricane risks falls into this category." Members of the subcommittee seemed most concerned about whether current federal policies can adapt to provide higher standards of protection. They asked witnesses to address what policy changes would ensure and sustain sufficient flood protection under tight budget limitations. Each witness presented a clear list of policy recommendations including legislative changes that would encourage sustainable redevelopment and strengthen the Army Corps of Engineers.

Peter Rabbon, representing the National Association of Flood and Stormwater Management Agencies (NAFSMA), called for a review of the U.S. Water Resources Council's Principles and Guidelines, which determine the Army Corps' priorities for funding flood control projects. "We are currently driven by a benefit-cost analysis that does not adequately address the human risk factor in its formula," said Rabbon. He explained that the current formula "focuses exclusively" on the economic benefits of protecting property and public infrastructure rather than weighing the costs of jeopardizing public safety. Edward Dickey, an economics professor at Loyola College in Maryland, agreed. "We can now fully appreciate that large scale, albeit infrequent, events like hurricane Katrina have economic and social costs that extend beyond the standard project benefit calculations that are typically based on reductions in property damages." Dickey recommended that, while the Corps' planning approach was "the best hope," it should be focused on total risk, ensuring that structural measures are accompanied by non-structural protection and enforced by local regulatory measures. One key to total risk management, he said, is addressing aspects of the larger policy framework, in particular the National Flood Insurance Program, which encourages vulnerable communities to merely find the cheapest way to remove its inhabitants from flood insurance requirements.

Each witness proposed that the Army Corps take a lead in establishing a national levee study, including a national inventory of levees and safety inspection to determine the adequacy of existing levees and areas of high-vulnerability. Gerald Galloway, an engineering professor at the University of Maryland, noted that levees protecting Sacramento, CA are a good example of deteriorating protection standards. Like many other cities, Sacramento is only protected to the 100-year level, "a level that has a one-in-four chance of being exceeded in the life of a 30 year mortgage."

Also featured in each witness' testimony was the need for wetlands restoration and other "non-structural" means of flood protection as a critical reinforcement to structural systems, such as levees. "Data indicates that the storm surge is reduced by one foot for every 2.7 miles of wetlands," said Rod Emmer with the Association of State Floodplain Managers. However, in response to questions about how to effectively encourage more environmentally sustainable planning, Dickey raised the point that policymakers need to overcome an

inherent bias in funding non-structural projects that place costs primarily on property owners rather than on the federal government.

Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) expressed optimism about working with Chairman Duncan and other members of the Subcommittee to introduce a policy that would integrate the witnesses' testimony. In order to assess the impact of such a policy, however, he asked each witness to follow up on whether there were specific projects that should be pursued, what cost estimates would look like, and what federal agencies or state entities would have to be involved.

In addition to the full witness testimony, the committee posted an extensive background section for the hearing that outlines existing storm damage reduction projects and weighs the pay-offs of several future options for protecting the Gulf Coast. To access these, click on the "Water Resources and Environment" subcommittee title from the [Committee Homepage](#), then click on "Hearings/Testimony."

-KCA

House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment
Hearing on "Expert Views On Hurricane And Flood Protection And Water Resources Planning For A Rebuilt Gulf Coast"
October 20, 2005

Witnesses:

Panel I

The Honorable John Paul Woodley, Jr., Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works)
Lieutenant General Carl A. Strock, Chief of Engineers, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
The Honorable Benjamin H. Grumbles, Assistant Administrator for Water, Environmental Protection Agency
Sidney Coffee, Executive Assistant to the Governor of Louisiana For Coastal Activities
Dr. Bill Walker, Executive Director, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

Panel II

Dr. Robert A. Dalrymple, Professor of Civil Engineering, John Hopkins University
Dr. Denise Reed, Professor of Geology and Geophysics, University of New Orleans
Raymond Butler, Executive Director, Gulf Intracoastal Canal Association
Dr. Roy K. Dokka, Director, Louisiana Spatial Reference Center, Louisiana State University
Jan Hoogland, General Director, Rijkswaterstaat, The Netherlands

On October 20, 2005, the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment heard expert views on hurricane and flood protection in the Gulf Coast. In her opening statement, the committee's ranking member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX) pointed out the complex nature of hazard mitigation in New Orleans, where "the very success of flood protection contributes to the loss of wetlands, which are crucial for hurricane protection." Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) pointed to the need for input from a wide range of scientific disciplines on plans for increased flood and hurricane protection. "We have reengineered that part of the world. We need to understand what we did and try to piece that back together."

The hearing's first panel offered perspectives from various federal and state government agencies. Representatives from the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency spoke of the need for an integrated approach to hurricane protection that included significant wetland restoration. Sidney Coffee, the Executive Assistant to Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco for Coastal Activities, supported the need for coastal wetlands to prevent storm damage and asked that the federal government invest \$32 billion in making Louisiana safe from hurricanes. Coffee also insisted that the process move faster than the typical pace of government authorization and appropriations, saying "We don't have 20 storm seasons to wait."

