



NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families

Responding to Hurricane Katrina: Keys to Recovery and Disaster Prevention
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Moderator: **Clifford Johnson**, Executive Director
Institute for Youth, Education, and Families
National League of Cities (NLC)

Speakers:

Mayor Melvin “Kip” Holden, City of Baton Rouge, Louisiana
George Haddow, adjunct professor at the George Washington University Institute for Crisis, Disaster, and Risk Management and principal in Bullock & Haddow in Washington, D.C.

JOHNSON: Thank you, and welcome, everyone, to the latest in our series of monthly audioconferences on topics related to children, youth, and families. I’m Cliff Johnson. I’m the Executive Director of the Institute for Youth, Education, and Families at the National League of Cities. As many of you probably know, we’ve been for several years now hosting a monthly audioconference series on various topics. We’re very excited this afternoon and this morning, for some of you, to be able to have an audioconference session focused specifically on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the responses to the challenges that the hurricane has left us with across the country.

We’re very fortunate today to have with us Mayor Kip Holden from the City of Baton Rouge. Mayor Holden has a 20-year career in public service. He was just elected and took office in January, 2005 -- January of this year. So he certainly had quite a first year in office already. His professional experience includes service in the Louisiana State Senate and the Louisiana House of Representatives; a member of the Metro Council, the city council in Baton Rouge. He also has been an associate at a law firm and an adjunct professor of law at Southern University School of Law in Baton Rouge. Welcome, Mayor Holden.

HOLDEN: Thank you.

JOHNSON: Thanks so much for being with us. Our second panelist is George Haddow. George is also an adjunct professor at George Washington University here in Washington, D.C., focused on crisis management and disaster preparedness. George served as Deputy Chief of Staff under the former Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) during the 1990s, and so brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to this conversation as well. Thank you, George, for joining us.

HADDOW: Thank you.

JOHNSON: George is with us from New Orleans, and Mayor Holden of course is with us from Baton Rouge. So we are well represented in the region at the moment. Mayor Holden, let me start by asking you just to paint a picture for us of what life is like in Baton Rouge these days. We read a lot in the national media about the enormous influx of people you've had to the city and the way in which it's changed life for everyone in Baton Rouge. Can you give us a sense of what it's like these days?

HOLDEN: Well, you start off first in the morning with a tremendous traffic problem. Within two weeks of Hurricane Katrina, we exceeded our 25-year traffic projection. That has resulted in quite a bit of traffic that we are trying to deal with at this moment. But we are, on that side, trying to approach from two levels -- both the local level by passing a half-billion dollar bond issue, which we were successful, and then at the same time with the federal government.

But other than that, you're watching a number of things, especially when it comes down to children. We have seen roughly about 7,000 additional children in the public school systems in our parish. That does not include what is going on in the private schools. In the private schools, they have had to go to shifts, with some people starting class at 3:00 in the afternoon. And with our local school system, the public school system, they have had to open two new schools based on some schools that were already closed. They reopened those schools. And now those schools are up and running as well.

As far as what's happening, many of the people have been moved out of the shelters, and they are now at FEMA sites. And those sites now are managing pretty much to carry out the services that were carried on in the shelter itself. When the people were in the shelter, for example -- I want to go back to education -- Red Cross partnered with a local charter school and that local charter school provided some educational training for some of the young people who were there.

JOHNSON: And the scale of this, Mayor -- I mean, I know it's been very large. How many families? How many children do you think you've had come to -- you said 7,000 have turned up in the schools. You've had hundreds of thousands arrive in some sense, right?

HOLDEN: That's correct. We still are looking at roughly about 100,000-plus people who have moved into Baton Rouge. Now the 7,000 figure that you mentioned does not include the number of students who have enrolled in private schools. So that number is quite large as well.

But what you see is we know that 100,000 is kind of remaining constant. We do traffic counts and quantitative analysis of different things to try to see where we are population-wise. We're finding that many of the families may not be going back to New Orleans, or they may be here for as long as two years, and maybe even longer. And that's primarily because a number of the relatives arrived from those areas that are devastated to the extent that they will not be able to go back home. And some people now are saying that many of those areas may not even be rebuilt.

