

Testimony of Dr. William Meehan
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Chairman Carney and Congressman Rogers, thank you for this opportunity to testify before the Homeland Security Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight. I am President of Jacksonville State University (JSU), and it is my pleasure to be here as a witness because this is an opportunity to highlight the contributions and achievements of JSU in the area of preparing our Nation's first responders.

Jacksonville State University (JSU) celebrated 125 years on February 22 of this year. Founded in 1883 as a state normal school, JSU currently enrolls over 9,000 students, offers 45 undergraduate programs and 24 graduate majors and has grown into a 459-acre main campus with 59 major buildings and other locations here at McClellan, Gadsden and Fort Payne. We have earned more accredited programs than any other regional university in our state, including discipline specific accreditations that are unique to only JSU in the state of Alabama. It is also noteworthy that we have as many Fulbright scholars as any other institution in Alabama, an indication of our university's exemplary faculty and our commitment to scholarship and global education.

JSU plays an integral role in the economic development of Northeast Alabama. Our graduates contribute significantly to the growth of the region and the state, and it is a goal of the University to further promote the health and wealth of Northeast Alabama. JSU is focused on outreach opportunities that will better the lives and economic well-being of the citizens of Alabama. To that end, JSU has a long history and strong commitment to preparing emergency response professionals for any situation: terrorist attack, natural disaster or other large-scale emergency. In fact, in May 2008 the National Weather Service designated JSU as the first "Storm Ready" university in Alabama.

Now I would like to briefly tell you about some of our accomplishments in Emergency Management and Homeland Security. JSU became involved in this arena while working with the redevelopment of Fort McClellan many years ago. We at JSU are indeed proud of our role in helping to establish the Center for Domestic Preparedness. Shortly after the announcement that Fort McClellan would close, it became obvious that there was no planned use for the Army's live agent training facility, and it would remain as an eyesore since the cost of dismantling the structure would be prohibitive. Congress had just passed the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici Domestic Preparedness Initiative in 1996 and JSU took the initiative to develop a proposal to utilize the live agent facility, along with other facilities at Fort McClellan, in order to prepare civilian first responders for a terrorist attack involving chemical weapons. As many of you may remember, JSU then took the lead role in marketing the concept of a first responder training facility. The establishment

of the CDP became a reality both through the efforts of JSU and the strong support of the local community, Calhoun County Chamber of Commerce and Senator Shelby, Senator Sessions and then-Congressman Bob Riley, now Governor of the great state of Alabama.

Through our efforts in developing the CDP, we at JSU became acutely aware of the need for emergency management education programs to address both the terrorism threat as well as natural disasters. JSU has been providing online academic programs for emergency managers and first responders since 1998. So, even prior to the events of September 11, 2001, JSU had academic programs in place that addressed planning considerations for both terrorism and natural disaster events. Recognizing that terrorist attacks, while devastating, cannot match the destructive potential of Mother Nature, our degrees continue to be designed to strike a balance between both natural disasters and terrorist (man made) events.

We currently offer bachelors and masters degrees in emergency management. We know there is a critical need for individuals with doctoral degrees to teach emergency management and homeland security courses in other colleges and universities; therefore, JSU is now in the process of establishing a doctoral program in emergency management. JSU is also a member of the Department of Homeland Security Center for the Study of Preparedness and Catastrophic Event Response and the Homeland Security Defense Education Consortium. Also, with the Association of Public-Safety Communication Officials International (APCO), and through partnership with Gadsden State Community College, we developed the APCO Virtual College whereby many 9-1-1 operators, who sometimes are referred to as the nation's true first responders, are able to pursue academic programs in public safety, emergency management and homeland security.