The second panel featured testimony from experts in several fields related to hurricane and flood protection. The panel featured two geoscientists, Professor Denise Reed of the University of New Orleans and Professor Roy Dokka of Louisiana State University. In her testimony, Reed emphasized the need for robust ecological restoration in Louisiana's coastal wetlands and pointed out the ecological importance of water exchange between lakes, bays, and the gulf, which could be threatened by storm surge barriers. Reed spoke optimistically about the ability of coastal marshes to adapt to environmental changes like sea level rise, saying, "They can survive if we give them a fighting chance." Roy Dokka, on the other hand, distanced himself from other panelists by saying that wetlands-centric solutions would not do much to protect the Gulf Coast. Dokka insisted the major threat in the area is subsidence, and that large scale engineering projects were the only means of preventing future disasters. "Without levee defenses we must surrender the coast and retreat," he said. Dokka also claimed that there is an urgent need for establishing accurate geospatial references, particularly vertical control. Vertical control is used to establish the true elevation of structures such as levees, and needs to be routinely reassessed in subsiding areas such as New Orleans.

The second panel also featured Jan Hooglund, the general director of the Netherlands flood protection program Rijkswaterstaat. Hooglund argued that long-term political commitment to flood protection was more important than specific technical solutions. Many of the committee's questions were directed towards Hooglund, as members wanted to know what had made the Dutch flood protection system so successful. In response to a question from Representative Charles Boustany (R-LA) about cost-benefit analyses, Hooglund said the Rijkswaterstaat had discontinued their use early on because "the cost of human life is incalculable." Asked whether or not it was possible to protect New Orleans from a category 5 Hurricane, Dokka said that it was. "The question is can you afford it," he added. "We're discovering more and more about how the world works. We can do this, but we have to do things smarter." Reed was less optimistic about the prospect of reversing the loss of Louisiana wetlands. She said that even the ambitious Coast 2050 plan would probably not bring much back. "It would really just stem the tide," she said. Reed also cautioned that engineers should not immediately try to restore beaches, marshes, and barrier islands affected by the hurricanes, saying that it was better to "wait and see how natural processes proceed."

-PMD

House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina
Hearing to Review Hurricane Relief Response, Focusing on the Role of the Homeland Security
Department
October 19, 2005

Witness:

Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Homeland Security

On October 19, 2005 the House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina held a hearing to examine the role of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in hurricane response. Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) opened the hearing by reminding the committee of claims made by former Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) director Michael Brown that FEMA had not received sufficient funding and was less hampered by its placement within DHS. "Was FEMA's effectiveness diminished by being folded into DHS? How personally involved was Secretary Chertoff?" Davis said as he put forth questions to the committee.

In his testimony, Secretary Chertoff focused on the aspects of hurricane relief that DHS and in particular FEMA had done well, including moving people from shelters to temporary housing. Chertoff did acknowledge, however, that there were major flaws in how FEMA responded to the disaster, particularly with regards to communications, logistics, and pre-disaster planning. The Secretary assured the committee that he was working with federal, state, and local agencies across the country to increase disaster preparedness, a process that will include in-depth reviews of emergency management plans. "We're going to kick the tires on these plans," he said.

Many of the questions followed the partisan trend of Democrats focusing on the failure of FEMA and other federal agencies and Republicans assigning blame to state and local officials. Representative Cynthia

McKinney (D-GA), one of four Democrats present, listed instances of FEMA turning away offers of help and said, "Nursing home owners were charged for criminal negligence. Why shouldn't you be arrested?" Chertoff answered by saying that he still didn't know the full story of everything that happened, but that he was "deeply and personally engaged." Representative Harold Rogers (R-KY), on the other hand, made much of the failure of state and local officials to evacuate in time, and asked Chertoff what he thought of Michael Brown's claim that state and city governments in Louisiana were dysfunctional. Chertoff replied diplomatically, saying, "I had no difficulties with the governor. I don't know Mr. Brown's personal experience, but I don't endorse those views."

Questions also addressed the concerns of funding and the role of FEMA within DHS brought up by Michael Brown at an earlier hearing. Representative William Jefferson (D-LA) asked about the loss of 500 employees that Brown had referred to as the "emaciation of FEMA". Chertoff replied that FEMA funding and employment had increased from 2001 to 2005. "I take issue with the idea that FEMA funding had been cut," he said. Chertoff also argued that FEMA was better off within the Department of Homeland Security than outside of it. "With DHS FEMA has better resources. The largest problems are attributable to planning," he said.

Overall, committee members were not as critical as they had been with Brown, but many members did express disappointment with Chertoff and the Department of Homeland Security's role in the disaster. Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT), who had been one of Brown's harshest critics, said, "I get a feeling you were a little detached from this. You knew they weren't evacuating. I don't get the sense that your heart was in this." Representative Charlie Melancon (D-LA) also charged the Secretary with being complacent during the disaster, and asked Chertoff about a trip he made to the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta the day the hurricane made landfall. Chertoff said that he had decided not to go to the Gulf because he was not a hurricane expert and because he had put Brown in charge of the DHS response.

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**House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, Subcommittees on Economic Development,
Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, and on Water Resources and Environment, Joint
Hearing on "A Vision and Strategy for Rebuilding New Orleans"**
October 18, 2005

Witnesses:

Panel I

Representative Richard H. Baker (R-LA)

Representative William Jefferson (D-LA)

Panel II

The Honorable Kathleen Babineaux Blanco, Governor of Louisiana

The Honorable C. Ray Nagin, Mayor of New Orleans

The Honorable Mitchell J. Landrieu, Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana

Wynton Marsalis, Musician

Panel III

Mtumishi St. Julien, Executive Director, The Finance Authority of New Orleans

Paul Farmer, Executive Director, American Planning Association

J. Stephen Perry, President and CEO, New Orleans Metropolitan Convention and Visitors Bureau

Gary P. LaGrange, President and Chief Executive Officer, Port of New Orleans

John Felmy, Chief Economist, American Petroleum Institute

Jerome Ringo, Chair, National Wildlife Federation

Michael C. Voisin, Owner and General Manager, Motivati Seafoods

On October 18, 2005 the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee's Subcommittees on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management and on Water Resources and Environment held

a joint hearing entitled "A Vision and Strategy for Rebuilding New Orleans." In their opening statements the chairs of the two subcommittees, Representatives John Duncan (R-TN) and Bill Shuster (R-PA), expressed concerns that taxpayer funds directed toward rebuilding New Orleans be used wisely. "New Orleans and the rest of the Gulf Coast will be rebuilt; it's just a question of how it will be rebuilt. We can't allow federal dollars to be wasted, or spent on unnecessary projects," said Duncan.