JOHNSON: Yes, we've been hearing that in the national media, too. It's quite daunting. How have the needs of the children and the families with children that have come to Baton Rouge looked different? What additional needs have you seen in that part of the population, in terms of evacuees coming into the city?

HOLDEN: Well, one of the things I believe that is very critical is you have to use a holistic approach. You cannot only talk about education, but you have to talk about health care. I think if there's one thing that we've seen, it is that there is an issue with health care. For example, one child went to school, and that child has tested positive for HIV-AIDS. But there were no records to indicate to the school itself that that child had been infected.

Now what we're watching through the whole session here is that normally in our schools, we have part-time nurses who may have three or four schools. But a lot of people now are finding themselves whereby they really need to be full-time because of the population swell. And so what we have also seen has been the fact that -- you know, it's sort of difficult for school nurses to really keep track of what's going on because the records are not following the child to the school. And obviously, the records in Orleans Parish, a lot of those records have been destroyed or there is no way to transmit those records to the school systems here. So I'm sure in the educational standpoint, they're virtually having to make internal assessments as to where that child is in terms of educational level. And then they're having to add families' questions in regards to the health care side.

JOHNSON: Yes, and then of course, I assume a number of families have young children as well, children who aren't school age and must raise, particularly in periods of time where those families have been in shelters -- a lot of challenges around the care and supervision of those young children.

HOLDEN: We have been working with the Department of Health and Human Services, and Secretary Leavitt has been very generous in looking at the needs created by Katrina. For example, we had 300 people already on a waiting list for Head Start. They were generous enough not only to look at those 300, but grant another 200 to 300 additional slots. They are also looking at paying for the personnel and also the physical structures that are needed to accommodate the children.

What we have had to do also is now, because the Head Start program is really operated by our city. And so what we have had to do as well is work with various agencies because one of the things we've found has been a shortage of bus drivers. And we've been working to get more bus drivers to ensure that children are properly enrolled in Head Start as well.

JOHNSON: George, let me turn to you. In your FEMA days, you've seen up close a number of natural disasters during that period. And then of course, you've had your own windows on the Katrina world. How does the report that the Mayor is offering about the situation in Baton Rouge fit with what you either are seeing now elsewhere or what you have seen in the past?

HADDOW: Well, it's truly unique, and it's unique in the sense that there have been evacuations in the past. For example, 2.6 million people were evacuated during Hurricane Floyd. But almost to a person they returned to their homes within days, if not hours, of when the evacuation occurred. Here you have people that are going to be at this place for months, if not years, for my family. For instance, my brother and his family have evacuated to Atlanta from New Orleans. That's where my other brother and sister live. And he's enrolled his children in school there. And while they're upset about missing their school here, they're also talking about

staying in school there through the end of June. So there are these mixed messages.

So this is a unique disaster in that the displaced people and the evacuees are not able to return, and it puts pressure both on children and families of the victims. But as the Mayor, I think, has very accurately pointed out, it puts pressure on the host communities that are helping these people in this time of need.

JOHNSON: Yes, it's really an amazingly daunting situation in that regard. And when you think about the vulnerability of kids and families, are there particular experiences that have come out of the past cycle of disasters? Other experiences where things come to the forefront in terms of their special vulnerability?

HADDOW: I think what we've seen in the past that's been exceptionally difficult for families is that, especially in the early days of a disaster, but in this disaster even now, seven weeks after the event -- the grown-ups, the parents are struggling to deal with the issues that they face -- housing, clothes, a job, income, schooling -- all those issues that in a settled time were all taken care of, or at least there was a regular schedule. And I think for the children, it's sometimes difficult to understand, one, why this is happening, and two, why are their parents in such a -- they don't recognize it as stress -- but a stressed-out mode. So I think that makes it difficult.

