

House Homeland Security Committee Holds Hearing on Hurricane Season Preparedness

[LIST OF PANEL MEMBERS AND WITNESSES](#)

THOMPSON:

The Committee on Homeland Security will come to order.

The committee's meeting today to receive testimony from FEMA and other key stakeholders on what has been done to prepare for the 2007 hurricane season.

Good afternoon. On behalf of the members of the committee, let me welcome our panel. We are glad that all of you are here to discuss preparations for this year's hurricane season.

First of all, I am enormously concerned, Mr. Paulison, that FEMA is still not compliant with the committee's requirement that testimony be submitted within 48 hours of the hearing. We've shared this to the secretary. I know you have significant jurisdictional issues, a lot of committees. We have said we'd work through it. And I understand what other challenges you have before you, but we have some committee rules that we have adopted, and, to the extent practicable, we'd like to see them followed.

The purpose of this hearing is to examine whether FEMA is adequately coordinating activities with its partners and the state and local level as well as key stakeholders in the private sector.

The 2007 Atlantic hurricane season officially begins on June 1 and will last until November 30. The fact that FEMA still not has issued the strategy that establishes practices and procedures for coordination among federal, state and local governments is very disturbing.

I called this hearing to examine just how FEMA is doing and whether all key stakeholders are ready to respond and coordinate effectively. As a member of the Gulf Coast, I have particular interest in seeing FEMA apply the lessons learned from Katrina into practices for the future. In the event that a hurricane makes landfall and puts our communities at risk, we need to know that FEMA will respond quickly and administer assistance in an evenhanded way.

Another key player that has some hard lessons learned from Katrina was the American Red Cross. I'm interested in hearing how the organization plans to coordinate with FEMA. As we all know, FEMA's response to Hurricane Katrina was abysmal. Last year, Congress passed major FEMA reforms with an expectation that we would see some real progress at this beleaguered agency.

I expect that Mr. Paulison will have an explanation for its agency's failure to produce a national response plan by the start of hurricane season, and FEMA will have a lot of explaining to do if it is not all ready when a hurricane makes landfall this season.

I want to thank the witnesses again for being here and look forward to their testimony.

The chair now recognizes the ranking member of the full committee, the gentleman from New York, Mr. King, for an opening statement.

KING:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me thank you for holding this hearing and for the bipartisan effort that we are making as far as ensuring that FEMA is given the jurisdiction and the tools to get the job done.

Last year, our committee, working in a bipartisan way, was very instrumental in the enactment of the FEMA reform bill, which kept FEMA within the Department of Homeland Security but certainly set up a chain of command and gave the director, I believe, the authority and the power that he needs to get the job done in times of terrorist attacks and natural disasters.

That legislation clarified the command structure, required establishment of a surge capacity force, it also consolidated emergency communications, grant-making and other responsibilities.

Let me just say also, speaking as someone from New York, I want to commend FEMA for the job they did during the heavy snowstorms this year. They delivered generators less than 24 hours after the snowfall ended, and even though it was not in my district, in talking to people around the state, they were very appreciative of the job you did, the professionalism and the timeliness.

I also, like the chairman, would appreciate testimony being provided to the committee on time. At the same time, however, though, I think it's important upon us in the Congress to work in a bipartisan way to reduce the number of committees that Director Paulison, Secretary Chertoff and all the undersecretaries and assistant secretaries have to report to.

So while I'm not excusing the late testimony, I also realize that it's in everyone's interest, including the country's, primarily the country's, that we consolidate this so you're not going from committee to committee and getting caught up in jurisdictional entanglements.

I look forward to your testimony. I want to commend you for the job that you have done. You took over under very trying circumstances. Certainly, from talking to first responders across the country, particularly those in the first service, they speak very highly of the efforts that you are making. Unfortunately, you're in a job where, I guess, you're judged by mistakes.

But all I can say is that I certainly want to commend you for the enthusiasm, the professionalism and the energy that you bring to the job, and I look forward to your testimony today.

I yield back.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

Other members of the committee are reminded that under the committee rules opening statements may be submitted for the record.

I now welcome our first panel. We are pleased to have the administrator of FEMA, Mr. David Paulison, here to testify.

Mr. Paulison has an extensive background in the emergency preparedness arena, having served as the U.S. fire administrator and as the fire chief of Miami-Dade County in Florida.

Without objection, the witness' full statement will be inserted into the record.

I now ask Mr. Paulison to summarize his statement for the committee for five minutes.

PAULISON:

Chair Thompson, I appreciate the invitation.

Ranking Member King.

And, just for the record, I take very seriously your issues with getting our testimony in on time, and we will make a very honest, concerted effort to make sure we do that.

I also take very seriously your comments about the national response plan. We are working very diligently to get that out and operating. I'll talk about that a little bit in my testimony. I'm sure it will come up during the questioning.

We have made steady progress to approve our preparedness posture for the 2007 hurricane season. The new FEMA is leaning further forward to deliver more effective disaster assistance, not only to individuals but to communities impacted by the disaster.

You can see our results in our response this year in Florida, Georgia, the Alabama tornadoes, the nor'easter that affected the states in the Mid-Atlantic and up in New England and just last week in Greensburg, Kansas. In each of these cases, FEMA was engaged as a partner with the state immediately, we deployed operational and technical experts, we rolled logistics and communication capabilities even before the disaster declaration was declared, and we coordinated with the governor to facilitate a presidential disaster delegation.

It was also FEMA that supported and helped facilitate the effective unified command among many federal, state and tribal and local partners involved in these responses. We called this an engaged partnership. Our response in these diverse and numerous events across the breadth of this great country are evidence of the new FEMA's readiness for the 17 currently predicted storms during the 2007 hurricane season.

With the first named storm of the season, Andrea, already behind us, let's look at our advanced preparation, our plans for operations during the storm and our proved ability to help with the long-term recovery.

Local governments will always, always be the first to respond, but FEMA has an important role to play. The old paradigm of waiting for the state and local governments to become overwhelmed before providing federal assistance simply does not work in today's environment.

Under our engaged partnership, FEMA has strengthened our relationship with key state and local partners. A one-size-fits-all approach to emergency management will not work. FEMA is helping each state analyze their strengths and weaknesses. Thus, our planning is more informed, and we can better anticipate specific needs and quickly move to support each state.

A visible demonstration of improved federal capabilities is our playbook of pre-scripted mission assignments. It contains plans for a range of federal support that may be requested in a disaster and lays out interagency coordination needed to ensure that it gets there. The support ranges from heavy helicopters from the Department of Defense, generators from the Army Corps of Engineers, to disaster medical assistance teams from HHS and emergency road-clearing teams from the U.S. Forest Service.

Prior to Katrina, we had just a handful of these pre-scripted mission assignments. Last year, we had about 40, and this year, we have over 180 pre-scripted mission assignments with over 21 federal agencies.

So don't believe the stories that say FEMA and the federal government is not ready and do not have plans in place. We do and they are getting better.

With these preparations underway, FEMA will be ready to act. We have prearranged contracts, an improving logistics system and other elements that are already in place to expedite our response. FEMA can surge its own teams and assess them to an area in anticipation of an approaching storm.

This forward-leaning new FEMA is evident of our response in the tornado that devastated Greensburg. In the first 72 hours, FEMA coordinated the efforts of numerous federal agencies, supplies rolled in before they were requested, mobile support vehicles moved in early, and when the state asked us to supplement their urban search and rescue efforts, the FEMA task force was on the ground within hours.

I also need to point out that the Kansas City National Guard, led by General Todd Bunting with the local mayor and the city administrator, simply did an outstanding job of responding to this disaster, despite the fact that their homes were destroyed also.

I'm proud of the response by our team of federal, state and local partners in responding to this tragedy.

Now, once a storm has passed, FEMA is also better prepared to help with the recovery. FEMA's disaster assistance directorate has expanded its capabilities to provide mass care, sheltering, debris removal, victim registration, including enhanced protections against waste, fraud and abuse, and coordination among government and private- sector entities, all moving to provide assistance.

I'm pleased to report that on May 3, 2007 an offer was made and accepted for the national disability coordinator. This individual is in clearance in our security office, and the official start date has not been declared, but we should have her on board by the end of this month.

One recent example is FEMA's response to the storms and flooding that hit the Northeast earlier this spring. FEMA had staff on the ground before the rain stopped, evaluated damage and registering victims. Mobile assistance centers were available in the immediate wake of the storm. The first individual financial aid was actually delivered less than 24 hours after the president signed the first disaster declaration. This fast, efficient, multi-state response shows the type of action you can expect from FEMA during this year's hurricane season.

In conclusion, we have made real progress at FEMA and are much better prepared for the 2007 hurricane season. By leaning further forward to coordinate the federal response, which is more informed through assessments and communication with our partners, we can better serve all Americans.

Today, FEMA has created an engaged partnership with state and local governments, we've facilitated and supported effective unified command across all levels of government, we've engaged with hurricane- prone states to gain a better understanding of the vulnerabilities, and we have improved logistics and communication capabilities to improve our response, and we have a much improved disaster assistance capability for recovery efforts.

Now, we're not done yet. We have a lot of work to do, but if our progress over the past year is any indication, I believe we're on the right track for fulfilling our vision of becoming the nation's preeminent emergency management agency.

I'm especially proud of the men and women who work at FEMA. They really have put their heart and souls into rebuilding this agency.

So I want to thank this committee and you, Chairman Thompson, particularly, for your continued support, and I look forward to the opportunity to discuss with you about the 2007 hurricane season.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much, Mr. Paulison. I thank you for your testimony.

I'll remind each member that he or she will have five minutes to question the witness.

I will now recognize myself for questions.

Before I do, I'd like to make reference that under the House rules and this committee, visitors and guests are not permitted to make undue noise or to applaud or in any way show their pleasure or displeasure as to the actions of the members of the House.

Mr. Paulison, as you know, with the hurricane season coming on June 1, when do you think we'll have the plan ready?

PAULISON:

Well, the national response plan is actually in place now, the one we've been using. The concept of how we're going to operate under that plan is still in place. What we're doing is trying to rewrite that plan, to build it from the bottom up, to make it much easier for the local communities to understand and use and also incorporate some of those things that came out of the Post-Katrina Reform Act.

We're going to try to get this thing ready before our first hurricane comes. I will not be ready by June 1, I want to tell you that right now, but it should be done shortly after that. I've had my staff working on it with the Department of Homeland Security and also a lot of our users out there are involved in rewriting this plan.

So we do have a plan in place. We have a CONOPS for hurricane season, we're doing right now multi-state evacuation planning and working with all the states and their planning efforts to make sure that we can fill those gaps that they have.

So we have a plan in place. The national response plan you're speaking of, as far as rewriting it, is not done yet, but we're working very hard to make sure we get done in a timely manner.

THOMPSON:

Can you give us an approximation of when you think it will be ready?

PAULISON:

I would hate to give you that and have something happen. Invariably, if I give a date on something, something happens with that. I can tell you that we're working hard to get it done in the June timeframe and not into July.

THOMPSON:

Well, I think you do understand the need to present that document.

PAULISON:

Yes, sir, absolutely.

THOMPSON:

Is your testimony to this committee of such that even though we don't have the plan before us, that it does not impede FEMA's ability to respond to any particular disaster, especially hurricanes?

PAULISON:

That's correct, sir. That is my testimony. We are ready to respond. We're working with the states, making sure we're doing those gap analyses, particularly with the hurricane states, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands and working with them very closely. And we are ready to respond should a hurricane come prior to getting that revised national response plan out; yes, sir.

THOMPSON:

Another issue that came before us in previous testimony is that we authorize FEMA a certain number of slots from a personnel standpoint. Can you provide the committee where we are in completing the slots, as authorized by Congress?

PAULISON:

At this point in time, we're just a little bit over 90 percent of our authorized strength, and I think that's remarkable. We will be at 95 percent before hurricane season, that's our goal. And don't forget we only had 1,700 people when I took over FEMA, and we lost 500 after Katrina. So we made a remarkable recovery of hiring people, getting them aboard, and we are at 90 percent.

If you're talking about the 254 positions converting to full- time, we're in the process of doing that. Of course, that will drop the percentage down once we get those in there, but we're doing a

remarkable job of hiring, being able to cut through some of the red tape and being able to get people on board.

THOMPSON:

Can you provide the committee with what you identify as some of the red tape that perhaps prevented you from bringing people on as fast as you would like to have?

PAULISON:

I think a lot of it was getting stuck in the mud, so to speak, with the old way of doing things. I'll give you an example: We have a job fair right there at the Holiday Inn where FEMA is located, and we had almost 600 people show up for 42 jobs.

So we're going to be doing more things like that, going out and looking at hiring veterans that have been disabled from the war in Iraq, going out to colleges and community colleges. I spoke at a commencement exercise last week and challenged people to come to work for FEMA. It is a good place to work. Targeting minority groups and women groups to get them to apply to come to work for FEMA.

We're looking outside the box, trying to cut through some of the red tape. One of the things I learned coming from local government, the hiring of the federal government is much more difficult than at the local level.

THOMPSON:

Well, as you know, one of the workplace issues for DHS in general is the morale of its employees. Can you provide us those things that you think that might help Congress help the department improve morale of its employees?

PAULISON:

The morale of -- I'll speak to FEMA directly -- the morale of FEMA when I took over was obviously, by anyone's perception, not good. They'd been beat up, they were overworked, short-handed, not enough people to do the job. So we are building the morale by doing a couple of things.

One, the employees see that I'm very serious about rebuilding this organization and they bought into that. Two, we've been hiring people. Like I said, we're at 90 percent of our authorized strength now. Three, and maybe as important as the other two, is bringing people on board who have experience to do the job, bringing in good leadership. We only had two of our 10 regional director slots filled. Now, they're all 10 filled, and they're people with 25 and 30

years experience dealing with emergency management. So the employees see that we're serious about it.

I think that what I would ask Congress to do is to continue what you've been doing, Mr. Chair. You've been supporting me, you've been supporting this agency, and the employees recognize that.

THOMPSON:

Thank you.

Last question, Mr. Paulison: Are you aware of an issue with formaldehyde in certain trailers that FEMA bought and placed in the Gulf Coast region? And if you are, to what extent have you had it investigated, and what have you come up with your investigation?

PAULISON:

The formaldehyde issue was brought to our attention, and we actually went out and investigated. We used EPA and some other agencies to do testing. We've been told that the formaldehyde does not present a health hazard; however, we do encourage our occupants of those trailers to air those out, keep them open as much as possible to let the fumes die out. And pretty much any mobile home you buy has that same issue. Actually, a lot of single family homes have that.

But we have been very cognizant and are on top of that and are making sure that we're not doing anything that's going to harm those people that are living in those travel trailers and mobile homes.

THOMPSON:

So there's not anything out of the normal?

PAULISON:

That's correct, sir.

THOMPSON:

OK. Thank you very much.

