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What a difference a year makes.

Last summer we announced the membership of the FEMA's National Advisory Council. Last October we held our first meeting. Today, the NAC is a vibrant body that is providing useful guidance on a variety of issues. I am really proud of the work all of you have done to build a strong and robust committee that is already tackling the real issues and providing feedback that will make FEMA a stronger organization today and tomorrow.

With this in mind, I'd like to welcome our newest members to the NAC.

- **John Lancaster:** the Executive Director of National Council on Independent Living here in Washington, DC.
- **John Stensgar:** an elected Business Council Member of the Colville Confederated Tribes in Washington state.
- **Kenneth Murphy:** the Director of Oregon Emergency Management and the President of the National Emergency Management Association.
- **Suzanne Mencer:** formerly the director of the Office for Domestic Preparedness here at DHS and a 20 year FBI veteran who is now the Policy Director for Brownstein, Hyatt, Farber and Schreck, LLP in Colorado.
- **and Lee Feldman:** the City Manager of Palm Bay, Florida.

I know that you will join the existing members in building a tradition of openness and communications and that your own backgrounds and insights will add to the value of the NAC's work and advice.

I will start today by looking at some of the issues which the NAC is already addressing.

First, and perhaps most visibly, is the National Disaster Housing Strategy.

FEMA issued the 2008 Disaster Housing Plan on June 10, 2008 and this plan is working. We followed this with a proposed Housing Strategy for strengthening the plan and expanding our housing options in the future. The Strategy summarizes, for the first time in a single document, the many sheltering and housing capabilities, principles and policies that guide and inform the disaster housing process. It also charts the new direction that our disaster housing efforts must take to better meet the disaster housing needs of individuals and communities moving forward.

The strategy is not intended to be a quick fix. The plan is the key for those in need today: and it is in effect and is working across the Midwest and in Texas.

With the release of the Strategy in July, we now look to you for additional advice and input – especially on the annexes that will need to be added to the final document. As required by the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act, we provided the draft specifically to the NAC, the National Council on Disabilities, and all pertinent Federal departments and agencies for review and comment. We are actively seeking comment and suggestions so that this fall we can release the final Strategy and embark on a deliberate course to achieve the vision and goals outlined in the Strategy.

We believe this Strategy captures lessons learned from Hurricane Katrina and subsequent disasters; embraces the larger issues of disaster victims beyond simply providing a structure; seeks innovative and creative housing options; elevates issues of safety, security and access to those with disabilities; emphasizes again and again the value of planning; differentiates the catastrophe above all other disasters; and, for the first time in any single document, addresses all forms of housing and suggests that these issues merit full time attention before and between disasters, not the traditional just-in-time, short term and sporadic term interest just after a specific disaster.

I know you are already hard at work on providing your advice and I thank you in advance for your efforts.

The second matter I will touch on today is our grants programs – which are key for many of the communities and organizations that you work with on a daily basis.

Last month I joined Secretary Chertoff in announcing the disbursement of \$1.69 billion in grants to help tribes, states, communities, organizations and individuals prepare for the variety of natural and man-made events – including terrorist attacks.

You can clearly see the commitment of this Administration, the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA to providing the resources necessary to strengthen communities

across the country and to ensuring that we are all better prepared when the time comes for us to respond to a disaster.

The grant award process is transparent, efficient and swift. It is worth noting that we announced these programs ahead of schedule and well before our legal deadline.

States are being kept apprised of the planning cycle as we move into FY 2009. This process includes continued outreach to our state and local partners to get their feedback on potential changes or improvements to the grant programs. We've worked hard to make sure that the changes resulting from the 9/11 Act did not result in dramatic swings in funding – as was requested by our state and local partners.

FEMA's relatively new Grants Program Directorate provides a one-stop shop for grants. Across this new office and all of FEMA we continue to emphasize customer service and interaction throughout the process, including providing a mid-term review. We also have started a new initiative to look at the effectiveness of our grant programs.

I look forward to the NAC's continued advice as we work to make grants programs in the future both more effective and more efficiently managed.

The third point I would like to touch upon relates to your focus and the work you do: in particular subcommittees and reports.

The National Urban Search and Rescue organization will be providing you with a short presentation and request on the needs of the Urban Search and Rescue community. I would appreciate your careful consideration of their request.

As to reports, at our last meeting I asked you to formalize many of the topics you discuss in an Annual Report. Thank you for taking up this challenge and I look forward to seeing the first of what I am sure will be a long line of successful reports.

I also think this report will have particular value this fall as we begin to transition to a new administration. While each of your terms continues into next year, our winter meeting will be my last. I am proud to have been part of standing up this Advisory Council. I have appreciated your input during my time at FEMA. I know you will continue to add value to whoever may serve in this role in the future.

In conclusion, thank you for your service and for your hard work. I always look forward to our discussions during these meetings, so rather than talk longer let's get right into some questions.