

Good Morning Senators:

First, I would like to thank you for your work in support of all first responders involved in both homeland security and emergency management and for allowing me the opportunity to meet with you this morning. I would like to address a few issues that have relevance here in Rhode Island.

As we approach the 2006 hurricane season, we do so with a renewed sense of commitment, and urgency. I just returned from the National Hurricane Conference in Orlando, during which I had the opportunity to gain valued information on hurricane response and preparedness. The lessons learned from our colleagues in Florida and the Gulf States must be learned and changes made in order that we can all respond in a coordinated manner to effectively serve our citizens.

We at the local level understand that local and county governments must take the lead in emergency response. Local government must be prepared to work through our State agencies with FEMA in coordinating the federal government's role in order that this approach is conducted in a team fashion.

In order for this to happen all parties must understand the “chain of command” for all responders in response to natural disasters.

During my training at the National Hurricane Conference it became quite apparent that from region to region this chain of command is not consistent. While most agencies, have adopted the National Incident Management System (NIMS), to conduct operations during emergency and disaster response, the chain of command varies greatly by region. I feel that a national standard should be adopted in order that all regions conduct operations in a similar manner. By doing so would allow greater understanding between operating agencies as to where they fit into the process,

particularly when federal agencies and assets are deployed in support of operations.

Communications

It is my understanding that FEMA's National Response Coordination Center (NRCC) - is upgrading equipment and installing software to improve the interface, coordination, and exchange of information with the Department of Homeland Security Operations Center (HSOC).

These improvements to information systems, will improve coordination, rapid exchange of information, and access to field reports before, during and after a disaster and are sorely needed.

However while these changes are taking place at the Federal level, those of us at the local level are still struggling with the dire need for interoperable communications. Interoperable communications capabilities must be developed at the local level in order that emergency response officials can effectively communicate during

a disaster. This type of communications system is extremely costly for any local municipality to develop on its own. I would ask that more support be given to funding sources that would allow local and state government to develop and maintain this vital equipment. As demonstrated during the recent response to Katrina, effective communications is vital to the success of any response.

Emergency Operations Centers

Essential for the effective response of any community to a disaster is its ability to staff, operate and maintain an adequate Emergency Operations Center. I would ask congress to support funding designed to allow every region to develop a center that meets the needs of the area. In Warwick we are presently working on improvements in this area, but more Federal support is needed if we are to truly build an asset that meets the needs of the region. These centers need to be established in a manner that is consistent

with the chain of command that I mentioned earlier. I believe that FEMA in conjunction with our State counterparts should review present centers and insure that they meet regional needs. While attending last week conference it became quite apparent that the southern states seem to have developed these centers to a greater level than many of us in the northeast. I am sure that much of this progress has unfortunately been driven by the frequency of hurricanes in that area in recent years, but we must develop and maintain similar facilities in all areas of the country if we to be truly prepared.

Shelters and Supply

We have been working hard in developing adequate shelters for our community. This effort has been successful with the cooperation of the Red Cross and our local CERT Teams.

However a concern to us is the ability to replenish and restock

essential disaster commodities such as food, water, ice, fuel, during a hurricane aftermath. It is extremely important that FEMA have a ready supply of needed commodities and assets for surge capability beyond FEMA's "on hand" capacity.

Agency Focus

During the period following September 11... we have seen the focus of available funding for emergency management and response shift to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as opposed to response to and recovery from natural disasters. For example, during the last couple of years we have seen tremendous DHS support of our hazardous materials and decontamination teams while other areas received very little. While attention to issues involving terrorism is vitally important and necessary, it must be noted that we should also be giving equal funding support to issues involving hurricane preparedness and response as well. During the course of last weeks conference there was considerable discussion regarding the inclusion of FEMA under the Department

of Homeland Security. I believe that congress should give this issue careful consideration and insure that if FEMA continues to remain part of DHS that it does not become lost within that organization and that its ability to focus on and respond to disasters efficiently is assured.

Reimbursement

The response to Katrina involved mutual for all parts of the country. The Emergency Management Aid Compact (EMAC) was allowed for the efficient deployment of local and state asset with great success. Although these deployments were successful in completion of the mission, many of them were nightmares for local communities who funded these responses, after assurances from state and federal agencies that reimbursement would be forthcoming, only to wait several months for compensation. If congress could streamline the process for reimbursement it would allow greater support of missions in the future.

In conclusion, the role of local government in hurricane response and preparedness must be clearly defined and integrated into any state or federal response. I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you this morning and I will gladly answer any questions you may have

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