I now recognize the ranking member of the full committee, the gentleman from New York, for questions.

KING:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Director Paulison, I understand that probably in the next several weeks the U.S. National Trade Commission may issue a decision, a patent dispute case, that would prohibit the importation of broadband- capable cell phones that allow users to share video, exchange other data via the Internet. I assume you're aware of it. I know several first responders groups have come to me, and they're concerned about the impact that would have.

What impact do you think it would have, and how would FEMA accommodate itself to that decision, if it comes down that way?

PAULISON:

We had a discussion with this yesterday, so your question is timely.

I won't have a major impact on FEMA itself, because we have the capability of doing those things already. What it does have an impact on is the first responders. They need that technology out there to be able to do the video, the data over one instrument instead of having several.

So without getting into a dispute on who's right, the fact is that the first responder community can use that technology and can use it to actually protect themselves and better protect the American public.

KING:

On to another point, and I realize that no two disasters are alike and no incidents are alike, but based on the leadership you're bringing to FEMA and based on the legislation that was passed last year, what would be done different if a Katrina-like event occurred this summer? How do you see FEMA reacting differently than it did two years ago?

PAULISON:

Well, FEMA itself, the difference is some of the things we've already talked about, about having a better communication system, having the right type of leadership on the ground who know how to handle disasters, know how to manage these big disasters, but also having visibility of what's actually happening in real time as opposed to guessing what's happening and getting it off some of the television stations.

Also, we've been working with each state, looking at evacuation plans. Are they in place, how are they going to transport people, where are they going to go, who's going to staff the shelters? We've been working very closely with the Red Cross on the shelter issue, putting a shelter registry in place. We've identified 44,000 shelters across this country that we didn't know that were there before.

So we're doing a lot of things that you're not going to see the same type of response. You're going to see a federal government that is extremely proactive, moving very quickly and making sure that when the state asks for something it's there on the ground waiting for them.

KING:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now yield to the gentlelady from California for five minutes, Ms. Sanchez.

SANCHEZ:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Mr. Paulison, for being before us today.

In the couple of weeks, I'm planning to introduce legislation to authorize the national urban search and rescue system, and my question for you is, do you think that the national urban search and rescue system and its task forces are a successful part in helping FEMA respond to these disasters?

PAULISON:

There's no question about it. They are an outstanding asset for FEMA to use. We have 28 teams out there right now. In '07, they received \$25 million from FEMA, and the president's proposed budget for '08 is another \$25 million.

SANCHEZ:

In particular, the legislation I have drafted right now would allow the urban search and rescue system and task forces to activate for pre-staging and training activities, and do you think that this will improve the system's preparedness and ability to respond when they're needed?

PAULISON:

Well, without seeing the legislation, I'll just speak generally, that any time that the teams exercise and deploy in practice, it makes them sharper and more able to respond in a better manner, if that's answering your question. And that's why we've increased the amount of money they get to \$25 million and again next year to give them the dollars to do some of those things.

SANCHEZ:

In the testimony that we received from the second panel, Mr. Fugate, the director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management, urges us to increase the funding for the Emergency Management Performance Grant Program. The National Emergency Management Association estimates that the current national need for that funding is at about \$487 million, and yet the president only put in \$200 million for this 2008 budget.

Given that this the only grant that we have of federal funding for the states and locals to use for planning and preparedness activities for all hazard disasters, do you think that that's enough money, the fact that the president only put in \$200 million in his budget?

PAULISON:

Well, since Mr. Fugate is sitting behind me, I'll be careful how I answer that.

Actually, the president and the administration does feel that that's sufficient. There is no amount of money that's ever enough for anybody to operate under. We know that our state emergency management systems are stretched. Florida has a very robust one, and Mr. Fugate is one of our better emergency managers around the country.

But the president is putting into the budget what he thinks is sufficient to keep those systems going. It is a state activity, and the federal government is simply assisting in that area.

SANCHEZ:

Do you think that the Department of Homeland Security has a sufficient all-hazards approach to emergency preparedness and response?

PAULISON:

I do. I'm a firm believe in all-hazards response and all-hazards preparedness. Any type of disaster that we prepare for we have to prepare for all of them. We have to prepare for natural disasters, manmade disasters, terrorist disasters, any type of thing. You can see it in your home

state what you have to deal with, from forest fire to floods, mudslides, earthquakes, all those types of things.

So we have to have a general perspective of this, and I do feel like that I get a lot of support as the secretary for an all-hazards approach to how we respond and how we prepare.

SANCHEZ:

And, lastly, let me ask, my biggest concern right now, being a Californian and just going out in the community, is that the first line of response or successfulness with respect to either a terrorist attack or a hazard situation is how the people respond. And what I've seen is really a deterioration in people even being prepared on an individual, family or unit basis. What do you think that we can do to increase that knowledge and really get people to understand that it may be nine days, like in Katrina, before the federal government or anybody else gets to them?

PAULISON:

And I've seen the same thing, and I'll talk about my home state of Florida after Hurricane Andrew came through. We saw several years where people were prepared and would get ready for every hurricane season. And as we got further and further away from that hurricane, it got worse and worse where people simply did not prepare.

With Hurricane Wilma coming through last year, we ended up working with the state and simply could not keep up with the amount of supplies we had to deliver to people because they were not ready. They didn't have their three days supply of food and water and medicine, flashlights and batteries and all those things that we know you have to have.

This country has to get back to a culture of preparedness. We can preach it from here, but it takes people like Mr. Fugate, who will testify in the next committee, and the local emergency managers and our congressional members and our local elected officials continuing to preach that we have to be ready for any type of disaster. Because regardless of what state you live in, in this free country of ours, there is some type of natural disaster that can be there. Plus we have the threat of terrorism.

So I think we're on the same page. We've got to get that out there and convince our public out there, our residents, that they have to prepare and take care of themselves and their families.

SANCHEZ:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

I apologize to the gentlelady. I looked at one red light and it was second.

We now recognize the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Rogers, for five minutes.

ROGERS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Those of us who were on this committee last Congress are all aware of the real difficulty DHS has had in trying to recruit and retain top management personnel, and we all are also aware how difficult it was for us when your position came open to recruit top-flight personnel to be interested in this job. And as I recall, you were the only top-flight candidate who didn't run for the hills, and our nation owes you a debt of gratitude for taking on this job when nobody else wanted it of your caliber. So I appreciate that.

Also, I appreciate the fact that when we had a tornado in Alabama earlier, a few months ago, FEMA performed exceptionally well, which was a stark turnaround from what we saw on the Gulf Coast after Katrina. So I know that didn't happen by accident either, so I appreciate your service in Alabama.

There's several things I want to ask about. First is, on the coast, in the coastal states, we have, and I know in Mississippi and in Alabama, primarily rural water systems that provide water to these small towns. It's my understanding that in Georgia and in Mississippi there are adequate numbers of mobile generators for pumping the water when the power goes out, but in Alabama there's a very small number of those generators. Is there anything being done by FEMA to address that inadequacy, at least on the southern part of Alabama, toward the Gulf Coast, in water generation?

PAULISON:

We have quite a few generators that we call 50-pack. We have 50 generators on a tractor trailer that we move in very quickly after a storm. Greensburg, Kansas was a -- they had their own water system and their own power system owned by the city, so we moved in very quickly with generators, along with the National Guard, to help them get those things back up and running again. And we would do the same thing in Alabama.

ROGERS:

Can these local rural water systems apply for grant assistance to get mobile units that they can move among their own members and their associations?

PAULISON:

They can after a storm. If there's a storm and their infrastructure is damaged...

ROGERS:

I'm thinking ahead of time, pre-positioning these things, knowing that on the Gulf Coast we're going to have seasonal weather problems that will take the water distribution down. Because Georgia has an adequate number and because Mississippi, because of Katrina relief, has them, I want to know if we can do anything in advance of a disaster to make sure these water systems have these mobile units they can share among each other?

PAULISON:

I'm not aware of any off the top of my head, Congressman, but I'll tell you what I will do: I will research and see if we can find something.

ROGERS:

If you would, I'd appreciate it, sir.

The next thing you talked about in response to Congressman King's question about what we would do differently. You talked about anticipating and working better with local governments. One of the things that our local officials in south Alabama talked about after Katrina was the debris removal, and they would like the latitude to go ahead and negotiate ahead of time with companies who are not in the immediate coastal area, to come in after a hurricane or tornado and remove debris, pre-negotiated prices along pre-negotiated routes so that we don't get extorted when we have these disasters.

Have you all done anything to allow these local governments themselves to pre-negotiate these debris removal contracts?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. In fact, we encourage them to do that. One thing that we've done is there used to be a disparity between at what percentage rate we reimburse the Corps, if the Corps did it, or if a local community contracted themselves, and we've taken that disparity away. That was not the right thing to do, so we've taken that disparity away.

We encourage local communities and states to have those debris contracts in place. It makes it much easier. First of all, it puts the work back at the local community where it needs to be so you can put local people working. And then, secondly, it takes the burden off of the Corps also.

ROGERS:

Excellent. My last question is to follow up on Congresswoman Sanchez's issue of search and rescue. Do you all have within your resources canine detection teams for post-disaster search and rescue?

PAULISON:

The 20 urban search and rescue teams, most of those do have canine dogs to search for live victims and also body recovery. FEMA itself does not own them, but we pay for them through the local communities that have urban search and rescue teams, or the states that have them.

ROGERS:

You pay for them?

PAULISON:

We support the urban search and rescue teams, again, \$25 million this year, and part of that the teams will support a dog canine corps at the urban search and rescue level.

ROGERS:

OK. Thank you very much.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize the gentlelady from the District of Columbia for five minutes, Ms. Norton.

NORTON:

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The gentleman from Alabama has raised an issue of the kind that about a dozen members came to testify before our subcommittee last week. And just for the information of members, we are preparing a package of legislative fixes really drawn from the Katrina experience. Sometimes they may apply to states like Alabama, which is also affected, but these would be one time only fixes, and we had the entire delegation from both states come. And we would appreciate your continuing input into that discussion.

I'm going to limit my question to a single one, particularly since my subcommittee is having a hearing that comes close to this one. It's going to be called, "Assuring the National Guard is as Ready at Home as Abroad," and I appreciate that you're appearing at both of these hearings.

Although I'm going to suggest to both chairmen, full chairmen, that we perhaps have some joint hearings so as to keep FEMA from running between two committees, which very honestly do have overlapping jurisdictions. And so we've just got to figure that out, and the committees are trying very hard. They each have a deep interest in your work.

My question really goes to preparing for the coming season and avoiding what I will call, for lack of a better word, false positives. We may have scared FEMA into overpreparedness. You'll remember, Mr. Paulison, our hearing on the millions of dollars above what was needed for food, and I know you are fixing that now, but several million dollars was wasted, some was given away.

We also have asked for an audit of your new management employees. I think much of that came out of both committees.

Mr. Chairman, you will recall that in our committee on the Federal Management Service we discussed, as we had in the other committee, how the person who became head of this federal police service that covers the entire federal work force, almost 2 million people, had never run a police department. I understand some of these people come out of the military, but that raises that some questions that I think only an audit will tell us about.

But you have now new people predicting hurricanes, and there was an internal debate in FEMA last year about this seven-day directive, that there will be seven days advance warning and so forth, and a lot of that comes out of the science, but the debate had to do with keeping mobilizations and deployments from occurring that may not be necessary. And it appears that a fair number of deployments were made that were not necessary based on this seven-day warning when in fact most of those hurricanes peter out and go out to sea, thank heavens.

I want to know if you feel that you are more actively able to discern which hurricanes are likely to hit land, and you know that in about three days out. In that case, wouldn't that be enough, given advance orders for food and so forth, if needed, to do the necessary deployments without trying to figure out seven days out and then deploying people around the country, spending taxpayers' money where it may not be necessary?

PAULISON:

That's a very difficult issue and a very intriguing question you're asking. We work very closely with the National Hurricane Center. In fact, I have a FEMA employee that's stationed down there. We have a hurricane liaison team actually based in the National Hurricane Center down in Miami. And we know they're working very hard to give us better predictions. Three-day predictions are pretty accurate, the five-day predictions are not quite as accurate, and if you get out any further than that, it makes it much harder.

We want to be proactive. The states have to move quickly. If we look at an area like Louisiana or anywhere in the Gulf Coast where a significant number of people are going to have to be evacuated and going to have to be evacuated by buses, if we wait too long before we start moving people, then they'll be in harm's way. Now, seven days is too early to move people, obviously, but, still, 72 hours out takes almost that long sometimes to move people.

I know Craig Fugate is here, and he has a lot of experience with that. I'm sure you can ask that same question from a state perspective just to tell you what they think.

We don't want to move assets needlessly, we don't want to waste taxpayers' dollars, but at the same time, the downside would not be there if they needed us.

So it's a tough call. We're trying to make the best judgment we can. I'm on the phone constantly. I was with Max Mayfield and the new Hurricane Director Proenza. We're developing a good relationship, and I'm on the phone with him constantly, "Tell me what you really think. Where do you think it's going to go?" We're just making the best call we can at the time.

NORTON:

Yes. It would be too bad if an audit then is done on FEMA going more places than was necessary. There ought to be some way to somehow do this scientifically. I do understand what you're up against.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

I'd like to remind the audience that cell phones should be in the "off" or "vibrate" mode during hearings. We continue to hear phones going off while questions and witnesses are responding.

I now recognize the gentleman from Florida for five minutes, Mr. Bilirakis.

BILIRAKIS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

As I'm sure you're aware, Director, many experts have predicted that this hurricane season will be a very active one. Obviously, those of us who represent coastal states are very concerned about the potential of these dangerous forecasts.

I believe it is incumbent upon our states and local governments to best prepare for major disasters. So with that, I'll ask my questions.

What are the most important steps that states, localities and even individuals can take to ensure that they are best prepared for the upcoming hurricane season?

PAULISON:

That's a pretty broad question. I'm from south Florida also. My family is still down there.

Individually, I can tell you what we do. We make sure that our home is prepared, make sure we have hurricane shutters. Every beginning of hurricane season we go out and purchase food and water, make sure we have batteries for our flashlights. I happen to have a portable generator. I make sure I have fuel for that and we're ready to go.

At the local level, the local community definitely has to be prepared, because that's where the response is going to come from. They have to make sure they have plans in place, they exercise those plans, make sure they know what their shelters are going to be, how they're going to evacuate people, when they're going to call it, how are they going to get there.

And at the state level, the same type of thing. The state needs to make sure that they're following up on each of those counties and each of those communities, that they're evaluating those plans to make sure those are in place and make sure the state is ready to respond with the assets it has.

It's a team effort. It takes the federal government, the state, the local community and the individuals all to take it very seriously to prepare themselves for these types of storms, particularly in the coastal areas.

BILIRAKIS:

OK. I have a question. I introduced a piece of legislation which was to provide tax incentives for Americans in their property to better withstand hurricane and tornado-free winds. Do you believe that the administration would be interested in working with me on this proposal to help continue our country's commitment to disaster preparedness? Because I think mitigation is where it's at.

