



## Southwestern Regional Event

*Readiness for Preparedness: The Galveston Model for Evacuation and Recovery*

Galveston, TX

January 18, 2007

Opening Remarks – Lyda Ann Thomas, Mayor

I often welcome groups to Galveston and generally can say it's a beautiful day on Paradise Island. But can't do that today (rain/ice). This is an opportunity for me, Governor, with great pride, to welcome you and our team to our island.

**The idea that Galveston and our activities during the Rita event would become a national model is something that we certainly never thought of during the four or five days of the Rita event. And we are most appreciative of the fact that you, Governor, have recognized our efforts and that you think that what we did here in Galveston is something that will be used throughout the country.** During our events, the Rita event in particular, we concentrated certainly on our island and on our county and our residents and getting them out of harm's way. I'm going to tell you more about harm's way later on because we got all the way to Houston and then we had a little harm there. I will have an opportunity to talk to you a little bit later.

In the meantime, again, Governor Gilmore, we are grateful to you and to NCORP for coming to Galveston, for recognizing us, and especially for your efforts regarding the entire country and your focus on asking the country to be prepared and to be able to respond in the event of a catastrophe, whether it's a storm or fire or, as I said to Dr. Stobo last night, his bugs get loose from the bio-defense laboratory at UTMB.

So before I sit down, though, it's very important that you who are not from Galveston recognize my team. Because without them, I could have never done what we did during Rita. So I would ask the members of the City staff, the fire, the police, Sharon Strain who's up here, Steve. Please stand. So as you all go through the morning you will know that it was with the help of my counsel, the City staff, UTMB, the county and many others who are here today who got us through that event. And if you just stand so you can be recognized? Because I'm not going to call your name. Thank you very much.

And Governor, again, welcome to you and to everyone who came with you. I'm just glad you were able to get here through the storm and the ice or whatever Houston said we were going to have. Thanks for being here and we look forward to working with you throughout the day.

*NCORP National Blueprint Best Practice Award Ceremony in recognition of Mayor Thomas and her leadership of the Mayor's Citizen Response Teams*

Anderson It's really a great privilege as president of NCORP to be able to travel around the country and attend these conferences, help put them on. Governor Gilmore in his earlier remarks I think recounted the various cities we've been to and you've seen from Jeb Carney, the Blueprint that we're putting together. And the comment and the information and the learning we're gathering from around the country. It's really a privilege to be a part of that, and we've learned so much. We've learned a lot about what's right and what's going well.

We've learned a lot about failures and lessons learned from around the country. And there are times, right after Katrina, in our November conference in Washington we felt the anger and the frustration of first responders who had to deal with impossible circumstances. And as time has gone by and we've continued these conversations, whether through the Blueprint or over a quiet breakfast or in a court or at a conference like this, we've often time heard the quiet anxiety of first responders who understand what it is they face. The threats, both manmade and natural. And also understand that their communities are not ready. But then we also come across something else occasionally; a real gem. Something that shines out as an example for the country.

**And here in Galveston we've come across a real 10 carat diamond, perfectly cut, right there in the sand. And that, of course, when I refer to that I refer to your wonderful mayor, Mayor Thomas. And to the Mayor's Citizen Response Teams.**

Now, you've heard in detail from Stan and from Jim how those response teams were created and the good work they do. I won't repeat that here again except to point out that this wonderful program that was created in response to a crisis has now become a working part of this community. Complete with databases concerning the volunteers that are there and the people who need help and how to get them help. And this is a tremendous asset to your community. And I believe it's a tremendous example for the nation and one they can learn from.

And so with that, I'd like to ask Governor Gilmore now to come forward and present the award to Mayor Thomas.

Gilmore Thank you, David. Mayor Thomas, if you'd come forward, please? I have a presentation to make to you.

Ladies and gentlemen, I don't want to in any way minimize anything. But I've often thought of a sports analogy: there are times when you see a basketball game and you know somebody who's a really great player because when the game's on the line they want the ball. Well, we have emphasized today that the entire team

of Galveston works together in order to make this community a success. And to be a leader in the nation, as an example for the nation which we will be incorporating into everything that we're doing with NCORP, doesn't in any way minimize the leadership that is necessary and called for when the crisis comes.

But when the crisis does come and the challenge is there, great leaders step up and they want to be there. That's the place they have lived their lives. They want to be there. Your mayor, Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas, is one of those people. And so we want to recognize not just you and everybody here, but specifically her and her leadership that she has shown. And I want to now read this:

*In special recognition of the Honorable Lyda Ann Thomas and her leadership of the Mayor's Citizen Response Teams, Galveston, Texas 2007, National Blueprint Best Practice Award*

Mayor Thomas, thank you very much for everything that you're doing for your community (applause).

Thomas

Thank you. Thank you, Governor. Thank you. Thank you very much. It's a - thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Governor. The Rita event has lots of stories. And I can take more time and keep all of you from having lunch and maybe even going to the ladies' room or the men's room. So I'm not going to, I'm not going to speak very long.

But I do want you to know that we have precedent in Galveston for what we did and what we're going to do. **After the 1900 storm, the leadership of this city, which included Shrub Kempner and my grandfather, I.H. Kempner, the Moodys, the Sealys, the rabbis, the priests, the ministers, black, white, Jew, came together in the middle of this wreckage and went to work. They were all volunteers. And with that model in mind, because I.H. Kempner left us a record of what he did with others to bring the city back, to rebuild it, to go and find the finances that we needed to make Galveston whole again.**

When Rita was coming dead on, I knew that this city could come together and take care of its citizens. And the most important thing that I needed to do was get people out of harm's way. We were able to do that because I have a council who said to me, "It's okay, Lyda Ann. We'll give you full authority." And it's true; I like authority (laughter). And I enjoyed the idea of being able to tell Mr. LeBlanc who to hire, who to fire, what we needed to do, go to Wal-Mart and get food.

And, I mean it really was a team effort. But down at the bottom of the well was my confidence that the citizens of this island could come together one more time. Because after all, what I saw in New Orleans after Katrina, the only picture I had in my mind was Galveston in 1900. So based on my own family's history and its involvement in this island, I was able to pick up the phone. And the cell phones did work. And I had a whole lot of numbers beginning with UTMB. Without them, I really don't know that I would have been able to do what I did because I knew that that emergency room one way or the other was going to stay open. At the end of Rita, when the causeway was blocked and people were banging to get back in and screaming and yelling to come home because the storm hadn't come; they didn't know why they couldn't come in; we didn't have any power in certain

places but everything else was kind of okay. I forgot to call Judge Yarborough and Dr. Stobo and say, hey, I'm going to open the gates and let everybody come home. And nine out ten people, of course, headed to UTMB because they'd had a terrible time on the roads. I'm not going to go into all that.

But again, I'm accepting this award on behalf of the citizens of Galveston Island.

Thank you.