

**STATEMENT OF RICHARD L. HODGES
MAYOR, CITY OF MILLINGTON, TENNESSEE
BEFORE THE SENATE APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE
ON ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT
ON THE TENNESSEE FLOODING MAY 1 – 2, 2010**

July 22, 2010

Chairman Dorgan, Ranking Member Bennett, Senator Alexander and distinguished members of the subcommittee on Energy and Water Development, thank you for the opportunity to be with you today. My name is Richard Hodges, Mayor of the great City of Millington, Tennessee. With me is Gary Graves, Fire Chief of the City of Millington. We are honored to be before you today to discuss the devastating flooding to our city on May 1 – 2, 2010 and how local, state and federal agencies along with the Millington community responded to this disaster.

My statement today will be summarized to four key points.

1. preparations made by local, state and federal agencies in the days before May 1st
2. the local response and role of outside agencies
3. recovery efforts by our citizens and government agencies
4. conclusion

The flooding that struck our area in the early morning hours of Saturday, May 1, 2010 was unlike any seen in my lifetime. I have been a life-long resident of Millington and remember well the Christmas day flood of 1987. Following the 1987 flood, the Corps of Engineers constructed a series of levees and various flood control measures to mitigate flooding in our City. Since that time we have experienced numerous torrential rains. The flood control measures in place performed as designed. This event was much greater in scope, occurred quicker than we could have imagined, and the damage more widespread than what we had ever seen before. An estimated 14 inches of rain fell in Millington on May 1st and 2nd topping the levees and causing flash flooding throughout the City of Millington including Naval Support Activity Mid-South.

PREPARATIONS

Our area is prone to various severe weather events that have an impact on our community. As part of our emergency preparedness we receive high-impact weather alerts from the Memphis office of the National Weather Service. On Thursday, April 29th we participated in a high-impact weather conference call facilitated by the National Weather Service. They gave predictions of rainfall in excess of ten inches in some areas with the possibility of widespread tornados. Following this conference call, we received an e-mail from the Memphis-Shelby County Office of Preparedness alerting all public safety agencies in the area of the potential weather event in the next 24 – 36 hours. On Thursday, we issued an e-mail alert to all department directors to begin preparations and ensure essential personnel were on alert throughout the weekend. On Friday, April 30th the Memphis office of the National Weather

Service held a second conference call. They reiterated that all computer models continued to indicate heavy rain and severe weather beginning overnight and moving eastward throughout the day on Saturday.

RESPONSE

At approximately 5:00 AM the morning of May 1st, the Millington Fire Department began to receive 9-1-1 calls to rescue persons trapped in their homes and cars. We saw early on the magnitude of this event. We were proactive by declaring a state of emergency in the City and notified our emergency management partners. As the need for rescues increased, our fire department's assets were quickly overwhelmed. The cooperation we received from our counterparts within Shelby County, the support from neighboring municipalities and NSA Mid-South was outstanding. Together, we coordinated and conducted over 1,500 rescue efforts on May 1st. These included rescue evacuations from a federal prison, Naval Support Activity Mid-South, and hundreds of homes. Our rescue efforts continued through late Sunday, May 2nd and were interrupted several times by severe weather.

The cooperation among government agencies extended beyond the local jurisdictions to our emergency management partners, both local and state. We were in constant contact with the Memphis – Shelby County Office of Emergency Preparedness and the West Region of the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency. TEMA Director, James Bassham and their West Tennessee office were particularly helpful in ensuring we had the necessary resources on the ground to respond. The local television stations provided nearly non-stop coverage of the weather affecting the area and allowed us several on-air interviews providing up-to-date information for our citizenry. In addition to the tremendous inter-governmental cooperation I must acknowledge the outpouring of support from the Millington community. Local businesses and private citizens stepped forward offering boats, food and other assistance to aid in our efforts.