PAULISON:

I can speak for FEMA, particularly. We would be glad to work with you on any type of legislation that would help people better prepare themselves and to sit down and talk with you and talk about what our issues are and how we think we can get this country all prepared for any type of disaster, quite frankly.

BILIRAKIS:

OK. Can you specifically discuss again -- I know it was touched upon -- the adjustments that your agency made post- Katrina?

PAULISON:

I will, and I'll cover them quickly, because I know you have another panel behind me. We took very seriously those things that came out of committees like this, came out of the White House, came out of the IG report, the GAO reports, and they boiled down to just a few things that were overall themes.

One, the biggest failure was communications, no communication between the local community and the state, between the state and the federal government and inside the federal government itself. That's why we put this unified command system in place. It has a better visibility of what's happening on the ground real time. We've put systems in place to be able to get live videos back where we can actually see that and have satellite communications.

Having a better logistics system, better handle on how much stuff do we need on the ground, how do we move it, how do we track it, and how do we get it to the people. Having better leadership on the ground, people who know what they're doing -- we learned that very clearly -- and then also being able to take better care of our victims, the people who have had to evacuate. Have a better registration system in place, being able to track people, making sure they get what they need but yet at the same time putting waste, abuse and fraud systems in place so we don't waste money like we did during Katrina.

And that's a very quick, short answer, but I'd be glad to sit down with your office and go over it in detail if you'd like.

BILIRAKIS:

Thank you, Director.

I yield back.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Carney, for five minutes.

CARNEY:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Paulison, once again, I want to commend you for your efforts in jumping on. It's not easy and I realize the task you have at hand.

On February 15 of 2006, February 15, 2006, Secretary Chertoff testified, and I want to quote this so I get it right, that, "It seems to me the minimum of what we need to do by June 1 is require that you put on the trucks the kind of communications that allow you to track where a truck is at any particular point in time," unquote.

Now, the secretary is talking about June 1, 2006. Does FEMA, in fact, have this capability in place by January 1, 2006?

PAULISON:

We do. We do for the Gulf Coast, and up the Atlantic Coast, anything that flows out of our office in Denton, Texas, or our offices out of Atlanta, which is our biggest supply depots. We purchased 20,000 GPS units and we can track our trucks real time, but it's a bigger system than that. So nationwide what we can do is our ordering system, where does the order come from, when is it filled, where is it going, and when does it get on the road. We have put a system in place like that.

CARNEY:

And that's nationwide?

PAULISON:

The tracking of the individual trucks is not nationwide. The tracking of the individual trucks is anything that comes out of Texas or anything that comes out of Atlanta.

But we're looking now at going to more of what we call a 3PL, third-party logistics where leveraging the private sector out there, like the UPSes and the FedExes and tying into their system instead of spending the millions and millions of dollars to purchase our own. So that's going to be the next phase of this.

CARNEY:

In case of a true catastrophe, are you going to then be pulling resources from all over the country; is that what you're telling us?

PAULISON:

Well, the bulk of our supplies are in Texas and Alabama, although we do have them scattered around the country. But what we're really doing is develop a partnership with the Defense Logistics Agency where they will be our main supplier and a backup supplier. So we'll be able to rotate stocks, so we don't have the wasted supplies like we had before, but at the same time being able to track those through that system also. We really are developing partnerships.

We have learned a lot of lessons over the last three years on how the logistics systems should work and also to the point of hiring one of the top officials. I had a DLA to come work for us and run our logistics, so we're excited about that.

CARNEY:

Thanks. In your prepared testimony, you said that the guiding principle of the new FEMA is that we are leaning further forward to deliver more effective disaster assistance to individuals and communities impacted by a disaster, and you called it, "engaged partnership." I really commend that approach. I'm very happy to hear that.

Yet last week, when White House Spokesman Tony Snow was asked about Kansas Governor Sebelius concern over response efforts, he said, quote, "If you don't request it, you're not going to get it," unquote.

Is this statement consistent with FEMA's principles or do you have some education to do at the White House?

(CROSSTALK)

THOMPSON:

Excuse me a minute. We'll save your time, Mr. Carney.

PAULISON:

What was the question again? Sorry?

CARNEY:

Your leaning forward approach, you've engaged partnership I think is great, but Tony Snow said, "If you don't request it, you're not going to get it."

PAULISON:

I think that was in context to some of the Guard issues, I'm not sure. But I can tell you that the philosophy of this agency is we're going to try to anticipate what the needs are. We see thousands of disasters all the time, so we kind of know what's going to be needed. So we're going to be moving supplies, communications but not without talking to the state and telling them what we're doing. We're not going to come in and take over. This is a local response and it's a state response.

But what we did in Greensburg, Kansas, just seeing the magnitude of the disaster of that, we knew that they were going to have a difficult time asking for things, so we started moving the stuff that we thought they would need right away, and it worked extremely well.

CARNEY:

Is Mr. Snow aware of this?

PAULISON:

Yes, he is. He was with us when we went down there and saw what we were doing. I think that may have been taken -- again, I don't know what the context of what that statement was said, but I know he was very supportive of what we were doing.

CARNEY:

Good. All right. That's good to hear.

Thank you very much. No further questions.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize Mr. Davis of Tennessee for five minutes.

D. DAVIS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you, Director Paulison, for being here. I appreciate your testimony today.

It's my understanding that FEMA and the national response plan make it quite clear that FEMA's role is to coordinate federal resources and to assist in disasters and not actually take over for local and state governments. Do you agree with that?

PAULISON:

Absolutely. All response is local; that is, we are not going to take over. We want to be there as a partner from day one, not wait for people to become overwhelmed before we step in.

But I was a local first responder also. I ran the Miami-Dade Fire Department, and I would not want somebody to come in and take over my disaster, but I would want somebody by my side, and that's the tact we're going to take. We're not going to take over, that disaster belongs to that state, belongs to that local community. We just want to make sure they have the tools and the supplies to do the job.

D. DAVIS:

You used the word, "overwhelmed," and it appears to me that we're really in a partnership, the federal government and state and local governments, coming together, working alongside, closer to the people. Local government, state government really take the lead and then FEMA comes in and follows up.

With that in mind, though, there are people around the country that watch national TV and they just feel like the federal government should take control and be there quicker. I'm not sure that I agree with that, but what would you say to the people around the country that have that sense that we should react quicker at a federal level?

PAULISON:

I think we should act quicker than we have in the past but not to take over. If the state or local community does need something, like communications equipment, food, water, blue tarps, all

those types of things that FEMA supplies, they should be there when they need them, not have to wait three or four days for us to ship them across the country.

So we are going to move faster with things that we think they do need, but we are not going to step on their toes, we're not going to take over these disaster scenes.

D. DAVIS:

I know that I have been a state legislator myself, and I understand that at the local level we're closer to the people, typically, than we are in the Washington level. Do you believe you even have the constitutional authority to take control or do you still believe that's down there at the local and state level?

PAULISON:

In a catastrophic event, the president would have legal authority to take over, invoking Insurrection Act or something like that. However, in a normal disaster, we are not going to do that. That's not what we have the authority to do. That is the local response or a state's rights out there.

Again, we want to be a partner. This is not an adversarial at all. We want to be there with them as soon as we can, standing by their side, "What do you need, how can we help, what can we give you," and that's the way we want to operate. That's the philosophy this organization is going to operate under as long as I'm in charge.

D. DAVIS:

Thank you for your partnership, and I can tell you, being from the mountains of east Tennessee, there's times that we have floods coming out of the mountains with rivers and streams and FEMA has always been very responsive. This is my first term but I hear very good things that you've been able to do in the past, and thank you for working with us on the local and state level.

And with that, I yield back.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize the gentlelady from New York, Ms. Lowey, for five minutes.

LOWEY:

And I thank you, Mr. Chairman, and what a delight it is for me to welcome Administrator Paulison.

I must tell you that we had a severe nor'easter and the subsequent flooding devastated many communities, particularly in Westchester County, which is my community, and Administrator Paulison joined Senator Clinton and me on a tour of the flooded areas and FEMA quickly had preliminary damage assessment teams on the ground, which led to the president issuing a disaster declaration in a timely manner. I cannot be more effusive. You were extraordinary, you responded immediately, and I visited every disaster preparedness center, recovery center, I guess we call it now in the district, and the response has really been fantastic.

You set up seven disaster recovery centers, nearly 6,000 households and businesses have registered for assistance, \$7.25 million in housing assistance grants have been approved for over 3,000 households. The Small Business Administration has approved 41 loans for a total of \$2.24 million, and the majority of those I've spoken with have really been pleased.

So congratulations, and we thank you for your very efficient, effective and compassionate response.

On another issue, I wanted to ask you about the Stafford Act, which limits grants for housing repair to primary residences, and I certainly understand the intent to not provide assistance for an individual to repair a second home or vacation house.

This limitation, we have found, can have a negative impact on landlords who are trying to make repairs so their renters can return home, and affordable housing is very scarce in my district, and after the recent flooding you and I saw many cases in which landlords are denied assistance to repair their rental units, because these are not the owners' primary residences.

The landlords must secure a Small Business Administration or private loan in order to repair their property, and in some cases, landlords have simply said that it isn't financially viable to take a loan to fix property that is rented by low or moderate income individuals.

So this exacerbates the affordable housing problems and really has had a major effect on renters who must find a new place to live.

So in order to solve this problem, which also remains in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, I'm working on legislation to allow FEMA to provide direct assistance to landlords of low to moderate income housing. It would also give FEMA the flexibility to set appropriate conditions to ensure that funding is directed to areas where it will be most beneficial.

I'd appreciate it if you could share with me your thoughts and whether you could support a change to the Stafford Act to assist landlords who rent to low or moderate income tenants.

PAULISON:

The issue that you saw is why we really encourage people to have flood insurance and insurance on their dwellings, because no matter where you are the potential for flood is always there across this country.

We would sit down and work with you on the issues. Obviously, I can't commit the administration position on the legislation, but I would like to look at it and have an opportunity to comment on it.

LOWEY:

I thank you very much.

And it's also my understanding that when seeking federal assistance for personal property losses, an applicant must first file for a Small Business Association loan and if denied, FEMA may offer the applicant a grant. Why does an individual -- oh, I see my red light, I'll talk quickly -- why must an individual first apply to the SBA for a loan when attempting to secure a FEMA grant for personal property damage?

PAULISON:

I'm not sure that's totally accurate. When they apply for individual assistance, if they get turned down by FEMA, then they can apply for SBA loan, but I don't think it's -- I think it's the other way around. Let me have my staff sit down with you and go over that individual -- that's' one of the things we're actually going to look at this next year.

OK. There is one called, "other needs assistance," and that part is correct, but we are going to look very carefully at the individual assistance piece this next year, because it doesn't move as quickly as want it to, it doesn't move as smoothly as we want it to, and see how we can streamline that and make it much more user friendly. And then next year we'll do public assistance.

LOWEY:

Thank you very much, and thank you for indulging.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize the gentlelady from Florida, Ms. Brown-Waite, for five minutes.

BROWN-WAITE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I want to also thank Mr. Shays for relinquishing his time to me, because I have to be in the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

I just wanted to thank you, Mr. Paulison, for proving that you're taking emergency management seriously. When we had the tornadoes touch down in central Florida, we got absolute great response from FEMA. We were able to have your people and SBA on the ground helping people, and that's what I think that they expect from government. So let me just commend you very much for rapid response.

Probably coming from Florida, you've just had a lot of experience in the Miami-Dade area, and, certainly, in Florida, we have a great state system that I'm proud to say I helped put together after Hurricane Andrew. When I was got elected it was right after Hurricane Andrew, and we knew that we needed some changes in Florida and made those necessary changes.

One thing that has concerned local elected officials in my area is that FEMA will not reimburse in a gated community for -- they will not reimburse the locality for out front of the house pickup of debris, and why some may think that gated community are just for the wealthy, I can assure you that I have low and moderate income mobile home gate communities also.

I'd like to ask you if the agency is considering any changes in that prohibition?

PAULISON:

I think we -- and I need to check with my staff -- but I think we have corrected that where we do do some of those things and the reimburse the communities for that type of pickup. I live in a gated community too, but let me follow up and make sure. I think we have put stuff in place to deal with some of these issues. But let me find out for sure. I don't want to give you a bad answer here.

BROWN-WAITE:

I do believe that what you do is, they have to haul it out to the front of the gated community, and it will be taken away from there. But for many elderly homeowners, that's a problem. And if people are in a gated community, I just don't see why we should be discriminating against them, either because they are at the wealthy end of the spectrum, living in a gated community, or at the very poor end of the spectrum, living in a secure senior mobile home park. And I would just ask you to take a look at that policy.

PAULISON:

I know we dealt with this during Katrina in New Orleans and some other areas, and we worked around it by getting a right of entry to do some of those things. But let me give you the right answer, and I'll get back with your staff and brief them on what those issues are. And if it's still not where you need it to be, we'll work on it some more.

BROWN-WAITE:

I appreciate that.

Certainly, at a time of an emergency, such as we regularly have in Florida and other coastal states, tell me how you coordinate with the National Guard. I know that the issue of the National Guard has been brought up recently. I wrote to the state National Guard general asking where Florida is, because that's of course my concern and Mr. Bilirakis' concern. Tell me how you coordinate with the National Guard.

(CROSSTALK)

BROWN-WAITE:

Excuse me, ma'am, I didn't ask you. I asked Mr. Paulison.

THOMPSON:

Excuse me. According to our House rules, you are out of order, and you're not allowed to speak. I've admonished the audience a couple of times about that. And we're trying to be tolerant, but understand we do have rules of the committee, and unless you follow those rules, we'll have you removed.

Continue, Ms. Brown-Waite.

PAULISON:

The National Guards are a state asset, and we work very closely with them when we get on the scene. In Greensburg, the adjunct general of the National Guard was the incident commander and we immediately made contact with him to make sure that we were coordinating the response.

I know the issue is, as we heard just behind me, about the National Guard's asset being overseas, but we do have a system in this country called, EMAC, the Emergency Management

Assistance Compact, where we move assets from one state to another to assist a particular state that's going through a disaster, and we do that with the National Guard asset also.

But we work very closely with the Guard. They are a key player in our response system, and we have a very good partnership with them.

BROWN-WAITE:

One other question: When localities contract with various clean-up companies, they very often will contract with two or three in case one is not available, which I think is a very wise thing to do. But during the tornado that struck down, it really was a feeding frenzy of, "Well, I've got the contract, no I've got the contract," and I'm not certain I want the federal government to enter in there but perhaps to advise the localities of one has to be the primary, one has to be the secondary. Because in this instance, both of these companies thought that they were the primary. And I'm sure you've found this in other locations.

After you respond to that, I will yield back the balance of my time, but please do respond.

