

Chairman Landrieu, members of the committee and other distinguished guests:

I am David Maxwell, Director and State Homeland Security Adviser for the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before the committee today.

I am here to discuss FEMA's responses to the three Presidential Declarations in my state following the tornadoes and flooding of February 5 and beyond; the tornadoes and flooding that occurred March 18-28; and the tornadoes and flooding that occurred on May 2 and May 10.

First let me say I was very pleased with FEMA's response for the first two declarations. During these first two disasters, I thought FEMA displayed a proactive response in addition to some creative out-of-the-box thinking. One example was the use of helicopters in conducting preliminary damage assessments from the air, which certainly expedited the overall process.

However, this was not the case for the third disaster in which FEMA's response took much longer. For example, the date of the first request for assistance (Individual Assistance only) was May 6, while the second request for assistance (Individual Assistance and Public Assistance) was made May 14. The Federal Declaration did not occur until May 20, delaying Federal assistance by as much as 14 days from the first request. We initially asked only for Individual Assistance to speed the process as we felt that the Individual Assistance request

was certainly valid because there were over 250 homes either destroyed or with major damage. It was especially true when you consider that some of the counties with damage had been declared in both the previous disasters. Direct dialogue with the reviewers could ensure questions are answered and the process stays on track, averting such unnecessary delays in assistance.

Arkansas has state disaster programs for events that are within our capabilities to manage. When an event reaches a magnitude that warrants requesting a Presidential declaration and assistance is delayed in the declaration process, we face the difficult decision of whether to implement our state program or wait until we receive a response to the Presidential request. We feel that having a State program is the right thing to do, yet sometimes it seems we are penalized by having them. Having disaster assistance at the State level should not impact the Federal request.

In summary, FEMA's response to our disasters was much improved. We still feel there are some additional improvements that can be made and stand ready to assist Administrator Paulison in achieving the goals he has set forth for FEMA's response and recovery efforts. We all understand that we are working toward the same ultimate goal and that is to better serve disaster victims. As long as we keep that basic purpose in mind we will be able to work together to strengthen the system and work through problem areas we have identified. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important subject.

