State of Louisiana, Hurricanes Katrina & Rita Emergency Operations Center, Baton Rouge, La., Labor Day, Monday Sept. 5, 2005

Photo: George Bush White House Archives.

YOUTUBE VIDEO: https://youtu.be/-GIAPjJsNuA


ANDY KOPPLIN: Good evening. This is Andy Kopplin and welcome to the Monday Labor Day conference calls. This will actually be the very last one of these conference calls.

Tomorrow, we will begin with a new system where we will have the reports called in and up in writing submitted so you can log in to www.leader.com/lagov. So again, that will be www.leader.com/lagov.

And, Rochelle Michaud Dugas will send that to you by email, and you’ll be able to go to that website and click on the report that you want to hear. And so, our report can then be called in as updates are available and you all can listen at your convenience and we can deliver the reports at our convenience.

We want to give you a little update on the Governor’s activities today. She went and met President Bush in Baton Rouge Airport about 9:30 and rode with him to the Bethany World Prayer Center where they are running a shelter. She met with some of the families there.

In fact, she has just returned to Bethany Prayer Center tonight because one of the folks she met had missed – had gotten separated from her son. We were able to track down her son in Alexandria and bring that young man to her mother tonight, and the governor was over there reuniting that family. And, we’re hopefully going to be able to do that with a lot more families in the coming weeks. So, that was some good news.

In addition, the Governor and the President met with the two generals, General Honore of the federal side, General Landrenau of the state side. Secretary Chertoff and the Louisiana Congressional Delegation this morning got a security briefing or a situation report on the entire state of affairs.

There’s been some discussion about the organization between the state and the federal government. And, the President said that General Honore is his general, and that if General Honore is satisfied with the arrangements, then the President is satisfied. And, if the Governor is satisfied with the arrangements, and her general, General Landrenau, is satisfied with the arrangements - and she’s told the President that she is, then he considers the issue of that settled.

And so, I think that’s a very important thing, because that’s been a distraction in the last couple days that wasn’t helpful to the main mission of getting the relief that’s so desperately needed and so urgently needed to all of the folks in the affected areas.

We also had the first day of the Jefferson re-entry, and unless somebody else has a report with specific knowledge on that, I have heard that the traffic was much less than they expected,
at least within Jefferson. I don’t know how it was going through [garbled] and some of the other parishes, but within Jefferson, it was lighter than I think a lot of people had expected.

I spoke with the Mayor of Gretna tonight who said that there were a number of people there. He saw people come in and actually leave, which is what he was hoping for, and it seems to have been successful. The first gentleman and the Commissioner of the Public Service Commission [garbled] were down there and they reported the same, that the traffic wasn’t as bad as had been anticipated.

Again, let me give you the address for tomorrow’s conference call, which will be whenever you want to log on to www.leader.com/lagov.

Now I’d like to ask Colonel Jeff Smith to give an update [garbled] National Guard.

SMITH: Thank you, Andy. Force flow continues to build up at Belle Chasse where a reception, staging and onward integration is occurring. There are 19,000 National Guard troops in the State of Louisiana now and just about as fast as they flow in, they’re being flowed to parishes. And, these parishes are conducting search-and-rescue operations, security missions, as well as distribution of commodities.

There is a significant National Guard presence in 11 parishes and also including the city of Baton Rouge and the city of Lafayette, so the soldiers are on the street at this time in force. And, we’re happy to report to you that the French Quarter is secure, and, we understand that a couple of bars have already opened. Thank you, Andy.

KOPPLIN: Let me ask Colonel Doran who’s been in Plaquemines Parish to give an update on Plaquemines Parish, because he had some good news from down there.

DORAN: We just took a helicopter in Plaquemines Parish with Senator Landrieu, Congressman Melancon, Representative Wooten, and Plaquemines Parish is on the ball down there. They’re getting things moving. They got their FEMA rep. They have New Mexico Guard who are assisting us, helping them out with their security issues, and things are moving well down there. Parish President Rousselle is in charge, working well with the sheriff and the folks down there to get things done. They’re putting stuff on the side of the highway, and they’ve got FEMA ready to come pick it up. They’re clearing the roads and moving on. They’re getting the medical supplies. We brought some medical supplies down to them.

