

**SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DISASTER PREVENTION AND PREDICTION  
SEPTEMBER 20, 2005**

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify concerning hurricane preparedness. My name is Windell Curole, General Manager of the South Lafourche Levee District.

No area is more dependant upon the Hurricane Center and its predictions than Lafourche Parish. I say that because we have a roadway that is only about three-quarters of a foot above normal summer-time high tide. That roadway leads to Grand Isle, our only inhabited barrier island in Louisiana, and also to Port Fourchon which supports deep offshore oil. That same road that leads to this port is the only evacuation route for 6,000 people who are working on offshore platforms.

The work that the Hurricane Center performs is critical and I've always appreciated their work. They are precise on what they expect from a storm. They make clear the accuracy of their predictions and the possible variations.

I have been indirectly advising evacuations since 1982, and since 1992 directly advising our parish presidents. Training at the Hurricane Center was invaluable in interpreting the Hurricane Center's projected storm tracks. The most important lesson is that predicted landfall cannot be guaranteed. Some conditions allow for more accurate projections, and some atmospheric conditions make projections very difficult. In either case, the Hurricane Center's information is the basis of our actions.

Our job on the local level is to educate people of the risk, direct our people from that risk, and provide the avenues to do so. Our goal is to try to help people understand their risk and to take appropriate action. In the end it is an individual's decision which controls their fate. It's the individual who makes the decision to leave or stay. In fact, when you order an evacuation, you're ordering the retreat of an untrained army. The retreat of a trained army is a very difficult thing to do. We work very hard to help people understand that it is an individual decision and that if you do not make the right decision, you will cause you family to suffer. Correct decisions minimize that suffering.

Educating the individual must be central in all emergency preparations on the local level. The problem is to describe a vision of which an individual has no experience, and then have them move time and again, even when the vision does not materialize. To develop that vision, I

employ historical data and pictures along with LIDAR and computer generated images to illustrate possible flooding and damage. Anniversaries of major storms are highlighted to remind us what has happened and what could happen again.

We organized a centennial commemorating the hurricane of 1893 which killed over 2,000 people in Louisiana. We produced an award-winning play of that hurricane which played to sold out performances that left some members of the audience shaken and emotional. Our mission was to insure that people do not forget the story or lessons from that storm. This past year I strongly encouraged New Orleans television stations to center their hurricane season specials on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hurricane Betsy, the last powerful hurricane to greatly affect southeast Louisiana. Yet, with all of the videos, articles, talk shows and presentations, some people will never believe or understand the extreme threat that a category 3, 4 or 5 hurricane poses. That segment of the population's lack of understanding must also be part of emergency planning.

Comprehensive Hurricane Protection is a concept which integrates hurricane protection levees, restoration of natural systems, hurricane evacuation routes and improved building techniques for individuals. Resolutions by parishes and the State Senate Concurrent Resolution in 1999 support the concepts of this integration of infrastructure, along with a re-evaluation of hurricane projects to provide protection for category 4 or 5 storms.

After Hurricane Georges in 1998 it appeared the state would work on this concept, but they chose to concentrate only on coastal restoration instead of the broader issues.

On the federal level we also had little success. Congressman Tauzin was able to generate committee reports suggesting FEMA conduct certain investigations. However, he had little support from FEMA which led to no results.

What did eventually lead to positive results was the creation of the Southeast Louisiana Hurricane Task Force. The Southeast Louisiana Hurricane Task Force was formed after Hurricane Andrew to improve the coordination of local, state and federal agencies.

As we watched the horror of the people who did not have the transportation to leave the city of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, we saw a total failure. But the fact is that had it not been for the continued pressure of the Southeast Louisiana Hurricane Task Force, people who had the means to leave before the storm, would not have been able to do so.

Evacuation studies had indicated that it would take 50 to 72 hours to move people out of metropolitan New Orleans. With hurricane track errors too great beyond 48 hours, the task force championed the reversing of interstate lanes so that almost all lanes were directed out of the city. The Southeast Louisiana Task Force, after years of trying, was successful in convincing the state into instituting contra flow. Before this, some of those people who did get out of the city for Hurricane Katrina, would not have been able to get out in time. As bad as the situation was for Hurricane Katrina, it would have been much, much worse had it not been for the work of the Southeast Louisiana Hurricane Task Force.

Levees, highways and our natural barriers protect and support an area which provides critical international trade, 25% of the nation's oil infrastructure, major shipbuilding and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest fisheries in the U.S. Protection of those interests also protects the 2,000,000 people who live and work there.

Maintenance and improvement of that infrastructure is critical for the successful planning and execution of emergency plans which minimize the loss of life and property.

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