

# Note to Readers

Fellow Citizens:

In the late summer of 2005, millions of us watched the satellite images of Hurricane Katrina as it moved through the Gulf of Mexico and drove menacing swells of water toward the American coastline.

We watched in sympathy as hundreds of thousands of lives were upended when the hurricane struck the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. We watched in horror as hundreds died in collapsed or flooded houses and nursing homes.

We were heartened by acts of initiative, perseverance, and heroism by local responders and the U.S. Coast Guard but, to add bewilderment and outrage to our sense of tragedy, we were horrified when the response to the Katrina catastrophe revealed – all too often, and for far too long – confusion, delay, misdirection, inactivity, poor coordination, and lack of leadership at all levels of government.

Meanwhile, thousands languished in heat and squalor on islands of concrete highway, in darkened stadiums, in nursing homes, or on rooftops, waiting for rescue, sometimes dying before help arrived.

All of this unfolded nearly four years after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001; after a massive reorganization of federal plans and organizations for disaster response and billions of dollars of expenditures; and after a closely observed hurricane struck when and where forecasters said it would.

We knew Katrina was coming. How much worse would the nightmare have been if the disaster had been unannounced – an earthquake in San Francisco, a burst levee near St. Louis or Sacramento, a biological weapon smuggled into Boston Harbor, or a chemical-weapon terror attack in Chicago?

Hurricane Katrina found us – still – a nation unprepared for catastrophe.

The United States Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs has prepared this bipartisan report to acknowledge what was done well, to identify what was done poorly or not at all, and to recommend changes in our national system for emergency response that will put local, state, federal, and private responders in a better position to provide prompt and effective relief when disaster strikes again. The Committee conducted a long and thorough investigation of these issues, and is grateful for the work of its staff of investigators, writers, researchers, and other professionals that made this report possible.

We hope you find it informative and, above all, useful.

Senator Susan M. Collins  
Maine, Chairman

Senator Joseph I. Lieberman  
Connecticut, Ranking Member