RECOVERY

As we entered into the forty-eighth hour of this event, we felt confident that all persons affected had been rescued and moved to temporary locations. We began concentrating on recovery efforts. Typically, the recovery effort moves to a more localized response with support of the local, state, and federal agencies. The recovery effort is a lengthy process which can cause additional strain on those affected. It was clear that our citizens and our City would need federal assistance to recover from this catastrophic event. People have come to expect federal assistance in times of disaster. Yet the process to obtain a declaration can be a daunting, time-consuming task. I applaud FEMA Administrator, Craig Fugate and FEMA Region IV for introducing the concept of early declaration. This made resources needed to begin recovery efforts quickly available to those most in need in our community. To receive a declaration for Category A & B for the local government and Individual Assistance for our citizens would typically take two weeks, but ours came within a matter of days. We felt the strong support of the federal government in our community with visits from FEMA Administrator Craig Fugate, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Shaun Donavant and Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke. I especially want to thank Senators Alexander, Corker and

Congressman Cohen for their visits and genuine concern on the recovery efforts and needs of the Millington citizens.

While we are enormously grateful for all of the federal support, I am most proud of how the Millington community pulled together. Clearly, the federal support is vital, but the real recovery begins at home. City employees worked around the clock in response to this disaster. The quick and decisive action of Chief Graves saved lives. The Millington Fire Department conducted over 1500 rescue missions with no loss of life or injury. The Millington Police were outstanding in securing the neighborhoods and keeping order. Millington Public Works brought hope back to our neighborhoods as they cleared personal belongings acquired over lifetime that were heaped in piles of debris lining the streets. I have yet to hear a single complaint from the employees of the City of Millington. The only thing I hear is, "What can I do to help?" Everywhere you look in Millington you see people helping people. The faith based communities stepped forward to provide emergency food, shelter and flood buckets filled with cleaning supplies for those in need. The civic organizations provided tremendous amounts of food, water and other resources. NSA Mid-South, in the midst of their own devastation of massive flooding with over 300 dislocated military families, stepped forward under the leadership of Capt. Douglas McGowen, to provide shelter for the dislocated civilians of Millington. Capt. McGowen said, "With the great need to shelter those displaced by the flooding and the large building we had available, it became a priority for us to ensure these Millington residents had a roof over their heads." Local businesses provided much needed food and supplies with an attitude of pay me later and never taking advantage of the situation. Private citizens organized benefits and flood recovery initiatives to help those affected. Like, Mr. Larry Silvey, a 70 year old Millington resident. A retired Navy Master Chief, contractor and entrepreneur, Silvey set up a tent at the corner of Arapaho and Bill Knight in one of the hardest hit areas in Millington. This tent became his headquarters of operations 6 days a week with only Sundays off. From this tent, he organized teams of hundreds of volunteers that have logged over 8,000 hours to date helping their neighbors tear out and rebuild their homes through this disaster. Donating 100% of their time and talent, these volunteers have rebuilt over 200 homes and counting.

CONCLSUION

In conclusion, it is hard to say if this disaster could have been averted. There is probably no way to fully protect your community from acts of God. Yet we are currently looking at the infrastructure in place to identify any areas for improvement. There are always lessons to be learned in every situation. I would encourage the continued appropriations for training first responders. As Administrator Fugate knows, fire personnel in our region were completing a month long series of technical rescue training as part of the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant funds. Coincidentally, the last day of the swift water rescue class was on May 1st. Much of the equipment used in our response came as a result of funding under the UASI program and our homeland security district.

I also would encourage this committee to form a group to examine the waterways in and around our area. The flooding left behind much debris in the open channels. In the coming winter months, we can anticipate more flooding rains. The waterways will once again become

filled with rain and begin pushing large amounts of debris downstream. Next Spring has the potential of another catastrophic event if these issues are not addressed. I would also like to encourage FEMA to continue moving forward for swift presidential declarations. This ensures the rapid help so desperately needed in disaster situations gets into the hands of those in need.

Senators, Millington is a small town in West Tennessee with a population of barely 10,000 people. When you think of small - town USA, you are thinking of Millington, Tennessee. It is a wonderful place to live and visit with friends and family, but we don't normally draw national attention. We have been thrust into the spotlight as a result of the largest natural disaster to ever affected Tennessee. The amount of rainfall, albeit historic in proportions, was predicted. We prepared the best we could. We responded in a swift and systematic manner and we are on the road to recovery. I understand and accept that I am responsible to our citizens. When disaster strikes, we are fortunate to have the support of the government, but recognize that response and recovery begins at home. I hope we have demonstrated in some minute way how inter-governmental relationships work. When local, state and federal agencies work together for the good of the community the citizens are better served.

Senator Alexander, thank you for your support. I appreciate the time and attention from this subcommittee and the opportunity to be here with you today. Chief Graves and I will be happy to answer any of your questions at this time.