The hearing began with testimony from two Congressmen from Louisiana, Representative Richard Baker (R), and Representative William Jefferson (D). Baker outlined the priorities in the rebuilding efforts, which include restoring the integrity of levees, cleaning up environmental hazards, and ensuring that public utilities are available to returning residents. Baker also mentioned that most people should be able to return to their homes and neighborhoods, but that there may be a "necessity for a limited right of eminent domain" if a few residents opposed major redevelopment projects. Jefferson, whose district includes New Orleans, focused on the need for innovative development and land use policies that would help to reduce poverty and mitigate risk from future storms. "If Hurricane Katrina taught New Orleanians anything, it is that attempting to dominate nature solely with structural barriers is insufficient to say the least."

The focal point of the hearing came with the testimony of Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco and New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin. Blanco emphasized the importance of secure levees to rebuilding New Orleans, saying "we cannot simply recreate the levees. It is essential that we build them stronger, safer, and better." The governor also attempted to assuage concerns that federal funds would be wasted by ensuring the committee that any recovery expenses would be reviewed by two major accounting firms. Mayor Ray Nagin sought to dispel any notion that corruption would be an issue in rebuilding New Orleans. "Google me. My whole focus has been on reform, on government honesty and integrity," he said. Nagin was not shy about asking the committee for federal help, saying "I strongly implore you to make adjustments to the Stafford Act to allow the New Orleans government to continue to operate." New Orleans has laid off almost half of its city employees due to a lack of revenues, and currently under the Stafford Act federal agencies are not authorized to pay city employees.

The third panel contained representatives of industries or groups with an interest in the rebuilding of New Orleans. John Felmy, the Chief Economist for the American Petroleum Institute spoke of the importance of the Gulf region to America's energy supply and detailed the devastation of oil and gas infrastructure due to hurricanes Katrina and Rita. "The Gulf Coast is the heartland of our industry," he said. "We have been living this disaster." Jerome Ringo, the chairman of the board of the National Wildlife Federation and a native of Lake Charles Louisiana, spoke of the need for wetland restoration in order to protect all economic interests in Louisiana. Ringo also brought up the threat global warming and sea level rise posed for the region. "All these efforts will be for not if we don't address global warming," he said.

Asked about the Pelican Act, a proposal from Louisiana lawmakers to rebuild the Gulf Coast Ringo criticized the bill's proposed streamlined approval process, which would forgo National Environmental Policy Act and Clean Water Act compliance review. "The National Wildlife Federation does not believe the Pelican Act moves the recovery effort in the right direction," he said. Addressing the panel, Representative Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) made the point that scientists had to be highly involved in the rebuilding effort given the many vulnerabilities of New Orleans. "We need to do something about sea level rise, subsidence, the plate tectonics that are creating instability. I want sediment to build up, and I'm not just saying that because I'm a green radical moderate Republican," he said.

-PMD

House Science Committee, Hearing on NOAA Hurricane Forecasting
October 7, 2005

Witnesses:

Brigadier General David L. Johnson (Retired), Director, National Weather Service
Dr. Max Mayfield, Director, National Hurricane Center

On Friday, October 7 2005 the House Science Committee held a long-delayed hearing to discuss the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) hurricane forecasting. While much of the focus of the hearing was on Hurricanes Rita and Katrina, many committee members expressed the need to look ahead and figure out what could be done to improve future forecasting. "We should be looking for information about the rest of the hurricane season, about what is behind the increased frequency and intensity of hurricanes, and most important, about what tools the National Weather Service needs to continue to improve its ability to forecast and track storms," said Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert (R-NY) in his opening statement.

In his testimony, David Johnson, the Director of the National Weather Service (NWS), summarized the role of NOAA and NWS, and described ongoing research to improve hurricane forecasting. Johnson pointed out that predicting hurricane intensity, as opposed to tracking storms, is an area where much work remains to be done. Max Mayfield, the director of the National Hurricane Center, spoke about how the North Atlantic is in a period of heightened hurricane activity due to multi-decadal oscillations, and that this period of high frequency hurricanes could last for another ten to twenty years. Mayfield also warned the committee that New Orleans is not the only major city that is vulnerable to hurricanes, and specifically mentioned Galveston, Tampa Bay, the Florida Keys, and New York City as other vulnerable areas.

During questioning Ranking Member Bart Gordon (D-TN) was particularly intent on asking both witnesses about communications between the NWS and federal emergency managers. "Congress has spent billions of dollars on the National Weather Service, and hundreds of billions on the Department of Homeland Security," Gordon said. "One worked and one failed." When Gordon asked Mayfield whether or not he had explained the consequences of a category 5 hurricane during briefings with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Mayfield replied, "These folks should understand what a Cat. 5 can do." Gordon also questioned Johnson about a NOAA memo, leaked last week, which said that media requests to NOAA had to be approved by the Department of Commerce. Johnson said that this was a longstanding policy, but Gordon was not satisfied with this answer, saying that the memo demonstrated a lack of transparency within the agency.

