



Presentation by Stephen J. LeBlanc

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Readiness for Recovery: Galveston Evacuation Model

January 18, 2007

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Well, thank you, Jim (Frierson). I really appreciate the opportunity to present this to everyone here and to the nation. And to be a part of the drafting of a Blueprint for response. And just to start off I want to say that I'm quite proud of Galveston. I'm quite proud of our team and certainly as the Mayor said, she couldn't do it without all of us. And I certainly couldn't do it without all of you. So with that introduction let me also start by saying that when I discussed this with Jim the other day I asked him specifically what it was that he thought I should do. And he said, "Steve, just step back and pretend for a minute that you're going to be a teacher. And you're going to teach the other communities who don't have your experience what to do." And in that vein, since I'm going to play the role of a teacher, I thought it would be best to break this lesson up into timeframes relative to the event.

There are concepts here that are best practices that are both simple, complex, short term and long term.

And so I'll start with a reference in relation to the events.

And the first thing that we start off by doing is to **prepare and inform the community at large**. We conduct town hall meetings in early May to refresh memories for those citizens who live here. To remind them about their plans as to what they're supposed to do individually. We also have continuous public information provided on our public information channel and our city's website. Simple concept but important as far as a concept to pass on. A transportable concept as Jim said. We hold public meetings to sign up for assistance. As Jim referred to and will be talked about later by Stan Blazyk and Jim Hale, we have sign-up meetings for those individuals who need help. I'll talk a little bit about, about the evacuation itself. We keep a watchful eye out at all times during the hurricane season. Charlie Kelly, our emergency management coordinator stays in touch with all his fellow emergency management coordinators throughout the season, attends meetings and keeps a watchful eye on the tropics. We stay in touch with each other. We hold meetings and this was the Mayor's concept. During the hurricane season we hold monthly and sometimes twice a month meetings at City Hall with stakeholders throughout the community, the county, the hospital, the school district, the housing authority, the Coast Guard, the Red Cross, the National Weather Service and all my City department heads. They're all here today. We review our plans. We address concerns that we all have. We decide and discuss how we will coordinate if needed. Each of those entities have

their own plans but it's important for us to get together and discuss those and keep reminding ourselves what's going on.

Another concept is practice makes perfect. One of the things that we do, and I know this is something other communities do; we conduct tabletop exercises that are used to again just remind us of the lessons that we need to be aware of. We have our plan of action. Who, what, when, where and how will we do this? Who's going to be in charge? The Mayor. Where are we going to go when this happens? When are we going to go? Where are we going to go, and how we're going to do it. We have to have a timeline.

At least an approximately timeline in order to pull this off. And in order to have a timeline, line or a frame of reference, what we do is we work backwards from the estimated time that the storm would make landfall. That time we call the zero hour, or H-zero. And backing up from that time we set out target times to do specific things. At the H-100 hour, or 100 hours prior to the expected storm landfall on the island we call together; or actually the county judge, Jim Yarbrough, calls together all the regional leaders into a decision maker's conference usually held up in his facilities on the mainland. At that point in time each of the various community leaders talk about when we might call for an evacuation, voluntary, mandatory and in what order we all might leave. Of course, we have dibs on that to leave first since we're on the coast.

Between the H-100 hour and H-72, sometime in that timeframe the City Council turns over control of the City to the Mayor. She likes that. In fact, she loves that, I know. She becomes solely in charge of the City's operations. And she does a wonderful job when she takes control. And when you get into an emergency mode you need one person in charge. And everybody else needs to support that one person. And that's exactly what we do. In fact, our whole organizational chart immediately changes upon that Council decision to give her the authority. Each of those positions, and I could go into those during the question and answer period. But each of those positions have various responsibilities and tasks and each of those positions have a backup person. The Mayor has a backup; the Mayor Pro Tem. The City Manager has a backup; the Assistant City Manager. And so forth and so on.

At the H-72 timeframe, the Mayor; or generally right around in there; the Mayor calls for a voluntary evacuation. That's the time at which we tell the general public it's about time to go. And it's also the timeframe by which we take care of our special needs population that needs help. And I'll talk a little bit more about that later. It's also about the timeframe that we implement the first call system, which is a reverse 911 system. Instead of you calling in for an emergency, we actually call you with a recorded message. And it's a mass call to thousands of people. Thousands of households on the island. Just to make sure that you're aware of what's going on and what the recommendations of the leadership of the community are. At the H-48 timeframe, 48 hours out, a mandatory evacuation could be called by the Mayor if it becomes necessary. The entire population is ordered to leave. This is very significant, obviously; schools,

businesses, the hospital. Everybody shuts down. And I'm going to come back to that in a few minutes.

