

Additional Views

Senator John Warner

The investigation conducted by this Committee represents a remarkable undertaking in contemporary Senate history – 22 investigative hearings calling 85 witnesses, formal interviews of 325 witnesses, and nearly 1 million pages of documentation have led to the Committee report. The enormity of this task cannot be overstated and I wish to applaud the tireless work of Chairman Collins, Senator Lieberman, and their staff on their efforts. All Americans share the same goal to prepare for the future and respond when called upon to help our fellow citizens. It is the responsibility of all levels of government to serve its people.

Department of Defense Response

After these investigative hearings and extensive additional interviews, it is my personal view that the Department of Defense (DOD) active-duty personnel, National Guard, and Reserves performed with professional distinction in the days and weeks following the landfall of Hurricane Katrina. There are many stories of individual service, persons or small groups accepting personal risks in helping the victims of this tragic natural disaster.

The Department of Defense response to Hurricane Katrina represents the largest and most rapid “domestic” deployment of the military in contemporary military history. Even while over 75,000 National Guard and Reserves were deployed overseas fighting for freedom in Iraq and Afghanistan, an additional 50,000 troops were deployed in response to Hurricane Katrina.

At the peak of the Department of Defense deployment there were 20 ships; 346 helicopters; 68 fixed-wing aircraft; and 72,614 Active Duty, Reserves, and National Guardsmen assisting the recovery effort. In addition, the DOD delivered 26.6 million Meals Ready to Eat, treated 26,304 patients, and flew 16,525 sorties.¹ While the Committee report deservedly singles out the contributions of the Coast Guard in performing 33,000 rescues, it bears mentioning that the National Guard and Reserve saved 11,000 people from their rooftops.²

The Department takes seriously its civil-support mission and provided unprecedented support to the response to Hurricane Katrina, as noted by the testimony of Assistant Secretary Paul McHale February 9, 2006:

The Department of Defense’s deployment of military resources in support of civil authorities after Hurricane Katrina exceeded, in speed and size, any other domestic disaster relief mission in the history of the United States. The ability of our military forces – Active Duty, Reserves, and the National Guard – to respond quickly and effectively to an event of this magnitude is a testament to their readiness, agility, and professionalism. It is also a reflection of the resources provided by Congress that enable them to organize, train, and equip to meet the full range of DOD’s missions.³

Over 72,000 Federal military and National Guard personnel were deployed in response to Hurricane Katrina, more than twice the number deployed in response to Hurricane Andrew in 1992 (over 29,000).⁴

As President Bush,⁵ DHS Deputy Secretary Michael Jackson,⁶ LTG General Russel Honoré,⁷ former FEMA Director Michael Brown,⁸ and FEMA federal coordinating officer William Lokey⁹ stated in their public statements, interviews, and testimony, the Department of

Defense performed commendably and responded effectively to every request made by FEMA for assistance to the Department. As a personal observation, Lieutenant General Honoré served with great distinction.

On the whole, the performance of the individual soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen – active, Guard, and Reserve – was in keeping with the high professional standards of the United States Military, and these men and women are proud of their service to help the victims of this natural disaster.

The Senate as a whole should be proud of these men and women in uniform who responded with courage and untiring professionalism on behalf of their fellow citizens who fell victim to the destruction of Hurricane Katrina.

National Preparedness and Response Authority and Organizational Recommendations

The movement of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) into the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with its creation in 2003 has led to criticism that this organizational structure impedes the ability of FEMA to adequately prepare for and respond to incidents. The Senate Katrina Report calls for the reorganization of FEMA into a quasi-independent agency that would combine preparedness and response functions under a “National Preparedness Response Authority” (NPRA) with direct reporting to the President during national emergencies.

It is my belief that the combination of preparedness and response functions can lead to a potential for focus on one of the two missions, leaving the other neglected. Certainly both missions are of extreme importance, as adequate preparedness efforts can contribute significantly to our ability to respond when emergencies take place. The current separation of these duties in the Department’s framework enables the Department of Homeland Security to provide significant resources and attention to both functions without leading to a situation choosing one over the other.

In addition, my experience in government has shown that a strong reporting structure can only serve to strengthen the ability of any organization to work effectively in times of crisis. Certainly the FEMA Director has the authority to execute his or her mission during national emergencies as granted by the Stafford Act.¹⁰ A dual reporting structure where the FEMA or NPRA Director reports to the Secretary of Homeland Security and the President simultaneously would inject confusion into the chain of command. However, as with all chains of command, should the President call on the Director, he or she is responsible to act. The most important factor in the success or failure of any organization rests on the shoulders of the individuals in that organization. Experienced leaders and talented staff are essential to the ability of FEMA to execute its mission.

For these reasons, I believe that the creation of the NPRA and elevation of the Director position above the Under Secretary level would not provide a more effective organizational structure for the Department of Homeland Security.

1 Department of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, After Action Report.

2 Testimony of Lieutenant General H. Steven Blum, Chief, National Guard Bureau, before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Defense, Sept. 28, 2005.

3 Testimony of Paul McHale, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, Feb. 9, 2006, p. 2.

4 Testimony of Paul McHale, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense, Feb. 9, 2006, p. 4.

5 Statement of President George W. Bush, Aug. 31, 2005.

6 Interview of Michael Jackson, Jan. 27, 2006, pp. 27-28.

7 Testimony of Lieutenant General Russel Honoré, Commander, First U.S. Army, Feb. 9, 2006, pp. 5-9.

8 Interview of former FEMA Director Michael Brown, Jan. 23, 2006, pp. 206-207.

9 Interview of William Lokey, FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer, Nov. 4, 2005, pp. 80-87, 136.

10 Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 U.S.C. § 5143.