



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

STATEMENT

OF

**MICHAEL J. VANACORE
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF INVESTIGATIONS
OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

BEFORE THE

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
UNITED STATE SENATE**

“LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE TO HURRICANE KATRINA”

**FEBRUARY 6, 2006
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

INTRODUCTION

Chairman Collins, Ranking Member Lieberman and distinguished Members of this committee, it is an honor for me to appear before you today to discuss U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and how our federal law enforcement and support personnel responded to Hurricane Katrina.

Before I begin to share with the Committee the details of our support to the people of New Orleans and Louisiana during and after Hurricane Katrina, I want to talk for a moment about the agency I am proud to represent.

THE ICE MISSION

ICE's principal mission is to protect the American people by combating criminal and terrorist activities that cross our borders and threaten us here at home. The men and women of ICE accomplish this by investigating and enforcing the nation's immigration and customs laws while also protecting vital federal facilities throughout the nation. Working overseas, along our borders and throughout the nation's interior, ICE agents and officers prove every day that the newly merged customs and immigration authorities create a powerful enforcement mechanism. Specifically, Title 8 of the U.S. Code allows ICE to detain and make arrests without a warrant for immigration violations. And Title 19 of the United States Code permits ICE to investigate complex banking and financial misconduct cases, conduct searches without first obtaining a warrant and to seize assets of criminal enterprises engaged in customs violations. These unique enforcement tools allow ICE to quickly detain arrest and remove from this country those who violate our

borders and also develop stronger cases that are more likely to be accepted for prosecution with more significant penalties.

By leveraging the full enforcement potential provided by the new and unique blend of customs and immigration authorities wielded by ICE, we are making it more difficult for potential terrorists and organized criminal groups to move themselves, their supporters or their weapons across our borders through traditional human, drug, contraband or financial smuggling networks, routes and methods. At the same time, our robust enforcement is yielding greater deterrence by combating the perception among U.S. businesses serving as magnets for illegal workers that less than full compliance with these laws is somehow acceptable. Our enforcement actions across the nation are increasingly underscoring this new, critical homeland security priority.

By virtue of their dedication, excellence and commitment, the men and women of ICE have made great strides since 2003 in building upon their traditional strengths and capabilities while simultaneously creating a new agency. We are rapidly and aggressively moving forward to realize ICE's full potential on behalf of the American people. While challenges undoubtedly remain ahead, ICE agents and officers across this nation will continue to excel in fulfilling their critical homeland roles and responsibilities.

Nowhere was this more evident than in our unprecedented response to Hurricane Katrina.

RESPONSE TO KATRINA

Prior to Hurricane Katrina making landfall, 30 ICE Federal Protective Service (FPS) personnel were on the ground, in the area, in preparation for the storm supporting the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) relief operations (food kitchens, medical assistance teams, Red Cross, evacuation shelters etc.) per agreement with FEMA and protecting federal facilities in the affected area. Additionally, an FPS Emergency Response Team (ERT) was deployed immediately from Washington, D.C. and further personnel were pre-staged along with resources in Houston and Fort Worth, Texas, Jackson, Mississippi, Atlanta, Georgia, and Tallahassee, Florida. As a component of ICE, FPS was on the ground before the storm came ashore.

In response to the magnitude of the storm and the subsequent flooding, ICE deployed large numbers of ICE law enforcement and support staff to the affected area. Six days after the storm made landfall, I deployed to the region. ICE also dispatched 498 additional ICE law enforcement personnel to the region by that date. That number jumped to over 1,000 by day eight. By that time our overriding mission was strengthening the law enforcement presence in direct support of Federal, State and local rescue and recovery efforts. Countless times, in response to the exigent circumstances in the area, ICE agents and officers participated directly in response, rescue and recovery efforts while also simultaneously establishing and visibly demonstrating a robust law enforcement presence. We accomplished this in the midst of countless life-or-death situations with an almost complete absence of local law enforcement capability and infrastructure. Over the course of ICE's commitment to the entire Katrina operation, we

deployed nearly 2,000 law enforcement officers, which included eight (8) special response teams, four (4) mobile command centers, and six (6) medical teams under the direction of four experienced, senior law enforcement managers.

By component, ICE's deployments included the following:

- Federal Protective Service (FPS): FPS deployed a total of 769 law enforcement officers to assist FEMA with all security issues associated with the relief effort, medical teams and general security issues, with pre-deployments beginning before the storm made landfall. Even today, FPS continues to support FEMA on the ground in the affected area with more than 80 deployed personnel.
- Office of Investigations (OI): OI deployed 458 law enforcement officers to the region. I, in conjunction with my FBI colleagues, assumed the role of coordinating the law enforcement presence while also assisting and participating directly in a variety of rescues and recovery efforts.
- Detention and Removal Operations (DRO): DRO deployed 181 law enforcement officers to the affected areas. DRO employed its substantial experience with large-scale contracts and mass mobilization to establish temporary quarters, resources and supplies for ICE and DHS personnel operating in the affected area. A tent city was established for 400 law enforcement officers, which included food service, fuel service and transportation services.
- Federal Air Marshals Service (FAMS): FAMS deployed 501 Federal Air Marshals to the New Orleans airport for airport security, humanitarian mission support and the joint interagency operations center. (FAMS was subsequently transferred to the U.S. Transportation Security Administration.)
- Office of Intelligence: ICE deployed five (5) intelligence analysts to the affected area. Intel organized data and pinpointed locations for the law enforcement officers in New Orleans to respond to several thousand backlogged 911 calls that the New Orleans Police Department was incapable of addressing. Intel utilized a variety of databases and queries to assist in the location of federal employees in the affected regions whose agencies were unable to be contacted following the hurricanes.