At the H-24 timeframe, it's time for us to, as we say, hunker down. Or it's time to batten down the hatches. Our team that's remaining on the island, which consists of approximately 200 City staff folks, along with others - county, etc., it's time for us to relocate to our safe haven and batten down the hatches and ride out the storm. And it takes time to coordinate that. And so we give ourselves about 24 hours to reposition police, fire, public works, EMS personnel all relocate. Our plan, although last, last time we had to do this we all hunkered down right here; actually not here in the Convention Center, but in the San Luis Hotel next door. We actually have modified that plan. We're not going to put all our eggs into one basket. We're going to break it up into three baskets. One on the west; one in central; and one on the east end. And we have understandings and agreements with Moody Gardens on the west, the San Luis in the Central, and UTMB on the east end. We make sure that each of those locations have plenty of fuel, excuse me, food, supplies. Because this is going to be our home for awhile, not knowing how long. But a day or two or three or a couple of weeks.

Another best practice is continuity of government. If for some reason we were to lose communication or control or something worse than that disaster, we send our Mayor Pro Tem - in this case it was Joe Jaworski - and the Assistant City Manager, Lloyd Renderer to the mainland to stay in the county's emergency management facility, along with others. We communicate constantly. But they're the backup team in case then the A-team goes down, the B-team is ready to step in. A redundancy. Redundancy is important in any plan. We have agreements with Galveston County to use part of their facilities; their emergency management facilities on the mainland. And we'll have an office, a communications center, information technology if we end up having to operate out of that location after the storm.

I want to go back to the evacuation for just a minute, because one of the things that we experienced during Rita was that when you call a mandatory; or when the Mayor calls for a mandatory evacuation you don't realize; you just say, okay, it's time to go. You must leave. And there is a **segment of the population who cannot do that. And the only humane thing to do is to help them.** In Galveston's case, it turned out to be about five percent of our population. But even that small percentage becomes a monumental task. These are people who have no cars. They could be bedridden, homebound, street people, people walking on the streets that are drug addicts, people who are on oxygen. People who otherwise don't have family and can't help themselves. Our plan in 2005 did not anticipate dealing with that. But the team quickly responded and put together a plan and found a way to get them off the island. And we used every resource we had. We used our buses. We used GSID's buses. We, I believe, got some buses from Houston Metro. But we quickly found a central location to stage this mass gathering of individuals who needed help and we did that with the help of Sharon Strain, with the Housing Authority. We used her facility centrally located on the island to, to be the staging area for this gathering. Since that time, we have decided that our buses are not capable of long highway trips. City buses designed

for city operations. The GSID buses certainly could make those long trips, but we realized that 36 hours on the highway, no restroom facility on a bus, is just not going to work in the future. So we have entered into a local agreement with Houston Metro to provide buses the next time around. These buses have bathrooms. They'll be equipped with drivers. And we will also equip those buses with our own City staff to help assist in the long duration of the ride. The other part of this transportation equation for special needs people came about because, as I mentioned earlier, there are those who cannot; I mean, they can't even get themselves on the bus. They have the oxygen. They're homebound, they're bedridden. And we've entered into agreements with Galveston County Emergency Medical Services to help transport those folks properly. And this is, although we haven't used it, it would be the way; only way to safely move those folks.

The other issue that we had, and we have fixed is once you leave point A, you really need a point B to go to. And we thought that's what would happen once we sent these individuals, these citizens who needed our help, up the road. We thought we were going from Galveston to Huntsville; A to B. But that's not what happened. When we got to B, Huntsville, it was full and there was no place for us to stay. And so we were scattered to C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J; all over the place. So in order to fix that, we have entered into an agreement; in a local agreement with the City of Austin. We will go from point A to point B with no deviation in between. And the City of Austin I must commend for their generosity, their open arms to welcome us to their facilities. They have an excellent emergency management plan. They have facilities that will house our 3500 citizens. They're there to help us. No we're not sending our people off to; and dumping them on somebody else in Austin. We're sending them with our help as best we can.