We also stopped in Saint Bernard today and again dropped off some medical supplies, as we were there. Their FEMA rep also showed up. Also, when he showed up, he also showed up
with a big communications van, so we’re going to have good communications in Saint Bernard by tonight. Folks down there are tired, but they’re doing well and we’re continuing to support them. We’ve just got to find a way to get in to them over the roads and get stuff to them, and they’re ready to rebuild. That’s all I have, Andy.

KOPPLIN: Thank you, Colonel, we’ve just gotten the Colonel of the State Police, Colonel Whitehorn, to join us and, Colonel, are you ready to go, or do you want a few minutes, and we’ll let somebody else go first?

WHITEHORN: Let somebody else go first.

KOPPLIN: All right, let me turn to Secretary Bradberry. Jimmy, you can move that mike down to Secretary Bradberry. We’ve got some extraordinary news coming from the ZOCD report tonight.

BRADBERRY: Early this afternoon at the 17th Street canal, we actually started moving water from the residential areas in New Orleans from a temporary pump into Lake Pontchartrain, so we made considerable progress today turning that pump on. We are about 75 feet from the end of the breach with our road. So where we are right now is putting road over sandbags, which is another considerable feat.

We’ve also started one of the pumps in pump station number six. As you know, pump station number six is the largest pump station we have in the city, and, in fact, it’s probably the largest pump station of its kind in the world. Nonetheless, we’ve got that - one of the pumps running, and the only thing we’re waiting on there is - we’ve got a concern about pumping too fast in that canal. We want to assure that we don’t have scour and another breach on the west side of that canal. So, we’re taking it a little slow with that particular pump station, but certainly by tomorrow afternoon, we should have a good portion of that station on.

With respect to the London Avenue breaches, we have two breaches there. We’ve been dumping sand in the southmost breach most of the day with helicopters. As you know, it’s very difficult to get into the London breach – the London Avenue breaches because we’ve got water on both sides. You really can’t get equipment in there like you need to. We found a way to get in there now. Some of the areas are drying out, and we’ve got cranes and barges on their way to start fixing both of those breaches.

As relates to bridges, five of the seven bridges over the Industrial Canal are operable and can accommodate marine traffic needed to move equipment for recovery efforts. The Seabrook
Bridge will be raised tomorrow to the open position. The two bridges we’re really having
difficulty with are the Almonaster Bridge and the Florida Bridge. They remain in a down
position. Both of these are railroad bridges, and the issue around those bridges still being in a
down position has to do with sunken barges. So, we’re trying to – and we have mobilized crane
barges to get those sunken barges out of the way so we can raise those bridges.

Work on the Algiers Point Ferry and Landing is going to be completed this evening and
operational by Tuesday morning. That ferry will move equipment, material and supplies between
the east and the west banks of the Mississippi River to continue to facilitate recovery efforts.

Today, DOTD met with Federal Highway Administration officials to discuss emergency
federal funding procedures. We have turned in or are turning in our first set of numbers with
respect to what it’s going to cost us to get our infrastructure back in shape. And, in first pass, just
to get our highways in shape, we’re talking anywhere from a billion and a half to two billion
dollars. But, nonetheless, we are trying to accelerate that process and get some money in the
bank as soon as possible so we can move forward.

The status of the road openings and closures has not changed in the last 24 hours with the
exception of Highway 61 and Highway 90 going into Jefferson Parish as Andy mentioned
earlier. That’s it, Andy.

KOPPLIN: Thank you, Secretary Bradberry. Colonel Whitehorn?

WHITEHORN: [garbled] Thank you, Andy. Well, good evening. I just returned from
New Orleans, and from what I saw personally just riding around the city and visiting with the
many, many, many police officers and National Guard troops and army troops, and such as that,
that it appears to me that order has been restored into the streets of the downtown metropolitan
area of New Orleans.