PAULISON:

Yes, I actually have seen that on occasion when there's several contractors, but that really is a local issue, and I think you're right, you don't want the federal government stepping into that. We do encourage the communities to have those debris contracts in place. We have the Army Corps of Engineers that can sometimes come in and referee those types of things, but that's up to the local community to say, "OK, you're the prime, you're the backup." We can advise them to do that, but it's really their contract, not ours.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize the gentlelady from the Virgin Islands for five minutes, Ms. Christensen.

CHRISTENSEN:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Mr. Paulison, thank you for your testimony. I'm encouraged by the progress you're reporting.

I have a question about mass care, because, as I understand it, the ESF-6, the housing, feeding and providing first aid now comes under FEMA, but I'd you to explain to me what the role of the Red Cross is then in mass care and how that's being coordinated.

PAULISON:

The Red Cross is one of our major players in that ESF- 6 system. We ended up taking it over, because they don't have the authority to mission assign other federal governments and we do. But they are partners in that, along with several other groups, like HHS and others, that fit into that ESF-6 position of mass care. And we take the lead in it, but they are right there with us as partners. And, by the way, I just met with your adjunct general and your state emergency manager recently, a few days ago, exactly and talked about some of these same issues. And they're doing a great job for you down there; they really are.

CHRISTENSEN:

Yes, they are. We're very proud of them and looking forward to have the change of command very soon.

I'm also concerned about mitigation, because in my experience with FEMA, mitigation played a big role for us in the Virgin Islands in being able to prevent the damage with recurrent hurricanes. And if I remember correctly, we could request about 20 percent additional funding for mitigation. And I'm hearing that that's no longer the case. Could you tell me if there's still a provision for mitigation as you repair and recover or is that done?

PAULISON:

No. If a disaster is declared, there's a certain portion of the disaster dollars that can be used by the state or the local community for mitigation efforts. There's also hazard mitigation grant program out there that can be used for public assistance, and I think it's 15 percent of whatever the disaster cost is. And that can be used to raise homes or do other things to mitigate future damage. But the money is still there. It's 15 percent.

WAITE-BROWN:

OK. I still have a little more time.

The PFO and FCOs...

PAULISON:

Yes?

WAITE-BROWN:

... do they both report to the secretary?

PAULISON:

No. The FCO reports to me. That is our employee. What we're doing with the PFO, the PFO is the secretary's representative out there to do the high-level coordination with federal agencies. The FCO is the primary federal person to manage disasters.

WAITE-BROWN:

But the FCO is the person that I, as the health person in the Virgin Islands, would go to to ask for whatever assets I needed from the federal government.

PAULISON:

That's correct. You should.

WAITE-BROWN:

I'm surprised the question didn't come up before, but it just seems to me that we have too many there, and when that happens, things fall between the cracks. Has that been exercised to see how it works and whether we really need those two officials?

PAULISON:

It has. We just had a major exercise just this last week, actually, two weeks ago, not only to a hurricane but tied into a terrorist event where the PFO and the FCO worked together. The FCO, which you normally deal with, is the person that handles anything to do with the Stafford Act in that disaster. That will continue on.

The PFO is the secretary's representative out there. Doesn't have operational control; the FCO has that. The PFO is going to help mitigate issues between different federal agencies, may feed the information back to the secretary. Again, it's his eyes and ears out there on the ground.

But the FCO is going to be the primary person managing the federal assets on the ground, not running the disaster. That's either, in your case, the territorial or a state responsibility to manage that disaster.

BROWN-WAITE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now yield five minutes to the gentleman from Connecticut, Mr. Shays.

SHAYS:

Thank you, Mr. Paulison, for being here. I think you've got a very difficult job, and I know you're working very hard at it.

I don't have the same reaction Ms. Lowey has about the gratitude from FEMA. You left Connecticut out of the businesses and personal assistance, and we could give you literally thousands of examples of -- excuse me, hundreds of examples of damage, 2,400 residential units and so on.

What I'm puzzled by is, wouldn't you group the area together and -- I mean, what does it matter if Greenwich in New York are divided if it's the same storm in the region? Isn't the whole point of natural disaster to look at the impact on the region? Why would you do it next door to the same storm and not Connecticut?

PAULISON:

I have my staff looking at Connecticut right now, actually. The president did sign off on two counties for public assistance. I have not turned down individual assistance yet. I've asked the state for more information about individual damage.

We're bringing on a small state and rural advocate into FEMA to report directly to me also. The public assistance and individual assistance piece for some of the smaller states like yours, it doesn't work as smoothly as I want it to. I'm just trying to be very candid here. Fifty homes in Connecticut is much different than 100 or 200 homes in New York or Texas or California. And what it does is, the whole idea of the Stafford Act is to cover when the state is overwhelmed and can't deal with a disaster.

So it's been very difficult with Connecticut. Your county system is not like the other states.

SHAYS:

No, we don't have a county system.

PAULISON:

And you don't have a county system.

SHAYS:

We have counties only in name, and that's the only thing that they represent.

PAULISON:

That's what's making it difficult for us, so I sat my staff down just before I came to this area, actually not even knowing you would be here, but I want them to look at this very carefully as we look at the individual assistance piece and the amount of damage. We have an area in there that was very low income that has...

SHAYS:

Right. I was going to read you some of the folks, renters, who didn't have flood insurance -- these were rivers that hadn't flooded as long as anyone can remember.

But the same storm that impacted Ms. Lowey's district impacted ours, and there's this artificial boundary in New York and Connecticut. I would think we would look at the region and treat the region, and if that's not possible, and it seems to me it's a defect in the law, we should look at us as a region. And I appreciate you checking that out, and I look forward to having more dialogue with you about that.

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. I'll be glad to do that.

SHAYS:

Thank you. I know you received correspondence from all five congressmen, two senators and the governor as well.

I'd like to ask, in regards to Katrina, we all weep for different reasons. Everything about it, it was a huge storm, 10 miles inland, 20 feet of water, and Mississippi. It was a biblical storm.

But there were things that were very troubling to me. One -- I want no comment about this, I'll just say it -- that the head of Homeland Security chose to only go there by Wednesday with the president. I would have thought he would have been there Monday, Tuesday, whatever. I think his reasoning was he wanted to let FEMA be FEMA and stay out of the way, but when I helped write the Department of Homeland Security legislation with others, we wanted the Department of Homeland Security to be added value to FEMA, not to just like say, "Here you go, you're the experts, do it." We wanted everything to be added value.

Can you tell me what added value you have by having the Department of Homeland Security and how the department may respond more effectively than it did, not FEMA, per se.

PAULISON:

There is a significant amount of added value by us being inside Homeland Security, from my perspective. I have assets at my fingertips that we would not have had before. I meet every week with the seven operational components of Homeland Security, from the Coast Guard, the Border Patrol, ICE, all of those -- TSA. And those are people that can give me assistance when we have a disaster or even in the meantime.

I don't have to do a mission assignment. All I have to do is pick up the phone and call all these people that I know on a first name basis and say, "I need some help or I need this or I need that." Tremendous assistance.

Secretary Chertoff has been personally, I mean personally involved in helping me rebuild this organization. Tremendous amount of support, making sure that I get the assets that I need, making sure that I get the support that I need from all the other agencies inside the organization. So I feel like that there is a significant amount of value added.

SHAYS:

Thank you very much.

Do I have time to make a unanimous consent now or do you want me to do that later?

THOMPSON:

We'll take it right now.

SHAYS:

Thank you. I'd ask unanimous consent to include, "The Mega-Catastrophe: A Call to Action," in the record. And this is a report produced by the financial services roundtable and provides 25 recommendations to the public and private sectors for reducing the economic and human impact, as well as reducing the cost of rebuilding after mega-catastrophes of not only hurricanes, the subject of today's hearings, but the earthquakes, floods, pandemics and terrorist attacks. And I could do that...

THOMPSON:

Without objection.

SHAYS:

Thank you very much.

And Thank you very much, Mr. Paulison.

THOMPSON:

We now recognize the gentleman from North Carolina for five minutes, Mr. Etheridge.

ETHERIDGE:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Administrator, thank you for being here today, and I appreciate your comments thus far.

Let me go back to a situation, you know, hurricane season is almost on us, and North Carolina pays a lot of attention to hurricanes, as you know. Florida does as well.

You partially answered this when you spoke to Ms. Lowey earlier. We're going to see some major changes to the national response plan, as you well know, but as you also know, the NRP is meant to provide standardization for incident managers so that the federal, state and locals can work effectively together. And, certainly, we know that in response to Katrina that did not happen. And even though this plan is not ready, it also impacts NGOs as well, because when you have a major catastrophe, that is an important part of this whole process.

My question to you, you partially answered but would you go into a little bit more detail, in the absence of that being completed, number one, when will it be completed, but, number two, in

the absence of that, do you feel comfortable that we're going to be ready, having these pieces in this hurricane season, be it natural or manmade?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. I am comfortable that we have a good plan in place. In fact, we're doing gap analysis now in North Carolina and other states up and down the Atlantic Coast to find out what those issues are that we have to help the states fill. And they can recognize themselves sometimes that there's a gap that they can fill themselves.

We have good solid disaster plans in place. The national response plan is still there. The new that we're revising is not out yet, and I want to get that out in June. But before we really get deep into hurricane season -- of course, we've had a storm already this year, so they're unpredictable when they're going to come usually -- but I'm comfortable that we are ready to response. We are working with the NGOs, the Red Cross is going to testify at the next panel, and I'm sure they'll tell you some of the significant things that...

ETHERIDGE:

Do you think we'll have it by June of this year?

PAULISON:

It won't be by June 1. It will be before -- I want it out before July 1, though, and we're going to work very hard on that. We have a good draft outline now, and we're populating that to get it filled in. I at least have that base plan done; yes, sir.

ETHERIDGE:

Thank you. Let me ask one question on the National Guard, because we heard from the Guard in the last meeting this committee held, and, as you well know, when Floyd struck North Carolina in 1999, it was a massive storm. They classified it as a 500-year flood plain. I don't know how you do that when no one was here to measure it, but be that as it may, we used 6,500 guardsmen with equipment, Fort Bragg, Lejeune, our active military were there with helicopters and others. We lost a lot of lives, but we saved a lot.

Just recently, our governor, Mike Easley said that we only have enough equipment now to handle a category three. You alluded to this earlier. Our Guard only has 55 percent of the dual use.

In addition to drawing from other states, here's my question, because I think that is critical: How much does FEMA have the ability to reach out and get equipment if you really need it

when it becomes catastrophic like the one we had? And, secondly, given the state of the equipment, can you pull that resource in in advance and have it ready and staged to work?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. We do have the ability to pull equipment in, not only from other states, but private contractors and also the Corps of Engineers who has a tremendous amount of equipment.

ETHERIDGE:

Have you pre-entered into those contracts?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. We have a lot of contracts in place, hundreds of contracts in place and literally hundreds of pre-scripted mission assignments with different agencies around the country. And we can move some of those things quickly.

Also, if there is a major storm coming in, and there are certain guidelines to follow, but we can do a pre-landfall declaration, the president can do that...

ETHERIDGE:

And get it ready.

PAULISON:

... that would allow us to move. So if we had a category four or five storm coming into North Carolina and we knew it was going to hit and you had to do evacuations, we can help you with all of that, with those dollars, asking the president to do a pre- landfall declaration.

ETHERIDGE:

Good.

PAULISON:

Yes.

ETHERIDGE; Good.

Thank you, sir.

In the time I have left, this may be above your pay grade, if it is, let me know, and if not, I'm sure it happened prior to your arrival, and if not, I'd like to have it in writing.

I have it from pretty good sources that within the last several -- well, in the last bit, previously, when hurricanes hit Florida, we had to contract out for pre-setting, when people were injured, were moved, put in mobile homes, to do the pads of water, electrical at a certain price. That was rewritten so that less than a handful of contractors in America were eligible to bid, which meant that the cost of those pads more than doubled.

If that was not written by FEMA -- I want to know if it was written by Homeland Security. I'd like to have that in writing when that was rewritten, who wrote it, and I'd like to see the documentation on that, if I may. And if that's not in your jurisdiction, just let me know where it is and I'll keep moving up the chain.

PAULISON:

That does belong in FEMA, and the fact is we rebid all of those contracts. I don't know about the early ones, but a lot of those contracts were done in the aftermath of Katrina, and the contracts were not what we wanted them to be. We've rebid all of those contracts, and we have a lot more contractors because they have to use local contractors to do a lot of the work.

But I'll tell you what, I'll break that whole thing down.

ETHERIDGE:

Please do.

PAULISON:

Yes, sir.

ETHERIDGE:

Because my understanding was it was rewritten to the point where you had to have so many engineers on staff, which meant that you only had one or two big contractors take it, then they subbed it out to everyone else, which drove the cost through the roof for the taxpayers of this country.

Thank you, sir.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

Following along that, can you provide the committee with whether or not any no-bid contracts have been awarded for this hurricane season in anticipation or have all of them gone through the procurement procedure?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. I will research and give you a definitive answer, but I can tell you that there were no no-bid contracts that I'm aware of. There may be an occasion to do those in the middle of a disaster if there's something you hadn't thought of, but what we don't want to do is we don't want to do no-bid contracts and we don't want to do contracts after a disaster happens. That's why we're putting these contracts now. In fact, we already have them on the shelf. You negotiate much better when you have the upper hand as opposed to after a disaster strikes.

THOMPSON:

Absolutely.

Thank you very much.

We now yield five minutes to the gentleman from Rhode Island, Mr. Langevin.

LANGEVIN:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And, Director, welcome. Thank you for your testimony today. I appreciated having the opportunity to meet with you personally a few months back, and I appreciate what you've had to say today.

Let me just turn to my attention to a couple of issues. Last year, Congress passed the Katrina Emergency Reform Act, which I believe, as do others, will enhance FEMA's ability to effectively respond to disasters in a timely manner.

Now, as part of this comprehensive legislation, I fought to create a new and, I believe, much needed position at FEMA, which is a disability coordinator. We all know that people with disabilities face unique challenges in their everyday lives, and they range from ability

impairment to communications barriers, and they can certainly become substantial obstacles in an emergency. We saw this as a result of the attacks on 9-11, we saw that in Katrina.

And so I believe it's, therefore, critical that the national disability coordinator position be filled immediately, and I'm extremely concerned that our 2007 hurricane season starts less than a month from now from today, and yet this crucial position remains vacant still.

So my question is here: How close are you to filling this position? Will the job be filled by June 1? And, finally, how will this individual be able to effectively implement a national plan for persons with disabilities when the position has remained vacant for so long?

My next question is, earlier this month, FEMA's region one held a mock hurricane preparedness exercise in my home state in Rhode Island -- this may be the one that you were just referring to in a previous question and answer with other members. But in carrying out this event, FEMA effectively partnered with other federal, state and local entities, such as around emergency management agency and first responders to test preparedness and response to our hurricane.

