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Last week, floods devastated this state, and even this city. I do not want to minimize the losses suffered or the damages done, but I do want to commend you for your efforts. I believe the floods last week showed the improvements we are making at every level of government as we continue to prepare our community for disasters and help them in their aftermaths.

None of us can nor should do it alone.

Last week, Missouri asked for help. The State of Missouri requested a federal declaration, and within hours of receiving the request President George W. Bush issued a major disaster declaration on March 19, 2008. His declaration approved direct federal assistance for 70 counties and the Independent City of St. Louis to support emergency needs for the flooding in southern Missouri.

To support state and local response operations, FEMA deployed a Federal Incident Response Support Team (FIRST-Chicago) and expert teams to Missouri who will work with the states as the waters recede to determine the need for additional federal assistance.

These activities are an example of the New FEMA's commitment to "Engaged Partnerships" between federal, state and local governments, volunteer organizations and the private sector. We are working with our partners to coordinate federal and local response to these floods. I am very pleased with the level of coordination we have seen.

To date, federal representatives from the affected regions and across the nation have responded to deliver immediate aid and coordination efforts under the combined federal response led by FEMA.

Dick Hainje, our Regional Administrator, activated his coordination center and has a liaison in the Missouri State Emergency Operations Center. FEMA provided water to the City of Piedmont in Wayne County, as a water main rupture damaged the city's water system.

Other federal agencies have also acted in response to the President's Declaration. This is emblematic of our commitment to working together as DoD, the Corps of Engineers, the Coast Guard and the American Red Cross all contributed on the ground to help provide shelter, food, sandbags, and Search & Rescue capabilities. These efforts benefited from a Joint Field Office in Jefferson City, established in response to winter storms and January's tornado, that was already up and running and thus able to support the immediate response to the flooding.

Sadly, Missouri is now one of the top 12 states for emergency disaster declarations. I am proud of our efforts to support you but wish you did not have to face such challenges.

It's tough to remember when faced with these devastating floods, but things could be much worse. And they would have been without your hard work. Missouri is the "Show Me" state, so let me show you how you made such a difference. When you compare the damage done in 1993 with floods last year and today – your success is evident. Fewer homes were destroyed and fewer people needed evacuation and support. Your efforts have paid off.

Look at some other reforms where the payoff can be seen today.

Missouri's State and county Mitigation Plans are repeatedly recognized as disaster and pre-disaster mitigation projects are approved for local jurisdictions. Some of the innovative local mitigation projects range from Community Safe Rooms to buried underground utility lines. Missouri pursued an aggressive Voluntary Buyout Program with local governments to move citizens out of the floodplains. These reforms proved their worth this month. Thank you for your efforts to see them through.

In 2006, I stressed to State Emergency Management Directors that Logistics Operations would be a priority for future disaster response. Again, Missouri stepped up to the plate and during recent disaster response has demonstrated a robust Logistics Operations. It helps that you have hired a fulltime logistics-resource manager. FEMA has done the same thing, bringing in a career logistics man in Eric Smith to head up our new Logistics Management Directorate and it makes a difference.

I also want to applaud Missouri's Regionalization program, which has helped you to maximize purchasing and response power.

It is also clear you are not resting on your laurels. You continue to prepare for the future – and not just for floods. As we move forward, we look to how we can continue to be ready in the future.

Last year, FEMA and the Central United Earthquake Consortium formed a catastrophic earthquake planning initiative. I am happy to report that Missouri is working closely with FEMA's regional Office in Kansas City on catastrophic plans, and earthquake exercises. Missouri is also working with counties on their catastrophic plans so there will be a seamless response in the event of a major earthquake along the New Madrid fault.

Missouri has an outstanding Statewide Volunteer Coordinator program, which is a model for the rest of the country. Through EMAC, Missouri's volunteer coordinator, Dante Gliniecki, has helped your colleagues around the country, heading the call of others and helping to respond on September 11, following Hurricane Katrina, and during the California Wildfires.

In a similar vein, we appreciate your support for the Citizen Corps program and the goal to bring government and community leaders together for all-hazards planning, public education and training, and volunteer support.

As we prepare for the future, we will all rely on new National Response Framework in place. It was rolled out last winter. Now we are on the next step: implementation.

Training is critical to the implementation of the NRF in the NIMS environment. While the NRF provides the Framework for response, it clearly must be understood and rehearsed through exercises by Federal components; State, Tribal, and local governments; and private sector as well as nongovernmental organizations. All stakeholders need to know how the Nation's response structure works and their roles and responsibilities within that structure. Each audience requires a different level of understanding or ability to work within the *NRF*. Personnel who have a specific role in the national response or who must interact with the Federal response require more detailed, position-specific training and exercises. Training and exercises will follow a logical progression from awareness of knowledge, to operational skill building, through skill applications using exercises.

We are also preparing for a future by developing a robust transition plan for the change in Administration next January. The initial focus has been on filling the career deputy slots with experienced and qualified people who will be ready to "hold down the fort" until the next President chooses their leadership team for FEMA. We are dedicated to leaving FEMA ready and prepared.

In succession planning there is a potential for leadership voids to arise due to retirement, exiting political appointees, or other reasons. We have identified personnel to backfill exiting critical positions if necessary. And I have named one of our career Regional Administrators, Nancy Ward, to serve as our Senior Career Transition Officer to help

facilitate the transition for FEMA senior leadership and potentially serve as Acting Administrator in the event that no Administrator exists.

We will also focus on a smooth knowledge transfer. We are currently working with each of the FEMA components and the Regions to develop simple, useful, and uniform means to transfer knowledge, experiences, and lessons learned to the new leadership. We will provide actionable guidance on the workings of critical functions such as the disaster declaration process, activation of the NRCC, grant processes and other activities that our stakeholders depend upon. We will provide overviews of procurement, budget, facility, and other infrastructure requirements. We will provide an understanding of major improvements underway to form the 'New FEMA' such as building robust regions, establishing Incident Management Assistance Teams, and integrating disparate processes.

You are dedicated to a strengthened response in your communities and it shows. We at FEMA are also dedicated to a stronger, more nimble FEMA that is ready to work hand-in-hand with you in the future. I think we have shown you this New FEMA in recent weeks. I wish us all continued progress in the future.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.