

Oral Statement of

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Good morning, Chairman Price, Ranking Member Rogers and members of the committee.

When I was asked to lead FEMA my mission was clear: rebuild and strengthen FEMA's ability to plan, prepare and respond to disasters in the light of the national man-made and natural disasters that had struck our country. The new leadership at FEMA brought in experts to conduct assessments and incorporated these lessons learned into a new vision for the agency. The President, Secretary Chertoff and you in Congress supported this effort and provided resources and other tools to make these improvements.

In my first appearance before this committee two years ago, we came together to begin repairing the damage to what was, frankly, a challenged agency. Last year, we implemented our New FEMA with its Vision Initiative, and you provided the tools we needed to get back on our feet, use the lessons learned to set a new course, and begin that journey. Today I am here with a budget that will build on our work of these past two years and will definitively put FEMA on track for a brighter and stronger future. Today I am here to tell you that with the President and Secretary's backing, and your continued support, we are laying the groundwork for a better tomorrow. Our goal is to leave FEMA stronger than we found it. It is for this reason that my testimony today is titled: The Way Forward.

Let me take a minute here to say something not always said in Washington: Thank You. You have done more than note the challenges facing us. You have provided the resources and tools necessary to overcome these challenges. Thank you for your support in our joint effort to build this New FEMA.

This is not the FEMA of two years ago, as our response to recent disasters has demonstrated. We have made major changes over the past year as we integrated the Preparedness and Grants Programs Directorates into the FEMA fold and added their capabilities and strengths to our existing preparedness and assistance programs. We built out our capabilities, brought in new leaders and expanded our professional staff with experienced professionals. I want to stress that these improvements and reforms are only as effective as the men and women we have at FEMA to execute them. Our existing staff provided a firm foundation as we expanded. I am very proud of the people at FEMA, both those new to the organization and its veterans, for the great work they have done in moving this organization forward.

When disaster strikes today, FEMA moves early and often. Our responses to events ranging from last year's California fires to the floods and storms that struck this winter, to this year's tornadoes across the Mississippi Valley have demonstrated the abilities of this new FEMA. In each case, when we saw the potential for disaster, we began planning and moving even before it struck. When a disaster was declared, resources were there and FEMA was ready to support them.

The American people, like you, deserve to have high expectations for FEMA. We must continue this progress.

We have a Way Forward that uses the tools and resources you have previously provided with those proposed this year to continue this transformation.

We will continue strengthen our national abilities. This budget adds \$25.7 million to strengthen core capabilities, planning competencies, and capacities; our regional operations; our partnerships with states; and our national emergency management system. We will continue to build our capabilities and to integrate efforts of all partners, public and private, in a holistic approach that will strengthen the national emergency management system and improve the Nation's ability to address disasters, emergencies, and terrorist events.

This budget includes resources to improve our ability to deliver assistance with additional funding and new staff for our Disaster Assistance and Logistics Management directorates. FEMA is focused on providing assistance, both before and after events, in an easily accessible and coordinated manner through simple and effective delivery mechanisms, while also minimizing possible waste, fraud and abuse.

To be able to accomplish this on the ground, we also need to strengthen FEMA as an organization by investing in our people, develop a capable and motivated workforce who will ensure mission success, and building a culture that rewards performance through personal stewardship, innovation, and accountability. The budget includes added resources for training; \$10 million for basic infrastructure needs that will give us the

space and equipment we need for this expanded workforce to do its job; and it includes \$20 million to bring FEMA into the 21st Century in terms of Information Technology.

When Congress passed PKEMRA, together we set a vision for what FEMA could become. But as the author and innovator Joel Barker said: “Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.”

This budget shows that President Bush, Secretary Chertoff and I are committed to vision with action. I know that you are committed, too. I look forward to working with you as we make the vision of New FEMA a reality.