

“Disaster Scenario” of Hurricane Katrina Was Held in July 2004, One Year Prior to the August 29, 2005 Disaster

Text of Open Letter by Rep. Henry Waxman and Chairman Tom Davis to DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff

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Twelve years ago, exactly: 29 August 2005, Hurricane Katrina. *The Hurricane Harvey Catastrophe started on Friday 25, 2017*

We bring to the attention of Global Research readers an event which has not been covered by the mainstream media.

This article was first published by GR, two weeks after the Katrina disaster of August 29, 2005

The Federal Emergency Management Agency had contemplated the possibility of a Hurricane disaster. In fact, it had simulated in minute detail the underlying consequences in an exercise undertaken in 2004.



In an open letter to Homeland Security Department Secretary Chertoff, Rep. Henry Waxman and Chairman of the Government Reform Committee Tom Davis outline the background of the Hurricane Disaster Scenario.

An exercise known as “Hurricane Pam,” was conducted by FEMA and IEM in July 2004:

“bringing together emergency officials from 50 parish, state, federal, and

volunteer organizations to simulate the conditions described above and plan an emergency response. As a result of the exercise, officials reportedly developed proposals for handling debris removal, sheltering, search and rescue, medical care, and schools.”

“The specific disaster scenario contemplated under the contract is strikingly similar to the actual disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina. The contract envisioned that “a catastrophic hurricane could result in significant numbers of deaths and injuries, trap hundreds of thousands of people in flooded areas, and leave up to one million people homeless.” The Scope of Work expressly directed the contractor to plan for the following specific conditions:

- “Over one million people would evacuate from New Orleans. Evacuees would crowd shelters throughout Louisiana and adjacent states.”

- “Hurricane surge would block highways and trap 300,000 to 350,000 persons in flooded areas. Storm surge of over 18 feet would overflow flood-protection levees on the Lake Pontchartrain side of New Orleans. Storm surge combined with heavy rain could leave much of New Orleans under 14 to 17 feet of water. More than 200 square miles of urban areas would be flooded.”

- “It could take weeks to ‘de-water’ (drain) New Orleans: Inundated pumping stations and damaged pump motors would be inoperable. Flood-protection levees would prevent drainage of floodwater. Breaching the levees would be a complicated and politically sensitive problem: The Corps of Engineers may have to use barges or helicopters to haul earthmoving equipment to open several hundred feet of levee.”

The text of the Letter is published below. The original letter is available in pdf and word formats:

<http://democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20050909123431-75333.pdf>

<http://democrats.reform.house.gov/Documents/20050909123505-34183.doc>

[Text of Letter to Michael Chertoff without footnotes]

September 9, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff

Secretary of Homeland Security

Department of Homeland Security

Washington, DC 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff:

The House Committee on Government Reform has obtained from the Department of Homeland Security a document describing the "Scope of Work" of a contract issued by the Federal Emergency Management Agency for the development of a "Southeastern Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Plan." We are writing to request any plans and other documents that were developed under this contract.

FEMA's Scope of Work contemplated that a private contractor, Innovative Emergency Management, Inc. (IEM), would complete the work under the contract in three stages. "Stage One" called for a simulation exercise involving FEMA and the state of Louisiana that would "feature a catastrophic hurricane striking southeastern Louisiana." "Stage Two" called for "development of the full catastrophic hurricane disaster plan." And "Stage Three" involved unrelated earthquake planning.

A task order issued under the contract called for IEM to execute "Stage One" between May 19 and September 30, 2004, at a cost of \$518,284. On June 3, 2004, IEM issued a press release announcing that it would "lead the development of a catastrophic hurricane disaster plan for Southeast Louisiana and the City of New Orleans under a more than half a million dollar contract with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security/Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)." A second task order issued on September 23, 2004, required IEM to "complete the development of the SE Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane plan." The cost of this task order was \$199,969.

The "Background" section of the Scope of Work stated that "the emergency management community has long feared the occurrence of a catastrophic disaster," which the document describes as "an event having unprecedented levels of damage, casualties, dislocation, and disruption that would have nationwide consequences and jeopardize national security." According to the background discussion, the emergency management community was concerned that "existing plans, policies, procedures and resources" would not be adequate to address such a "mega-disaster."

According to the Scope of Work, the contract "will assist FEMA, State, and local government to enhance response planning activities and operations by focusing on specific catastrophic disasters: those disasters that by definition will immediately overwhelm the existing disaster response capabilities of local, State, and Federal Governments." With respect to

southeastern Louisiana, the specific “catastrophic disaster” to be addressed was “a slow-moving Category 3, 4, or 5 hurricane that ... crosses New Orleans and Lake Pontchartrain.” The Scope of Work explained:

Various hurricane studies suggest that a slow-moving Category 3 or almost any Category 4 or 5 hurricane approaching Southeast Louisiana from the south could severely damage the heavily populated Southeast portion of the state creating a catastrophe with which the State would not be able to cope without massive help from neighboring states and the Federal Government.