In addition to that, we are now seeing people that were at one time afraid to come out of
their homes are now coming out when they see the police patrols. And, I saw many residents of
New Orleans just wandering the streets but didn’t encounter any violence. There was no reports
of any violence. I was talking to the officers there about arresting looters, and there’s really no
one there to arrest at this point, so no shots were fired and didn’t hear any sirens going other than
the blue lights we were using to maneuver through the traffic. Our rescue and evacuation
missions are continuing throughout the metro area, and our patrols are continuing.
As you know, today we started the re-entry into Jefferson Parish. At one point, the traffic was pretty heavy. We had some backups reported up to eight miles, particularly on U.S. Highway 61. I think the re-entry went as well as could be expected, and right now some of the traffic is beginning to move out. I saw a lot of pickup trucks loaded with furniture and other items coming out of that area. The traffic is quite heavy right now leaving, but there are no wrecks that we’re working, and there is little traffic headed into New Orleans at this time.

There was a report today that I saw, and I think it was actually reported Friday in the Times-Picayune that stated that state troopers – Louisiana State troopers – were resigning their commissions in lieu of working in New Orleans, and I don’t know why these reporters will report some of these lies and the fact is I’ve got retired troopers coming back to work. I thought one of my troopers that was so ill I threatened to send him home, and he told me “Colonel, you couldn’t make me leave”, and that’s the type of nonsense that’s out there in the media.

We have a total of 843 police officers from around the country as part of the EMAC agreement, 843, in addition to the 800 plus that we’ve sent in, and other - we have some volunteer agencies that have just showed up. I couldn’t tell you the number of police officers down there, but they’re running over one another, so we’re going to have to try to get a handle on that now, and start stomping the tide of all the law enforcement coming in because we’re going to need them for the long haul. We figure this is about a six-month process, so we’re going to have to try to figure out how we stagger these officers coming in, but right now, ones that I have commissioned are 843. And, that’s the end of my report.

KOPPLIN: Thank you, Colonel. I’d like to turn to Jimmy Guidry. You have an update on the medical stuff, Dr. Guidry? Move that, please, move that mike closer.

GUIDRY: Okay, this day turning out not to be near as many people that are being rescued that require medical assistance at this point in time, so we feel like we’re stabilizing. We have numerous medical professionals from other countries - er, other states and other places volunteer to come in here and actually put a database together, so that when we do need them, we will be able to call them back and say now’s the time to come in here. But, right now, we feel like we’re able to handle any of this.

We do have several hospitals in the affected area that are now back up and running, and their request for medical professionals to help those hospitals are being met, so we’re trying to make sure the resources that are available match the resources that are needed and we feel
optimistic that we’ll be able to take care of the patients here in Louisiana without having to send
them outside of the state. We feel like we’ve really made great effort at this point and are able to
take care of those that are here. End of report.

KOPPLIN: Dr. Guidry, I’m going to give an update of something I heard in the report
with Secretary Chertoff and others this morning and you might want to supplement it. But, as I
appreciate it, there are some joint state and federal local teams doing some health assessments
based on the standing water in New Orleans; in particular, with regard to mosquito-borne
illnesses and looking at trying to identify whether there are mosquito abatement programs that
need to be initiated that are more substantial than the usual aggressive Louisiana mosquito
abatement programs which we have a lot of, and which they have in the Greater New Orleans
area. There was some discussion about that as well as other sampling of potential pathogens. It
remains a very significant concern of everybody, which is also going to be something that we
need to consider as the Mayor and folks are talking about similar re-entry into the area in New
Orleans over the coming days.

GUIDRY: That’s correct. Essentially, these controls send a number of experts to help us
evaluate the need for mosquito control and also whether water – how to make sure that the water
is where you can drink it again, and to make sure that in some of the outbreaks of dysentery in
our shelters that we’re making sure that we keep those under control. And, we feel like we have a
lot of federal experts helping to make sure that people aren’t put at risk of infection as a result of
this situation in New Orleans and affected areas.

KOPPLIN: Thank you. Let me ask the Public Service Commission for a report tonight.
We’ve got a representative of the Public Service Commission to make that report on progress
with our utilities. Please speak loudly.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION: Electric Service outages reported by the electric
utilities as of 1700 hours today: CLECO 72,200; DEMCO 8,264; Entergy Gulf States 420;
Entergy Louisiana 261,812; Entergy New Orleans 200,749; SLECA 362; Washington-St.
Tammany 44,799. There are 588,606 customers that remain out of service. We’ve had 310,687
customers that have been restored since August the 30th. The telephone service outages are at 89
– excuse me, at around 95,095 and the gas outages are at 3,000.

