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GOVERNMENT REFORM
COMMITTEE

The Honorable Tom Davis
Chairman
Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation
for and Response to Hurricane Katrina
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I commend you and the Select Committee for your investigation into the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina. Many of the deficiencies identified by the Committee were also identified by DoD during earlier internal after-action reviews. These findings will be incorporated into DoD action plans to improve our Department's support to civil authorities during future catastrophic incidents.

Upon review of the Military section of the report, I noted three areas where inaccurate or misleading statements could lead to incorrect conclusions.

On page 204, I am quoted in an interview with Mark Sappenfield of the Christian Science Monitor: "During Katrina, the federal military remained under FEMA's control." The referenced article inaccurately stated my comments, which in the original article did not appear in quotes. The Federal military was never under FEMA's control during Hurricane Katrina. Rather, consistent with law and policy, military forces remained under the control of the US Northern Command commander, the Secretary of Defense and the President. What I conveyed to Mr. Sappenfield was that DoD Federal military forces were always engaged in missions in support of FEMA. This is a critical distinction for both legal and policy reasons.

Also on page 204, the report details what it characterizes as a lengthy and cumbersome process to communicate Requests for Assistance (RFAs) to DoD. The process described is incorrect. While our Defense Coordinating Officers (DCO) informally notify their chain of command of impending RFAs, the actual RFA process is much more direct and rapid. The FEMA Federal Coordination Officer, after consulting with the DCO, forwards the RFA to FEMA HQ which then passes the request to DoD. The Joint Staff determines availability of forces and the impact on readiness. A coordinated recommendation is then made to the Secretary of Defense or, in his absence, the Deputy Secretary. This process is not slow, cumbersome or bureaucratic. In fact, we often worked with verbal or draft requests from FEMA, obtaining approval from the Secretary prior to receipt of the official request. Mr. Scott Wells, Deputy FCO for Louisiana, stated in his December 8 testimony to the Committee regarding DoD response to RFAs: "I need to say, parenthetically, that in Katrina we did not see that lag that we

normally see in most disasters. And they were fairly responsive.” Unfortunately, the RFA process described in the report is factually incorrect.

Finally, the report on page 203 and 204 faults DoD and DHS coordination. It describes communications reflecting a “lack of information sharing, near panic, and problems with process.” Having reviewed the cited emails, we don’t agree with this characterization. More importantly, as the text of the report makes clear, when DoD recognized that RFAs from FEMA were not being generated at a rate and with the substantive capabilities required, DoD proactively began drafting the needed RFAs in cooperation with FEMA. To reference this as a deficiency in the Military section of the report gives the impression that DoD was the problem, when in fact, consistent with our sense of urgency, we provided the solution.

Thank you again for your leadership of the Bipartisan Select Committee. Please let me know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. McHale", written in a cursive style.

Paul McHale