

UNCLASSIFIED

STATEMENT BY

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL H STEVEN BLUM
CHIEF, NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU**

BEFORE THE

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES, SUBCOMMITTEE ON TERRORISM,
UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS AND CAPABILITIES,
AND
HOUSE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE, SUBCOMMITTEE
ON EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, SCIENCE AND
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**ON
RESPONDING TO CATASTRPOHIC EVENTS: THE ROLE OF THE
MILITARY AND NATIONAL GUARD IN DISASTER RESPONSE**

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Chairman Saxton and Chairman Reichert, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the role of the National Guard in disaster response.

Today, the National Guard finds itself more than ever linked to the vital interests of our nation, both here at home and around the world. Over 80,000 National Guard soldiers are currently deployed in support of operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, and dozens of other nations. At the same time, the men and women of the National Guard have responded magnificently to the catastrophic events of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma here at home. Over 50,000 National Guard personnel hailing from every state and territory - responded to calls for support during this difficult period. That is more than the United States employed during Grenada or Panama operations.

As the government begins the necessary process of assessing the effects of the hurricanes and the response to those events, the picture is one of laudable successes as well as areas requiring improvement.

I am particularly proud of the timeliness and magnitude of the National Guard's efforts in advance of Hurricane Katrina and our response in its immediate aftermath. National Guard forces were in the water and on the streets of New Orleans rescuing people within four hours of Katrina's passing. More than 9,700 National Guard Soldiers and Airmen

were in New Orleans by the thirtieth of August. The National Guard deployed over 30,000 additional troops within 96 hours of the passing of the storm.

More than 11,000 National Guard personnel remain on active duty today in Louisiana alone, with over 12,500 total personnel in the five affected states. In short, the National Guard response to the catastrophic events of Hurricanes Katrina, Rita and Wilma has been and continues to be both timely and extensive.

While we have been successful in meeting the needs of the warfight overseas, there exists room for improvement in our capability to respond effectively to domestic mission requirements. Resourcing National Guard units deploying in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom has reduced the equipment inventory of the National Guard's non-deploying units. Every effort has been made to ensure that our deploying units are fully equipped and ready to support operations anywhere in the world. So far, we have transferred over 101,000 items of equipment in support of these missions. But these efforts have resulted in reduced inventories of many critical equipment items here at home, including trucks, radios and heavy engineering equipment.

Resources earmarked in current legislation will help the National Guard a great deal in addressing these challenges. By working with the Army, the Air Force and the Congress to continue to prioritize National Guard equipment needs, we will be well on the path to ensuring that the Guard is fully prepared to fulfill its missions both at home and abroad.

Interagency relationships are fundamental to the success of the federal response to any disaster, and we must continue to foster strong relationships with the Department of Homeland Security and U.S. Northern Command. Indeed, coordination efforts to date point to the need for better planning, procurement of more equipment and interoperable communications, and joint training of the National Guard, active duty forces, and our federal partners.

As a full member of the national security team, the National Guard had met its mission requirements at home and abroad. But additional resourcing and better inter-governmental coordination is needed in order for the National Guard to be effectively postured to meet the needs of the future. By working closely with the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Congress, the National Guard will continue to be Always Ready, Always There.

Thank you.