I think the second thing is because of the overwhelming need for the parents to get some order back into their life, to get an income, and to get things settled, they sometimes forget to talk to their children. And I think the children and their needs sometimes get a little bit lost in the shuffle to just deal with the everyday circumstances. And I think that's something that we used to advise parents to keep in mind as they were going about trying to put their lives back in order to not lose track of where the kids are and what their concerns are and talk some of these issues out.

HOLDEN: I think one of the things -- we're finding some unique situations. For example, we heard about one parent who did not want her child to go to school because she was afraid to let the child go. And I would imagine some of this is like, "I have my child. I watched death and destruction around me. I just don't want my child out of my sight even for a second."

And so we're watching now as we are still registering people and having to make the adjustment by going to the sites where FEMA has trailers. And virtually almost having somebody go door to door or having the school system work in conjunction with those families to say, "We need to register your child. Your child needs to be in school. We will provide the transportation and we will take care of them." It's like the child has become their security blanket.

HADDOW: Right, and in a lot of instances in the past, that's a natural reaction. I think in this instance, that response is even more exaggerated because you're not in familiar surroundings. You're not returned to your home now. You're not returned to your community where you know the people and your child knows the students, and you have other folks as an adult that maybe you can rely on. But yeah, I think this whole situation is very unique.

JOHNSON: And of course, the irony here is that for the children involved, a return to school and to school routines is one of the steps back towards normalcy. So these folks trying to help the parents cope with what they're dealing with and also help the children restore some sense of

structure and order to their world.

Mayor, you've talked a fair amount about the ways in which the school system has tried to respond. Are there other things that the city, other public agencies, or your private relief partners have tried to do to respond specifically to the needs of children and families that have been evacuated? I certainly think, for example, about the mental health needs and the mental health issues that we've just been talking about. Have you had opportunities to try and get a handle on any of that?

HOLDEN: Yes, we have. And for example, we're finding that you're going through a transition with FEMA as well because they are not used to this situation. So they're in the sheltering business. But we're trying to say, well, you have to have some components here that extend to transportation. You have to have a component that deals with job skills. We have to virtually go back in and try to teach people how to live okay. You have to tell people that "You are in good hands, that between us and the site manager, we're going to take care of you. And FEMA obviously will only be providing that assistance for a short period of time."

I think we are trying to make sure, number one, that we are setting up mobile health care units whereby they can go to the site and then actually try to see families and provide health care at that level. At the same time, I think one of the voids being created is -- okay, again you have people who are not familiar with the surroundings. So what happens if there is an emergency coming up during the day or at night? How do they respond? How do they know where to go and those things? And communications and all of this working with your emergency medical services unit, working out with the site manager, working with the families to say that we want you to know that these services are available to you. And at the same time, have some on-site services as well. We're talking about things such as trying to locate computer labs and making those labs available to young people on site as well. So in the afternoon when they come home, they can have the computers. And hopefully we'll move also to get tutors to help them educationally. And at the same time, try to make sure they have the supplies. Because in the early part of this whole storm, many people just left home with what they had on their backs.

So it goes back, Cliff, to what you were talking about, and George, about having to have clothing. And now we're moving to the shelter end, having to provide food, having to provide transportation. So you're finding a mixed reaction from the evacuees. All of a sudden, they feel helpless because here they were, maintaining in a community. They had a job. Their children were there. They knew their neighbors. They knew their friends. And then now they're thrust into an environment where they're having to relearn people skills and at the same time try to learn about the people who are living next to them, who they have never seen before.

HADDOW: You know, Mr. Mayor, it's almost as if they've had a terrible accident and they have to relearn how to walk and talk and eat food again. And it's a very difficult situation to be thrown into. And unfortunately, FEMA is going to provide financial support, both through the state to your city and to the folks that are helping these people., but FEMA, from a program standpoint, is not equipped to deal with this going as far as I think it's going to go in terms of the transportation and the medical and the afterschool things and the computers. They can help finance some of that, but they don't have the skilled persons that they're going to need to help these families if they're going to pay for it, like they pay for stress counseling and things like that.