KOPPLIN: Thank you very much. From Natural Resources, a DNR report.
NATURAL RESOURCES: Thank you, Andy. A couple of major issues. The electrical power at key energy locations in the affected area continues to improve, and the assessment of pipeline infrastructure by industry continues as the manpower and the guards become available.

Regarding federal oil and gas production, 78.93% of the oil remains shut in in the federal waters and 57.8% of the natural gas remains shut in in the federal waters. Regarding state oil and gas production in Louisiana, 50% of the oil production remains shut in. 29% of the natural gas production remains shut in. On pipeline issues for the loop facility, loop facility is 70% capacity and expects to be at 100% capacity in seven days. We’re continuing to work with the Public Service Commission to provide electricity to key areas to improve the capacity.

Regarding a Strategic Petroleum Reserve, President Bush ordered a release of 30 million barrels of oil from the SPR. As far as refineries - of the seven refineries in Southeast Louisiana, five refineries remain shut down, and two refineries are restarting.

A couple of miscellaneous things. We were successful in obtaining National Guard troops to provide security for industry personnel to ramp up their operations, and that security was provided for Chevron at Belle Chasse, Shell at Norco and Convent, and Exxon Mobil at Chalmette. We continue to work with EPA and DEQ for waivers on sulfur limits for gas refining. And, we will issue emergency orders to relax the reporting requirements for moving oil when production resumes, and we will issue any additional emergency orders as needed. Thank you.

KOPPLIN: Thank you. We don’t have DSS here tonight, but we do have Vic Howell from the Red Cross for a shelters report. Vic?

HOWELL: As of this afternoon, the Red Cross was still operating 131 shelters, sheltering just over 51,000 people statewide. We served a little over 200,000 meals today and had about 3,000 Red Cross personnel on the ground. And, just as the American Red Cross has provided generous support to our other countries when there was trouble, today I saw teams from the Red Cross in Canada, Germany, France and Italy show up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to help our cause.

We are beginning to go through a transition strategy now, working with the Governor’s Office to redefine these shelters a little bit. Typically, in a disaster of this type, on a smaller scale or more normal scale, the Red Cross would look at sheltering people for 15 to 30 days. We’re now being told that we should expect to be sheltering people for 60 to 90 days. That transitions us to a different look at our shelters to make them more community centers rather than just
shelters, and we’re working on that strategy with representatives from the Governor’s Office and DSS.

And, finally, we had an offer today from the International Rescue Committee, an organization that works worldwide to come in and help coordinate the activity of other non-governmental organizations. We’re receiving wonderful offers of aid from many, many other non-profit organizations, and trying to coordinate that can be quite a task, and we’re glad to have the assistance of the International Rescue Committee to help look at that issue. Thank you, Andy.

KOPPLIN: Thank you. We now actually do have a representative department secretary [garbled] update from DSS. Secretary Williamson?

WILLIAMSON: Great, thank you.

KOPPLIN: Why don’t I do this – while the secretary is doing an update – I’ve got an economic development update. The Governor, when she met with the President today, while recognizing that we are still very much in the search-and-rescue phase, in the evacuation phase, in the relocation phase, we also need to start thinking about the rebuilding phase for Louisiana.

And, she gave the President a letter in which she suggested that the President and the Governor together appoint a council to provide some leadership in the area of restoring Louisiana’s infrastructure and rebuilding its economy. We want to make sure that we take care of that, address coastal restoration and environmental damage, and restore the cultural fabric of the impacted region and recreate one of the most notable and greatest cities in the world, as well as the surrounding areas, which have great cultural assets as well.

Each of the parishes that was severely impacted has unique characteristics that need to be restored in order for our state to reestablish itself with the kind of energy and vision that we need to succeed and rebuild our way through for the future. We’re going to reestablish Louisiana as a global leader in energy production and shipping, in manufacturing and tourism and technology industries.

