

REMARKS OF CEDRIC B. GLOVER
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AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER RECOVERY
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
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Thank you for inviting me to testify today on the response to and recovery from Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

Shreveport, Louisiana, where I serve as Mayor, is more than two hundred miles from the Gulf of Mexico and more than three hundred miles from New Orleans. So why is my viewpoint relevant? It's very simple – when a hurricane threatens the Louisiana or Texas Gulf Coasts, Shreveport and other inland cities are where many of the evacuees seek shelter. During Hurricane Gustav, Shreveport, Bossier City and Northwest Louisiana housed more than 13,000 persons in formal shelters – and more than double that number in hotels, private homes and churches.

I have been asked to address what went well – and what did not – in the aftermath of Gustav and Ike. I would like to share those thoughts with you and to suggest measures that all levels of government, working together, can take to improve our ability to respond to the inevitable next storm.

What went well? Clearly, the evacuation itself went well. State and federal assets were marshaled in unprecedented numbers to assure that most people got out of harm's way, especially in the New Orleans area and the adjacent coastal communities. The effort worked. Had New Orleans been hit with catastrophic flooding, there would have been far fewer people in danger.

Communication between FEMA and the State of Louisiana appeared to be much improved over Katrina and Rita. FEMA did not appear out of touch, as they had three years ago, but rather were on the ground before the storms arrived.

The levee systems in New Orleans, upgraded since Katrina, worked just well enough. The televised scenes of water overtopping the flood walls in New Orleans were frightening, but the levees held – this time. There is still much to do to make New Orleans safer from the next big storm, particularly in rebuilding our coastal barriers, but those efforts will take time.

In the mean time, what can we do to improve our ability to respond to these storms? A look at what did not go so well gives us some ideas.

First, there is much room for improvement in the federal response to requests to commodities, equipment and supplies. Let me give you some examples, from the Shreveport perspective. We ordered cots and towels, through the state EOC, for one of

the state-run shelters in Shreveport on September 1st. The supplies were delivered on September 17th. Another truckload of cots was delivered the next day. We had no way to tell what materials were on their way or when they would arrive. As a result, our city government and numerous community volunteers had to scour the city for towels and other supplies.

Another critical need was for shower facilities. When a single shelter is housing more than 2,500 tired, worried people, basic decency requires that they have something as simple as showers. Our local emergency managers requested that showers be delivered before Hurricane Gustav made landfall. The state did not contact the appropriate contractor until well after landfall, when the shelters were already populated.

When it became apparent that this critical need was not being met, I and our city employees did what had to be done. We built a shower facility – on Labor Day – at one of the state-run shelters. We organized a shuttle bus system, which took thousands of evacuees from other shelters to local schools and our football stadium, so that they could take a shower – three or four days after they arrived in our city. People smiled and thanked us when they emerged – but they should not have had to wait that long! Although the state has taken the responsibility for the lack of showers, FEMA can assist them in seeing that it never happens that way again.

We also believe that federal and state emergency managers should **focus on the people**, not just the storm and where it is going to make landfall. I am extremely thankful to be here discussing a shortage of towels and showers and not a shortage of body bags. However, the system which got the people out of danger did not consider what would happen to them when they reached a safe haven. Several sex offenders and individuals with outstanding warrants were allowed to evacuate on buses with children present. Many evacuees had major medical or mental health issues that had to be addressed by those of us on the receiving end. Our local firefighters and paramedics, aided by an incredible corps of medical volunteers, performed triage as each bus unloaded. Many persons went straight from the bus to the examining room to the hospital.

The experience of those riding buses also needs to be addressed. Many riders talked of buses with overflowing or inoperable bathrooms, making it necessary for them to soil themselves before they ever reached us. It is critical that evacuees be treated humanely throughout this entire process. Evacuation from your home is stressful enough.

Effectively returning evacuees to their home areas also needs to be addressed. As buses prepared to return evacuees to their homes, some persons had medical needs that kept them from being able to ride the bus. Others, persons who had driven their own vehicles to the shelters, did not have the money for food or gas to get home. Some were just plain scared, particularly after Gustav when Ike was headed our way, and just did not want to go home. Volunteers and churches in our community stepped up and purchased gas and fast food cards to allow those in need a way to get home.

We need permanent, well-supplied shelter facilities. This is not just a Louisiana and

Texas problem. When hurricanes threaten, the residents along the Interstate 10 corridor move toward the Interstate 20 corridor for shelter. This includes Dallas, Shreveport, Jackson, Birmingham and Atlanta. This is part of our inherent responsibility due to our geographic location.

These shelters need to be equipped to shelter large numbers of people for both short and long periods of time. They need to have the infrastructure to meet basic human needs – indoor restrooms, showers, water, diapers, eating facilities, places to perform rudimentary medical care and safe, well-organized places to sleep. These hard assets do not need to be on a truck coming from far away and arriving well after landfall. They need to be in place from Day One. These facilities need to have trained managers and have well-coordinated access to all of the wrap-around social services that are needed when large numbers of evacuees are housed together in one place.

Shelters cannot just be big empty boxes, waiting to be filled with people. In addition to the things I just mentioned, shelters need security, medical care, lighting, access to transportation, janitorial services and access to communications and the outside world. All of those arrangements need to be made before the storms come.

One or more of these shelters should be placed in the Shreveport metropolitan area. Each shelter should be located near major highway routes, for ease of access. Many organizations, such as the International Association of Assembly Managers, have developed best practices for how these facilities should be built. We do not need to reinvent the wheel, but we do need to act.

Although not all shelters need to be pre-stocked with supplies, those supplies need to be close at hand. One possibility might be to place some of these supplies at National Guard armories or similar facilities. No matter where they are placed, they should be under State or local control. Give us what we need so that when the next hurricane hits, we will not have to wait for FEMA approval or a truck from wherever.

We need to keep the focus on the people. We need better coordination of volunteers and donations. The 211 system is a valuable tool to connect people to social services. When the 211 systems in south Louisiana shut-down, many of those calls were forwarded to the call center in Shreveport. Listening to those calls, you hear the desperate voices and the unmet needs of our citizens. “We ran out of gas and can’t make it to the shelter, what do we do?” “The police told me that it was too late to evacuate. I am scared. Here is my name, address and phone number in case I don’t make it.” “I am in a wheelchair, they told us to meet at this spot to evacuate, but no one is here, what do I do?” We need to keep the focus on the people.

When the phone rang, our community answered. We opened up and will continue to open up our buildings as well as our hearts and pocketbooks. Shelters were located in churches, schools, vacant buildings, convention centers, arenas and coliseums. We sheltered people and pets. Our volunteers were numerous and diverse. Our community came together and did what needed to be done. I am asking for the federal and state

governments to put the critical assets in place to allow us to more effectively and efficiently serve our citizens in their critical time of need. We must keep the focus on the people.

Thank you again for giving me this opportunity to speak to you today. It has been an honor and a privilege.