The event was highly successful from everything that I could see, and I think it's critical that each state, city or town have a pre- approved plan that has been thoroughly examined before a catastrophic event occurs. Each plan, obviously, has to take into account a region's unique assets and vulnerabilities and must be properly tested to give the government, first responders and citizens an idea of existing weaknesses.

So my question in this area are: Are other FEMA regions embarking on similar tests, do you believe these simulations should become annual preparedness exercises, and, finally, what other initiatives are you undertaking to test preparedness and response for the upcoming hurricane season in regions throughout the country?

You can start with the issue of the disability coordinator first. Thank you.

PAULISON:

We have interviewed for the disability coordinator. I have made a selection. She is ready to come on board. She's going through background checks. I suspect that we will have her on board within a couple of weeks. And I think we made an excellent, excellent selection. She will report directly to me, so she will have access to my office to make sure that we can get things get done. Actually, we're excited about having her on board.

We learned a lot of lessons during Katrina of things that we didn't do right that we should have done with some of our people who had had difficulty with access, and she'll be a tremendous asset to us to help us do a better job.

LANGEVIN:

Well, I look forward to that announcement and hopefully a meeting with this individual.

PAULISON:

As soon as she gets through the process of the background checks, we should have her on board. She's ready to come, and we're ready to bring her here. We interviewed a lot of people and picked out who we think is an excellent person.

The second piece, yes, it was an excellent exercise, and, yes, we are doing them with all of our regions, and, yes, I do think it should be an annual type of thing to do those exercises, test our system and to find out where our gaps are, because they're going to be different every year. I'm very supportive of those types, of having plans in place and exercising them.

LANGEVIN:

What other initiatives do you have coming up?

PAULISON:

We're doing catastrophic planning also. We're picking four areas right now. One is the southeast Louisiana for catastrophic planning, two in Florida, one around Lake Okeechobee, the Herbert Hoover Dike, working with the state to do evacuation planning around there, south Florida, category five coming into there. And then the new Madrid fault, doing catastrophic planning for that and then also for California. We're picking those because they represent pretty much everything we're going to have to deal with in putting our catastrophic plans in place.

LANGEVIN:

Well, thank you, Director. I appreciate your answers to that and look forward to continuing to work together. Thank you for the job you do.

PAULISON:

And I appreciate your support too, by the way. Thank you.

LANGEVIN:

Thank you, Director.

I yield back the balance of my time.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now recognize the gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Jackson Lee, for five minutes.

JACKSON LEE:

Let me thank the chairman and the ranking member.

Mr. Paulison, thank you for your presence here today.

I think we can look back over the last couple of years, I think we can say a couple of years, and applaud the fact that a first responder, firsthand, is in the position that you happen to be in, which is the director of FEMA. It makes a difference. It's an important first step, I believe, as we have tried to rebuild the building blocks.

And as we have hindsight, we understand that the whole challenge of FEMA was vertical. It was a combination of many issues, and it really didn't fall to personalities as much as it fell a lot to process, particularly, obviously, the angst with the secretary of the Homeland Security Department, who recognized the enormous frustration but really loss of life. And I think that is something that should always be in front of us, the fact that the debacle of Katrina really focused around the enormity of the loss of life and how we could have been better custodians, if you will, better protectors of the American people. We must always be protectors of the American people.

My questions will focus in that direction.

I know you were not here for 9-11, but I simply want, to your recollection, a yes or no answer. Your recollection is that after 9- 11 was FEMA on the ground in New York?

PAULISON:

Yes.

JACKSON LEE:

And the reason why I wanted that as a backdrop is because it's important to note that FEMA is an agency that deals with natural disasters and, tragically, manmade disasters. You have to be holistically prepared. And so I really want you to -- Major General Blum mentioned the lack of equipment in states, and you had this line of questions. And we're looking at this threshold of 40 percent of the National Guard not being available or not being in-state.

Would that not have an impact -- if 40 percent or more of the National Guard were away, would that not have an impact on response coordination with FEMA?

PAULISON:

I don't think it would have an impact on the coordination with FEMA. I guess, depending on the size of the disaster, it may or may not have an impact on the response.

In Greensburg, Kansas, the lack of resources they said they had did not have an impact on that particular response. What the adjunct general said, if they had another disaster of that same size, they would have trouble responding. And what I committed to him was that if they did have another one, that I would make sure that we have resources from other states, bring the Corps of Engineers in with equipment they needed and also access our contracts out there to bring equipment in.

JACKSON LEE:

I think your answer is very accommodating. I'm not suggesting that you're being forthright, but, frankly, I think that we would have problems. And one of the issues that I think is important is coordinating with FEMA and other emergency entities pre-deployment of National Guard out of different states. I don't know if we thought about that.

So that means that, one, you have an inventory of who's gone and what states are gone, because I think my colleagues have asked the question, how quickly can you get them there. So if the next-door neighbor state or the next-door neighbor to the right or the left are down to zero, you have a similar problem.

Let me move forward and comment. I think you made the point about lack of equipment and a lot of states have a lack of equipment. That has an impact, does it not, yes or no?

PAULISON:

Again, I think that would depend on the size of the disaster. Something as catastrophic as Katrina I think you have to say it would have an impact if they're not at the full speed. We are at war, there's no question about it.

JACKSON LEE:

Clearly, but it has a negative impact if you don't have equipment to meet that disaster.

Let me move on to the question, a particular question that you always hear about Houston, Texas. One, this is a solution, I guess, that they attempted, but I do want to put on the record, out

of the \$400 million that came through CDBG monies, Houston got \$60 million in Houston and Harris County. And I want to put on the record that obviously that's an outrage.

I want to move to interoperability. There's \$1 billion. We understand that this money is going through the states on the interoperability. My question to you is, how in the world can the average cities, major urban cities at risk -- and I know this is a process -- function with dollars going through the states, percentages taken off and the question as to whether or not cities who need this interoperability, the top 50 cities, can get the appropriate amount of dollars through this process?

Have you all consulted about using a different formula for getting dollars to the at-risk cities, like directly to the cities?

PAULISON:

I'm sorry, I didn't understand the question.

JACKSON LEE:

There's \$1 billion in interoperability money, which falls under different aspects of the homeland security but, clearly, it responds to FEMA's needs. You need cities to be able to speak to each other or speak inside the city when there's a disaster.

The formula that is being used is a formula that sends the monies to the states. Is it better to send the money directly to the at-risk cities? And this is from your professional opinion, not from the idea of jurisdiction inside the department. Cities are crying out for the at-risk cities to get the monies directly.

PAULISON:

And my staff is telling me that by law the funding has to go through the states. We want that money to flow down where it needs to go, but most of our interoperability issues in this country are not equipment per se, it's a governance issue of how you act interoperably with other units. It can be as simple as exchanging hand-held radios with another city alongside of you. We have equipment that we can bring in to help with interoperability.

But the money going through the states, the states understand the entirety of the whole state to help with the interoperable issue, and we feel that's the right way to go right now.

JACKSON LEE:

If I may finish, Mr. Chairman, I just want to finish this sentence.

Director Paulison, the question was really from your professional perspective. I do know that the utilization of this equipment is how you use it within an area, but the point is if a state has the money and it doesn't get directly, fully to the impacted area, I can assure you that your job as a first responder is going to be that much tougher, and so the local jurisdiction should be the first in line. And I do know it's law. I'm just trying to get your professional position on the record.

I yield back.

SANCHEZ:

The gentlelady's time has expired.

Mr. Perlmutter from Arizona -- Colorado, I'm sorry, Colorado, from the great west.

PERLMUTTER:

Director, and I appreciate your answers, do you know how many states deployed National Guard units to the Gulf Coast during Katrina?

PAULISON:

No, sir, I do not. We could probably track that down, but I don't have any off the top of my head how many actually responded.

PERLMUTTER:

I was just looking at reports that was issued today, and there are a couple of things that concern me. Looking at page four, it says, "For us, it is difficult to assess the probable results of these initiatives in improving response to a major or catastrophic disaster, such as a category four or five hurricane."

And it goes on and says, "The National Guard has traditionally been an important component of response to major disasters. States and governors rely on their National Guard personnel and equipment for disaster response. However, as we reported in January 2007, the types and quantities of equipment the National Guard needs to respond to large-scale disasters have not been fully identified because the multiple federal and states agencies that would have roles in responding to such events have not completed and integrated their plans."

So along with what Representative Jackson Lee was saying and the woman who stood up in the audience and from comments that various adjutant generals have made, I mean, has your office, your division looked at the fact that we have a number of our National Guards deployed

in Iraq and what effect it has on being able to respond to a category four or five hurricane in the Gulf Coast?

PAULISON:

I don't know that we've looked at that particular issue. I'd like to find out what report that is to know who it came from. But we depend heavily, the states depend heavily on our EMAC system, Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

No, I believe you, I just didn't know what the name of the report was.

I wasn't questioning your word at all, sir.

PERLMUTTER:

It's a GAO report.

PAULISON:

OK. Because I wanted to get it and read it myself too.

But we depend heavily on the Emergency Management Assistance Compact between states to share equipment back and forth. We've done that for years. The system has worked well. It's more robust now than it ever has been. And that's how we would respond to these disasters. And we know there's a lot of equipment gone, there's no question about it, nobody can argue that, but there are still resources in this country to deal with disasters.

PERLMUTTER:

And I appreciate that. And, clearly, a national disaster is going to require a national response. And I appreciate the effort that all of you have gone to so that we respond to something like Katrina in a much more thoughtful, methodical manner, but there's only so many people and contractors and National Guardsmen and women to go around.

And this is a debate for probably with the president and not you, but if in fact we have something like we had with Katrina or Rita or the one that Mr. Etheridge was talking about that hit North Carolina, I mean, the bottom line is you don't know what the real impact of our deploying National Guard troops and the numbers we have to Iraq will be on responding to a Katrina.

Yes or no or answer it however you like.

PAULISON:

Well, first of all, I'm going to work with General Blum on the issue and talk about some of those issues you just raised and raised in this committee and raised behind me. But to say what kind of impact any particular thing is going to have on a disaster, that would be impossible to answer. I can tell you that we do have the ability to move equipment around, we do have the ability to move National Guard around, and we are going to prepare for whatever storm comes our way or whatever it is with what we have, and we're going to make the best we can with it.

PERLMUTTER:

I guess, a couple just factual questions. I'd like to know how many National Guard units from across the country were deployed to the Gulf Coast for Katrina and how long they stayed. And if in fact, as you're doing this process and you're preparing for a mega-storm or a mega-emergency, what kind of National Guard effort you see as part of your plan. Those would be my questions, and if you could help me with those later on, I'd appreciate it.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

PAULISON:

I'd be happy to do that.

PERLMUTTER:

I return the balance of my time.

SANCHEZ:

Submit that for the record. That would be great.

We have some votes on the floor, so what I would like to do is to try to get Mr. Green and Ms. Clarke in for their questions, and then we could dismiss the director. And then we'll come back from votes and have the second panel.

So with your concurrence, Mr. Green and Ms. Clarke, instead of giving each of you four minutes, try to keep it closer to maybe three and a half, because by the time we finish we still need to get running across to take the vote.

So the next one in line would be Mr. Green of Texas.

GREEN:

Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Mr. Director, for appearing today. The style of this hearing is 2007 hurricane season, are we prepared. So why don't we visit for just a moment with reference to this topic, are we prepared.

With reference to the ability to determine who's in charge, are we prepared, and I ask this given the circumstance that developed with Katrina and some consternation as to whether the federal government was to make the first move or whether the state government was to. Are we prepared to deal with that?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir. We have a very clear system in place. The response is local. The local community and the state are in charge. We are not in charge of a natural disaster. Our role is to come into a system as best we can to give them the tools and supplies they need to do their job.

We are going to move early, I made that very clear. We may move even before the state asks for assistance, but I move with what I think they're going to use...

GREEN:

Permit me to intercede quickly. Are we indicating that the same system that we utilized previously is the one that we would have in place now for making this determination as to which entity is going to make the call?

PAULISON:

As far as what?

GREEN:

The debate last time was whether the governor of Louisiana or the president of the United States should have done something immediately, if not sooner. Is that same system still in place?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir.

GREEN:

OK. If that same system is still in place, how will we avoid seeing what we saw on television, persons begging for help and nobody showing up? No disrespect to you but that's what the country saw, in fact that's what the world saw. How do we avoid that is the same system is in place?

PAULISON:

And I meant by the same system is the fact that the state is in charge, the local government is in charge to respond to disasters. The federal government there is to assist them, and that's what we're going to do.

However, there are several things that we can do that we have in place now that we did not have before. One, we can do a pre-landfall declaration if there's a major storm coming into a vulnerable community where we move assets in before the storm comes in. And we're going to do that anyway.

GREEN:

Is it your belief that we will not see what we saw previously?

PAULISON:

There is no question in my mind whatsoever that you are not going to see another Katrina in this country.

GREEN:

Next question, quickly, please, if I may. With reference to pre-hurricane or pre-disaster relief, do we have the vehicles, do we have the gas stations, can we move scores of thousands of people along the highways and byways, out of harm's way immediately?

PAULISON:

That's why we're working with the states to make sure that there are good solid evacuation plans...

GREEN:

Can I assume that your answer is, yes? Because the reason I say this, sir, is because sometimes when people finish I don't know whether they said yes or no. So I have to ask.

PAULISON:

Well, I didn't want to say yes or no, because I wanted to tell you what we're doing.

GREEN:

Well, unfortunately, I have to deal in a world of yes or noes right now. Will we move scores of thousands of people over the highways and byways to get them out of harm's way?

PAULISON:

Yes.

GREEN:

Next question: Housing post-disaster, can we house scores of thousands of people such that we will not find ourselves with people in the streets of life after the hurricane has hit? Can we do this?

PAULISON:

Do you mean will there be homeless, will they not have a place to stay?

GREEN:

Will we have the same circumstances we had in Houston, Texas where we had people who were brought in and we had to have NGOs trying to find places for people to stay. People were sheltered in various and sundry places, but we didn't seem to have a plan to accommodate people, and thank God Houston was accommodating to the extent that it was. So will we avoid that circumstance?

PAULISON:

Yes, sir.

GREEN:

And final question is this -- this goes beyond probably your pay grade, but it does say, are we ready, and I consider myself a part of the, "we" -- how are we going to -- and this is rhetorical -- going to deal with displaced voters? We still have a political question that has not been resolved with reference to people who were forced away from their homes who could not vote and participate in the political process?

Thank you, Madam Chair. You were gracious with the time.

SANCHEZ:

Ms. Clarke?

CLARKE:

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

And good afternoon to you, Director Paulison. You know me from Brooklyn, New York.

I just wanted to ask three questions very quickly. In 2005, some of the greatest in FEMA involved reaching the many individuals who lived in the inner city, in particular in the poorer areas. How will your national response plan address this issue, one?