The Scope of Work further stated: “The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Louisiana Office of Emergency Preparedness (LOEP) believe that the gravity of the situation calls for an extraordinary level of advance planning to improve government readiness to respond effectively to such an event.”

The specific disaster scenario contemplated under the contract is strikingly similar to the actual disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina. The contract envisioned that “a catastrophic hurricane could result in significant numbers of deaths and injuries, trap hundreds of thousands of people in flooded areas, and leave up to one million people homeless.” The Scope of Work expressly directed the contractor to plan for the following specific conditions:

- “Over one million people would evacuate from New Orleans. Evacuees would crowd shelters throughout Louisiana and adjacent states.”
- “Hurricane surge would block highways and trap 300,000 to 350,000 persons in flooded areas. Storm surge of over 18 feet would overflow flood-protection levees on the Lake Pontchartrain side of New Orleans. Storm surge combined with heavy rain could leave much of New Orleans under 14 to 17 feet of water. More than 200 square miles of urban areas would be flooded.”
- “It could take weeks to ‘de-water’ (drain) New Orleans: Inundated pumping stations and damaged pump motors would be inoperable. Flood-protection levees would prevent drainage of floodwater. Breaching the levees would be a complicated and politically sensitive problem: The Corps of Engineers may have to use barges or helicopters to haul earthmoving equipment to open several hundred feet of levee.”
- “Rescue operations would be difficult because much of the area would be reachable only by helicopters and

boats.”

- “Hospitals would be overcrowded with special-needs patients. Backup generators would run out of fuel or fail before patients could be moved elsewhere.”
- “The New Orleans area would be without electric power, food, potable water, medicine, or transportation for an extended time period.”
- “Damaged chemical plants and industries could spill hazardous materials.”
- “Standing water and disease could threaten public health.”
- “There would be severe economic repercussions for the state and region.”
- “Outside responders and resources, including the Federal response personnel and materials, would have difficulty entering and working in the affected area.”

It appears that IEM completed the task order for “Stage One,” the hurricane simulation. An exercise known as “Hurricane Pam,” was conducted by FEMA and IEM in July 2004, bringing together emergency officials from 50 parish, state, federal, and volunteer organizations to simulate the conditions described above and plan an emergency response. As a result of the exercise, officials reportedly developed proposals for handling debris removal, sheltering, search and rescue, medical care, and schools.

It is not clear, however, what plans or draft plans, if any, IEM prepared to complete “Stage Two,” the development of the final catastrophic hurricane disaster plan. The task order for “Stage Two” provided that the “period of performance” was September 23, 2004, to September 30, 2005.

The basis for the award of the planning work to IEM is also not indicated in the documents we received. The task orders were issued to IEM by FEMA under an “Indefinite Delivery Vehicle” (IDV) contract between IEM and the General Services Administration. According to the Federal Procurement Data System, FEMA received only one bid (from IEM) for the task orders.

The documents from the Department raise multiple questions about the contract with IEM and the planning for a catastrophic hurricane in southeastern Louisiana. To help us understand these issues, we request that the Department provide the following documents and information:

- (1) Any documents relating to the “Stage One” simulation exercise, including documents prepared for exercise planners and participants, transcripts or minutes of exercise proceedings,

participant evaluations, and after action reports;

(2) Any final or draft plans for a catastrophic hurricane in southeastern Louisiana prepared under “Stage Two” of the contract, including any final or draft Catastrophic Hurricane Disaster Plan, Basic Plan Framework, Emergency Support Function Annex, or Support Annex; and

(3) An explanation of the procurement procedures used in selecting IEM for the contract and task orders, as well as a description of IEM’s qualifications and the justification for selecting IEM.

We recognize that Department officials are engaged in ongoing relief efforts, and we do not want to impair those efforts in any way. For this reason, we have tailored our request to the discrete set of documents and information set forth above. To expedite your response to this request, we have enclosed copies of the Scope of Work, task orders, and other documents cited in this letter.

Sincerely,

Rep. Tom Davis Rep. Henry A. Waxman

Chairman Ranking Minority Member

Enclosure

ANNEX

Opening Statement of Chairman Tom Davis

Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina

October 19th, 2005

Good morning, and welcome to the Select Committee’s third hearing on the preparation for and response to Hurricane Katrina.

On September 15, before this Select Committee was established by a bipartisan House vote, the Government Reform Committee held a hearing on the early lessons learned from Katrina. At that hearing, the Committee’s Ranking Member, Henry Waxman, said there were “two steps we should take right away.”

First, he said, we should request basic documents from the agencies. And second, he said – and I quote – “we need to hear from Michael Brown and Michael Chertoff. These are the two government officials most responsible for the inadequate response, and the Committee should call them to testify without delay.”

I'm happy to report that we haven't delayed. We've met and exceeded these goals. We're doing the oversight we're charged with doing. While many who so urgently called on Congress to swiftly investigate have refused to participate and instead tilt at windmills, we're investigating aggressively what went wrong and what went right.

And we - those on my side of the aisle, and those Democrats who agree we need to ask tough questions, together — are doing it by the book, letting the chips fall where they may. I will continue to invite Democrats to join us. I will continue to give them full and equal opportunity to make statements and question witnesses and help guide the direction of our inquiry.