Another issue that was mentioned frequently during the hearing was the future of NOAA's budget. Currently the House has appropriated over a billion dollars less for NOAA than the Senate has. Representative Brad Miller (D-NC) asked Johnson whether or not the House version of the appropriations bill would affect NOAA's "ability to do a good job". Johnson answered diplomatically, saying, "We are anxiously awaiting the conference committee. There is always an opportunity to do better and improve." Representative Dana Rohrabacher, (R-CA) asked about the future use of technologies to redirect hurricanes. Neither Johnson nor Mayfield thought that it would be possible to for humans to control the path of a hurricane. "It's great to have vision, but I'm not going to hold my breath for that," said Mayfield.

For more information on this hearing, [click here](#).

-PMD

**Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina:
How is FEMA performing its mission at this stage of recovery"
October 6, 2005**

Witness:

Robert David Paulison, Acting Director, Federal Emergency Management Agency

On October 6, 2005, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs held a hearing with acting Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director R. David Paulison to investigate the ongoing role of FEMA in relief and recovery efforts for victims of Hurricane Katrina. As Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins (R-ME) pointed out in her opening statements, many concerns remain about FEMA's ability to manage the work being done by federal, state, and local officials to rebuild the Gulf Coast region. "The humanitarian mission is being carried on despite the lack of a coordinated federal response," said Collins. The hearing was marked, however, by a sense of cooperation and civility that was in stark contrast to

the often hostile behavior of former FEMA director Michael Brown before the House Select Committee on Katrina a week earlier. "We have a spirit of determination to work together with FEMA and the Department of Homeland Security to get this right," said ranking member Joseph Lieberman (D-CT).

In his testimony, Paulison recognized the huge responsibility he had taken on but also avoided blame for past mistakes made by FEMA, reminding the committee that "most decisions were not on my watch." Paulison's major point was that FEMA's overarching goal was to assist victims in reestablishing normal lives and that the first priority for the agency was to provide housing for everyone displaced by the disaster. Paulison made it clear that FEMA needed to work with state and local officials, and did not express the frustration with Louisiana officials that Brown had expressed repeatedly in his testimony. "The recovery process for Hurricane Katrina will be neither fast nor easy. I am confident that we will get there, but only by working together," he said.

Questions from the committee focused on a variety of specific issues related to FEMA's efforts to help victims. Senator John Warner (R-VA) asked if there was any way for FEMA to help to pay the salaries of New Orleans city employees who would otherwise be laid off. Paulison said the only assistance the agency could provide was in the form of Stafford loans, which were capped at \$5 million per city, and Warner said that he would introduce an amendment to remove this cap. Senator Tom Coburn (R-OK) was concerned about the use of cruise ships as temporary housing, claiming that the ships were too expensive and that they were not being filled to capacity. Paulison responded by saying the ships were "an essential piece of the housing plan" and that they were currently 90% full.

One major issue that featured prominently during questioning was FEMA's contracting process, with several Senators expressing frustration about no-bid contracts awarded to large corporations such as Halliburton, Co. without Gulf Coast-based companies given an opportunity to compete. Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) brought up several examples of contracts that had been awarded out of state when local vendors were available, sometimes at a lower price. Paulison answered by pointing out that 72% of the money spent in the first three weeks following the hurricane went to small businesses and said that he was committed to supporting local entities. Upon further questioning, Paulison announced that FEMA would re-bid some of these contracts, and has started the re-bidding process already. "I've been in public service a long time, and I've never been a fan of no-bid contracts," he said.

Paulison also pointed out that, as FEMA helped people in New Orleans and elsewhere rebuild their homes, the agency would make sure that new buildings would meet building codes designed to prevent future damage from hurricanes and flooding. "The President is committed to rebuilding better and stronger," Paulison said.

-PMD

House Energy and Commerce Committee, Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee
Hearing on "Hurricane Katrina: Assessing the Current Environmental Status "
September 29, 2005

Witnesses:

Panel I

Marcus Peacock, Deputy Administrator, United States Environmental Protection Agency
Henry Falk, Director, Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
John P. Woodley, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works

Panel II

Karen Gautreaux, Deputy Secretary, Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality
Bill Rutledge, Mayor, Pontotoc, Mississippi
Stephen Ragone, Director of Science and Technology, National Ground Water Association
Erik Olson, Natural Resources Defense Council Senior Attorney

Beverly Wright, Director and Founder, Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Xavier University
Robert Verchik, Chair in Environmental Law, Loyola University

On September 29, 2005, the Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee held a hearing to discuss the environmental effects of Hurricane Katrina. In his opening statement Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Joe Barton (R-TX) said, "this is one of the most important hearings on the aftermath of Katrina and Rita. It's not the sexiest, but it's important." Most subcommittee members agreed that the hearing addressed a crucial topic. Representative Lois Capps (D-CA) expressed concern for people who were returning to affected areas. "The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) has acknowledged great uncertainty about health hazards, but people are already moving back in," she said. Representative Nathan Deal, however, made the point that too much concern for environmental problems could slow down recovery. "No community is going to be environmentally perfect," he said.