Another good practice to pass on. About 50 individuals, to be specific, is what the plan calls for that would be sent up with the 3500 citizens. **When you send 50 people up, those people need to have training on giving care.** And Carolyn Cox, part of our team, and others do; have done a great job in training those who will provide care. UTMB has also been a part of that training.

I couldn't go forward without talking about pets. Pets are family members. We have; in my household two additional furry family members that my wife would not leave the island without. So when you plan for and call for a mandatory evacuation you must call for a; or find a way to take care of the little people; the little pets. We had some big ones, but the little ones are, are also a part of this picture. The City of Austin has agreed to provide shelter for pets. Houston Metro won't provide; they don't want pets on their buses so our team will provide City buses and, and school buses to take, take the pets to Austin. The other part of the equation on pets is that there are pets who don't get to make the trip. It's unfortunate. During Hurricane Rita we had about 120 pets that were either dropped off at a vet or just abandoned. And they, they need to be taken care of. And the Council on; at the next Council meeting will consider an agreement with the Houston, the Houston Humane Society who will house, feed and care for these otherwise abandoned pets in the next event for, for a two week period of time.

Another best practice is to have a refuge of last resort. Even though a mandatory evacuation is called, some people just don't want to leave. So we have an inner local agreement to address that. We have an inner local agreement with the school district to use their facilities during the storm. If the individuals who decided or were not smart enough to leave when called for; they must sign waivers that say you enter into this facility on your own; at your own risk. Including death. And that's how serious we are. Another good practice: help your neighbor. We have mutual aid agreements with our neighbors; our neighboring cities that is. And this became critical during Hurricane Rita. Lake City, Friendswood, Houston all came to our beckon and call when we had a fire during the height of the storm in Hurricane Rita. And your neighbor is your true first responder for you. And likewise, you to them.

Another concept to pass on in the Blueprint. **Communication: lots of redundancy is needed here.** Cell phones get clogged or jammed. Or they lose battery power. If you lose power you can't recharge them. Radios; radios. In our case, we - and I'll talk a little bit more about that in just a minute. But those turned out to be our true, true base and standard by which we communicated once we lost power. We also have for the management team, the Mayor, the head, the police chief, the fire chief, the public works director - we have a few satellite phones that are also used in the event. So redundancy in communication is essential.

The next item, a good practice, is, this is going to maybe sound a little funny but it's absolutely true, and for those in the media, please don't take this personally. But **we have to have media management.** During the Rita event you couldn't turn a corner without being - I don't want to use the word attacked. But certainly questioned at every turn from a reporter. "What are you doing?" "What's happening?" And when you're in the mode of trying to manage an emergency, the last thing you really want to deal with is, you know, a push person. So one of the things that; and I'll credit the Mayor with this. I thought it was an excellent idea, was that we gathered all the reporters together and we said, Folks, we need you. We want you to communicate the message, but you're bothering me. So what we're going to do is we're going to have set times that we'll talk to you. We'll talk to you at 10:00 o'clock in the morning and we'll talk to you at 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon. Otherwise, leave me alone. And please, with no disrespect to the media, but just to manage the media is, is an issue when you're in that state and frame. And we need the media because as I said earlier, there is no other way to communicate with the citizens. Many, many of my friends told me they heard me on KTRH. They saw me on Channel 2. They; and they wouldn't have known what to do otherwise. Because I couldn't have e-mailed them all or called them on their cell phone. So there was no other way to, to get the message out. So we need you, media. We just need you when we want you, not when you want us.

The other issue that I think is important to pass on to the rest of the nation is a couple of things. **The water supply in your city; I mean you know, when you come back to town you've gotta have good water.** I mean, you can't go

without water. For many reasons, not just to consume it, but to fight fires and, you know, clean yourself, cook food. It's an essential element. You must protect that source of water as best you can. And in Galveston's situation the uniqueness of our island dictated that we, we make us some tough decisions. Even though the storm didn't hit, we cut the west end water supply off. If you were on the west end we just cut you off. You didn't get any water. Because it's not protected by the seawall. And we felt that if we were to get it and we had it still flowing out there, number one it; a line would break, we'd bleed the system and have no water. Number two, it would contaminate the rest of the system. So we said we cut it off. And it took several days to turn it back on. Not that we couldn't just turn the valve and get it back on. But when you cut a water supply off, anybody in the regulatory business will tell you, you don't just turn it back on. You have to make sure it's tested so it, it didn't reverse contaminate itself. Because that can happen.