In order to rapidly get seasoned professionals in the field, and make the greatest impact on national security, our programs are targeted toward mid-career professionals in the public safety arena. Recognizing that these individuals must continue working while earning a degree, the courses are completely online. The success of these programs has been greatly rewarding – and ultimately beneficial to the U.S. and other nations through the work of our students and graduates. We have had students from 49 states, several territories and many foreign countries, and we have had students represented on all 7 continents. To-date, we have graduated 173 with masters and 85 with baccalaureate emergency management degrees. Our greatest impact, however, is through the accomplishments of our graduates, as many currently hold key positions with the public, private, or non-profit sectors. For example, our graduates work for local and state emergency management agencies, the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, the Red Cross, and the Center for Disease Control. Indeed, many of these graduates and currently enrolled students' preferred career path is to serve rural communities. Furthermore, our graduates can also be found on Capitol Hill, at the Pentagon and overseas in both civilian and military-oriented positions. To illustrate our program's popularity, enrollment in fall 2007 included 232 students in the baccalaureate program, 48 in the certificate program, and 80 pursuing the master's degree.

Finally, JSU has actively supported local, state and national emergency management and homeland security initiatives through the provision of contractual assistance in a number of areas. Several were related to the Alabama Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP) and included development of Emergency Operations Plans for municipalities and other entities; design and/or support for annual exercises/drills; plans for special needs population, and service as medical coordinator.

I am very proud of our accomplishments, and I believe that JSU has already helped to make our country a safer place in which to live. We have indeed made a big impact in a short period of time, and our work will continue in these efforts. Along with the significant contributions our bachelors and masters degree recipients are making globally, I believe that the initiation of our doctorate program will have an even greater contribution to the safety and security of our nation. Furthermore, through our contractual and community services, JSU will also continue to be a significant contributor in helping our emergency planning and response professionals to be prepared for terrorist or natural disaster events.

Another academic program with a strong connection to the Center for Domestic Preparedness is the Lurleen B. Wallace College of Nursing and Health Science (CNHS) at Jacksonville State University. Created by the Legislature of the State of Alabama in 1967 to meet the educational needs of the state, JSU's nursing program educates and graduates exemplary health care professionals known for expertise in critical thinking and decision making. The College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS) continues to experience extraordinary growth with a 120% increase in enrollment since 2001. Just last year the program graduated 11 Master of Science in Nursing students and 157 Bachelor of Science in Nursing Students. Enrollment for fall 2007 was 50 in the MSN program and 423 in the BSN program, numbers indicative of the growth in this discipline so vital to the region, indeed the nation.

However, a nationwide nursing shortage threatens our rural communities. Since fall 2004, 310 qualified nursing applicants have been denied admission at Jacksonville State University's (JSU) College of Nursing and Health Sciences (CNHS) due to lack of nursing faculty, classrooms, and clinical sites. In 2006 the Alabama Board of Nursing reported that 4046 qualified applicants were denied admission to nursing programs in Alabama; while at the national level more than 46,000 qualified applicants were denied. Rural communities need these qualified nurses who are prepared to respond to disasters, natural or man-made.

Both undergraduate and graduate nursing students have clinical experiences at the Center for Domestic Preparedness. Recognizing the importance of preparing a healthcare workforce with knowledge and skill in disaster response, emergency/domestic preparedness, concepts are integrated throughout various undergraduate and graduate courses in the curriculum. Our students have the unique opportunity to participate in courses offered through The Center for Domestic Preparedness, which is viewed by faculty and students as an extremely valuable learning experience.

Just last week, two of our Master of Science in Nursing students attended the Pandemic

Influenza Preparedness Courses here at the CDP. Their week concluded with the opportunity to participate in live nerve agent training, a rather unique experience for a healthcare provider. While the likelihood of an actual nerve agent event is slim, the lessons learned about the importance of personal protective equipment and decontamination can be applied to many emergency and disaster situations. As a result of such training, one of our recent graduates led the development of a Pandemic Influenza Response Plan for a large school system in Alabama. Our MSN graduates are employed in diverse roles, including school health, healthcare administration, education, and clinical services. Knowledge of emergency preparedness, coupled with the nationally renowned training offered through the CDP, provides our graduates with a foundation to positively influence planning and response efforts in their respective institutions and communities.

Jacksonville State University clearly plays an important role in preparing first responders; a role that is in keeping with our University's mission and critical to our community at large. We continue to capitalize on these disciplines and reach out to potential community, state and federal partners. We at JSU strongly encourage the federal government's contribution and support of training and preparing our nation's rural first responders. I thank you for your leadership on this issue, and I am delighted to answer any questions you may have at this time.