And, she laid out some strategies for the President to consider for those areas, and so, that’s something that we hope to begin working on with a broad-based group of stakeholders from around the state, in particular. But also, we’ve got an opportunity to get some of the best ideas from around the country and around the world, and we’re hoping to engage good thinkers to help Louisianans create the kind of vision that we want for turning the devastation that we
face into an opportunity to honor those who have been so impacted by this storm through the loss of loved ones.

And so, that’s one of the challenges we’ll have in the coming months and years, and it’s something that the Governor wants us to start thinking about immediately. I think Secretary Williamson -

WILLIAMSON: Right. The out-of-state total at the start of the day in terms of our displaced citizens is up to 66,213. We have approximately 51,000 displaced citizens in state shelters and 1,600 in special needs shelters. In addition to that, you are likely all familiar that we have now administered the emergency food stamp benefit program since Friday and have over 90,000 applicants certified to receive those emergency food stamp benefits, with the average benefit amount being about $370 per applicant.

What we have recognized is that our citizens have had to wait in extensive lines. Our response time is not as quick as it should be. Therefore, we’ve recognized that the infrastructure of our technology leads me to make the decision that beginning tomorrow, we will only accept applications from 6:00 - beginning at 6:00 a.m. until midnight, and then for the six hours between midnight and 6:00 a.m., the offices will still be open. What we’ll be doing is processing the applications and allowing the data to run through the technology system.

So, I do want you all to know that we will be sending a message to our citizens that, out of respect to their time and our intention to become more efficient, that the public access to the offices will be from 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 midnight, beginning tomorrow. We just want to increase the efficiency and the responsiveness of our process and believe that this will enable us to do so with technology capacity to process that.

KOPPLIN: Okay, thank you. Tonight we also are joined by Senator Ben Nevers. Because communications have been devastated in Washington Parish, we’ve had little to report, but Ben Nevers can give a little bit of a report as to the situation there over the last week and how it’s looking today. Senator?

NEVERS: Thank you, Andy. And, certainly, we take the opportunity to talk to my fellow legislators. Communication has been non-existent in Washington Parish. Last time I really spoke to the legislators was Sunday night prior to the storm and our last conference call. Washington Parish is devastated. It is [garbled] on almost every home. It’s been almost impassable from the
rural areas to get the hospitals to come to the staging areas where some of the supplies have been sent in.

In my opinion, FEMA has failed the rural portions of Louisiana in a manner that’s not acceptable. Day 7, I’m speaking of the day, I have two parish presidents that have yet to meet with a FEMA representative. They have not talked to a FEMA representative in seven days. Totally unacceptable. And, I met with FEMA and they are flying in tomorrow to meet with these gentlemen.

But I’ll say to you that the Governor’s Office – her administration has worked with me hand-in-hand trying to get help to our people. If it was not for the private citizens across this great country and corporate individuals that have stepped up to the plate, there would be hundreds of people dead in Washington Parish, I can tell you right now.

LSU hospital system’s done a tremendous job under very adverse situations. We had to take two local pharmacists, put them in the LSU Hospital and try to open up a pharmacy, with security surrounding the area. They actually filled 800 prescriptions in about eight hours, and I’m talking about medications that people had to have to live. No narcotic drugs prescribed, and it was advertised that they would not be. When I say “advertised”, the only means of communication we have is word of mouth.

I’ve traveled to Baton Rouge almost every night to bring messages here. It just seems unbelievable that in a world that we live in today with so much technology that we can’t communicate. The only communication we have in Washington Parish is a ham radio between here and Bogalusa. But, I simply say that if it was not for the Governor’s Office and her administration working with Washington Parish and northern Tangipahoa, I think there would be hundreds of people dead today that will survive.

Things are getting better. There has been a small amount of electricity restored to the hospital and sewage treatment plant in Bogalusa and some in Tangipahoa Parish. The people are coming into our area. FEMA will be there tomorrow, they’ve assured me of that. The Red Cross is there. There are people from all over the United States has responded to a plea that we made over WWL Radio. There’s a sheriff of Massachusetts which the Governor’s Office sent to us. He had called the Governor’s Office and asked where they might could go to do to help people. He brought 22 deputies with him and a command center - state-of-the-art command center, and what
a sight that was to be rolling into Washington Parish to help those people. The Sheriff’s
Department was in tears.