Another best practice is to keep your plan flexible. Once we hunkered down the policy plan says you're not going to leave this safe haven that you're at. And however we, we broke that rule. But only after some, some discussions with the fire chief, Mike Varela. I believe Mike Wisco was a strong part of that. We had the east end of our island on fire. There's lots of; I could go into how that happened, but it's not necessary. But we lost power. We were standing in; the Mayor and I were standing in the tenth floor of the San Luis looking over a dark island and you could see, see the fire burning on the east end of the island. And, but we were hunkered down; we weren't supposed to go anywhere. And the storm was raging. I mean, what we had of it. So we made a decision to break the policy. To go save a valuable, precious thing that's part of Galveston and that's the east end historic district. Which is irreplaceable. So many brave souls, firefighters, went out and fought that fire. There were three structures on fire and we put them out. On, in 90 mile an hour winds. In addition to that, our neighbors, mutual aid agreement, those cities I mentioned earlier all came to the City of Galveston despite the fact that there were 90 mile an hour winds. They came to the island not to help us fight that fire but to protect the rest of the city in case it caught fire. And remember, there were many lines down, power lines that could have sparked a fire. So we had, we had our stuff together. After the storm, after the storm typically; I mean, if it really had hit hard you worry about recovery of life. Taking care of the injured. You immediately restore order, law enforcement and you start to clean up and to that end one of the lessons we learned from others, and I sent a large contingency of my staff to Biloxi and Gulfport after Katrina; after their devastation to learn what they did wrong.

And one the things they said was, gee whiz, **you, you need to have redundancy in cleanup. And so we have actually three contracts for cleanup. DRC, an emergency services company, one of the host of this event** - Tom Combs; great group - is one of those three. We also have an agreement with a company to simply manage the three debris management companies so that we keep the proper paperwork in order so that we can get reimbursed from FEMA after the fact. Another good practice to pass on to the nation.

And that is, in recovery you need to quickly do damage assessments in order to get back on your feet. And in New Orleans they couldn't do that very quickly, I don't believe. But in other communities, Gulfport and Biloxi, they used software, the latest technology. But the concept of having the ability to quickly assess damage is a good concept to pass on. And we've purchased that software to help us do just that. The, the next thing in recovery - and I'm winding this down, so it's almost over.

But the next thing you need to think about is restoration of utilities and power. And one of the things that we did was we worked very closely with Center Point Energy in order to determine who gets power first in priority. I mean, once you come back if that was the case. Obviously the hospital, the command centers, selected grocery stores that are going to feed the rest of us while we're here, gas stations, etc. We have letters of understanding with Wal-Mart and Home Depot and our fuel vendor because those are the things that we're going to need. We need them to be in place. We need the private sector to be there for us.

We have two more, a couple more points. And one of the things that we have done, and I think this was very key and instrumental on the part of our finance committee, and that was a recommendation that every, **every part of the City business have enough in reserves to deal with not having any income during the time after the storm.** And I know that Shrub's going to cover that a little bit. But, but basically what we've done in pretty short order is to make sure we have at least a 90 day reserve in all of our funds, water funds, sewer fund, drainage fund, every enterprise fund. And the general fund. And believe me that's no small task, having; and I'm talking millions of dollars in reserves to carry us for at least 90 days. Because you have to spend money in order to get it reimbursed from FEMA. I'm going to end my discussion with a couple of key points. And that is in being prepared for an emergency and a disaster, everything I talked about was pretty short term. But there are some long term things. *And, and Galveston, I'm proud to say is a shining example of long term readiness and preparedness. And those long terms are things such as we have a water storage supply on our island that is far greater than most communities. Our forefathers were smart enough to have enough volume, ground storage tanks, elevated storage tanks, so that if the island was cut off we could survive for days without water coming to the island. And that has served us very well in, in the past and will serve us well in the future.*

One last key point that Galveston has. **And again, long term readiness and preparedness from our forefathers, and that's the seawall.** The seawall was a monumental accomplishment that has survived 100 years in protection of this island. The city of Texas City has a seawall. Most people don't think of that. But they have a levy system that's like a seawall. They call it their seawall. Same concept. Long term readiness and preparedness. And I'll close with this. **The greatest lesson is to share; exactly what you're doing. Share with others, go visit other communities, find out their successes, their failures.** We did just that and will continue to do that.