In the first panel of witnesses government officials made it clear that at this point there is a great deal of uncertainty regarding environmental and public health effects of the disaster. Representatives from the EPA, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), and the Army Corps of Engineers stressed that their agencies had been working hard to collect data, but acknowledged that much more sampling needed to be done before an accurate public health assessment could be made. "From what we've seen so far, we can't say there are definite long-term effects, but we need comprehensive sampling," said Henry Falk, director of the ASTDR. Marcus Peacock, Deputy Administrator for the EPA, pointed out that 2.3 million people still lacked drinking water, while 1.8 million people did not have operational wastewater systems.

The second panel, which included state and local government officials as well as environmental advocates, reiterated the point that it was too early to make conclusive statements about Katrina's environmental impacts. Many of the witnesses, however, criticized local governments and the EPA for not doing more to inform residents about environmental hazards. Beverly Wright, from the Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, expressed her frustration at the lack of information available for New Orleans. "I'm really begging the EPA to do a better job." Erik Olson, a senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council, pointed out that much of the information that has been produced is not accessible or understandable by the average citizen. "You practically have to have a Ph.D. in chemistry to understand it," he said regarding information on EPA's website.

Much of the questioning focused on whether or not it was safe for residents to return to New Orleans. Peacock made the point that while the EPA is responsible for communicating the broad health risks of returning to the city, it is not supposed to make determinations of the safety of individual homes or neighborhoods. Instead, such determinations are the responsibility of the mayor, governor, and Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thad Allen, head of the Katrina relief operation. Other panelists did not have much faith in the decisions made by these officials, however. "The government has no idea whether it is safe or not," said Robert Verchik from Loyola University.

Moving away from the hearing's primary focus on public health, Representative Charles Bass (R-NH) asked about the effects of pumping flood waters into Lake Ponchartrain. Karen Gautreaux, of the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality, said, "What we have seen is pretty encouraging." She pointed out that most of the heavy metals that have entered the lake will adhere to sediments and be buried. Verchik, however, warned that much more testing needs to be done in order to assess the long-term effects on the lake.

An ongoing controversy over a hurricane barrier proposed in the 1970's was also brought up during the hearing. Barton asked John Woodley, who heads the Army Corps of Engineers, about the Corps' reasons for not building the barrier near New Orleans in the 1970's. Woodley said that substantial local opposition and a court injunction caused the Corps to reject the plan. Verchik, however, disagreed, saying, "It is false to suggest that small grassroots organizations overturned the will of the Department of Defense." Verchik claimed instead that the Corps ultimately decided that the project was not cost-effective.

-PMD

House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina
Hearing on "Katrina: The Role of the Federal Emergency Management Agency"
September 27, 2005

Witness:

Michael Brown, the Former Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

In its second hearing, the House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina called on former FEMA Director Michael Brown to explain his role in the federal response to Katrina. Brown, who resigned from his position on September 12th, has been widely criticized for overseeing a slow federal response and for seeming removed from New Orleans' deteriorating conditions in the immediate aftermath of the storm. Throughout heated interchanges with committee members, Brown defended his performance before and after the disaster, and placed most of the blame for mismanagement on state and local governments, particularly in Louisiana. "I get it when it comes to emergency management," he said. "I know what I'm doing, and I think I do a pretty darn good job of it."

Early in his testimony, Brown conceded only that his major error during Katrina was not being able to persuade Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco and New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin to work together. "My biggest mistake was not realizing until Saturday that Louisiana was dysfunctional," said Brown. Several members of congress were bothered by this statement and claimed that Brown was not facing up to FEMA's failures. "Your mistakes sound like a job interview where someone is asked their greatest weakness and they say 'I work too hard'," said Representative Christopher Shays (R-CT). "I want to know what you could have done better." Other members of the panel, however, focused on state and local reluctance to evacuate. Representative Harold Rogers (R-KY) asked Brown how important the failure to evacuate was. Brown responded, "In my opinion it was critical; that was the tipping point for all the other things that went wrong."

Brown did admit to specific areas in which FEMA was inefficient, but throughout the hearing he was adamant that the federal agency is not a first responder. "FEMA doesn't evacuate communities. FEMA does not do law enforcement. FEMA does not do communications," he said. When Representative Gene Taylor (D-MS) asked whether it was part of the federal emergency management plan to have "first responders looting stores to feed themselves," Brown replied that "Individuals should take personal responsibility and be ready to survive for two or three days. If Congress wants to be able to take care of everyone you need to have a serious policy debate." Brown also said that the idea of FEMA providing gasoline to people who otherwise could not evacuate was "a horrible path to go down" and that this should be the responsibility of state and local governments or charitable organizations.

When committee members brought up specific instances where FEMA had not responded adequately Brown claimed that he was not aware of the details in those situations. Representative William Jefferson (D-LA) asked about a report on NPR that generators supposed to be provided by FEMA had not arrived a week after the hurricane made landfall. Brown replied, "I don't know the facts. Everyone was stressed to the max and it does not surprise me to hear someone complain about FEMA. If that was true we ought to fix that." Brown similarly did not know about the problem of dead bodies that were left for long periods of time in parts of New Orleans. Brown said it was false, however, that he did not know about people trapped in the New Orleans convention center until Thursday September 1st. "I was tired and misspoke at that press conference," Brown said. He also said that FEMA was slow to respond to the problems in the convention center because it was not a planned evacuation center.