HOLDEN: And the counseling is very, very important because you think about, again, children who saw this mass destruction. And now a lot of those children are trying to transition back into school. But for a lot of those children, they will need long-term counseling and somebody to really follow up to see whether or not the impacts of this hurricane now equate to a lower performance in school. And so there has to be a tracking mechanism somewhere to just see what can be done to make sure those children do not lag behind in terms of their performance based on the experience that they have gone through.

HADDOW: And this is a program that I know FEMA has beefed up over the years. Because after September 11, there was a tremendous demand in the New York and New Jersey areas, Pennsylvania and down in Washington, D.C. for stress counseling. And FEMA has, I think, a pretty good track record of providing funding to local agencies and local professionals so that they can provide those services. And I think, as the Mayor said, it's now a function of communicating to the displaced and evacuees that these services are available and ensuring that everybody is aware of that and they take advantage of those opportunities to meet with the counselors.

JOHNSON: And how does that work, George? Who actually asks FEMA for that kind of help and support? And is it left to the community to organize the delivery of that counseling?

HADDOW: It works -- FEMA's money passes from the federal government to the state, and then the state to what they call sub-grantees, which would be, say, the City of Baton Rouge or an equivalent jurisdiction that would ask for those funds. And the city would work with local mental health providers.

JOHNSON: I see. And so then there is still a challenge or a task there for the mayor and his staff and folks in other communities similarly situated to figure out who can actually provide those services and how to organize that.

HOLDEN: Yeah, without a doubt. I think one of the things you have to do -- and we're finding out for example when FEMA hires a management company to come in and run the site, the management company is not from this area. So the management company is not familiar with everything that's available in Baton Rouge and all the various organizations, both private and public, who can provide the resources.

So one of the things you have to do is make sure that that management company also is aware of the resources available. And then we try to work in conjunction with them to provide any additional services they may need.

JOHNSON: Mayor Holden, have there been needs that you've seen -- and I'm sure there must be -- among families and children that have just been particularly worrisome to you? Things that you don't have an immediate answer for or that rise to a level of a big challenge going forward?

HOLDEN: Well, primarily you're finding families who are still wondering when they can go home. It's not like they understand the magnitude of what has happened in New Orleans and other areas. So they want somebody to give them a timetable so they can go home. But they can

go home -- there's nothing there. And so we have seen families or people who have gone back to New Orleans, and once they saw the destruction, they have come back even more depressed. And it's again one of those things -- what else can we do to help them? Because sometimes in spite of all you do, you still find yourself feeling helpless because you're watching the expressions on faces. You're watching the tears roll down faces as well. And now you wish that there was some way to maybe restore them back to a position that they were comfortable with.

And now it's a matter of working partnerships. We're using a lot of faith-based organizations as well to try to help provide spiritual counseling, to try to give people guidance. We're embracing churches coming in to try to take people into the communities where they are located to say that this is your family and we are here for you. But I guess really the sad, sad part is watching that little child who has never been hugged before in such a long time that you know you have to make that extra effort to let those young children believe and feel that somebody is there looking out for their best interests.

JOHNSON: I'd love to talk for a bit more about this question of evacuated families and children going home. Because it's hard to imagine, when you picture these situations, how parents, in particular, have enough information, how they have the full range of information they need to decide when it's feasible to come home. And that ranges everything from, as you described, the question of whether there is a home still standing there to return to. But all the other questions of, you know, are the schools going to be open back home and when are they going to be open? And will the childcare center that I've been relying on for my three-year-old still be there? And when will they be open? All families rely on such a web of supports in their lives and their communities that it's hard to see how they know when it's possible to go home. Mayor, have you had thoughts of how the city helps the folks that you are providing shelter for negotiate those questions?

HOLDEN: Well, we have tried. But I think the level of frustration is really high. And people are asking over and over -- for example, when the Mayor of New Orleans came to a shelter here, people asked him the question, "When can we go back home?" He could not provide an answer, and even today there are no answers provided, simply because somebody is still trying to determine various things. For example, what is the contamination -- what level of contamination is on that site? Can people safely go back in? They've tested the drinking water, and so far the state has said the drinking water is fine. Yet when you talk to the Office of Public Health, they're advising people if you go back into those neighborhoods, make sure you have a mask over your face because you can get other germs and other things could happen to you. So now you have this thing almost like being somewhat of a Catch-22. And so we're watching as this goes on.

