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Thank you for that kind introduction. I'm sorry I can't stay long but things are a little busy right now.

September is National Preparedness Month. This September we are seeing just how important preparedness is during a response to a disaster, and just how vital private sector preparedness is to the overall effort.

As part of the New FEMA vision, we have worked to integrate the efforts of all partners – public and private, state, tribal, territorial or local – in a holistic approach that will strengthen the national emergency management system and improve the ability of our communities and our nation to address disasters, emergencies, and terrorist events.

Earlier this year we released the new National Response Framework that is helping all of us to coordinate our activities at every level of government, as well as with the private sector. The NRF takes into account the lessons we've learned and will continue to incorporate changes and reforms as we move forward.

In addition, FEMA's new Strategic Plan places focus on building "strong partnerships that leverage capabilities and capitalize on public-private efficiencies." To achieve this goal, FEMA must build better partnerships that place a renewed focus on engaging the capabilities and strengths of the private sector, law enforcement, health professionals and other essential communities. We have established a Private Sector office to work specifically with our partners in the diverse private sector to facilitate this coordination before, during and after a disaster.

The truth of the matter is that government, no matter how effective, is not the entire answer. All Americans must understand and take responsibility for their role in disasters so that they can help themselves, their families and their communities.

The private sector is a vital part of the preparedness mission. States around the country now offer tax holidays before Hurricane Season so that people can buy the supplies and equipment they need to be properly prepared. Private sector partners often set up kits and other materials to make it easy to get prepared. Heck, I was at Epcot Center earlier this year as a new exhibit there teaches visitors about preparedness and mitigation. Everyone has a role today.

But right now – it is your own preparations that are front and center. When we need to respond to a storm like Ike, or a series of storms like Dolly, Edouard, Fay, Hanna, Gustav and Ike – all of which hit the U.S. – then it is the groundwork that you have already put in place that makes difference.

We saw it earlier this year with the floods in the Midwest where FEMA took advantage of the distribution system put in place and the water available at warehouses. In this case, Wal-Mart stepped up and was part of the coordinated response.

We saw it with the earlier storms in Florida. FEMA was criticized by one media outlet when local businesses were quicker to provide needed supplies. The media does not understand: this is a success story! We are all working to help those in need – it does not matter who gets there first as long as someone gets there quickly. As President Truman said, “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

Today we see the private sector roles under the National Response Framework brought to life in Texas and Louisiana. Nongovernmental organizations, including both businesses and nonprofit organizations, can provide a range of on-the-ground support, ranging from mass feeding to providing situational awareness that helps inform local and state plans, to offering other critical resources. A few examples:

- In Baton Rouge, the Office Depot Foundation provided parking lot space at local stores, where water trucks were able to stage while they were in transition to assist survivors of Hurricane Gustav.
- Wal-Mart has sent regular situation updates from its national emergency operations center, which provides information on store openings, employee impact, and other vital information to provide awareness to the state and federal response to both Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.
- National and state trade associations were able to provide updated information on the status of grocery store openings, which helps the state and federal responders consolidate emergency support where it is most needed.

- In Louisiana, the Southern Baptists from Oklahoma partnered with the American Red Cross to provide meals to evacuees. The Southern Baptists provided the staff while the Red Cross provided the food and supplies.

It is also worth noting that the businesses that prepared themselves were among the first to return to full operation. Restaurants, gas stations, and hotels that had emergency plans and generators were able to service both the local residents and the emergency response. In addition, this quick return to business meant they were able to minimize interruptions to cash flow and employment – which in turn helps bring back the local economy that much more quickly.

As I said, government can not do it alone. Faith based and charitable organizations play a large role, with the American Red Cross being one of the most prominent. The Red Cross coordinates with other groups to manage large kitchens and help with the sheltering. The private sector plays a crucial role. Many private sector partners are fulfilling government contracts by providing buses, or fuel, or supplies, or housing, or any number of crucial pieces of the puzzle. Other private sector partners play an independent role by donating commodities to local communities, or even just getting their services reestablished. Power, water and telecom companies have been essential partners during the response to storms along the Gulf Coast.

We need to not only work together but also educate Americans on how our roles are intertwined. All too often I hear media stories that the private sector stepped in when government failed. Often this was a planned and coordinated activity that the media only thinks is the absence of government when in fact it is a demonstration of teamwork and coordination. In Texas, a town recently told us that they had plenty of drinking water thanks to a brewery that was providing it to them. So we shifted water to those without. A great story – yet the media tells it as if we failed the town that has to rely on the private sector. I stress again, it does not matter who gets there first as long as someone gets there.

FEMA has made a lot of progress in the past few years.

We have placed an added emphasis on planning. Can you believe when I took the reins at FEMA we had no full-time operational planners? Today we have them not just in Washington, but in our regional offices where they can work directly with you and others on the ground.

Our Gap Analysis tool has allowed us to look at each state and determine what they will need to get the job done. Sometimes that means we reach out to the private sector to help us fill that gap – like with transportation and medical evacuations.

We have expanded our training and exercises which include the Red Cross and our partners in the private sector. When we train together, we are better able to work together.

We have also focused on how we can bring the private sector, charitable and faith based communities into the process through our use of the Aidmatrix Foundation's online portal, which is designed to make it as easy as possible for individuals, organizations and companies to offer financial support, product donations, or to donate skills and time to the nonprofit organizations active in disaster relief.

There is still much to be done. But our activities over the past few weeks have shown we can be flexible, responsive and effective. With your continued support we can build on the foundation and stand up an emergency management system of which all Americans can be proud.

I'll say it again: government – even with the federal, tribal, state, territorial, and local governments working perfectly in sync – is not the entire answer. All Americans need to be part of the emergency management process. Americans must understand and take responsibility for their role in disasters. We must continue to develop a culture of preparedness in America, in which every American takes personal responsibility for his or her own emergency preparedness. FEMA will be a partner with all of you as we move forward. We ask you to join us as we all prepare for the future and to help those in need.

Thank you. God Bless You. And God Bless the United States of America.