Brown also spoke of the difficulties that resulted from FEMA becoming absorbed into the Department of Homeland Security. In particular, he testified that securing sufficient funding for FEMA within DHS was a continual challenge. When asked about lessons learned from the June 2004 Hurricane Pam exercise, Brown said that FEMA had requested funds to implement mitigation recommendations that came out of the exercise, but the request had been deleted by DHS. "The point is that financial and personnel resources of FEMA have

dwindled," said Brown. "I predicted privately that we would reach this point." Brown was criticized by several members of the panel for not airing these concerns publicly. When Representative Kay Granger (R-TX) asked why Brown had not brought the insufficient funding of FEMA before Congress earlier, Brown replied, "Maybe I should have resigned earlier and gone public with things."

Despite his assertion that FEMA was not funded properly within the Department of Homeland Security, Brown made a point of not criticizing the Bush Administration. "The President supports FEMA," he said. Brown also said that he had been in communication with the White House, including chief of staff Andrew Card and President Bush. Brown's counsel, however, informed him that he could not discuss those conversations with the committee.

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**Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Disaster Prevention and Prediction
Subcommittee
Hearing on "The Lifesaving Role of Accurate Hurricane Prediction"
September 20, 2005**

Witnesses:

Dr. Max Mayfield, Director, National Hurricane Center

Mr. Windell Curole, General Manager, South LaFourche Levee District

Dr. Marc L. Levitan, Director, Louisiana State University Hurricane Center

Dr. Keith G. Blackwell, Associate Professor of Meteorology, Coastal Weather Center, University of South Alabama

Mr. C. Patrick Roberts, President, Florida Association of Broadcasters

On Tuesday, September 22, 2005, The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee's Disaster Prevention and Prediction Subcommittee held a hearing on "the Lifesaving Role of Accurate Hurricane Prediction." In his opening statement, Subcommittee Chairman Jim DeMint (R-SC) said that the purpose of the hearing would be to detail what public and private forecasters did to mitigate the threat posed by Katrina. "We want to know what they did well, what they could do better and what they need from us to continuously improve their ability to prepare Americans for hurricanes, tornadoes, and tsunamis."

In his opening statement Senator David Vitter (R-LA) brought up a June 26th hearing on hurricane prediction at which he had requested more funding to prepare New Orleans for a major hurricane. "I expressed my frustrations with the policy at every level of government being reactive to disasters instead of being proactive to prepare and prevent these disasters from ever occurring," said Vitter. "My exact quote was 'we can spend millions now preparing for a disaster, or we can spend billions later responding to a disaster.'"

In their testimonies the witnesses described their efforts to forecast the effect of Hurricane Katrina and inform officials and the public of the danger it posed. Windell Curole, from the South LaFourche Levee District described the difficulty of organizing a large-scale evacuation. "When you order an evacuation, you're ordering the retreat of an untrained army. The retreat of a trained army is a very difficult thing to do," said Curole. Keith Blackwell from the University of South Alabama's Coastal Weather Center called for a new hurricane category system based on more than wind speed alone, while Mark Levitan, from the Louisiana State University Hurricane Center encouraged the creation of new building codes and zones to prevent future hurricane damage.

During questioning several senators praised Max Mayfield from the National Hurricane Center for his highly accurate forecasts of where and when Katrina would make landfall. Chairman DeMint asked Mayfield about phone calls he made to the governors of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana and to the mayor of New Orleans. Mayfield said that he made these calls to make sure they understood the severity of the storm and that he had only made calls like this once before over the course of his career. Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) asked Patrick Roberts from the Florida Association of Broadcasters about recent suggestions that the National Weather Service be privatized. Roberts said that privatization could reduce the quality and efficacy of the

service, and that it was important to maintain a neutral and credible source of information. "It would be sad day when one private sector company becomes the official government weather system," said Roberts.

In a digression from the primary focus of the hearing, Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee Chair Ted Stevens (R-AK) asked Max Mayfield from the National Hurricane Center what his opinion was on possible connections between hurricane activity and global warming. Referring to recent increases in hurricane intensity Mayfield said, "Without invoking global warming I think natural variability is what this can be attributed to, and I think the important thing here that even without invoking global warming we need to make sure that we get our country prepared for what we think will be another 10 or 20 years of active hurricane activity."

-KCA

House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina
Hearing on "Predicting Hurricanes: What We Knew About Katrina and When"
September 22, 2005

Witnesses:

Dr. Max Mayfield, Director, National Hurricane Center
Retired Brig. Gen. David Johnson, Director, National Weather Service

On Thursday September 22, 2005 the new House Select Committee on Hurricane Katrina began its official investigation into the shortfalls of the federal government's response to the hurricane by questioning National Weather Service officials on their prediction and warning procedures. In his opening statement Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) stated that the point of this initial hearing was to create a timeline of who knew what before the hurricane hit, and that this timeline would be a starting point for further investigation.

Davis decided to hold the hearing despite the refusal of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) to appoint any Democrats to the committee. Democrats have issued a boycott, calling instead for an independent, nonpartisan commission to investigate the administration's response to Katrina. "This issue is too important for carping," said Davis, "I have extended an olive branch to senior democrats. I am intent on doing this investigation right, whether or not members of the other party are present." Two Democrats from the Gulf Coast, Representatives Gene Taylor (D-MS) and Charlie Melancon (D-LA), made an agreement with Pelosi to be present at the hearing, even though they were not official members of the committee.

