



Presentation by the Honorable James D. Yarbrough

County Judge, County of Galveston
Galveston Model of Readiness to Recover
January 18, 2007

Yarbrough Thank you. I don't know if it was by accident that they put Sjostrom on one side of the room and me on the other (laughter). Kind of a balance. If I'd known I was going to be on the screen, I'd of done something better with my hair. But anyway I do appreciate very much the opportunity to be a part of this afternoon's luncheon discussion. You know, the success that the City of Galveston and that Galveston County enjoyed during the Rita environment absolutely comes as no surprise. I would expect nothing less. In this particular cycle of events the City of Galveston and the Mayor stepped up and provided the leadership and did what it took to take care of the people they serve. Had the event happened in Texas City or League City or Friendswood or Santa Fe, I am equally confident that the leadership in those communities would have done the same thing.

In my mind, it happened for three simple reasons. One, back in 1995 the **elected leadership collectively in this county decided to put emergency management as a high priority**. Long before Rita. Long before 9/11/2001, emergency management became a priority for the entities within this county. Number two, from that day forward we put planning on a **continuous program**. You know, we were fortunate last summer to have kind of a little lull in the hurricane season. The beauty about this conference and this forum is this kind of gives us a kick start. Because right before you know it, we're going to be the first of June and we're going to be back at hurricane season. So this kind of gives us a little bit of momentum to get ready for the next hurricane season. The third reason I would say that I wasn't surprised and I would expect nothing less was besides being a high priority, besides doing the planning on a year round basis, is that an old football coach of mine; I know my Sunday School teacher Benny Raimer is here. But an old football coach of mine told me one time that perfect **practice makes perfect**. And every exercise we have, we try to emulate and, and do things as real as you can on a tabletop or on an exercise basis.

And we have 13 cities within this county. And we work as one. We evacuated Galveston County and the City of Galveston in particular, with relative ease. All the boys and girls in our Galveston County plan did exactly what they were supposed to do. They were where they were supposed to be. And the public responded and they moved forward.

All of a sudden we end up with less than adequate, less than acceptable outcomes when we interfaced with the region. A lot of reasons for that. Yeah. Was that a

tactful way to say that, Sally? Well, I wasn't that tactful with a few of the mayors and county judges in the region a year and a half ago. But the time has allowed me to be more tactful. You know, there's always circumstances that are going to create the environment that don't make it easy to move all of our people. And this one was no exception.

We thought it was going to hit Corpus and it just kept moving on up the coast. And as it kept moving people in Corpus and people in Matagorda and people in Brazoria County were evacuating. And our people really didn't have much way to go. And so what we; we don't ever expect to run these type of operations just picture perfect and real smooth because we don't have real tests that often.

What we do expect is to learn, **make incremental progress, do it better than next time, learn some things, try to put protocols and communication in place to make sure that we are more successful the next time** we have to have an evacuation. We think we've done that. You know, for years, to me it starts with internal communications and teamwork and to me internal is Galveston County. Bar none, you ask Jack Colley at the State, there's none better than Galveston County and our 13 cities and school districts and major employees and the whole, the whole package. We gave lip service to try and to reach out to our regional partners. Harris County, city of Houston, Brazoria County. We gave lip service to getting help from the State.

Now that we've been through Rita, that lip service is going to start turning into some real action. And we want to thank; obviously, the Governor stepped up and appointed a task force. Local county judges in the region did the same. Some of the things we've learned as we began to talk about **evacuation is our people can use any route they choose** to. They're not going to be forced to go up I45 or Highway 6 or 146. Yeah. We've got, we've got major money invested in this state with a wonderful farm-to-market lateral road system. We need to take advantage of it.

One of the things we learned, obviously, was that **if you can leave early. There's no substitute for individual plans.** Government can't do it for you. You've got to have your own plan. Your family's plan; your neighbor's plan. Help your neighbor. Move; get out early.

Not all of us are in a position to leave early. They work for somebody else; they've got responsibilities. And so we've got to deal with that. You know, 2005 the State government gave us mandatory evacuation authority. Before that it was always, we strongly encourage, we suggest you leave.

Now we have mandatory authority. I can promise you at the county government level and certainly I think I'm speaking for the cities. We're not going to have the sheriff or Chief Mack over here going door to door arresting people or writing tickets because they didn't evacuate. We don't have the time; we don't have the desire to do that. But the mandatory mantra has a gravitas that carries more weight to it. And so we think people have responded to that. With that mandatory authority comes responsibility.

Before we gave again, lip service to trying to move special needs. And we define special needs at the county as anybody who can't leave on their own will. If they need any type of assistance, whether it be economic, the medical or whatever other reason, they're special needs. And so now we come in to have a whole other host of issues trying to do and move special needs. We've learned; and at the county level we learned from the City of Galveston. We're **not going to reinvent the wheel**. We don't have near the; Galveston by far has the largest special needs population, probably more so than all the rest of the county combined. We estimate probably double of the rest of the county.