But one other big problem is that we're finding out that a large number of people were renting their homes and renting their apartments. So that puts them in another category altogether because they did not have direct ownership. And so now the decisions of going back into those areas are not being made by the evacuees. They're being made by the landlords, who are not here.

HADDOW: Yes, and I think this is an exceptionally difficult time for everyone involved in that it is the part of the recovery where three things almost have to happen at the same time. You have to be able to bring back housing. At the same time, you have to bring back jobs. And at

the very same time, you have to bring back schools, because families can't move to an area where they don't have a home, they don't have a job and the schools aren't open. And I think the Mayor of New Orleans is trying as best he can to figure out which areas, first, are safe, as Mayor Holden was describing. And second, then how can those small businesses that are really the lifeblood of employment and of commerce in any community -- how can they get back online? They've been off -- a lot of these businesses have been closed for seven weeks. And unfortunately, historically, small businesses that are closed for even two weeks because of a major disaster, 40% of them traditionally don't reopen. So it's a very difficult situation.

And it's frustrating for the families. My mother is sitting in Atlanta as well. And she keeps saying, "Why can't I go home?" And she's actually planning to come back here I think on November 3 or 4. And still -- I'm staying in her house right now. She doesn't have hot water, which is an interesting thing. But they have to get the gas turned on. They have to get the water heaters checked. But she wants to get back in her home. And I think a lot of people in New Orleans want to. But there are other decisions that need to be made. Which parts of the city are going to be redeveloped? Which parts may not be developed again?

And again, the Mayor makes this extraordinary point in terms of how many people are not homeowners, but renters in this city. And the decision on their housing is going to be made by a third party.

JOHNSON: And these issues presumably are replicated across the Gulf region, right? I mean, obviously there is a huge issue in New Orleans. But Mayor, I assume many of the families that are with you in Baton Rouge have come from other parts of the Gulf Coast. And so how they know what the circumstances are in a Biloxi or in a small town on the Mississippi Coast must also pose big problems and challenges, I assume.

HOLDEN: That's absolutely right. And again, what we're trying to do is now be more proactive. For example, today we're issuing an order for \$50 million in bond money for affordable housing. So what I made a note of last night was to ask our mortgage finance authority to make sure that the victims of Katrina and Rita both have some priorities in terms of monies to get into housing. And we're looking at down payment assistance and other programs whereby we can help them, even if they have what we call a "hiccup in your credit." So we're watching the way, but we know full well that we just cannot sit back and say this is somebody else's problem, let them take care of it. Let the City of New Orleans take care of it. Because that would be a crazy answer to what is going on, and people out here are suffering. And they don't need to be bounced back through whose problem it is and who is going to take care of it. So we're watching.

We're moving forward also with a housing committee. And we're working now to look at other things that we can do, including infill in some areas, and taking blighted areas and taking adjudicated property and all of these things and putting them back into commerce at a quicker rate so that we can get these homes up.

But we're not just doing it one-dimensional with just developers. For example, there are a group of scientists who have been working with the LSU [Louisiana State University] School of Business. And they are now looking at a model project that they had been hoping to build for some time. And we're working with them for this experimental housing. And this housing that they're talking about is really energy efficient. So it takes care of the other problem with the high cost of fuel and watching the skyrocketing utility rates. We're trying to make sure

that if we put them in a home and they are there that when they get that paycheck, that paycheck won't go right back out the door because they can't afford the place where they're living.

JOHNSON: We actually have two questions from folks who are listening on the line. And the first focuses on how state services are connecting to what you see in Baton Rouge, and also, George, perhaps what you see in other parts of the Gulf region. Mayor, when you had been speaking earlier, you had spoken about FEMA help. You referenced the support through Head Start. How are the state services, mental health services, child care, job training, WIC [Women, Infants, and Children Supplemental Nutrition Program] programs, other services for young children that are typically provided by the state -- how are those state systems playing a role in the work that you're doing, trying to help families and kids?

