



**United States Senate**  
**Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**  
Senator Susan M. Collins, Chairman

**Opening Statement of**  
**Senator Susan M. Collins**  
**Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**  
**“Hurricane Katrina: The Defense Department’s Role in the Response”**  
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Today, the Committee will scrutinize the performance of the United States military – both National Guard and active duty forces – in the response to Hurricane Katrina. We will analyze the military’s actions on the ground, review the military’s work with other agencies involved in the response, and explore the relationship between the Guard and active duty troops. In doing so, we will examine the fundamental issue of whether the United States military is properly structured to meet the 21st Century threats to our homeland.

There is no question that the men and women of our military shared much in common with the first responders helping the victims of Katrina: they performed well under extraordinarily difficult and dangerous conditions. There also is no question that the military brought substantial material resources to relieve the suffering of the Gulf Region. From meals-ready-to-eat, vehicles, and communications equipment to the ships that became vital platforms for search and rescue operations, we have heard throughout these hearings of the military’s contributions to the relief effort.

There also is no question, however, that the military was not immune from the conflicts, the confusion, and the lack of coordination that occurred across all levels of government and that prevented the response from being as quick and effective as it should have been. Furthermore, it is apparent that these problems existed not just between the military and other agencies, but also within the military itself.

The active duty military and the National Guard share many traits: unmatched material assets, experienced and dedicated leaders, and highly trained personnel possessing courage and devotion to duty. Yet during Katrina, the active duty military and the National Guard seemed to be – to paraphrase Churchill’s famous quip about England and America – two forces separated by a common mission.

Katrina revealed a split between Northern Command, the combatant command focused on homeland security created by the Department of Defense after 9/11, and the National Guard, which is under the command of its State’s governor. The very institution that Americans look to as the model for a unified chain of command revealed itself to have fallen short in that regard. Better coordination between the active duty forces and the National Guard must be ensured before the next disaster strikes.

I appreciate the appearance today of our first panel of distinguished witnesses – Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense Paul McHale, the Commander of Northern Command Admiral Timothy Keating, and the

Chief of the National Guard Bureau, General Steven Blum – and I look forward to hearing their views on these important matters.

The second panel of witnesses will describe military preparedness and response on the ground for Hurricane Katrina. I am pleased to have with us today General Russel Honore, the commander of Joint Task Force Katrina, and General Bennett Landreneau, the Louisiana National Guard Adjutant General.

I am interested in hearing from all our witnesses the problems they encountered in melding two forces into one cohesive effort, the challenges they faced in trying to establish a clear and effective chain of command, and the difficulties in the relationship between DoD and FEMA.

For example, FEMA officials have told the Committee that the Department of Defense subjected its Katrina mission assignments to what they saw as unnecessarily protracted and detailed reviews that delayed the requested support. On the other hand, we know that Defense officials often saw those requests as vague, as not clearly identifying the specific support needed. “Send us everything you’ve got” is not a reasonable request to make of a military that bears enormous national security responsibilities around the world.

This conflict reveals, above all, one of the fundamental problems the Committee’s investigation has uncovered: the lack of concerted pre-disaster planning among all levels of government so that expectations and capabilities are understood in advance, and so that needs can be met rapidly and efficiently when disaster strikes.

Among the questions I hope we will answer through this hearing are:

- What did DOD do to prepare for this storm both in terms of planning and pre-positioning of assets shortly before landfall?
- Why didn’t the Department of Defense work through its coordination role with FEMA before the storm, and did the failure to do so contribute to the sense among some FEMA officials that the Department was reluctant to help?
- When were active duty troops requested, and should they have been deployed sooner? Did disputes over the chain of command affect the deployment of troops?
- Why was the command and control issue still being worked through almost a week into the disaster, and was this a distraction or worse?
- If most of the work in the response was done by the National Guard with little visibility by Northern Command, then what is Northern Command’s mission going forward?
- What will the Department do to bridge the gaps in coordination between the active duty forces and the National Guard?

These questions are raised by Katrina, but they also delve into the very foundation of American society and the philosophical basis of American government. They bring into focus the principle of federalism and the respective roles and authorities of 50 sovereign states under one central but limited government. From the founding of our nation to the present day, the question of deploying the military in response to domestic crises has been of grave

concern. It is addressed in our Constitution and in statute, from the Posse Comitatus Act to the Insurrection Act to the Stafford Act. The key question for this panel is how we can continue to uphold traditional principles of federalism as we confront the challenges and prepare for the threats of the 21st Century.

We will explore that question in the context of Hurricane Katrina, an event that brought longstanding traditions and deeply rooted political philosophy into a shocking collision with reality. The United States military – both active duty forces and the National Guard – is unparalleled in excellence, commitment, and courage. We must find a better way to employ this invaluable resource when disaster strikes our nation, as we continue to embrace the principles that lie at the heart of our nation.

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