Dr. Max Mayfield, the director of the National Hurricane Center, offered testimony via videoconferencing because he was busy working on forecasts for Hurricane Rita. Questioned primarily on the timing of National Hurricane Center warnings, Mayfield said that he held regular briefings with FEMA and other state and federal emergency managers every day at noon beginning on Wednesday, August 24th. At one of these briefings President Bush was on the line from Crawford, Texas, although Mayfield could not recall anything the President said.

On Friday, August 26th the National Hurricane Center forecasted that Katrina would the Gulf Coast as a category 4 or 5 hurricane. Then on the evening of Saturday, August 27th Mayfield personally called the governors of Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, as well as the mayor of New Orleans, in order to make sure they realized that Katrina was a very serious threat. "Politicians can be very isolated," said Mayfield, "I told them that I wanted to go to bed that night knowing I had done everything I could do." Mayfield did not, however, make any recommendations about evacuations during these phone calls, since, he said, evacuations are not the purview of the National Weather Service. By 7 a.m. on Sunday morning the National Hurricane Center had begun calling Katrina "potentially catastrophic" and "extremely dangerous." The hurricane eventually made landfall at 6 a.m. on Monday August 29th.

National Weather Service Director General David Johnson gave a brief statement in which he outlined the differences between the National Hurricane Center, which analyzed a storm system as a whole, and local forecast offices that tailor that analysis to local concerns. Johnson also pointed out that it is the National

Weather Service's responsibility to disseminate information about storms, but not to order or recommend evacuations. During questioning Johnson pointed out that 80% of New Orleanians evacuated before the storm made landfall, which Johnson called a "phenomenal number".

Representative Harold Rogers (R-KY) asked Johnson about the role of the Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC) during Katrina's approach. Johnson said that HSOC had been involved, but that he was not sure what role it played and that he would "defer to FEMA on that one." Rogers suggested that the committee investigate whether or not HSOC had been used properly during the event. Representative Christopher Shays questioned Johnson about the Hurricane Pam simulation, an exercise that was used to assess how emergency managers would respond to a major hurricane striking New Orleans. Johnson said that lessons had been learned from the exercise and that these lessons had been incorporated into emergency response plans, but could not give details because he had not been present for the exercise.

-PMD

House Government Reform Committee
Hearing on "Back to the Drawing Board: A First Look at Lessons Learned From Katrina."
September 15, 2005

Witnesses:

Panel 1

Constance Perett, Administrator, Office of Emergency Management, County of Los Angeles, California

Ellis Stanley, General Manager, Emergency Preparedness Department, City of Los Angeles, California

Robert C. Bobb, City Administrator, District of Columbia

David J. Robertson, Executive Director, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments

Tony Carper, Jr., Director, Broward Emergency Management Agency, Broward County, Florida

Carlos Castillo, Director, Miami-Dade County Office of Emergency Management, Miami-Dade County, Florida

Panel 2

John R. Harrald, Professor of Engineering Management, George Washington University and Director, Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management

James J. Carafano, Senior Fellow for National Security and Homeland Security, Heritage Foundation

On September 15, 2005 the House Government Reform Committee held an oversight hearing titled "Back to the Drawing Board: A First Look at Lessons Learned from Katrina". In his opening statement, Chairman Tom Davis (R-VA) clarified that the committee's oversight of the federal emergency response must not interfere with ongoing relief efforts. "We can begin contributing to the dialogue this morning by looking at emergency plans in other major metropolitan areas- places that potentially face, and have faced similar catastrophic events, natural or man-made," he said. Democratic committee members, however, were not convinced that listening to other cities' disaster plans was the best way to begin hearings on Katrina. In his opening statement Ranking Member Henry Waxman (D-CA) said, "I am perplexed by the timing of this hearing. It's going to be hard for D.C., Miami, and Los Angeles to know what lessons to draw from Katrina until we fulfill our obligation to investigate the disaster in New Orleans and find out what went wrong and why."

These statements instigated some heated exchanges among committee members over a variety of issues related to the hurricane. Democrats emphasized the failures of FEMA and other federal agencies and called for an independent commission to investigate the response to the disaster. Republicans instead claimed that local and state governments were equally to blame, that the federal government is not supposed to act as a first responder, and that a bicameral committee would be best way to investigate the problematic response to Katrina. Several Democratic committee members asked why former FEMA Director Michael Brown was not being questioned at the hearing. Chairman Davis assured them that he had attempted to get Brown to testify and that Brown would be available for questioning soon.

Once the opening statements had concluded the witnesses on the first panel described the emergency plans that were prepared for their metropolitan areas. All of the witnesses were confident that their home counties or cities were well prepared for a natural or man-made disaster, but also recognized that there was more that they could do, particularly in learning from failures in the response to Katrina.

Overall the panel had little to say specifically about the disaster in the Gulf Coast region and offered more general recommendations. Chief Carlos Castillo, Director of the Miami-Dade County Office of Emergency Management, presented several suggestions for improving responses to major disasters. These included utilizing a National Incident Management System and actively integrating FEMA with local government in all aspects of emergency management. But others, such as District of Columbia (DC) City Administrator Robert Bobb echoed some of the committee members concerns that emergency response policies and methods in other cities have little bearing on how to assist Gulf Coast states. Bobb pointed out some of the major differences between the threats facing New Orleans and DC, including the fact that DC is not below sea level and thus less vulnerable to flooding, and that federal resources are much more readily available in the capital region.

