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Thank you. I am dedicated to building strong ties to our partners in the private sector and am truly pleased to be here. The private sector is an important part of American's emergency management system.

When I was asked to lead FEMA my mission was clear: rebuild and strengthen FEMA's ability to plan, prepare and respond to disasters in the post 9-11/Hurricane Katrina environment. The President, Secretary Chertoff and the Congress supported this effort and provided resources and other tools to make these improvements. This is a stronger and more capable FEMA, as our response to recent disasters has demonstrated.

As we officially entered Hurricane season this week, it is worthwhile to look at some specifics.

FEMA has focused on expanding our capabilities and strengthening our organization.

We have placed greater emphasis on Pre-Scripted Mission Assignments that help us to facilitate 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 our new Incident Management Assistance Teams – or IMATs. They will be ready support you in the state within 12-hours, coordinate federal activities and provide initial situational awareness.

Our new Logistics Management Directorate is working closely to develop a supply chain that is in sync with the private sector. We brought in private sector experts to advise us on this. Already we can better track our resources and thus improve our coordination. We also have contracts and inter-agency agreements that will improve our capabilities.

FEMA is also better prepared to be on the ground as communities rebuild.

FEMA today 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 those involved in building a robust system for evacuation, sheltering and housing. 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.

FEMA has also gone further in preparing for any disaster – natural or man-made – that may strike our nation. Our response will only be as good as our planning and preparedness within FEMA.

When I joined the agency, we had few full-time operational planners. Today we have hired and continue to hire operational planners at the FEMA Headquarters and Regional levels.

Our plans incorporate a Gap Analysis review. Last year we rolled out this tool to identify what was needed where. We use a consistent set of measures and tools to evaluate strengths and vulnerabilities in seven critical areas.

FEMA will soon issue our 2008 Disaster Housing Plan which sets out our approach to working with states, local communities and individuals with disaster housing needs during this hurricane season.

As part of the New FEMA vision, we have worked to integrate the efforts of all partners – public and private, state, tribal, territorial or local – in a holistic approach that will strengthen the national emergency management system and improve the ability of our communities and our Nation to address disasters, emergencies, and terrorist events.

Earlier this year we released the new National Response Framework that will help FEMA coordinate our activities with our partners at every level of government, as well as with the private sector. The NRF takes into account the lessons we've learned and will continue to incorporate changes and reforms as we move forward. But with all of us working from the same plan, changes and improvements will be systematic and not piecemeal as we move forward. The Framework is a living document. Many of you have contributed your thoughts and solid suggestions, and you continue to do so as we strengthen annexes and continue our work to develop strong, robust plans.

As we look at all of the reforms put in place – both operationally and in planning – it is clear that the nation has learned from the events of recent years and built a stronger emergency management system. Simply put: we are all better prepared.

One of the overarching themes running through FEMA’s new Strategic Plan is building “strong partnerships that leverage capabilities and capitalize on public-private efficiencies.” To achieve this goal, FEMA must build better partnerships that place a renewed focus on engaging the capabilities and strengths of the private sector, law enforcement, health professionals and other essential communities.

At FEMA, we have established an office to work specifically with our partners in the diverse private sector to facilitate this coordination before, during and after a disaster. We set up this new Private Sector Office at FEMA to focus exclusively on opening a dialogue and building a bridge of collaboration and information sharing with organizations outside of the government. The Director of the Private Sector Office, Cindy Taylor, has years of experience both as a career FEMA employee and in the private sector.

The office has three main goals.

First, the office is dedicated to engaging with the private sector to learn from your best practices as we work to improve FEMA’s capabilities and capacities.

Second, the office will engage with you to connect the private sector to FEMA in the key roles you play in the many elements of disaster preparedness, protection, mitigation, response and recovery.

And third, the office is working with the private sector to improve information sharing by leveraging organizational communications capabilities. You are an important channel for information to your employees, your customers and your communities in general. We will pursue every avenue of communication to make sure the American people get the information they need before, during and after emergencies.

Together we will continue and build upon efforts in several key areas: business continuity plans; plans that help you employees protect their families and get back to work – a key element of recovery is getting people back to work as quickly as possible; systems to help businesses and their organizations work directly with emergency managers, first responders and government to support mitigation activities, preparedness planning, disaster response, donations management, and recovery efforts; and the inclusion of the private sector in planning, training, and exercise activities – the resulting relationships and shared vision can only help to strengthen our nation’s preparedness.

It is the work and resources we expend on this planning now, before a disaster, which will pay dividends later in a faster recovery and a more resilient nation.

Government – even with the federal, tribal, state, territorial, and local governments working perfectly in sync – is not the entire answer. All Americans need to be part of the emergency management process. Americans must understand and take responsibility for their role in disasters.

Earlier this year FEMA was criticized by one media outlet when local businesses were quicker to provide needed supplies. The media does not understand: this is a success story! We are all working to help those in need – it does not matter who gets there first as long as someone gets there quickly. As President Truman said, “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit.”

We all must continue to develop and foster a culture of preparedness in America, in which every American takes personal responsibility for his or her own emergency preparedness. FEMA will be a partner with all of you as we move forward. We ask you to join us as we all prepare for the future and to help those in need.

Thank you. God Bless You. And God Bless the United States of America.