

September 9, 2005

James Lee Witt, Special Advisor to Governor Blanco
Briefing on FEMA

Remarks by Witt:

1st conference call w/affected parishes this morning. Next conference call will be FEMA/state conference call.

Brought in special team (EMAC) from Port of New Jersey to set up a command and control center in New Orleans to handle finance, 911 calls, project work orders, et al.

Cleanup has begun in some areas. Water & power to hotels such as Marriott & Hyatt, so that workers have a place to stay.

Make sure everyone gets all help that they're eligible for.

CDC must first test for safety before workers can come in. Houses must be tested to determine whether to tear down or rebuild.

Governor, Lt. Governor, & cabinet for short term & long term housing – need estimates for costs and type of housing.

Area will have economic boom.

Important to get temporary housing for workers.

Biggest need is controlled access for companies to go in so can file insurance claims.

Major companies still paying employees until insurance can be filed.

Employees are eligible for independent assistance w/FEMA.

Not about partisan politics.

Nancy Murphy introduced as his assistant.

Remarks by Lt. Gov. Mitch Landrieu:

All interested in details of how FEMA works.

Opened up for questions:

Senator Julie Quinn: Will FEMA only pay flood insurance?

Witt: Insured value of home – no gap – cannot match cost share(initial 60 days the feds pay 100% of eligible expenses, after 60 days the state/local share becomes 75%). FEMA estimates \$100 billion cost for eligible expenses - every legislator should write Congress asking to make it 100%.

Senator Broome: How to get instructions connecting people with resources?

Witt: Problems always exist in a disaster of this magnitude. He suggests sending community relation teams w/Red Cross and all agencies to all shelters to set up a mini-mall at shelters. Need to establish Disaster Recovery Centers – DRC's.

Landrieu: Vice President Cheney and Congressman Baker spoke on this yesterday. Important to reconnect families. Not all shelters are run by Red Cross. Need to identify shelters. FEMA was receptive.

Senator Broome: Economic boom factor - encourage to use Louisiana businesses. Outside companies are a concern.

Witt: Every parish can use own contractors. FEMA will task Army Corps to let big contracts. Task orders must go through FEMA.

Bill Hatchett w/Home Inspector Board - state board will identify contractors and offer to state - Who can I go to?

Witt: Recommend set up a meeting w/Art Jones at OEP.

Rep. Durand: St. Martin Parish received 300 to 500 families staying with residents - can't get medicine, but those staying in shelters can.

Witt: Call Red Cross - He & Landrieu will address this at OEP.

Rep. Bruneau: 85% of his district under water - all are homeowners and ask "What can I do to salvage belongings?" Need to get specifics to these people on what to do. Two questions:
(1) Specific guidance to reclaim property.
(2) How to interact with FEMA.

Landrieu: Different categories (1) homeowners ((2) those in shelters and (3) those who couldn't leave Must tell the needs of people specifically but may develop into different reentry plan. Need in writing from each legislator specific questions to put together an answer packet.

Senator Murray: His mayor has been briefed, but what about others?

Witt: Most have representatives in meetings.

Senator Schedler: Geographics have different circumstances. FEMA must clearly identify its mission. Some homeowners think because they have 3 feet of water in their home, it will be torn down.

Witt: When he was director, "Recovery Times" was issued to every single official every step of the way on each day's activities with answers to hypothetical questions.

Schedler: Great idea. Use plain, simple language.

Witt: If FEMA won't do it, let's do it as a state.

Jerry Luke LeBlanc: Need to get specific questions to *Legislative Resource Center* to address issues by district and zip codes. **Please send request to:**

Legislative Resource Center

[lrc@legis.state.la.us or 225-342-6945 or 225-342-2040, 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM 7 days a week through emergency]

Landrieu: Identify geography & district!

Schedler: His business is Hospice - patients spread all over - need to get into facility for medical records.

Witt: Angelle Davis is point person. [*this statement is NOT correct. State Police are in control of permitting the re-entry for each parish in cooperation with the parish governing authority. Whenever a parish opens its borders, the State Police will govern the permitting. Contacting the Leg Resource Center with the particulars will place your constituents in our database and allow us to transfer the relevant information to the State Police whenever the borders are opened*]

Kim Manning w/Sen. Boasso: - how can info be disseminated?

Problems understanding FEMA vs. insurance.

Witt: FEMA has boxes of applicant briefing material.

Landrieu: Who is "go to person" for correct info?

Witt: Let us put a fact sheet together.

Kim Manning: Need medical care - can temporary clinics be set up? Where should people go?

Landrieu: Holden addressed w/federal authorities. FEMA will set up clinics.

Witt: HHS has responsibility (EMSFHRI). Also Red Cross.

