



One Hundred Ninth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

January 24, 2006

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I am deeply concerned about reports released today regarding critical warnings on the potential effects of Hurricane Katrina that your Administration failed to heed. According to widely published accounts, a 41-page assessment by the Department of Homeland Security's National Infrastructure Simulation and Analysis Center (NISAC) was delivered by e-mail to the White House's situation room at 1:47am on August 29, 2005, the day Katrina made landfall.

The NISAC analysis accurately predicted the collapse of floodwalls along New Orleans's Lake Pontchartrain shoreline, flooding that could leave New Orleans submerged for weeks, a communications blackout that would hamper rescue efforts, the long-term relocation of hundreds of thousands of people, and at least 100,000 poverty-stricken people stranded in the city of New Orleans.

These reports echoed comments made previously by Max Mayfield, director of the National Hurricane Center, who said Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Director Michael Brown and other top federal officials, were briefed as much as 32 hours in advance of landfall that Hurricane Katrina's storm surge was likely to overtop levees and cause catastrophic flooding. "They knew that this one was different," Mayfield has said.

Despite these warnings, in the days following landfall, comments coming from the White House and senior levels of your Administration gave the American people the impression that no one expected the storm protection system in New Orleans to be breached. A September 1 interview quotes you saying, "I don't think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees. Now we're having to deal with it, and will." Additionally, in a September 4 press conference, Secretary Chertoff said that the levee breach that flooded New Orleans was a "perfect storm" that "exceeded the foresight of planners," who did not expect both a powerful hurricane and a breach of levees that would flood New Orleans. He added that authorities assumed that "there would be overflow from the levee, maybe a small break in the levee. The collapse of a significant portion of the levee leading to the very fast flooding of the city was not envisioned."

I am very concerned that even though the highest levels of your Administration were informed of the potential problems Hurricane Katrina could cause, the response was still so slow. In order to obtain a better understanding of what went wrong, and to ensure that the Department of Homeland Security is better prepared to deal with future disasters, including terrorist attacks, I would appreciate your Administration providing answers to the following questions:

- Who was in the White House situation room when the NISAC report came from FEMA?
- Who in the White House and elsewhere in your Administration saw the document?
- How was it distributed throughout the White House and your Administration?
- Was the report forwarded to State and local officials? If so when and by whom?
- In what other ways did the White House and your Administration respond to this report?

I look forward to a timely response to these important questions. If your staff has any questions, please do not hesitate to have them contact Jessica Herrera-Flanigan, Democratic Staff Director, at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B" and "T".

Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Homeland Security

Cc: Secretary Michael Chertoff