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STATE OF MISSISSIPPI, MISSISSIPPI DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

THE UNITED STATES SENATE, COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

**OVERSIGHT HEARING, “ARE WE READY FOR NEXT HURRICANE SEASON? STATUS OF
PREPARATION AND RESPONSE CAPABILITIES FOR 2018.”**

APRIL 12, 2018

Good morning. Thank you Chairman Thune, Senator Wicker and members of the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee for hosting today’s hearing and asking an important question. **Are we ready for the next hurricane season?**

Mississippi’s People and Lessons Learned

It is my honor to come before you and offer Mississippi’s perspective on hurricanes, hurricane preparedness and our ability to respond and mitigate the impacts of the next major storm.

Mississippi is a state where we value simple and practical solutions to problems. We value personal responsibility and taking care of our neighbors. As the most charitable state in nation per capita, we value giving. Hurricanes have taught Mississippi some challenging lessons. They remind us how vulnerable we are to their power. But I’m here to share with this committee the lessons taught have not gone unlearned.

Mississippi has been the beneficiary of the American people’s incredible generosity when storms such as Hurricane Camille, Frederick, Elaina, Georges and Katrina made landfall in Mississippi. Mississippi was given a great responsibility to put those dollars to use to devise creative programs and policies to protect our citizens and mitigate future damages.

Mississippi’s Investment in Mitigation

When Mississippi’s coastal communities were built, it was without regard for significant hurricane impact. That all changed after Katrina. With the daunting task of rebuilding roads, infrastructure, housing and the economy from a mountain of debris, Mississippi put the necessary safeguards in place to avoid the total devastation from future storms. Those safeguards required dramatic changes to building codes and elevation requirements.

Housing programs implemented post-Katrina included the Homeowner Assistance Program, or HAP. HAP required grant recipients to elevate their homes and maintain flood insurance. The Homeowners Elevation Program provided grants to residents who did not lose their homes, to elevate the structures to FEMA base flood map elevations. And finally, Mississippi’s Small Rental Assistance Program was designed to rebuild single family rentals and duplexes with the new property covenants.

Infrastructure initiatives included the Gulf Coast Infrastructure Program, which focuses on building a utility infrastructure backbone mitigated against future storm damage.

The Port of Gulfport Restoration Program created a more resilient facility to withstand future hurricane damage. Efforts included elevating the port and creating an evacuation plan to ensure containers, equipment and cargo did not wash inland. New buildings were also required to be built to the FEMA Flood Velocity Zone standards, so critical structural components could withstand storm surge.

Mississippi believes in hazard mitigation. Coupled with the housing and infrastructure programs mentioned, Mississippi has invested more than \$350 million in hazard mitigation directly. We invested \$230 million in public and private safe-rooms, \$85 million in wind retrofits for homeowners, \$21 million in flood control and \$16 million to acquire properties in the floodplain.

Hurricane Nate in 2017

The payoff for Mississippi's investments in preparedness and mitigation was never more evident than October 8, 2017, when Hurricane Nate made landfall along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Nate brought sustained winds of 85 mph and a significant storm surge of 12-feet. This storm, by all accounts, should have caused an estimated \$100 million in damages. However, Mississippi incurred no deaths or injuries and not one single home or business sustained major damage. Once the water subsided and debris was cleared, Mississippians went back to business as usual in a minimal amount of time. Governor Phil Bryant said it best when he correctly stated, "Mississippi did not dodge a bullet, we took a direct hit."

Mississippi is Ready in 2018

As the waters of the Gulf of Mexico begin to warm, Mississippians know —now is the time to put together their individual preparedness and recovery plans. We have strong leadership from a dedicated Governor, statewide Emergency Management Agency and seasoned local emergency managers and communities that remain vigilant.

Although we will never be able to completely prevent the damages caused by violent storms, Mississippi is better prepared today to withstand the effects of tropical weather thanks to our responsible use of mitigation and preparedness resources. Our structures are higher and stronger, and Mississippians are much smarter.