But regardless of who does and does not show up for our hearings, we have a job to do, and I'm intent on doing it right.

Our goal today is to understand the Department of Homeland Security's role and responsibilities before, during, and after Hurricane Katrina made landfall in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama on August 29, 2005.

I want to thank DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff for being here today so we can discuss the specific actions he took right before, during, and after the storm. His insight and perspective will be critical as we construct the narrative that will serve as the foundation of our final report.

Although the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Michael Brown have received the most attention from Members of Congress, state and local officials, and the news media in Katrina's wake, DHS and Secretary Chertoff have primary responsibility for managing the national response to a catastrophic disaster, according to the National Response Plan.

Three weeks ago we heard from Michael Brown. Today we'll hear from his boss, the man who ultimately fired him.

We need to find out if Michael Brown had it right when he testified before our committee. Has FEMA been under-funded and under-staffed? Has it become 'emaciated'? Did Congress undermine FEMA's effectiveness when we folded it into DHS?

Michael Brown testified that he asked the Department for funding to implement the lessons learned from the Hurricane Pam exercise and that those funds were denied. He also testified about brain drain, diminished financial resources, and "assessments" of \$70 to \$80 million by DHS for DHS-wide programs. He said he wrote memos to Secretary Ridge and Secretary Chertoff regarding the inadequacy of FEMA's resources. We will ask the Secretary about these assertions.

And regardless of his response, we are left with the question of whether any of this affected the government's preparation for and response to Katrina.

We also need to establish the Department's role and responsibilities in a disaster. What resources can the Secretary bring to bear? What triggers the decision to deploy those resources? During Katrina, how personally involved was Secretary Chertoff in seeking, authorizing, or deploying specific resources?

Michael Brown testified that he had "no problem picking up the phone and getting hold of

[Secretary] Chertoff..." How many times during these difficult days did he make those calls? What did he ask for? What did he get?

Michael Brown also testified that he wished he'd called in the military sooner. Did that require Secretary Chertoff's involvement? Did Mr. Brown ask the Secretary to seek military support? If so, when?

Over the past several weeks, we've all boned up on the disaster declaration process outlined in the Stafford Act. We understand the goals, structure and mechanisms of the National Response Plan. We've learned the alphabet soup of "coordinating elements" established by the Plan: the HSOC ("H-Sock") and RRCC; JFOs and PFOs; the IIMG.

Now it's our job to find out how this soup was served.

At the end of the day, we'll tell a story about the National Response Plan, and how its 15 Emergency Support Functions were implemented with Katrina. We'll see how well the ESFs were followed. Where there were problems, we'll ask why. Where even flawless execution led to unacceptable results, we'll have to return to questioning the underlying Plan.

The American people don't care about acronyms or organizational charts. They want to know who was supposed to do what, when, and whether the job got done. And if it didn't get done, they want to know how we are going to make sure it does the next time.

Americans know by now that there was no shortage of plans, no shortage of exercises. They know just as well that there was a profound failure to be proactive, a deep inability to execute. They understand this was a big, big storm. But they also understand that too many people viewed preparation and response as "someone else's problem."

Under the National Response Plan, the DHS Secretary is the federal official charged with declaring an Incident of National Significance. Part of that declaration is naming a Principal Federal Official, or PFO, to manage the response.

We only received a handful of the e-mails we requested to and from Mike Brown in time to prepare for this hearing. We were disappointed, to say the least, that a congressionally mandated committee, with subpoena power, has had to wait this long on a seemingly simple request. The bulk of the documents we requested did not arrive until late last night. It's this sort of inadequate responsiveness to requests for information that has long frustrated many of our Members, and perhaps sheds some light on the Department's woeful response to Katrina.

But, from the handful of Mike Brown's emails we did receive in a timely manner, we know that he *resented* being named the PFO by the Secretary. What does the Secretary have to say about that? What does this say about the underlying Plan?

Finally, we hope today to ask Secretary Chertoff what we're asking all officials as part of our investigation. Where were you in the days and hours right before, during, and after the hurricane? What were you doing? Who were you talking to? Establishing this timeline will be a key part of the story we end up telling in our report.

Based on the information we have gathered so far - and we have much, much more to gather - it seems that all too often, local, state, and federal leaders were *planning* in a crisis environment. A lot of decisions that seemingly should have been made days or months or

years before were being made on the fly, or not made at all.

That's just not good government.

NYU Professor Paul Light wrote recently that "Mr. Chertoff is just about the only official in Washington who can say 'I told you so' about FEMA," based on some of the reforms he outlined last July in his Second Stage Review. I wonder if Secretary Chertoff believes FEMA's response to Katrina would have been better if the reforms had been in place on August 29th.

Interviewed by CNN on September 21st, Secretary Chertoff said it is his "responsibility to fix the things that don't work well. That's what we are in the process of doing right now." Today we hope to hear his thoughts on exactly what didn't work well with Katrina, and how the Department's process of self-examination is proceeding.

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