This was in addition to other DHS law enforcement assets in the Gulf, which included:

- Customs and Border Protection (CBP): CBP established a forward deployed operations command center in Hammond, Louisiana and deployed 699 law enforcement officers to the affected region. More than 200 CBP Border Patrol Agents performed a wide array of ESF #13 missions in response to Hurricane Katrina. CBP Air UH-60s and teams of Border Patrol Trauma and Rescue (BORSTAR) trained agents engaged in search and rescue operations. CBP Officers worked with the U.S. Coast Guard and other federal, state and local law enforcement boarding inbound vessels, facilitating the reopening of the Mississippi River and expediting the movement of international relief aid and other international trade.
- U.S. Secret Service (USSS): The Secret Service deployed 35 law enforcement officers to Mississippi and Louisiana in support of ESF #13 missions, including protecting Federal officials traveling in the region and facilitating the credentialing of federal law enforcement officers.
- U.S. Coast Guard (USCG): The U.S. Coast Guard placed many of its assets and approximately 5,400 of its law enforcement personnel in the Gulf. The Coast Guard performed a significant number of search and rescue missions as well as supporting ESF #13 in other areas of law enforcement.

With respect to my personal involvement in Hurricane Katrina, I was notified on Friday, September 2, 2005, that I had been selected to deploy to Louisiana and attended a meeting at DHS headquarters that same day. I departed Washington, D.C. by commercial air for Louisiana on Sunday, September 4, 2005. I was charged with serving as ICE's lead representative on the ground to help coordinate the ongoing Federal, State and local law enforcement activities while ensuring connectivity between the field and ICE headquarters. Over the course of ICE's support to Louisiana, our agents and officers completed thousands of law enforcement and security assignments and rescued hundreds of citizens from their residences. As part of their basic training, ICE agents receive a course of instruction on the National Response Plan and the National Incident Management System (NIMS). With the issuance of the NRP in December of 2004, in-

service training was in the process of being developed for ICE employees. ICE has also taken advantage of existing FEMA online training courses to permit our employees to better operate under NIMS, NRP and the Incident Command System.

Due to ICE's ability to quickly and fully locate its personnel in the hurricane affected area, ICE was requested to support other DHS agencies such as CBP, Citizenship and Immigration Services, TSA and the U.S. Coast Guard in locating approximately 115 missing DHS personnel in the affected area. ICE was able to directly locate 49 of the missing personnel for other DHS agencies. Working with the other agencies, ICE helped locate the remaining missing employees. ICE personnel in Washington, D.C. also worked closely with the headquarters elements of our Federal counterparts to expedite the flow of personnel to the region. For example, ICE staffed the Emergency Support Function #13 (ESF-13) desk within FEMA's National Response Coordination Center. That desk position is the central DHS point of focus for Federal law enforcement response to a national emergency.

CONCLUSION

Any response to a natural disaster of this magnitude on U.S. soil cannot and should not escape close scrutiny in an effort to improve our ability to assist those affected. Many questions have been asked, such as what lessons have we learned on pre-hurricane deployments and how we can enhance emergency preparedness, strengthen command and control and increase coordination between Federal, State and local law enforcement, first responders and the National Guard?

The Department has publicly acknowledged that Katrina revealed problems in national response capabilities, stretching back more than a decade, and demonstrated the need for more comprehensive federal, state and local planning for catastrophic events. DHS has publicly announced that it will issue a comprehensive strategy to improve the nation's capability to manage catastrophic incidents in the very near future.

In closing, I would urge the members of this Committee that in the course of your important oversight responsibilities to consider that the numbers of DHS and ICE personnel deployed do not begin to tell the whole story. Every one of our deployed agents, officers and support staff left friends and family to help others in the face of great hardship and uncertainty. Upon arrival, our people worked round the clock in a very austere environment. Their tireless work and dedication to their mission reflected the very highest performance standards of the Department of Homeland Security. The degree to which people from different agencies rose to the occasion, worked together seamlessly and without institutional friction to surmount challenges was impressive.

At the outset, our goal was to provide critically needed assistance to the people of Louisiana during a very difficult time. We fulfilled our mission by assisting the people and police departments throughout that state and most importantly, we saved lives.

Thank you for your continuing support of the men and women of ICE and the Department of Homeland Security. I would be pleased to answer your questions.