

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
GOVERNOR BOB RILEY, STATE OF ALABAMA**

**HEARING ON “HURRICANE KATRINA: COMMUNITY REBUILDING NEEDS  
AND EFFECTIVENESS OF PAST PROPOSALS”**

**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**SEPTEMBER 28, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today to offer my thoughts about the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. I commend the committee and the Congress for undertaking a close examination of what happened and how to rebuild the Gulf Coast.

First – I’d like to thank all of the people from around our great country – and the world – for the generosity and compassion they’ve shown for the thousands of people affected by Hurricane Katrina.

I’d also like to thank our first responders – our state troopers, National Guard members, and other local emergency management officials – some of whom lost their own homes and continued to work day and night to save the lives of people they don’t even know.

Finally, I’d like to thank the Federal government for working so closely with Alabama. While there are always lessons to be learned – I can say without hesitation that President Bush, Secretary Chertoff and FEMA were always responsive to our needs in Alabama. We value and appreciate the strong partnership we’ve developed during the three major hurricanes that have impacted Alabama over the past 12 months.

The devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina is something that was almost unimaginable until I saw it with my own eyes. As you know, communities that once thrived along our Gulf Coast are now virtually gone – but I can assure you that the spirit and pride of the people of Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi is far from gone. We’ll be back stronger than ever.

Although Alabama – overall – did not receive the level of damage experienced by Mississippi’s coast and New Orleans – there are several communities in my state that were hit equally as hard. The devastation in these areas is truly enormous.

President Bush has offered a bold proposal to rebuild the devastated areas of the Gulf Coast. The President – I believe – correctly recognizes that the key to the area’s long-term recovery is greater private investment. Encouraging investment and expanding

private enterprise are the engines to long-term recovery. I hope Congress will embrace these initiatives.

In considering rebuilding proposals – I encourage members of this committee and all members of Congress to consider the following:

First – 12 months ago – other parts of Alabama suffered enormous damage – on par with the devastation we’ve seen in Mississippi – when Hurricane Ivan ripped through most of Alabama. Hurricane Katrina only intensified the problems our farmers, commercial fisherman, timber growers and others have experienced. It only makes sense to include these counties in any Gulf Coast rebuilding effort. These citizens suffered losses from Ivan as great as others did from Katrina. Congress must be equitable as it considers policy changes and funding proposals associated with rebuilding the Gulf Coast.

Second – In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, many have concluded that all the answers are to be found in Washington, DC. As a former Member of Congress, I recognize that the federal government has a unique and critically important role to play in responding to catastrophes – but state and local leaders must retain the primary role in planning and acting as first responders. Congress should avoid attempts to “federalize” planning and response activities that are the responsibility of state and local agencies. Communities must have the flexibility to shape their preparedness and emergency response efforts. Accordingly, Congress must invest more in preparedness and provide states with the necessary means to respond effectively to hurricanes and other natural disasters. When a hurricane approaches – our first and most important mission is to get people away from danger. The federal government could be most helpful in this mission by providing the states with resources to help get people out of harm’s way and to pre-stage commodities such as water and MREs. Let me give you an example:

Earlier this year – Alabama faced a potentially devastating storm – Hurricane Dennis. Dennis was the strongest storm ever to form prior to August. It was a Category 4 hurricane – the earliest in the season that a storm had reached this level of strength since 1957.

The National Hurricane Center predicted a landing at near full strength. However, the storm weakened just before landfall. As a result – damage from Hurricane Dennis was not as widespread or catastrophic as first feared.

Still – Alabama acted wisely and made preparations for what all expected to be a destructive storm. Those preparations cost millions of dollars to the state. Some of the costs are reimbursable – albeit in arrears – and others are not – such as purchasing commodities in advance of a storm and leasing or buying space to pre-position food and water. Congress must work to ensure that there is not a disincentive for acting responsibly.

Third – states must be fully reimbursed for new or additional costs – such as Medicaid and education expenses – that are incurred as a result of providing assistance to victims

of Katrina. The number of evacuees associated with this disaster is unprecedented in our nation's history and is an expense that states alone cannot afford. Alabama has taken in an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 evacuees from Mississippi and Louisiana. Our schools have enrolled some 6,000 evacuee children since Katrina hit. Along these lines – I'm pleased to see legislation moving through Congress that provides 100% Federal reimbursement to states that have been impacted by hurricane Katrina. I urge Congress to act quickly on these proposals.

As Congress and the Administration formulate a federal response – I hope these key points will be considered and incorporated.

The job before us is enormous – but there is no doubt in my mind that – by working together – an even better Gulf Coast will emerge.

Thank you.