And, two, were a catastrophic disaster to occur in New York, it could easily displace many hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people, potentially far more than New Orleans.

Do you feel FEMA is prepared to successfully reach everyone necessary in such a larger, more densely populated city? And I'm not thinking just FEMA unto itself but, of course, an incident command structure and everything else that may have been put in place.

And then, finally, among my concerns is the ability of FEMA to effectively communicate with victims of a disaster. Not only do you need to urgently explain to them what they need to do during an emergency, but afterward FEMA must register everyone and ensure that they understand where to go and what to do in order to navigate a sometimes complicated bureaucracy and receive assistance. Nowhere else in the world are there more languages spoken than in New York City and in Brooklyn, and many residents are not highly proficient in English.

Have you done anything to ensure that FEMA officials would be able to communicate with people from such a broad range of dialects, particularly during an emergency when family and friends may be separated?

PAULISON:

OK. If I remember, the first question was about being able to reach some of the inner city with directions and how. We've contracted with some of the predominant black colleges to come up with how do we effectively communicate with lower income, sometimes minority populations better about personal preparedness, what to do when things happen.

So we're working on that issue, to how do we do that and how do we better reach people, how do we get to them and tell them what they're supposed to do, where they're supposed to go and those types of things.

CLARKE:

Excuse me, Mr. Director. Is that part of your national response plan? Like in New York City, there isn't a historically black college.

PAULISON:

But the philosophy is going to be the same regardless of who does it. I think Texas A&M is one of the colleges that's working on some of those issues to come up with -- and we had a grant actually from Congress to do that.

The second was that you talked about what happens if we're going to have a catastrophic event in New York. Joe Bruno, the state emergency manager for New York, has just probably one of the most comprehensive disaster plans that I've ever seen. It's about 300 and some odd pages. In fact, we're using that, and he's working with us, to use that for other states around, but right now we're doing the hurricane coast.

They have a great plan in place on how to deal with a disaster, and they've looked at a category four or five hurricane coming right into Brooklyn. So I'm very comfortable with what they're going to do and how they're going to move people and how they're going to house them. It's, again, very comprehensive.

And the last piece is the communication really has to come through the state and local government on where people are supposed to go and what they're supposed to do. That should come before a disaster happens and also during a disaster. The people need to listen very carefully to what their local emergency manager is saying. If they're asked to evacuate, they should do so quickly. And the individual should have a personal plan in place too. If I'm in an evacuation air zone, where am I going to go if I'm told to evacuate, and how am I going to get there and where am I going to go.

SANCHEZ:

I thank the director.

I thank you, Ms. Clarke. Your time is expired.

And if there are any other questions from the members for you, we'll get it to you in writing. We hope you get us back an answer fairly quickly.

And we stand in recess with votes on the floor to come back after votes for the second panel.

PAULISON:

Thank you, Madam Chair.

(RECESS)

THOMPSON:

If we could, we'd like to get our panel of witnesses before us. My colleagues will be coming there shortly. I appreciate your indulgence for allowing us to interrupt so we could take those five votes.

We'd like to reconvene the recessed panel. On our second panel, we have three witnesses.

First witness is Mr. William Jenkins, who is director within GAO's Security and Justice Issues Division. And Mr. Jenkins has served as a director for four years, and has worked on a wide variety of issues in his 28 years at GAO.

Second witness is Mr. Craig Fugate, who is director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management. Mr. Fugate has been serving as the director for seven years.

Our third panelist is Mr. Joe Becker. Mr. Becker is here to represent the American Red Cross, and serves as the senior vice president of the Preparedness and Response Division.

Without objection, the witnesses' full statement will be inserted in the record. I now ask each witness to summarize his statement for five minutes, beginning with Mr. Jenkins.

JENKINS:

Chairman Thompson and members of the committee, I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the important topic of our nation's emergency preparedness and response system as we approach the 2007 hurricane season.

Well-planned, well-coordinated, and effective disaster preparation and response can save lives and mitigate damage while helping set the stage for recovery. Preparing for and responding effectively to a major disaster, and particularly a catastrophic disaster, is a difficult task.

There's no magic bullet or easy solution for success. It takes hard work, attention to details, and effective pre- and post-disaster cooperation and coordinated actions among all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations, and the private sector.

Individuals can also contribute to success through knowing evacuation routes, complying with evacuation orders, and having a disaster preparedness plan and supplies.

FEMA provides assistance in major disasters principally by coordinating and deploying a range of resources from a variety of government and nongovernmental sources. This requires it to develop effective partnerships with a wide range of organizations.

The Post-Katrina Reform Act includes provisions designed to strengthen FEMA's organizational capacity to coordinate the preparedness for and response to major and catastrophic disasters, regardless of cause. Effectively implementing the Act's provisions should address many of the recommendations and concerns we have had as a result of our work on Katrina.

Although FEMA has formally completed its reorganization under the Act, it enters the 2007 hurricane season as an organization in transition, one that is working simultaneously to implement the Reform Act's provisions while addressing immediate preparedness needs and capabilities.

FEMA faces a formidable challenge as it works to implement the Reform Act's provisions, change its culture from one of mostly reactive to more proactive, and quickly build its capacity to effectively respond to a major disaster that could occur at any time.

It is important that FEMA's approach, preparedness, and response for major disasters is a national system with linked capabilities and responsibilities among all levels of government and nongovernmental organizations.

Developing these capabilities must be a cooperative effort that integrates and defines for all major participants what needs to be done, how it should be done, and how well it should be done.

On the basis of our post-Katrina work, we identified three basic areas of focus. One, having clear and clearly understood roles and responsibilities. Two, identifying, developing, and maintaining needed capabilities. And three, balancing the need for quick, flexible action with accountability for the use of resources.

We noted that improvements were particularly needed in the areas of situational awareness, emergency communications, evacuation, search and rescue, logistics, and mass care and shelter. In each of these areas, the lack of clear and clearly understood roles and responsibilities contributed to the problems that were experienced in the Katrina response.

FEMA has initiated reviews and actions in these and other areas, but their effectiveness has not yet been tested in a major disaster. Some targeted improvements, such as a completely revamped logistics system, are multiyear efforts. Others, such as building mobile communications and registration assistance vehicles, have been used already in recent tornado and flood events.

As the principal federal agency now responsible for preparedness and response, FEMA has a unique opportunity to evaluate how it can most effectively target the grants it will now administer to enhance the nation's disaster preparedness and response system. This can best be done by viewing the grants collectively rather than individually.

As FEMA and the nation move forward, there are several areas that we believe deserve congressional oversight. Each of these areas is part of a considerable ongoing effort and resource investment by both federal and nonfederal agencies.

These areas include: One, the development and implementation of the National Preparedness System, including preparedness for all types of major disasters, natural or man-made. Two, needed state and local capabilities and the use of federal grants in building and sustaining those capabilities.

Three, regional and multistate planning and preparation. Four, the role of preparedness exercises in building and maintaining preparedness and response capabilities. And five, the transparency of DHS policies and the basis for those policies.

It is important that those affected by DHS and FEMA policies have sufficient information to enable them to understand the basis for those policies, and for Congress to assess how well DHS and FEMA are using the billions of dollars of resources that have been entrusted to it.

We look forward to working constructively with this committee, the Congress, FEMA, and DHS in the weeks and months to come as efforts continue to build the National Emergency Preparedness System that we all want and our nation deserves.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. I'd be pleased to respond to any questions you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much. We now recognize Mr. Fugate to summarize his statement for five minutes.

FUGATE:

Thank you, Chairman Thompson, ranking members, and distinguished members of the committee for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Craig Fugate, and I serve Governor Crist as his director of emergency management, a position I've served for two governors, Governor Bush and Governor Crist.

My experiences go back 25 years, and I've been involved in numerous disasters, both as a first responder, as a paramedic and firefighter, later as an emergency manager for Alachua County -- which is home to the University of Florida in Gainesville -- as well as serving the state as state coordinating officer and the governor's authorized representative for the 2004 hurricane season, 2005, and currently serving Governor Crist as the state coordinating officer during the wildfire emergency that is occurring in Florida.

There are several key areas that we'd like to present for consideration as we talk about getting ready for the 2007 hurricane season. And the first one is all-hazard. When we talk about hurricanes, or we talk about specific disasters, many people, in trying to describe all-hazards, look for the common elements within the disaster itself.

I'll tell you, Mr. Chairman, there's nothing in common with a hurricane and the wildfires. They're entirely different creatures. What is all-hazards is the fact that the governor of the state of Florida will be the governor in all of those disasters.

It is the team that you build to deal with a variety of threats to community space, those known and both unknown, that is truly all-hazard. And when you try to define all-hazard by talking about disasters, you miss the point. So while we're oftentimes concerned about hurricane season, understand what we do in Florida isn't just about hurricanes.

As we're talking about right now, we still have major fires going in Florida. We have over five fire management grants issued by FEMA. We have emergency management assistance compact from other states, from Georgia and South Carolina. Black Hawks are flying in support of our Division of Forestry and our National Guard fighting these fires.

And this is not a hurricane, but this is how we do business in Florida. It's the all-hazard approach. And that's why we've been so insistent that it needs to be the basis as we look at the variety of disasters we face in the nation.

The second one, which is really a concern for my peers in other states and local government, is the Emergency Management Performance Grant. This is a 50-50 funding program that has been authorized by Congress for numerous years, starting back with the era of civil defense, that builds capability and capacity in our communities to share resources, respond effectively, and manage many of those local disasters without state or federal assistance, or, in many disasters, only require federal reimbursement assistance, because we built capacity.

Again, to look at that is a wise investment for our country, to continue building that capacity. Because when you look around the nation, I don't know how many fire trucks the federal government has, but I can tell you the state of Florida doesn't have that many.

They're at local government. And if we don't build the capability to share the unimpacted resources of the nation, we leave too many resources off the table when the victims are in their time of need, and we need to support that capability-building.

But you also have to be able to move those resources from state to state, and that brings us to the Emergency Management Assistance Compact. It was something the late Governor Chiles realized after Hurricane Andrew, that we needed to have a better way of bringing assistance from other states, and through the Southern governors, developed the Southern Governors' Compact.

Congress thought that was a great idea, endorsed it, issued a public law to allow states to enter into that compact, and moved it beyond just the Southern states. And now we have the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, which all 50 states are a member of, as well as several of our territories and commonwealths.

This allowed us in the state of Florida to send over 7,000 responders to Mississippi in their time of need during Hurricane Katrina. Not only was it sending resources or sending people, we were actually sending resources -- food, water, and ice -- that we did through our own contracts. As we were prepared to serve our citizens in their time of need, we were able to provide that assistance to our neighbors in their time of need.

And finally, the last one I want to get to is one that hasn't been discussed very much, and that's the Temporary Disaster Housing Program.

Mr. Chairman, you know as well as I do that housing is an issue before a disaster strikes, and oftentimes it exasperates the program. The Stafford Act was never designed to heal the ills a community has in housing needs before a disaster, and yet we try to make that disaster program fit the needs.

There's been a lot of talk about moving the Temporary Housing Program to HUD. I would suggest it again. We need swift and effective means to house people in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, or we're going to depopulate regions of this country, as we saw in Katrina.

But I think we need to have a better understanding that FEMA's role is the emergency, and many of these issues are longer-term, far beyond ever anticipated under the Stafford Act. There should be a better system that we can use the FEMA program to do the immediate housing needs, then realize many of these folks will have long-term housing issues.

And perhaps the more appropriate will be a hybrid between FEMA and HUD, where at the end of the emergency, many of these people that still have long-term housing issues are then transitioned into HUD programs, versus creating a new program from scratch in the midst of another hurricane season.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We now will recognize Mr. Becker to summarize his statement for five minutes.

BECKER:

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee. My name is Joe Becker, and I lead the American Red Cross' national disaster relief efforts. Thank you for your invitation to speak today.

I was asked to cover three topics: to review what the Red Cross does for victims of disasters and what we don't do, to share the steps that we've taken since Katrina, and to discuss our changed role in the National Response Plan.

What we do in times of disaster for people? We shelter, we feed, we distribute items that people need, the supplies that they would need to get through the immediate next few days. We've learned over the years that there are some supplies where it's difficult to give the actual item -- gas for a car or shoes where sizes matter -- and we give some financial assistance so people can obtain those when their economy recovers.

We provide mental-health counseling. We provide health services with our nurses and shelters. We provide information to connect families with lost loved ones, and we work in the longer-term recovery to help families plan and find resources -- our resources and others -- on their longer-term recovery.

What we don't do: We don't evacuate cities. That's a state and local, particularly local, operation. We don't rescue people. That belongs in the first-response community.

We don't give everybody money who had a loss. We're not a bank. We're not an insurance company. And we don't build houses. There are others that do that very well.

You hear of the Red Cross charter to provide a national system of disaster relief. That means we don't pick and choose which disasters we respond to. We don't think about if it's a big enough one, that we'll come, or if our people are available, or if we have money in the bank. We respond regardless, to about 200 events a day, around the country.

If the event is larger than the very small event, such as a multifamily fire, we'll be joined by our usual key partners, mainly faith-based groups. The Southern Baptists will be there to help feed, Catholic Charities will often serve, Salvation Army would be there to help feed.

If an event is much larger, or if there's an event that's very visible in the news, we'll be joined by many from the community, and others who arrive to do good work, mostly faith-based groups, some businesses and civic groups.

The challenge is for the local quarterback, the local emergency manager, and whatever structure the community has, to incorporate their good works into a coordinated response. And how that's done varies community by community.

What did the Red Cross learn from Katrina? I'll give you a list of key learnings. Briefly, we learned instead of moving our supplies in ahead of a storm, it's better for us to expand our stockpile and permanently keep them in risk areas. We learned where our systems need to be bigger, especially our systems to use untrained spontaneous volunteers, and to move large numbers of people around the country to help.

A key learning, we learned where our relationships with community groups, particularly faith-based groups, were not as strong as needed. These are nondisaster organizations who step forward in a very large disaster and don't know how to plug into the system and help. We learned which of these community groups, such as churches, would step forward and didn't know how to get support, and we learned how we can do that better.

We learned that we needed year-round staff to work with state government in risk areas, and where we needed a larger team to work with our federal partners. We learned where our infrastructure, particularly our IT infrastructure, was completely overwhelmed and had to be rebuilt post-Katrina. We learned where our satellite communications system wasn't big enough, and where we needed more redundancy.

In short, we learned about our capacity, and we learned about our relationships, and we learned that we needed to grow both. We had a large number of projects post-Katrina that just had to be done by last hurricane season last year.

We gave ourselves four months to acquire a million and a half square feet of warehouse space, to put in those warehouses additional supplies to shelter 500,000 people for a six-day period of time, buying a half million cots, a half million blankets, and those related supplies. We now have 6 million prepackaged meals ready to go.