And we've made plans with our emergency management coordinator, John Simpson. We will coordinate our activity at the Doyle Center in the middle of the county. We will pick up at various locations across the mainland and Bolivar Peninsula part of the county, move them to the Doyle Center. We will triage them there trying to get compatible populations and deal with the various issues that we've learned from the City of Galveston right there at the Doyle Center and headquarter out of there. We've got buses coming from the State of Texas. Our backup plan; we have private sector contracts. Our backup plan; we've got contracts with Clear Creek Independent School District. Great resource not only to move people but to move public assets out of harm's way. We will continue to work that plan.

Our problem as Stan and Jim talked about earlier, identification. The 2-1-1 system the State's put in place is a step in the right direction. Little activity; not many people are calling. We're using our senior citizens. We're using people like Ivan Arseno. We're using people across the county trying to continuously update our database to make sure we know where the people are. We will automatically go into our first call. Automated phone calling to every resident in the county, giving them phone numbers and instructions on how to and where to call. We can customize those messages for Santa Fe and Hitchcock and Friendswood and Bolivar.

We're working with the State. Jack Colley and they have finally stepped up to the table. **We'll have a contra flow as part of the evacuation equation on the highway system. From the beginning of the operation;** not in the middle of the operation. **The toll way systems; once the evacuation calls become free highways.** The State's committed to have **trucks with fuel bladders that will help give you a couple gallons of gas to get you to the next exit.** The State's working with the major oil companies; not the little mom and pops, because there's too many of them. But the Valeros, the Exxons, the Gulf Chevrons. All the big boys. To make sure that they are opened and available to service the needs of the evacuating population and then provide their employees security during the event. Those steps have been taken. We'll see how they work. Those are lessons learned from our last cycle.

We're beginning to put CERT teams together. Volunteers much like they have in Galveston. CERT teams across this county to help us serve at each gathering post of people to help them evacuate. To begin to register, take the information.

We, too, have an agreement with the City of Austin. You know, the true heroes in the last cycle were those bus drivers. We put those bus drivers out there and said,

go to Hodsoll. We hope there's a place for you when you get there. Look for the signs. We gave them no security. We gave them a mix of population that maybe sometimes weren't compatible. You know. They did a great job of putting that together. Now that we've; can sit back and learn from it we can triage and we can move things more orderly. So we have contract with the city of Austin for evacuation. You know, like I tell people, you know, you had to make College Station and evacuation site to get people to go there. You know? And did you see how fast they left when you gave them the opportunity. You know? Sorry about that. You know, my Aggie brethren have been giving me a lot of trouble since Thanksgiving, you know? We have made strides.

A good part of this job is managing expectations. You know, I go to; I go; and I know some of you get tired me hearing me talk because you see me at Rotaries and all these Chamber functions. But I go to these Rotaries and Chamber functions and I get tired of hearing you talk, too, so don't say anything. We go to these functions. And it's amazing when you have the little question session, there are, there are people who seriously have expectations that they're going to evacuate during a hurricane going 50 miles; 55 miles an hour through Houston. Now you can't get through Houston at 55 miles an hour at 1:00 o'clock on today. Much less when you're putting all these folks on the highway. So you got to understand; you got to make sure you, you go into this with the expectations that it's not going to be a pleasure trip. It's going to take time and it's going to take patience and you're going to have supplies and all the things you got to do in your own personal plan.

And so, the biggest lesson we've learned is just reiterated some of the things we already new. And that's make our personal plans; let's be ready. When the hurricane came last we had a meeting at City Hall. There wasn't panic in the air. There wasn't panic in the air when we had our decision making meeting in League City to call for the evacuation. Those are things we had talked about. We had planned. We had protocols in place and our elected leadership did a good job.

But again, the folks that are there when the rubber hits the road are people like John Simpson and Charlie and Terry Bird and Bruce Claussen and all our coordinators across; we've got a group of professional folks and the politicians understand to turn it over to the folks who know what they're doing; who are professional in what they're doing. And take a back seat sometime, we'll be better served. And that's the case we found ourselves in Galveston County. The other thing that we've; and one final comment.

One of the other things that we've learned and we think we will successfully implement is again, out of the Governor's task force came the **recommendation that we needed a coordinating; they wanted a coordinating person.** We've got kind of a coordinating entity. Councilman Weber's on that committee. Terry Bird sitting over here represents Galveston County at that conversation to make sure that the communication lines are open **between the 13 counties and the two major cities in this region; the City of Houston and the City of Galveston** are at the table making sure that we have direct communication links where one of us don't make a decision that is contrary to somebody else with at least not knowing about it. And so we think progress is made. We hope we don't have roll back

into action for many years to come. But when we do have to roll into action I can assure you that your communities are well prepared and we'll handle it just equally as good or better than we did last time.

Thank you.

The Honorable James D. Yarbrough
County Judge
County of Galveston
Galveston Model of Readiness to Recover
James.yarbrough@co.galveston.tx.us