The National Guard has beefed up its troops. They have about 180 troops in Washington
Parish now and around 200, little better than 200 in Tangipahoa. Security was a problem. I think
we’re overcoming that situation. We did have one convenience store that was looted and burned
to the ground the night we were over here looking for security.

It’s been a very, very tough situation, communication being, I guess, the worst nightmare
than any of us has faced. I cannot talk to my parish president even within the parish. And, just
unbelievable, satellite phones don’t work, I mean, it’s just unbelievable trying to communicate.
But, I say to all of you, we can be proud of our Governor and our staff, because they come
through for the rural areas of Louisiana, and I hope we never forget it. Thank you, Andy.

KOPPLIN: Thank you, Senator. And, we know you’ve gone through - everybody in the
area has gone through a tough time. We appreciate your sharing your experience with it.

NEVERS: One other thing, Andy, I need to bring to all of your attention. We have many
people in Louisiana that have food stamp cards. Right now, where you have no power or no
phone lines or where you have power and no phone lines, no one will take those cards. So, we
have people out there with no cash, no way to get food, and we have to find a way to address this
situation. These people in the poor communities that actually have no other means of income
other than taking a food stamp card, and going to the grocery store and getting food for their
family. That’s non-existent in northern Tangipahoa and Washington and maybe parts of Saint
Helena and maybe some in northern Saint Tammany. While we are having power restored, the
phone systems will follow maybe a week or two or three behind that, so we’re still going to have
that problem.

So, I’m asking Secretary Williamson that maybe she could find some way to deal with
this situation quickly. So, if we can get a handle on that, I think we can begin to at least restore
some confidence in the system and allow these people to get to some facilities that they can get
proper nutrition and proper health care provided to them. Thank you.

KOPPLIN: Thank you, Senator. Secretary Williamson, do you have any comments on
that?

WILLIAMSON: Sure, to everyone, and especially to Senator Nevers, thank you so much.
What my intent is is to immediately reach out to the food and nutrition services of the USDA,
who are clearly equipped with The Commodities Program, a national commodities program.

That means what we can do, short of the technology challenges, is get trucks of food and drink to the citizenry and avail our offices to be a distribution point. We can go to shelters and ensure that those citizens - well, the shelters, of course, are being [garbled] - you know, those that are suitable. But, for all of you, if you feel that your community’s citizenry is being shortchanged in terms of getting their food and nutrition needs met, I welcome you to bring that to my attention either via email or my cell phone 931-9394 and let me know about that. How does that sound?

NEVERS: Well, it certainly sounds very good other than the fact that many of these people have no transportation from the small communities into one of the sites that you might man. We have to find a way to get these services out into their communities. They have no gasoline. There’s a ten-gallon ration on gasoline in Washington Parish, and most of the time, there’s a line at least three-quarters to a mile long to get to the gas station. Many people never make it there before the gas station runs out of fuel.

That is another critical need in Washington and northern Tangipahoa is gasoline. The facts are ten gallons is not much fuel, when if you are lucky enough to have a generator at home to try to run it, and if you think about what you’d have left after running that generator, you wouldn’t have enough really to get anywhere, so I would hope we could move those goods out into the rural areas.

WILLIAMSON: Even [garbled] charges?

NEVERS: Whatever it takes, we have to do it. Thank you.

KOPPLIN: Thank you. I also wanted to point out something, Senator Nevers. For those of you who are in Washington Parish and might have wanted that communications truck to process was, we did get the call from the Governor’s Office. I called Colonel Doran who just walked in and said we got a communications truck and 18 sheriffs’ deputies from Massachusetts, and they’re looking to help. Where are they most needed and where have you got requests? And, Colonel Doran said “Well, we need communications in Plaquemins and Saint Bernards, but [garbled] communications [garbled] the truck. That means Washington Parish is the place that needs it. So, since - that’s the way the process works. We do coordinate that, so it’s not a random decision up here by the Governor’s Office. We try to get help to whoever needs it based on the advice that we’re getting from the folks in the field.
NEVERS: Might have said that the sheriff himself came, from Massachusetts. He represents a county that has 1.4 million people in it. He actually came and is staying in Washington Parish for at least a week.