Questions from the committee members tried to find links between the witnesses' testimony and Hurricane Katrina. Vice-Chair Daniel Shays (R-CT) asked what the witnesses thought they would have done differently if they had been in New Orleans during Katrina. The panel offered a range of answers, from providing more hand-held radios to emergency responders to securing back-up water supplies for victims. Shays pressed one witness, Constance Perret from the LA County Office of Emergency Management, on whether or not taking care of disaster victims was primarily the responsibility of the local or federal government. Perrett answered that she thought it was a local government responsibility. Representative Stephen Lynch (D-MA) then asked what the panelists would want to know if they were questioning those responsible during the response to Katrina. David Robertson, the executive director of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments said, "I would like to know what information was available to them and when," while Ellis Stanley, the General Manager of Emergency Preparedness for Los Angeles would have asked, "What were the implementation plans, and what went wrong with them?"

The second witness panel featured two experts on disasters and national security. Dr. John Harrald from the Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management testified that the delayed response after Katrina was due to problems of preparation and competence and to systemic failures, and that these two different issues should be dealt with differently. "I believe we are guilty of both doing some wrong things and doing some things wrong," he said. Dr. James Carafano from the Heritage Foundation listed a series of specific recommendations to improve disaster response. These recommendations included restructuring the National Guard and keeping FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security.

Questions for the second panel focused on what specifically delayed the National Guard and FEMA in the wake of Katrina. Harrald pointed out that, as a multitude of federal agencies became involved in the relief effort, confusion and inefficiency increased. "As water was rising from the south, bureaucracy was descending from the north," he said. Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) asked why it took so long for the National Guard to arrive after Katrina when they had come within hours after the September 11th attacks. In response Carafano said, "We can't compare 9/11 and Katrina. 9/11 had a very small impact area. With Katrina an enormous area was impacted and most of the state capacities were wiped out."

-PMD

Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs
Hearing on "Recovering from Katrina: The Next Phase"
September 14, 2005

Witnesses:

Pete Wilson, Former Governor of California

Patricia Owens, Former Mayor of Grand Forks, North Dakota

Mark Morial, Former Mayor of New Orleans and President and CEO of the National Urban League
Iain Logan, Operations Liaison, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

On September 14, 2005, the Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee held the first of several federal oversight hearings about the response to Hurricane Katrina at all levels of government. "We will ask the hard questions about the adequacy of planning efforts for this long-predicted natural disaster," said Committee Chairwoman Susan Collins (R-ME) in her opening statement. Bringing into question what progress has been made since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, Collins went on to highlight the remarkable lack of "command unity, coordination, and communication" that was exposed among government officials, responders and utilities in the wake of the hurricane.

Despite their goal of answering big questions related to failures in the federal preparedness and response structure, leading members of the committee explained that the current hearing would focus on the immediate assistance needs of hurricane victims. "This is our chance to hear from experts and begin to lay down markers of what kind of steps can help put these communities back on their feet - and also what steps we might want to avoid," added Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), the committee's ranking member.

In an hour of opening statements, members of the committee weighed in on various issues, including whether to construct a 9-11-style independent commission to investigate the government's shortcomings, and whether the local government in New Orleans has the authority and power to launch an expeditious recovery. Senator Pete Domenici (R-NM) declared that President Bush ought to appoint a lead coordinator in the region to do the job "and do it quickly." Earlier that day, Domenici introduced a Senate resolution calling for such a coordinator, stating, "my concern is that, without a primary coordinator, we face the likely prospect of dozens of well-meaning federal agencies chaotically tripping over each other as the recovery process moves forward." He also warned that, "when this much money gets put out this fast, there's a real danger of waste, fraud and abuse."

Testifying before the committee were local and state government leaders who had extensive experience handling major natural disaster emergencies. Former California Governor Pete Wilson, whose term encompassed 22 declared disasters, including the 1994 Northridge earthquake, testified that the success of recovery in his state often depended upon the interoperability of equipment, the ability to suspend certain regulations, and the central, coordinating power of FEMA. Patricia Owens, former mayor of Grand Forks, ND, also successfully evacuated and relocated 50,000 threatened by the Red River Flood in 1997. Owens also attributed her success to the tight and enduring coordination between local, state, and federal officials.

All of the witnesses expressed spirited confidence in the Gulf Coast states' ability to recover, but also an urgency to centralize authority and organize operations. When Senator Collins asked the panel to offer their top priority at this stage of recovery, Wilson and Owens agreed with Domenici, saying that there needs to be one point person appointed at the state or federal level who can make urgent, fair decisions and not get tied up in party politics.

Perhaps the witness who was most forthcoming with recommendations was Mark Morial, the former mayor of New Orleans, who said that he came before the committee "shocked, angry, hurt, betrayed, and bewildered." While Morial agreed with the need for a central coordinator who has credibility and expertise to oversee the efficient use of funds and thorough assessment of environment and health hazards, he focused most of his recommendations on the immediate needs of displaced people. Among his suggestions, Morial called for a federal victims' compensation fund, a carefully conceived and appropriate unemployment assistance program, and the meaningful involvement of local voices in issuing rebuilding contracts. He also emphasized the need for a place that people can go to now for accurate information in order to combat false hopes and media rumors.

The testimony went over well with members of the committee. Senator Lieberman said the witnesses' reports were "extraordinarily helpful...programmatically and therapeutically." Senator Domenici declared it was the best panel of witnesses he had ever heard.

Sources: House Government Reform Committee; House Science Committee; House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee; Senate Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee; Senate Environment and Public Works Committee; Hearing testimony; Associated Press.

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