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Good morning and thank you for that kind introduction.

It's great to be among friends. I've served in many roles during my years in Washington: Administrator, Director, Under Secretary. But the most prestigious title I've ever held is Chief. My staff still call me Chief. And you should all be honored to serve your communities as Chief. I know they all recognize your hard work and service.

Let me just recognize two leaders in the fire services community who have joined me here, today.

The first is well known here – my successor at the US Fire Administration and former Virginia Beach Fire Chief Greg Cade. We're glad to have such another great Chief in our midst.

But Greg hasn't been alone at USFA. In fact, Deputy Fire Administrator Charlie Dickinson did have to do it alone as he held both jobs for a year and a half when he served as Acting Administrator. Prior to his appointment in 2002 as Deputy Administrator, Charlie spent 44 years in the fire services community. He started in Hayward, California, working up to Battalion Chief and Emergency Services Coordinator before moving over to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where he eventually spent 10 years as Fire Chief. An impressive record of service.

Sadly, Charlie is leaving us to enjoy a well-deserved retirement. He leaves big boots to fill and Greg will have his work cut out for him without Charlie to do the real work. But I know Greg joins me in wishing Charlie well and in thanking him for all he's done for USFA, FEMA and the Fire Services Community. We also know his commitment remains strong and he plans to volunteer with the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. Thank you, Charlie, for your service.

By the way, Charlie may be leaving but I am not. I know the rumors were flying earlier this year, but let me assure you that my term runs through January 20th of next year and I am committed to using this time to continue our reforms at FEMA and to leaving this organization better, stronger and more nimble than it was just a few years ago. We are focused on helping you and your cities when we are called upon.

So what are these reforms and how will they help you on the ground?

Since I joined FEMA just over two years ago, we have focused on expanding our capabilities and strengthening our organization. Look at some of the reforms already in place and what they mean to you.

We are better prepared to respond.

Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments help us to facilitate a rapid response, as well as to standardize development of mission assignments prior to and during disaster operations. In 2006, FEMA started with 44 Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments with 2 Federal agencies. Today that number is 223 with 31 agencies.

On the ground, we are stronger with new Incident Management Assistance Teams – or IMATs. Each IMAT is composed of 15 professionals, specially trained and designated to be the first federal responders on the ground.

Our new Logistics Management Directorate is working closely to develop a supply chain that is in sync with the private sector. Already we can better track our resources and thus improve our coordination.

Our operations capabilities are improving every day. But it doesn't stop there. We are also all involved on the ground as you and your communities work to rebuild.

We are better prepared to support the recovery.

FEMA now has 60 Mobile Disaster Recovery Centers that can be deployed on-site at a disaster to help people get the support they need. FEMA continues to work with you and our federal, state, and voluntary partners to build a robust system for evacuation, sheltering and housing, including our collaboration with the American Red Cross to implement the National Shelter System. We've established a National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System and a National Emergency Child Locator Center to help those displaced find their loved ones. We have a new policy to help those with pets. And we are focused on streamlining and improving the housing and individual assistance programs.

We've made it easier for the American people to stand with their neighbors by facilitating their generosity through the Aidmatrix system – which directs donations made nationally to where they can do the most good on the ground. We also have the Citizen Corps Program with over 2300 state and local Citizen Corps Councils that bring government and community leaders together. We've also focused on strengthening our relationships

with the faith-based community, who often play a large in helping during a disaster with charitable donations and volunteers.

Each improvement has already made a difference. I saw them in California when the wildfires displaced thousands, and I saw them recently on the flooded plains of the Midwest. In each case, FEMA personnel were on the ground, earlier than ever, standing with those in need, and helping them to get back on their feet.

In fact, since March of 2003, FEMA has responded to over 400 major disaster and emergency declarations that included floods, tornadoes, winter and tropical storms, landslides and mudslides, earthquakes, droughts, typhoons and hurricanes. In responding to these, FEMA has provided direct material and financial assistance to well over three and a half million individuals across the nation.

Our actions will continue to support you as long as we all remember that we are working together on behalf of the American people.

We are focused on helping you.

Over the past five years FEMA and DHS have provided over \$2.5 billion in fire fighter grants. This is on top of the more than \$23.8 billion for state and local projects through our disaster grant programs. Firegrantsupport.com has the details if you're interested.

But it is more than money.

USFA is involved in extensive research that will benefit emergency responder training. Research is underway in the areas of Health and Safety; Vehicle Safety; Firefighter Safety; and Civilian Life Safety.

USFA's National Fire Academy, FEMA's Emergency Management Institute in Maryland and our Center for Domestic Preparedness in Alabama provide extensive training programs that have helped to train thousands of first responders. There are on-line courses for your partners who can't make it in person, and we are working to improve our relationships with state academies, universities and colleges to expand our support for local efforts that are more accessible to your colleagues at home.

We are working to develop voluntary credentialing standards for first responders who react across jurisdictions to insure that you know who is offering their assistance when a crisis hits. When I was chief in Miami-Dade during the Valu-jet crash, I had numerous folks show up at the scene and I had no idea who they were. This can be a valuable tool as we move forward.

And the National Response Framework lays out a clearer outline for our joint coordination in large-scale disasters.

In short, the New FEMA recognizes we are not in this alone – and I hope you know that, too.

Just a few short years ago, FEMA’s plans were based on sequential failure. When you in the cities or counties were overwhelmed, you asked your state government for help. When the state was overwhelmed, they came to us. Then we acted. That old paradigm is a thing of the past. It just didn’t work.

Today, we are committed to developing an engaged partnership with you that begins long before a disaster hits and results in cities and communities working hand-in-hand with FEMA and your other federal partners. FEMA is not there to replace or take over from your people on the ground. Today we pledge to work with you to plan for, mitigate against, respond to and recover from a disaster in a partnership of which you can be proud. I ask for your help as we move forward...together.

Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.