KOPPLIN: The final report I think we got tonight. The Governor asked – the Governor of Virginia, Governor Mark Warner - asked his Chief of Staff, Bill Leighty, to come help us, and Bill volunteered to come down here and help the people of Louisiana and the Governor of Louisiana for the next two weeks. In three days, he’s only had one night’s sleep since he’s been here, and the guy’s done an incredible job. And, last night he was helping try to get replacement firefighters for the fire departments in the affected areas, and I wanted to give Bill an update on the progress of that effort that the Governor asked him to get involved in.

UNKNOWN: Thank you, Andy. Yes, and Governor Blanco was particularly concerned about the firefighter replacement, the amount of hours people had been working down there, and I’m very pleased to report that as of about five o’clock today, we had 87 New Orleans Fire Department and rescue workers and EMS workers over at the Belmont.

And, Colonel, I have to give quite a tip of the hat to Lieutenant Fudge, because although we were able to secure air transport to get them out, and air transport to get 40 replacement workers in, Lieutenant Fudge found a vacant hotel and turned it into a habitable place in a matter of hours today with food, lodging, got the air conditioning turned on, got a crew in there to clean it up, and to top it all off – I don’t know how he pulled this off – he had a crew from here in Baton Rouge there to welcome them when they got off the buses and have a party for them and celebrate. It was quite an event. I went over there myself.

We also facilitated last night, and literally all night long until about 3:30 this morning, 350 firefighters from New York – a fire department in New York - that flew in today into downtown New Orleans. Lieutenant Fudge also handled a lot of the ground arrangements for this. They did fly in, and we also brought out 350 firefighters from downtown. They’re over at LSU at the gym. You need to understand all these firefighters are getting in-depth counseling, debriefings. They’re getting mental health counseling, they’re getting shots, they’re getting medical attention as well. And, all of that was arranged through your Guard, sir, and we do appreciate it. And, I know, I don’t want to undermine any of the work that the other organizations that were touched on in pulling all of this together. The Red Cross arranged for the food, the lodging and the cots and things.
I’m also pleased to report that about two to three hours away, we are also going to be receiving 600 firefighters from Illinois that bring in their own equipment self-contained. They’ve got their own fuel truck. They’ve been moving on their way down, and they’re driving non-stop. We also do - right now, my next task after this meeting is over, I’ve got 50 Saint Bernard Parish firefighters I’ve got to get out here very, very shortly.

KOPPLIN: Thank you. Finally, we’ve got a new gentleman joining us who’s given Plaquemine Parish reports from time to time. We got a little bit of a Plaquemine Parish report from Colonel Doran, who is down there today, but Councilman Cormier, you could give us a wrap-up. Anything from Plaquemine today?

CORMIER: Yeah, I was able to go to Ground Zero today. I’ve seen aerial pictures. We will be opening up Belle Chasse and Jesuit Bend in two or three days for residents to come back. That’s the good news. The bad news is from Diamond on down. It’s total destruction. I’m not talking water damage. I’m talking houses reduced to kindling. So, we will need every ounce of federal and state assistance that we can possibly get. Thank you.

KOPPLIN: Thank you for that report. Some tough news. Well, ladies and gentlemen, again, the conference call – this is the last conference call. Tomorrow, we will have folks – I will be calling different folks to give a phoned-in report at their convenience, which will be accessible online at www.leader.com/lagov. We’re also going to have to come up with a phone number that you can call in if you don’t have computer access, that you can listen to those reports that way, because that way you’ll be able to listen to them at your convenience, and we’ll be able to deliver the information more timely and at more convenient times for all of us.

Again, I thank everybody here. We continue to make progress. Today marks another day of significant progress in what’s going to be a very, very long effort for Louisiana to bring our family back together, to unite them, mourn those - the many who have perished and find them, and give them a respectful recovery process, which is underway, particularly in the most affected areas and in New Orleans. And, with that, I will sign off, and we will hopefully see you all very shortly. Bye-bye.
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