We now have 21 cities in risk areas with permanent triple- redundant communications equipment along the coast, and we're adding more cities. We've hired full-time staff for 14 state emergency management offices, such as Mr. Fugate's, and staff to work with partner groups to help national partners, national organizations, become part of the disaster response. We redid our IT systems, and we did a lot of work on our supply chain.

Locally, our chapters have created new partnerships, especially with faith-based groups, to enable the work, and we even worked with about 100 national partners. A good example would be the NAACP, where we trained over 1,000 of their members, and they helped respond to the tornadoes in Florida and to Alabama and Georgia.

You might also remember that our role in the National Response Plan has changed recently. We have a separate team that supports the federal structure in disaster. They help receive requests from states for support items for mass care, and help the federal agencies fill those requests.

This team is very different from our operating team. It does not direct our operating team. It takes information from the operating team, and gives it to federal partners.

In the new construct, in the new National Response Plan, in a key learning from Katrina, if you're going to be a primary agency in the National Response Plan, you need to be able to help make quick and decisive commitments of federal assets.

It's clear that the Red Cross can't commit federal resources. I can't sign a contract on behalf of government for water or fuel to appear. And now that ESF6 is growing to include evacuation planning and pet planning, it's appropriate that a federal agency take that role, and FEMA has agreed to do so.

The key point here is that there will be no change in our service delivery on the ground. This is a separate team from the people who feed and shelter and do those seven things that I described.

Are we ready? We're never ready enough. We've made big strides with our people, in our supplies, in our plans, in our systems, but we work every day and we see the problems at county level, we see the problems at state level, we see the problems in our federal family. And we know there's much more to be done.

The Red Cross has learned a lot. We've done a lot, but we have a lot more to do. Thank you very much.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

What I'd like to do to start the questioning, Mr. Jenkins, in your analysis of FEMA, can you capsule what you think, post-Katrina, what you've seen FEMA do that's their politics, and what items if any that cause you pause with respect to FEMA not being up to what you would consider an acceptable standard?

JENKINS:

Well, as Mr. Paulison pointed out in his testimony earlier, there's a number of things that FEMA has done in each of the areas that I mentioned in terms of situational awareness, where they now have teams that go out, they have automated trucks with capacity to do that.

There's the same thing with regard to assistance. They've got now a greater capacity to do that, and a capacity to be able to do that in a way that also tries to identify duplicates and fraudulent applications. So in each of those areas that I mentioned, they've taken positive steps.

I think with regard to logistics, they have a long way to go. They can now, as you point out, track trucks that leave from two of their principal warehouses, but they still have quite a bit to go

in terms of how they're going to refine what their requirements are and work with the private sector in that area.

They recognize that it's a multiyear effort, that they're not going to have that implemented for this hurricane season. They really just need to revamp that system from A to Z, and they're working on that.

The thing that I think I'm a little bit concerned about is, I think it's important that if in this hurricane season, the new NRP comes in places he suggested in late June, it's whether or not you really want to try to implement that plan, that new plan, in the midst of the hurricane season?

Or do you want to go with what you've got, where that's what you've trained on, that's what people understand their roles and responsibilities are. They're not trained in the new system, whatever it might be? And so, I think that's one question as to whether or not you want to do that.

I think it's also important that there be a clear understanding of the roles of the FCO and PFO, and that's not always clear. Under the existing NRP, the secretary of homeland security can appoint a single individual to serve as PFO and FO except in the case of terrorist events, and the reason for that exception is not clear in the NRP.

But it's in our view probably better that that particular person, one person, serve both roles, as opposed to having it in two roles. It definitely provides clearer lines of communication and authority.

There is, at least, by having them predesignated, however, that these positions -- now being predesignated for three regions and two states -- there is an opportunity for both the FCO and the PFO to meet with state and local counterparts so that there can be a better discussion of what their roles would be, how they would interact with the states, what their individual roles would be in terms of the federal response. But that is an area of concern for us.

I think the other thing is that FEMA has put a lot of things into place that potentially are certainly much better than Katrina was. I think the real issue that we have is the extent to which these initiatives can actually be successfully deployed and implemented on a very large-scale basis, like a hurricane IV or V strength.

THOMPSON:

Well, I'm glad you mentioned that. Mr. Paulison talked about a hurricane V scenario for Florida, Mr. Fugate. And part of that, phase one, focused on developing a regional response and recovery in the counties around Lake Okeechobee. Are you familiar with that scenario?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir, Mr. Chairman. It was at my request.

Last year, the Army Corps of Engineers responded to Governor Bush, who had asked for a review of the dike, came back with the water management district with concerns that the dike may have a higher percentage chance of failure in certain scenarios. That was not something we had previously planned for.

So we approached Director Paulison. We knew they were looking to do catastrophic planning in South Florida, and said, as a part of that, can we first look at Lake Okeechobee, and what would happen if we had a dike failure there, all along those very small rural communities, and lack of resources.

So we began there. We're going to shift that focus, as we have completed that planning, into South Florida. And much of what we're looking at is building upon the system that's already in place in Florida, with the state and locals.

Again, our critical issue is not what many people are talking about. Quite honestly, sir, the National Response Plan doesn't respond. People do.

Here's the challenge I want to talk about: We look at a Category V hurricane hitting South Florida, similar to the Great Miami Hurricane that actually hit in 1926. Based upon today's population, that would result in losing over 300,000 housing units in less than 24 hours in a band that will stretch from the Miami-Dade-Broward County line all the way through Tampa.

I have yet to hear anything in the National Response Plan, or anything that's being proposed in the Katrina after-action reports, that tells me how we're going to house 300,000 families -- close to 1,000,000 people -- without having to disperse them all over this country.

Those are the kind of challenges, when we talk about catastrophic planning, we're trying to get down to, not who's on first base or who's in charge. We knew that in Florida the day our constitution got written. It's the governor of the State of Florida and the local official declares the emergency.

THOMPSON:

And I appreciate this line of discussion. Have you shared any of your concerns with anyone at FEMA, or anything of this nature?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir, and that's part of why we were very fortunate to receive that catastrophic planning. Our primary emphasis, as we move into the South Florida areas, will be, again, looking at our existing plans for evacuation response, but really starting to challenge some of these things that we don't have answers for.

In Florida, we've moved millions of people in hurricanes. We've responded after disasters, but there's some challenges that we have yet to see the impacts of what people term catastrophic.

I tend to still term that a major disaster, but what happens when you have the challenges of housing loss of that nature, based upon not theoretical, but actual hurricanes that have hit and applied to today's population.

THOMPSON:

And I think part of what we saw with Katrina -- even though we had a scenario run before Katrina -- it was whether or not we knew what the outcome would be.

But we did not prepare for the impact on the population, so we saw that dispersal of people, and to some degree, the abandonment of quite a few. But we knew the physical damage, but it was the human aspect of it that was not included.

And we'll probably come back to another round. I see my time has expired.

I yield to the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Bilirakis.

BILIRAKIS:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it very much. And I want to thank you for calling us back. This is really important, and I'm glad you extended the time. I appreciate it very much.

And thank you for your patience, panel.

And I love these recesses, because my seniority increases every time we come back -- climb the ladder of seniority.

Director Fugate, I would like to thank you for testifying, of course, before this committee. The state of Florida has been the national leader in disaster prevention and response.

I know I'm a little biased, but I think it's true. Mississippi doesn't do bad either. I want to thank you for your years of service in making our state a national standard, and under, as you said, Governor Chiles first, Governor Bush, and now Governor Crist.

Maybe you can elaborate on this, but what do you attribute Florida's success to? I know you touched upon it, but if you can elaborate, we'd appreciate it.

FUGATE:

I appreciate the question. And again, I think it's the leadership that our governors have given us. But more importantly, it's the fact we learned we had to be a team.

Mr. Chairman, I'm looking around me, and you've got two government officials and the Red Cross. That's not the team. We don't have the private sector here. For a long time, when we talked about volunteers, we only talked about the Red Cross. We left the faith-based off the table.

When we talk about disasters and building a team, it's got to be all levels of government as partners. And partners mean you bring something to the table. You just don't hand your hand out and say, "Give me something."

It means that we have to have our volunteers, and all of our volunteers, both those that deal with disasters as a primary, to those that step forward with resources that may be emergent during an emergency. You can't say no when you need the help.

But following the other leg of that stool is the private sector. We oftentimes find ourselves competing and duplicating with our private sector when what we really should be doing in many disasters is not ordering up more ice and water, but spending more time thinking about how we get those local retailers back on line, so FEMA's disaster assistance can go to people and they can go out and take care of themselves.

And again, when you talk about building a team, it has to be something that is not seen as a local issue, a state issue, or a federal issue. It cannot be seen as government solution or volunteer solutions. You have to look at what works in a community on a day-to-day basis, and look at those elements.

And from that, that's how you build a team. And the focus is always going to be on our citizens we serve. But without the private sector, without the volunteers, government is one leg of a broken stool. That was the lesson of Hurricane Andrew.

BILIRAKIS:

Thank you, appreciate that. Again, Director Fugate, would you also address the National Guard issue, if you'd like, with regard to readiness to respond to a natural disaster?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir.

Again, Mr. Chairman, in the state of Florida, we currently have more National Guardsmen back in Florida with more equipment than we had in the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons. Throughout all of the response to the world terrorism and to the deployments, we had more

National Guardsmen available for deployment than we had deployed at any time during Hurricane Andrew.

I think there's a clear distinction between the war fighting mission and the long-term impacts on the Guard to carry out that federal mission at the expense of training and equipment. But in the short term, the disaster response in Florida has not been compromised.

We use our Emergency Management Assistance Compact very effectively. I currently have authorized, and we have EMAC missions from the state of Georgia and South Carolina supporting us with firefighting helicopters fighting fires. Those are the types of things we do every day to get ready for disasters, and I think it's the way to multiply and maximize our forces.

But I do think long term, the nation needs to look at the role of the National Guard in the federal mission, and how do you keep them equipped and trained for the long term. But I'm not concerned about the ability of the Florida National Guard to support Governor Crist and the team this hurricane season.

BILIRAKIS:

Thank you. Unfortunately, we've been seeing numerous disasters have plagued our country. Tornadoes, floods, and recently, wildfires have caused millions of dollars in damage and tragically, have taken lives. Do you believe that the standards outlined in EMAC need to be revised to ensure the states are best prepared for these disasters?

FUGATE:

Well, I think in our process that we're using, the thing that we lose sight of when we talk about disasters are local is, we always look at the community's impact. And we forget about the communities nearby that weren't impacted, and the states that weren't impacted.

Our ability to leverage our responders in those communities is our biggest force multiplier. They will bring more to the table faster than any federal program or any state program. And so, as we continue to enhance and develop our Emergency Management Assistance Compact, we have asked for is the National Emergency Management Association funding to support that.

Again, our goal is, don't leave the resources of this nation off the table just because they're not part of the federal or state response. And to do that effectively, we have to have a system across state lines, get into the areas and serve citizens without the paperwork becoming so burdensome that it stops a response.

BILIRAKIS:

OK, thank you. I know I've got 10 more seconds.

Quickly, any additional suggestions you may have, how the federal government can help out the states?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir. We've got to stop responding to disasters as our only course of saving the taxpayers' dollars and saving lives, and start mitigating them before they happen. Most of these disasters are well known. The hazards are well known.

And we have a backwards system of dealing with disasters. We spend billions of dollars after a disaster fixing what would have cost hundreds of millions to fix beforehand, at the loss of life and misery that's unimaginable.

I think again, because of our priorities, we need to go back and look at how do we get citizens to take greater ownership of mitigating their homes, protecting their families, so they're not a burden to you and me when disaster strikes, but we've given them the tools to make their homes safer and protect their family.

BILIRAKIS:

Very good. I have a couple of suggestions.

Thank you very much, appreciate it.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much.

We've been joined by the gentleman from Colorado for five minutes. Mr. Perlmutter?

PERLMUTTER:

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

And Mr. Fugate, I think the comments you made right at the end is just so on the mark. We can always find -- whether it's in business or something else -- you can always find time when the car breaks down to take it to the shop and get it fixed, most of the time you can.

And it takes much more time and it takes a lot more in dollars if you just spend a few bucks early on to prevent it, you've saved yourself the time and the money. And we always kind of forget that. And the same thing applies on a much grander scale when it comes to disasters.

But I want to go back to the National Guard piece, because you heard my questions earlier, I assume, of Mr. Paulison. So, I'm looking at your testimony, and I apologize, I didn't hear all of your testimony. But it says that you deployed 497 National Guard personnel to Mississippi during Katrina?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir.

PERLMUTTER:

Did you deploy any to Louisiana?

FUGATE:

No, sir we did not deploy battalion strength. We provided technical adviser and aircraft to the request we got from Louisiana.

PERLMUTTER:

Did you retain National Guardsmen and women in Florida at the same time you deployed to Mississippi?

FUGATE:

Oh, yes, sir. We probably had about 8,000 guardsmen available. In fact, we were faced with a couple of tropical storms and hurricanes during that deployment. It did not result in us having to back off our support to the states when we were facing other threats, not as severe, of course. And then we were able to respond full speed to Hurricane Wilma with many of the folks that had rotated back out of Mississippi when they had been released.

PERLMUTTER:

So you maintained some in Florida, just in case something bad happened in Florida, but you were able to send some to Mississippi to assist them?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir. And also, understand that over 7,000 responders went from Florida to the National Guard. In many cases, the majority of the resources that came from other states under EMAC were National Guard.

In the state of Florida, that was actually local governments. Over half those responders came from local governments through mutual aid and EMAC. So again, we were able to reach out to all our resources, including the National Guard, and still be ready in Florida for other disasters.

PERLMUTTER:

Do you know how many in total, in terms of the National Guard, were deployed to either Mississippi or Louisiana during Katrina?

FUGATE:

No, sir. I believe you can get that information from General Blum, commander of the National Guard Bureau. It was in the tens of thousands. I want to say in testimony -- I don't want to guess -- but it was in the tens of thousands. He can give you the best number. And they were coordinated under the Emergency Management Assistance Compact.

PERLMUTTER:

Do you know whether -- and again, this may be outside of your purview, but how many -- you said in Florida today, you have more guardsmen available than you did in 2004-2005?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir.

PERLMUTTER:

Do you know how many in Florida have been deployed today to Iraq?

FUGATE:

Actually, sir, the Florida National Guard, in the war on terror, had been deployed. We had one full brigade. The 53rd Infantry Brigade was deployed to Afghanistan. We have units that have been deployed to Iraq as well as to Africa, and also Bosnia.

So our Florida National Guard has pretty much been everywhere in this world that our Department of Defense has called upon them. I can ask General Burnett to provide that information. But the Florida National Guard has been in a lot of countries and a lot of wars since the September 11 attack.

PERLMUTTER:

But today, do you know how many, actually from Florida, are deployed outside of Florida to another country? I assume that you don't have anybody deployed to any other state today?

FUGATE:

No, sir. We actually have other states deployed to us fighting fires today. One of our main ...

PERLMUTTER:

Why?

FUGATE:

The helicopters that fly the firefighting mission, the Florida National Guard does not have -- as organic to their mission -- sufficient platforms. So it's not an issue of the war on terror or any other war. It's actually that we don't have that many Black Hawks, so when we're fighting wildfires, we routinely -- and this is well before September 11 -- reach out to our neighboring states for more rotary wing.

We had more air defense units, most of our infantry-type units. We did not have a lot of aviation assets. So, we used the Emergency Management Assistance Compact, which we've been using since I've been in the division back in 1997, to access those National Guards that have particular units that we did not have. And that gives us the ability to reach out.

(CROSSTALK)

PERLMUTTER:

All right, because I just want to understand the system. So the system, what you have in place, basically it's a national system?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir.

PERLMUTTER:

If you don't have the Black Hawks, they come in from New York City, or someplace like that, who might have them. Some National Guard will be deployed to Florida when called upon, or from Colorado or wherever?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir.

PERLMUTTER:

Let me go back to my other question. My other question was, from Florida today, how many units, if you know, have been deployed outside of the United States?

FUGATE:

I'd have to defer to General Burnett. I know we just got back one of our combat engineering units -- the Red Horse came back. I think that our Special Forces just came back. And so, the last count I got, was we actually had our highest number of troops back since we actually engaged in the airport security missions right after September 11.

PERLMUTTER:

Thank you. I do have one more question, if I could, Mr. Chairman. When they return, are they bringing their equipment, or are they leaving some or all of it in Iraq, or wherever it was they were deployed outside the country?

FUGATE:

By and large, when they deploy their equipment, they don't come back with their equipment. But we've been successful in getting equipment moved back into Florida, and releveling those units.

I think our primary concern isn't being able to respond to disasters in Florida. I think it's the longer-term issue of the federal mission, of the equipment and training that will be a deficit for the National Guard, but from what we see in Florida, is not an immediate threat to our ability to respond to disasters, particularly this hurricane season.

But I think it is nationally a long-term concern that we don't equip the National Guard for their federal mission, particularly in the training, as we go in the out years without this equipment.

PERLMUTTER:

Thank you very much.

THOMPSON:

Thank you very much, and I think we'll do another round, since we only have these members present.

Mr. Becker, you referenced some operating agreements that you have in place, you said Catholic Charities, Southern Baptist Convention, and Salvation Army. Now, those are three agreements you have?

BECKER:

On a national level, we have about 130 agreements with national partners. Those are the partners that we know are going to respond on a larger-scale disaster. A lot of our other partnerships are with the types of partners that Mr. Fugate was referring to. They're not necessarily disaster organizations, but they have great resources that the country needs in time of disaster.

THOMPSON:

What I'm trying to get at is, are you talking about Tier 1 operating agreements with those three organizations that I talked about? Are all operating agreements the same?

BECKER:

We specify what each party can expect of the other, and what we think they'll bring in a disaster, and what they can expect from us in terms of support. But I think what's important here is, when it's a very small disaster, when there's going to be six houses burnt tonight in the Capital area, the Red Cross will be there at 2 in the morning with our volunteers.

If the disaster's a little bit bigger than that, a small flood or a tornado, the Salvation Army will most likely be there, Southern Baptists would most likely be there. And we work nationally and locally with them. It's a well-oiled machine.

That part worked during Katrina. What didn't work during Katrina was the local faith-based groups in particular, who stepped forward and said, "I've got a kitchen," or "I'll be a shelter," and it was a pastor and a key and an empty building.

And after two or three days, they fatigued. They didn't know where to get supplies, they didn't know where to get help. And the local emergency management didn't know they were there, didn't know they needed law enforcement, didn't know they needed infrastructure.

What we've done in our local chapters is ask the community, in a common structure, to say who will be willing to step forward. And we've sought out partners, partners in hard-to-serve locations, maybe very rural areas, that speak specific languages that we don't have a competence in. So those are local partnerships ...

THOMPSON:

Not to cut you off, but let me tell you personal experience, what happened to me. A number of those individuals came to offer help, and was rejected, turned away. They said that you were not qualified to serve as a volunteer in time

Many of them were people in the faith community. And I'm of the opinion that that is not the time to turn help away. Now, I'm glad to hear that you indicate that that is not the case any more. But you have not changed the national operating agreement.

One other issue is that in many instances, like in New Orleans and areas where there is a high percentage of minority populations, you don't have an operating agreement that provides reimbursement for expenditures, to my knowledge. Now, I stand corrected. But you called three organizations.

One of the problems associated with Katrina is, you could not get individuals to go into the impacted areas for quite some time, fear of harm or what have you. So a number of people suffered because of that.

Now, other than the three groups I identified based on your testimony, you talked about NAACP and some other groups. But that's down the line. Southern Baptist Convention, wonderful group, but they're not the only religion in America. Catholic Charities is another, but there are a number of other faith groups that ought to have a similar operating agreement with the Red Cross. Now, are you saying that they do have one?

BECKER:

Yes sir, Mr. Chairman. We have operating agreements, particularly with churches, where we will train them ahead of time, we will give them access to our supplies, our cots and our blankets, and we will pay their expenses if they are feeding or if they're sheltering or doing our core work. That is new since Katrina.

THOMPSON:

What I would like for you to do for the committee, and I appreciate you, because that was one of the difficulties -- a number of churches offered shelter. They were told, "You're not a qualified shelter."

I had an armory in my district that offered shelter. They were told, "You're not a qualified shelter," even though they housed men and women who served us every day. So I would hope that we have bridged the Red Cross bureaucracy, and moved it into the service bureaucracy for the community, because that was one of the major criticisms we heard all along. But I would like for you to get me the new list of people you have operating agreements with.

BECKER:

Mr. Chairman, just to address the one issue you raised, we need to be clear about who designates a shelter, who declares a building to be a shelter. The local emergency manager would declare a public building to be a shelter.

The Red Cross just can't show up and take over a school and say, "We're here and we're going to run a shelter." We have about 40,000 shelters in our Red Cross system. We don't own those buildings.

Those are typically high school gyms, and the ones that are churches now would be typically outside the emergency management system. And that's where we can reimburse, that's where we can enter into those types of agreements.

THOMPSON:

Well, what I'm of the opinion is that my experience with the Red Cross and the state of Mississippi in trying to get an armory that had a full kitchen, full bathrooms, showers, cots, mattresses, air conditioning, everything you would need, the Red Cross personnel said, "This is not an approved shelter for us." Do you understand?

BECKER:

Thank you. I would like to look into that, if I can.

THOMPSON:

Greenwood, Mississippi.

I yield to Ranking Member.

KING:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it very much. And thanks for bringing that up, too, on the shelters.

Mr. Fugate, following up on your comments regarding the private sector as an equal partner in disaster preparedness and response, will you please discuss how Florida encourages the private sector to participate before, during, and after a disaster?

FUGATE:

Yes, sir. After the Hurricane Wilma response, we realized that in many cases, we were handing out food, water, and ice in front of an open store, oftentimes within hours to a day after the storm had hit. Didn't make sense to us, didn't make sense to them why we were competing.

So we had individual meetings with all of our major retailers in the grocery and in the hardware chains, and sat down. And the first question we began asking was, how they could do more of our job?

We realized very quickly we asked the wrong question. The question should have been, what can we do to get them open? Because when you can get the private sector back open in a disaster area, you put people back to work, you jump-start the economy, and they're much more effective with their already existing logistical chains to meet demand.

We then can focus on our more vulnerable citizens in those areas the retailers don't serve, which if we go back to Hurricane Wilma, we should not have been setting up in front of an open grocery store. We should have been in Belle Glade and Pahokee, where there were no stores, and where our most vulnerable citizens were at.

Because quite honestly, the other thing we never talk about in disasters is, who is the most vulnerable in this nation? And it's generally the poor. Poverty is the most underestimated impact in trying to deal with disasters, because without resources ahead of time, they're not prepared.

They end up in these programs the most vulnerable. The programs were never designed to fit them. And they're the ones that much later, we find, that are still in need, and there are still challenges.

So we said we should be focusing on those folks, our most vulnerable citizens, and support, and asked a question of how do we get our retailers back up faster, so they can serve the rest of us -- those of us that can afford to go get our food, water, and ice after a disaster -- so that government and volunteer agencies can focus on our most vulnerable citizens.

KING:

Thank you very much.

And I yield back the balance of my time, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

GREEN:

(OFF-MIKE) Thank you very much.

Mr. Perlmutter is recognized for five minutes.

PERLMUTTER:

Thanks, Mr. Chair.

And Mr. Jenkins, I'd like to ask you a couple questions about the quotation that I read to Mr. Paulison, where it says: "Thus it is difficult to assess the probable results of these initiatives in improving response to major catastrophic disasters, such as a category IV or V hurricane."

Can you explain what you meant by that sentence, and how you came to that conclusion that you're concerned there's not a good plan in place, or I don't know what it is you're saying. Let me just ask you what you meant by that sentence.

JENKINS:

Well, it's not so much that there's not a good plan in place. FEMA has taken certain actions. Let me just give you an example.

They had a major problem in Hurricane Katrina registering people for individual assistance. If you registered by Internet, they could then check for duplicates and check your address, and so forth. If you registered by telephone, they couldn't, and a lot of people that registered by telephone who were not eligible or made multiple applications.

They now say that they can register up to 200,000 people a day with their system, and that they have the ability to check addresses and make sure that those addresses are correct. And the question that we have is it's never been tested for 200,000 people a day.

In other words, it's never been stressed to that point, and it's not clear what would happen, and what kind of contingency plan they have if that system goes down, for being able to register people.

There's another issue, is a particular file they're using to check addresses is a file that very often election officials use, and it has one particular flaw. And that is that it tries to identify residential addresses, but in that particular file, if you live above your business, the address may be shown to be a business address, not a residential address.

And therefore, you might not be able to register, because it doesn't show that this was a residential address. So it's those kind of issues that we're concerned about.

PERLMUTTER:

In the next paragraph, you talk about the National Guard, and you say, "The National Guard needs to respond to large- scale disasters that have not been fully identified because the multiple federal and state agencies to such events have not completed and integrated their plans." I mean, when you put together your report, what kind of research did you do into the National Guard's part of any disaster response?

JENKINS:

Well, this particular paragraph is actually a very high-level summary of a much more detailed report that we issued on the National Guard and domestic preparedness in January.

And that did look at the equipment that the Guard had, how they were determining what equipment was needed for their domestic missions, what kind of equipment they had, how DOD was assessing their role in domestic missions.

As we point out in that report that DOD doesn't routinely measure the readiness of the Guard for domestic missions. So this is a high summary of a much more detailed report which I can send you that was issued in January of this year.

PERLMUTTER:

Yes, I'd appreciate it if you would send me a copy of that, please.

No further questions, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

ACTING CHAIR:

Thank you.

And I will now recognize myself for five minutes. I am the acting chair, as you can see, and the chairman -- Chairman Thompson -- made a salient point that I'd like to revisit just for a

moment, if I may. He talked to you about the relationship between the Red Cross and what I would call other NGOs.

And I assure you, I was not in his district, so I have no idea as to what was said, other than what I heard him say. But I heard similar comments in my district, and I want to help improve the image that has been somewhat tarnished because of what happened in the aftermath of Katrina.

So my first question to you is this: What is the most important thing that you've done since Katrina to help you become proactive as opposed to reactive with reference to your emergency response?

BECKER:

You're referring to the partnerships or to our capacity to respond in general?

GREEN:

Capacity to respond as well as partnerships.

BECKER:

I would say one of the most significant things we've done is, rather than roll resources to a hurricane area ahead of the storm -- which we've done in the past, and prepositioned items as the storm is coming.

We now have every state, from here to Texas along the coast, with at least one prepositioned warehouse with what it takes to shelter 500,000 people for a six-day period of time. To have the supplies already in the affected area helps us, because we had problems moving items into the affected areas and through the affected areas post- Katrina.

I would say of all the action we took, and there were 40- something projects that we undertook before last hurricane season, that was probably the most significant, to have our capacity there before the storm, to have it there year-round.

GREEN:

And with reference to the NGOs other than yourself, your entity?

BECKER:

I would say the most powerful thing that we have done is to enable each of our chapters to work within their communities on those right relationships, and give them ability to bring resources and money to the table, to the conversation.

When we go to a church and say "Would you like to help this community in time of disaster?", the answer is typically, "Well, call us when the big one hits and we'll come if we can." And we need to do better than that.

And what we're trying to do is to work with the faith community in particular and say, "Would you help the Red Cross, would you be part of this community's disaster response? And if you will, we will give you the training you need so that you can run the Church X shelter when they have the shelter manager and the shelter workers and your supplies.

"We'll train you, we'll give access to our supplies. We'll give you our cots." And then more importantly, what they really wanted to know is, "Will you pay my bills at the end of all of this?"

GREEN:

How is this message being conveyed to the masses?

BECKER:

To the -- I'm sorry?

GREEN:

The masses. How is this message penetrating to the entities that you desire to impact?

BECKER:

What we ask our chapters to do is to look strategically at the community and see who the right partners would be. Some of it's about geography. Where are we slower to get to because it's very rural, or very far away from where our volunteers are?

Some of it is demographic. It's language, it's parts of town that were slower to respond to, or where do we not look like the people we are saving. So it's asking our chapters to reach out and form those right partnerships now and ahead of time, as we have done on the national level.

And then I mentioned before, we have about 130 national partnerships, and some of these are with organizations that aren't disaster responders. We trained 1,000 members of the NAACP, and resourced them. They responded in the Daytona area to tornadoes. They responded to Alabama with us. They responded to Georgia with us. They were doing mass care work, but they were

representing the NAACP, not the American Red Cross. We all think that was a significant improvement.

GREEN:

Thank you.

Permit me to ask Mr. Jenkins a question if I may, sir.

Mr. Jenkins, sir, with reference to the National Guard and your survey, do you have a comparison between when we were at our peak of readiness at home, as opposed to where we are now?

JENKINS:

The survey that we did really wasn't designed to do that. What we did is, we asked the various National Guard bureaus what kind of equipment they had, and what they thought their inventory was compared to what they needed, in other words, if you have 40 percent, 50 percent, or whatever.

But the survey wasn't really feigned in terms of peak readiness versus current readiness. It was like, what equipment do you have and what kind of shortages do you have?

GREEN:

Thank you. My time has expired.

Does Mr. Perlmutter have any additional questions?

PERLMUTTER:

(OFF-MIKE) No, sir.

GREEN:

All right. Well, we'd like to thank all of the witnesses for your valuable testimony today, and the members for their questions. The members of the committee may have additional questions for you, and we will ask that you respond expeditiously to their questions in writing, of course.

And the hearing is going to be adjourned, given that there is no further business. And I am instructed to strike the gavel. Thank you.

List of Panel Members and Witnesses

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