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DEPUTY WHIP

Commerce, Science, and Transportation

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Special Committee on Aging

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

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The Honorable Michael Chertoff
Secretary, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
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SENT VIA FACSIMILE

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am concerned that readiness for the 2007 Hurricane Season is not where it needs to be. As you know, the State of Louisiana is even more vulnerable now than before Katrina and Rita struck our shores. The levees and pumping stations throughout Louisiana are not fully repaired, residents and evacuees are still living in 49,000 travel trailers throughout coastal Louisiana, and many local municipal offices in charge of emergency response are also still in trailers. In light of these ongoing challenges, I was dismayed to recently read your letter of March 22, 2007, to Governor Blanco wherein you state that DHS does not feel it necessary to provide the same level of preparedness for Louisiana in 2007 as it did in 2006.

To discuss our level of preparedness needed for the upcoming hurricane season, I requested a meeting with representatives of FEMA, the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness (GOHSEP), and the Louisiana National Guard. It appears that FEMA's level of support and commitment to the State of Louisiana and the entire Gulf Coast leaves huge gaps in planning, support, and supplies. Areas that appear to be lacking and that need to be addressed immediately are as follows:

- Pre-staged supplies are inadequate. GOHSEP and FEMA confirm there are no usable emergency supplies pre-staged in Louisiana in advance of the 2007 hurricane season. The limited food and water supplies stored in Baton Rouge have been allowed to spoil. Also, I have been informed that FEMA does not plan to pre-stage emergency supplies in Louisiana, instead planning to rely on supplies stored in Ft. Worth, Texas, hundreds of miles from Louisiana's coast. Also, plans to ship food, water, generators and other supplies such long distances on the same roads that could be congested with evacuating traffic during an emergency may fail.
- GOHSEP reports that FEMA does not have contracts in place to rapidly procure additional emergency supplies to respond to a hurricane.
- Food, water, and generators needed at medical special needs shelters were put in place last year in advance of the 2006 hurricane season but have since been removed. These supplies should be replaced immediately. Additionally, firm commitments are needed now for specialized air and ground transportation to evacuate special needs patients, the most vulnerable of our citizens. I believe high-level discussions between the state and

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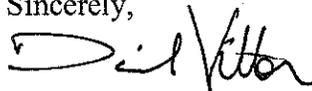
federal government are necessary to address these issues and establish a clear and definitive plan for evacuation and care of patients.

- Last year, FEMA pre-arranged the use of AMTRAK trains for evacuations of the New Orleans area if needed. This year, however, FEMA has refused without explanation to make similar arrangements.
- I have been informed that Admiral Johnson is in charge of a current study to address the overall transportation needs for a regional Gulf Coast Evacuation Plan. While I understand the need for a regional view point, the hurricane season begins in less than two weeks, and we have already seen one named storm. A short-term transportation plan is needed now, and Admiral Johnson's broader study should be used to address future needs.
- Command and control of emergency response is still not clear. After a significant delay in knowing who would be the point person, FEMA has designated Mike Smith as the FCO. However, there still seems to be confusion within the emergency response team regarding the permanence of his designation. The need for a clear command and leadership structure understood by all was a key lesson learned from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Louisiana's point person from FEMA for the duration of the storm season and the roles in command and control for response must be clarified immediately.

Also, while I understand that the National Guard is not your direct responsibility, there are at a minimum two issues requiring attention to enable the Guard to perform their emergency response role in cooperation with FEMA. First, the new National Guard Boat Unit recently established in New Orleans needs boats to perform its rescue and response role. Boats have been promised, but not provided. Second, a clear, written memorandum of understanding is necessary between the Department of Defense and the National Guard concerning availability of DOD aircraft following a hurricane for rescue and supply missions, allowing for rapid deployment of such air assets without the red tape that delayed response time following Hurricane Katrina. I ask that you work with DOD to resolve this issue quickly.

I appreciate your prompt attention to resolve these issues and protect the lives of the citizens of Louisiana and the entire Gulf Coast. Thank you for your service, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



David Vitter
U.S. Senator

CC:

Hon. Robert M. Gates, Secretary of Defense

Hon. R. David Paulison, Director of FEMA

Col. Jeff Smith, Louisiana's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness