

STATEMENT OF  
SCOTT WELLS  
FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER  
FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

BEFORE THE  
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY SUBCOMMITTEE  
FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JANUARY 13, 2006

GOOD AFTERNOON CHAIRMAN NEY, RANKING MEMBER WATERS, AND  
SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERS.

I AM SCOTT WELLS, FEMA'S FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICER IN LOUISIANA  
FOR HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA. THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY OF  
APPEARING BEFORE THIS SUBCOMMITTEE TO DISCUSS OUR SHELTERING AND  
HOUSING EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF HURRICANE VICTIMS IN LOUISIANA. WE AT  
THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY AND FEMA APPRECIATE YOUR  
INTEREST IN THE UNPRECEDENTED HOUSING CHALLENGES THAT HAVE ARISEN  
SINCE LAST AUGUST AND WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE RESOURCES CONGRESS  
HAS PROVIDED TO HELP US TRY TO MEET THOSE CHALLENGES.

WE ARE FULLY COMMITTED TO PROVIDING EVERY LOUISIANA APPLICANT  
WITH THE ASSISTANCE FOR WHICH THEY ARE ELIGIBLE. AN ENORMOUS AND  
DEDICATED TEAM OF FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL ENTITIES HAS BEEN  
WORKING LONG HOURS TO ENSURE THAT THIS GOAL IS ACHIEVED. WHEN  
PEOPLE HAVE A DWELLING WHERE THEY CAN STAY FOR A STABLE PERIOD OF  
TIME, THEY CAN BEGIN TO MAKE CONCRETE PLANS TO PUT THE REST OF THEIR  
LIVES BACK TOGETHER. THEREFORE, OUR TOP THREE PRIORITIES ARE  
HOUSING, HOUSING AND HOUSING.

A MONTH AGO, ACTING RECOVERY DIRECTOR GARRATT'S TESTIMONY TO THIS  
COMMITTEE OUTLINED THE AVAILABLE HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

UNDER THE ROBERT T. STAFFORD DISASTER RELIEF AND EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE ACT. TODAY I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE YOU AN UPDATE ON THE STATUS OF THOSE PROGRAMS IN LOUISIANA.

FOR MANY, THE FIRST HOUSING OPTION WAS IN AN EMERGENCY SHELTER. IN THE EARLY DAYS AFTER KATRINA MADE LANDFALL, THE PEAK POPULATION IN LOUISIANA'S 563 AMERICAN RED CROSS OR STATE EMERGENCY SHELTERS WAS 146,292. THERE WERE ALSO TEN SPECIAL NEEDS SHELTERS THAT HOUSED 2,480 PERSONS. CURRENTLY, THE POPULATION (82 PERSONS) IN TRANSIENT SHELTERS HAS DROPPED BELOW PRE-KATRINA LEVELS. THESE REMAINING SHELTEREES ARE INELIGIBLE FOR OTHER PROGRAMS OR HAVE REFUSED OTHER HOUSING OPTIONS SUCH AS TRAVEL TRAILERS.

WE HAD TO TAKE SOME UNCONVENTIONAL MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THE LARGE SHELTER POPULATION. FIRST, WE SENT 133 FEMA/CONTRACT STAFF FOR A HOUSE-CALL OPERATION THAT COMPLETED OVER 7,000 FACE-TO-FACE REGISTRATIONS AT SHELTERS AND IN AREAS WHERE INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES DID NOT HAVE EASY ACCESS TO THE INTERNET OR PHONE LINES. SECOND, NEARLY 100 FIELD STAFF HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN EFFORTS TO HELP PEOPLE IDENTIFY HOUSING SOLUTIONS MORE SUITABLE THAN TEMPORARY EMERGENCY SHELTERS. GENERAL POPULATION AND SPECIAL NEEDS SHELTER OCCUPANTS WERE THE FIRST PRIORITY FOR PLACEMENT INTO AVAILABLE HOUSING, INCLUDING FEMA MOBILE HOMES

AND TRAVEL TRAILERS. OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES PROVIDING RESOURCES INCLUDE HUD AND USDA RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

FEMA HAS ALSO BEEN USING HOTELS TO SERVE AS TEMPORARY EMERGENCY LODGING, UTILIZING 85,000 ROOMS NATIONWIDE AT ITS PEAK. AT THIS POINT, THERE ARE 9,946 HOTEL ROOMS IN LOUISIANA IN USE BY EVACUEES. MORE THAN 190 FEMA COMMUNITY RELATIONS STAFF ARE ON OUR HOTEL POPULATION OUTREACH GROUP, CONTACTING EVACUEES AND HELPING THEM FIND MORE STABLE ENVIRONMENTS.

TO HELP MOVE THOSE REMAINING PEOPLE IN HOTELS/MOTELS TO MORE APPROPRIATE HOUSING, FEMA BEGAN AN AUTHORIZATION CODE PROGRAM ON JANUARY 10. THIS ESTABLISHES A SYSTEM FOR AN ORDERLY TRANSITION OF THE EMERGENCY SHELTER PROGRAM TO LONGER-TERM HOUSING OPTIONS. THE PROGRAM REQUIRES THOSE IN FEMA-PAID HOTEL ROOMS TO CONTACT FEMA BY JANUARY 30 FOR A UNIQUE CODE NUMBER TO AUTHORIZE FEMA PAYMENTS FOR THEIR HOTEL ROOM. THOSE WHO DO NOT CONTACT FEMA FOR THE AUTHORIZATION CODE WILL FORFEIT FEMA HOTEL PAYMENT AS OF FEBRUARY 7. WHEN EVACUEES CALL TO OBTAIN THE CODE FEMA WILL TELL THEM HOW LONG THEIR HOTEL BILL WILL BE PAID. HOUSING RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH LOCAL HOUSING AUTHORITIES AND REALTORS, COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARDS, A TOLL-FREE FEMA NUMBER AND ON THE INTERNET.

FEMA ALSO ESTABLISHED A RELOCATION PROGRAM FOR EVACUEES TO RELIEVE THE BURDEN ON DISPLACED SURVIVORS. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME THAT FEMA HAS PAID FOR THE TRANSPORTATION EXPENSES OF INDIVIDUALS TO RELOCATE OUT OF STATE TO FIND TEMPORARY HOUSING OR REUNITE WITH FAMILY MEMBERS SHELTERED IN ANOTHER STATE. NEARLY 10,000 HOUSEHOLDS HAVE USED THIS ASSISTANCE. THIS PROGRAM RAN THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2005.

THE FEMA PROGRAM TO ASSIST FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS, AUTHORIZED UNDER SECTION 408 OF THE STAFFORD ACT, PROVIDES RENTAL ASSISTANCE, HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE, HOME REPLACEMENT ASSISTANCE, DIRECT HOUSING AND OTHER NEEDS ASSISTANCE TO MEET NECESSARY EXPENSES AND SERIOUS NEEDS OF ELIGIBLE DISASTER VICTIMS. THIS PROGRAM PROVIDES A SAFETY NET. IT DOES NOT, AND WAS NOT, DESIGNED TO MAKE PEOPLE WHOLE AGAIN.

IN LOUISIANA, MORE THAN 833,550 VICTIMS OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA ARE ELIGIBLE FOR HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND 226,413 ARE BEING CONSIDERED FOR OTHER NEEDS ASSISTANCE. TO DATE, FEMA HAS PROVIDED \$4.088 BILLION IN ASSISTANCE TO HELP LOUISIANA RESIDENTS GET BACK ON THEIR FEET. WE PROJECT THE TOTAL WILL CONTINUE TO GROW.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE IS TRIGGERED THROUGH OUR APPLICATION SYSTEM. REGISTRATION IS ACCESSIBLE ON-LINE OR THROUGH A TOLL-FREE NUMBER, 24 HOURS A DAY, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK. FEMA TOOK MORE REGISTRATIONS IN THE FIRST THREE MONTHS AFTER KATRINA AND RITA THAN THE TOTAL REGISTRATIONS IN THE LAST THREE YEARS – INCLUDING THE MULTIPLE FLORIDA HURRICANES IN 2004. THE CURRENT NUMBER OF LOUISIANA REGISTRATIONS FOR KATRINA/RITA IS MORE THAN 1.4 MILLION. WE PROJECT A TOTAL OF 1.5 MILLION APPLICATIONS IN LOUISIANA FOR THESE TWO HURRICANES.

RENTAL ASSISTANCE. FEMA MAY PROVIDE RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR THOSE WHOSE HOMES ARE UNINHABITABLE AND WHOSE RENT IS NOT COVERED BY INSURANCE. MORE THAN \$1.2 BILLION HAS BEEN DISTRIBUTED IN RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR LOUISIANA FOR 554,581 VICTIMS OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA AND THE NUMBER CONTINUES TO CLIMB. RENTAL AND HOUSING ASSISTANCE MAY ALSO BE PROVIDED BY FEMA FOR THOSE EVACUEES WHO ARE LEAVING HOTELS IN FEBRUARY.

IN ORDER TO BE ACCOUNTABLE FOR FEDERAL FUNDING, INSPECTIONS ARE REQUIRED TO VERIFY PROPERTY DAMAGE. WE HAD MANY CHALLENGES TO QUICKLY GET MONEY INTO VICTIMS' HANDS AND CONSEQUENTLY HAVE HAD TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY. THE CHALLENGES INCLUDED RESTRICTED ACCESS TO MANY AREAS FOR LENGTHY PERIODS OF TIME, AN INABILITY TO

SEND INSPECTION DATA ELECTRONICALLY DUE TO DAMAGED INFRASTRUCTURE, AND AN INABILITY TO CONTACT APPLICANTS FOR REQUIRED SIGNATURES AND DOCUMENTS. IN THE FACE OF THESE CHALLENGES, FEMA MADE USE OF GEOSPATIAL TECHNOLOGY TO PERFORM OVER 41,000 INSPECTIONS IN THE FIVE HARDEST-HIT PARISHES. THESE HOUSEHOLDS WERE INSPECTED USING GEOSPATIAL DATA IN ORDER TO PROVIDE ASSISTANCE IN A MORE EXPEDITIOUS MANNER. IN THOSE AREAS OF CATASTROPHIC DAMAGE, THE APPLICANT WAS NOT REQUIRED TO BE PHYSICALLY PRESENT FOR AN INSPECTION.

HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE. FEMA IS AUTHORIZED TO PAY UP TO \$5,200 IN HOME REPAIR ASSISTANCE TO ELIGIBLE VICTIMS OF THE HURRICANES AND QUALIFIED APPLICANTS MAY RECEIVE ADDITIONAL REPAIR FUNDS BY MEANS OF A SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION DISASTER LOAN. THE IDEAL SITUATION IS FOR PEOPLE TO REMAIN IN THEIR HOMES, IF AT ALL POSSIBLE. THIS IS A VIABLE OPTION FOR 71,180 HOUSEHOLDS IN LOUISIANA, AND FEMA HAS PAID \$162,707,196 FOR THIS TYPE OF ASSISTANCE, TO DATE.

HOME REPLACEMENT ASSISTANCE. FEMA MAY PAY UP TO \$10,500 TOWARD HOME REPLACEMENT TO ELIGIBLE VICTIMS. SO FAR, PAYMENTS TOTALING MORE THAN \$212 MILLION HAVE BEEN MADE TO 20,336 LOUISIANA FAMILIES FOR HOME REPLACEMENT.

DIRECT HOUSING ASSISTANCE. FOR UP TO 18 MONTHS FROM THE DATE OF DECLARATION, FEMA CAN PROVIDE DIRECT LEASES FOR APARTMENTS OR PROCURE MANUFACTURED HOUSING IN THE IMPACTED STATES WHERE EXISTING HOUSING IS UNINHABITABLE. A QUARTER OF THOSE REQUESTS ARE COMPLETED, PRIMARILY FOR MANUFACTURED HOUSING AND THE TOTAL NUMBER OF FEMA DIRECT HOUSING RESOURCES IS EXPECTED TO BE ABOUT 88,000. TO DATE, FEMA HAS ALSO PROVIDED 2,248 HOUSING UNITS TO SUPPORT PRIVATE INDUSTRY EFFORTS TO GET ESSENTIAL EMPLOYEES BACK TO WORK IN THE MOST DEVASTATED AREAS. FEMA IS WORKING WITH NEW ORLEANS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND APARTMENT ASSOCIATIONS, HUD, VA, AND GSA TO IDENTIFY ADDITIONAL HOUSING RESOURCES FOR APPLICANTS.

CRUISE SHIPS WERE ALSO USED TO PROVIDE CRITICAL HOUSING IN LOUISIANA WHERE NO OTHER RESOURCES EXISTED. AT THIS POINT, THE REMAINING SHIPS ARE AT 97 PERCENT OCCUPANCY. THIS PROGRAM WILL END ON MARCH 1, 2006.

SPECIAL NEEDS. THE 2000 CENSUS SHOWED THAT MORE THAN 21 PERCENT OF THE NEW ORLEANS POPULATION SELF-REPORTED AS BEING DISABLED. AFTER HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA, 1,460 CASES REQUIRED ADDITIONAL PLACEMENT ASSISTANCE BY FEMA AND DHS. DHS IDENTIFIED OTHER RESOURCES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THESE APPLICANTS, AND FEMA STAFF IS PARTNERING WITH LOCAL, STATE, FEDERAL, AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES TO



IDENTIFY ORGANIZATIONS TO ASSIST THOSE APPLICANTS WITH THEIR CRITICAL AND IMMEDIATE NEEDS.

DISASTER RECOVERY CENTERS ARE FEDERAL/STATE FACILITIES THAT GIVE HURRICANE VICTIMS AN OPPORTUNITY TO DISCUSS THEIR SPECIFIC NEEDS FACE-TO-FACE WITH PROGRAM REPRESENTATIVES. AFTER KATRINA AND RITA, 56 FIXED-SITE AND 12 MOBILE RECOVERY CENTERS OPERATED THROUGHOUT THE STATE OF LOUISIANA. MORE THAN 524,010 APPLICANT VISITS HAVE BEEN LOGGED THUS FAR. MORE THAN 700 STAFF – INCLUDING LOCAL HIRES, FIREFIGHTERS, AND CONTRACTORS – MANNED THE RECOVERY CENTERS. INDIVIDUAL ASSISTANCE STAFF PROVIDED TRAINING TO OVER 1,100 PERSONS TO SUPPORT RECOVERY CENTER AND APPLICANT SERVICES OPERATIONS. MORE THAN 40 RECOVERY CENTERS ARE STILL OPEN IN LOUISIANA.

WE ARE STILL BUSY. TYPICALLY, AN APPLICATION PERIOD IS CLOSED 60 DAYS FOLLOWING THE DATE OF THE DISASTER DECLARATION. AT 137 DAYS INTO THE DISASTER, WE CONTINUE TO RECEIVE 300 NEW REGISTRATIONS PER DAY.

WE STILL FACE MULTIPLE CHALLENGES IN FINDING SUITABLE HOUSING FOR MANY DISPLACED FAMILIES IN LOUISIANA. WE CONTINUE TO WORK WITH STATE AND LOCAL PARTNERS, FEDERAL AGENCIES, AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS TO FIND WAYS TO RETURN LOUISIANA RESIDENTS TO AN

INCREASING SENSE OF NORMALCY AFTER THE HORRENDOUS DESTRUCTION OF HURRICANE KATRINA AND HURRICANE RITA.

WE HAVE NEVER FACED A DISASTER OF THIS MAGNITUDE WITH SUCH WIDESPREAD CONSEQUENCES, YET WE WILL CONTINUE TO SOLDIER ON UNTIL ALL VICTIMS HAVE RECEIVED ALL THE ASSISTANCE THAT WE CAN GIVE THEM UNDER THE LAW.

THANK YOU. I AM HAPPY TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE.