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STATEMENT BY

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**BEFORE THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS,
PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

SECOND SESSION, 110TH CONGRESS

ON

Practicing Like We Play: Examining Homeland Security Exercises

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Chairman Cuellar, Mr. Dent and distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss homeland security exercises in preparation to domestic disasters, natural or man-made.

The National Guard has been actively participating in homeland security since the Revolutionary War. It has always been the first military responder in times of need, to natural disasters, civil disturbances, or attacks on our homeland. The National Guard's success in the performance of its historic dual mission, especially in the last several years, has increased the expectations for a sustained and coordinated National Guard response to crisis at home.

Starting in 2003 the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, Lieutenant General Steve Blum, has acted aggressively to meet those expectations. With the support of Congress, the National Guard has created at least one WMD Civil Support team in every state and territory, 17 Chemical Biological Radiological Nuclear and Explosive (CBRNE) Enhanced Response Force Packages (CERFPs), designed to aid in search and extraction, decontamination, and medical care in WMD environments and Joint Incident Site Communication Capabilities (JISCCs), designed to enhance interoperability between military and civil responders.

LTG Blum also tasked my organization, the National Guard Bureau-Joint Doctrine, Training and Force Development Directorate - to provide education, training and exercise support for these new capabilities. The centerpiece of this effort is the Vigilant Guard Regional Exercise Program, which is designed by the National Guard Bureau to train and enhance the preparedness of our state level Joint Force Headquarters and Joint Task Forces in their mission to support civilian authorities. Each Vigilant Guard exercise is designed to involve multiple States – ideally all of the States in a FEMA region. Beginning with an August 2005 exercise in Ohio, at FEMA Region 5, we have conducted seven (7) exercises thus far. Subsequent exercises were conducted in Kansas/ FEMA Region 7; Texas / FEMA Region 5; Utah / FEMA Region 8, last Spring's exercise in Indiana, associated with NORTHCOM's Ardent Sentry, and, most recently, in Washington State / FEMA Region 10, and Virginia / FEMA Region 3. These exercises have grown from command post exercises concentrating on the Guard information management tasks to robust State and local full scale play. The exercise conducted in Indiana last May is especially

notable. It was the largest homeland security exercise ever conducted of its type. We linked one of our Vigilant Guard exercises to NORTHCOM's Ardent Sentry, which included participation of personnel from the State of Indiana, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), FEMA Region V, and the local responders from multiple counties. We came together to execute the kind of multi-level, multi-jurisdictional exercise we believe is the future of Homeland Security exercises. For future training, the National Guard Bureau is now building exportable exercises for the States, based on the fifteen (15) National Planning Scenarios.

As a companion to our exercise program, we have built a National Guard Lessons Learned Program to capture and implement nationwide what we have learned at each regional exercise. As our exercise program has matured we have made great progress in raising the level of knowledge and experience of each State National Guard on the National Incident Management System, the Incident Command System and the National Response Plan. Also, we have increased integration with our partners in DHS and their Homeland Security Exercise and Evaluation Program (HSEEP), NORTHCOM and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Exercise Program.

We commend the Department of Homeland Security for their work in building a foundation for future exercises. My staff has been actively monitoring the developments in DHS's HSEEP, its supporting HSEEP online toolkit and the implementation this year of the National Exercise Program (NEP). I see some exciting opportunities and synergies for future exercises involving the National Guard where local and state civil authorities combine efforts with our federal and military partners. We are especially interested in DHS's Regional Exercise Program, which could connect the civilian exercises with what we have been doing on the National Guard side to increase regional cooperation and integration of supporting capabilities.

The biggest challenge the National Guard has faced in achieving a National Exercise Program fully integrated with the Department of Defense and inter-agency partners has been resourcing. Beginning with the President's Budget request for Fiscal Year 2008, the Vigilant Guard exercise program will finally be funded in the DoD budget. This will cover planning and design of exercises.

The National Guard remains committed to work inside the Department of Defense and with the Department of Homeland Security and States in finding training opportunities to enhance our preparedness within the capability afforded by present resources. On behalf of the Chief, National Guard Bureau, LTG H Steven Blum, we commend your leadership and attention on this important issue.