Kim Manning: Businesses need computer hookups. Who would set up such an infrastructure?

Witt: Maybe satellite business offices

Kim: Warehouses would be sufficient, doesn't have to be offices.

Witt: IBM donated millions - maybe they could assist.

Sen Dupre: (1) Terrebonne & Lafourche - 95% up and running. Facing economic lifeboat in Baton Rouge, Hammond & Houma. Regarding Disaster Recovery Centers – do not open one per parish. Recommend 3 centers in each parish (smaller, one-stop shops).

(2) Chief of Police Pat Boudreaux accompanied him. Red Cross does not man their evacuee centers. Need plan for evacuation NOW for future hurricane. Must have security, medical, etc.

Rep. Quezaire: FEMA imposters have been misinforming impacted families. Need official FEMA stating official plans—maybe a status report by the officials at a certain time.

Witt: Need to include FEMA & state officials.

Frith: Person or agency to pay rent?

Witt: Apply to FEMA to pay. Fill out Individual Assistance Application. Then an inspector looks at application. Can get up to 18 months for rent – depends on whether had insurance. Encourages people to call FEMA. When application is filled out, individual gets a control number.

Rep. Johns: Has information on prescription drugs. Spoke w/Louisiana Pharmacy Board. Board met w/FEMA and have plan in place. Meantime, tell people to contact major chain pharmacies for a 7 day supply. FEMA will reimburse pharmacy directly.

Rep. Cazayoux: Any time lines for Recovery Centers or temporary housing?

Witt: Not yet.

Jerry Luke LeBlanc: Many thousands have been ordered and some being set up - temporary housing must be close to the economic corridor so as to get people back to work. Kim Reed point person on housing.

Cazayoux: When will Disaster Relief Centers open?

Witt: GSA working w/FEMA to set up - a lot will have to use tents.

Cazayoux: How will centers be staffed: Can National Guard be used? Volunteers?

Witt: Depends on which agencies and services needed to provide. Usually the agencies will request help from other cities and states.

Cazayoux: FEMA cash cards – or they off the table in Louisiana.

Witt: Do not know.

Sen. Schedler: Met w/Christina Simpson - cash cards were used in Houston as a trial. Didn't work.

Sen Schedler for Sen Adley: FEMA tells to call or e-mail, but phones busy, e-mail down.

Witt: Working on Disaster Recovery Centers.

Schedler for Adley: How can Shreveport businesses get involved in reconstruction.

(No response)

Rep. St. Germaine: Offers of shelters and families- 1500 families. If FEMA looking for places to set up, can they contact legislators?

Jerry Luke LeBlanc: Give specific info to Kim Hunter Reed.

Witt: Give specifics.

Dr. ___ : (1) Sen. Landrieu gave estimate of \$200 billion, but FEMA \$100 billion. Why the difference?

Witt: FEMA gave early estimate of \$100 billion in eligible FEMA programs. Will be other factors such as cost of insurance in \$200 billion estimate.

Dr. ___: (2) Plan by FEMA to prevent this from happening again?

Witt: Coast land and levee preservation.

Dr. ___: (3) How to avoid such a complete communication failure?

Witt: Met w/Governor & Adj. General. Instructed them to put in task order now to get communications integrated system. \$17 million approved by FEMA. Also have on drawing board a brand new OEP in New Orleans. Will be hardened facility. Won't lose communications.

Pat Boudreaux, Houma Police Chief: Houma/Terrebonne Civic Center - any plan to move current evacuees north if a declared evacuation because of a new storm?

Witt: Good point - important to critique what works and what doesn't.

Jerry Luke LeBlanc: Question understood. But we'll get back with an answer. Hoping to move evacuees soon.

Eric Baumgartner, Legislative Resource Center: FEMA will settle with parish governments on public assistance. But Individual Assistance should be optimized. FEMA may cover hotel costs?

Witt: Must file an application for Individual Assistance. May be eligible for up to 18 months. If out of home and eligible for Individual Assistance, must file an application and must be approved.

Jerry Luke LeBlanc: We do not want to generate more paper - Please put specific questions targeted to specific areas in writing to the *Legislative Resource Center* [lrc@legis.state.la.us or 225-342-6945 or 225-342-2040, 7:00 AM to 9:00 PM 7 days a week through emergency].

Witt: A lot of businesses calling for assistance for their employees and assistance in filling out applications.

Sen. Schedler: How to get local contractors involved? Understand that Corps of Engineers contracted with Asprit of Florida.

Witt: FEMA tasks Corps of Engineers to contract for debris removal.

Schedler: Federal emergency statutes come into play.

Senator Adley: Business interruptions for those businesses who are not in affected areas, but their market business is no longer in play.

Witt: Not in Stafford Act. They should check with their insurance.