

*Remarks to the
MEMA Annual Conference
June 9, 2003*

■ Recognize Robert Latham

- Thank him for his commitment to Mississippi
- Latham is the type of professional the people of our state want, need and deserve as head of emergency management
- Each of you fit that same description

■ As Robert said in his introduction, the past three years have not been easy ones with regards to emergency management

- Tornadoes / floods / hurricanes have taken a toll on our state and our people

- I know President Bush gets tired of receiving letters from me asking for a federal declaration
 - I'll send him as many letters as it takes to make sure our people and each of you have the resources necessary to recover and rebuild

- Rest assured I will continue to be on site with you as much as possible
 - When homes and lives are destroyed in a matter of minutes because of a natural disaster, people need somewhere to turn
 - Together, we will continue to give them the relief they need

- I have been proud to work with you at disaster sites
 - Proud of your professionalism
 - Proud of your compassion and understanding

- As emergency management professionals, the past three years have been challenging, to say the least
 - Outside of the natural disasters, we've faced the disasters of man
 - 9/11 has changed much of the focus of emergency management
 - We have to plan for the unthinkable and be ready for the unimaginable

- I'm proud of the way you have responded to these new challenges
 - You are well-trained, well-prepared for any scenario
 - Since 9/11, you've done more and learned more than ever before

- We're working hard to make sure you have the resources you need to do your jobs
 - In early March, we called on President Bush and Secretary Ridge to release federal funds for our emergency responders
 - That was done a few days later / \$7.5 million for Mississippi
 - Funds to support training, equipment, risk and needs assessments

- You must have the tools to do your jobs /
protect the people of Mississippi
 - Even if funds not available, we will get
the job done
 - There is no other alternative

- Since 9/11, we have been working to make
sure we were ready for any scenario
 - Summit on Domestic Preparedness
 - Bioterrorism exercises held around the
state
 - Incident Command System established
to ensure all levels of emergency
personnel use common terminology,
unified command, integrated
communications
 - First Responders Conference in March

- Back in February, signed Executive Order 874 establishing State Interoperability Executive Committee
 - Charged with:
 - Coordinating information between state agencies
 - Providing recommendations for immediate and long-term improvement of public safety wireless communications

- Cannot afford to relive problems of 9/11 where fire and police personnel in New York were unable to communicate effectively, with tragic consequences

- This work will be stepped up to ensure we are completely ready

- Want to assure everyone here today that we are going to continue to work together
 - Municipal and county governments will be involved in decision-making and planning
 - Guidelines and support will be available from state agencies

- No emergency responder in Mississippi will be alone in reacting to a situation
 - We are all in this together / that will not change

- Thank you for your courage and
commitment to your jobs and those you
serve
 - This is going to be a difficult time for all
Mississippians
 - I have confidence in your abilities and
skills