HOLDEN: Well, we pretty much have a coordinated effort. I think where you run into a problem sometimes, if a federal government says, "Okay, this policy can be flexible in order to accommodate a certain situation." Well, then the key is whether or not the state that is the recipient of those pass-through dollars disagrees with them and says, "Well, I don't want to go in that direction. Let me choose to go in another direction." And you find out that therefore you can end up in some problematic areas. But for the most part, the state is like everybody else. The state now is hamstrung for money, scheduled to go into a special session looking at at least a \$1.5 billion deficit. So they're scurrying now to find every source they can to just prop up the state.

At the same time, we find ourselves saying, well, we can't really wait for the state. We have to utilize the services that we provide with our local health and human resources office and with our social services office to make sure that people get the assistance that they need. And we started that back when people were in the shelters, helping them process unemployment claims and helping them work through the paperwork of getting in contact with the Red Cross and FEMA for assistance. So primarily the state really has its hands full. And so including possibly additional cuts along the medical side because the Medicare budgets and everything that have been increasing, it's costing them a greater amount of money in terms of local match.

JOHNSON: So you've got big capacity issues there. And with the extent of the devastation across the State of Louisiana, I assume some of these state systems are strained on many fronts.

HOLDEN: They are strained. But for example, what we call a Charity Hospital is similar to what a county hospital is. But the state runs its hospital system -- one of the hospital systems. And so we're seeing, for example, LSU saying, "We wanted to build a 250-bed hospital. But because of the increase in population in Baton Rouge, we now have to ask for a 400-bed hospital." And we're watching all of the health care issues evolve and grow to a level that we never expected.

So one of the things that we are looking towards helping the state with is their partnership here whereby we can have the resources provided through what we call our community centers. You give us a doctor that will take some of the patient load in terms of the day-to-day services people need for health care. They can come to our community centers and try to get some assistance. So there are a lot of things in this equation. As a matter of fact, before the storm hit, I remember saying that this is the X factor hurricane. And truly, it's the X

factor hurricane. And it's like having a blank sheet of paper, and then with the blank sheet of paper, if you have the pencil, you can write in things. But now you have a blank sheet of paper and somebody else is writing on that paper for you.

JOHNSON: Wow. And these capacity issues, Mayor, I mean, even in an area like Head Start, where the Secretary of Health and Human Services has stepped in to try and help you with extra capacity -- aren't there issues around finding extra staff and making sure that -- figuring out how to recruit qualified teachers? Has that been a problem?

HOLDEN: No, that has not been a problem. The good thing about what the Department of Health and Human Services is doing also -- we know now that there are a number of displaced teachers and other professionals out of New Orleans. And so one of the things that they've said - - we want you to give priority in hiring to a number of the teachers who were in the Head Start programs in New Orleans and other affected areas. So now we're combining our resources with the resources that now are newly arriving in Baton Rouge and making sure that people have a job. So we have not had a shortage at all.

JOHNSON: I see. George, I have another question -- this one from Indianapolis -- about how you handle challenges related to evacuees who are not eligible for FEMA benefits. What's your sense there? Are there reasons why substantial numbers of families with children would be in a situation where they are not eligible for benefits?

HADDOW: No, I can't think of any situation where evacuees would not be eligible for some form of assistance from FEMA, especially if they're living either in a shelter or in FEMA subsidized housing, whether it's trailers that they've brought in or rental assistance to rent an apartment, say, in Baton Rouge. Everybody should be eligible for that. And that program is funded by FEMA, managed by the state. And it provides both assistance with housing, but also with dental and medical issues that arise from the disaster, personal property replacement, things like that.

Again, the program that would usually be bring talked about right now would be how would people repair or replace their homes. And we haven't even gotten to that point yet because people just haven't been allowed to get back into the city, or large sections of the city. But this temporary housing and temporary assistance, I would imagine that most of the evacuees should be eligible to receive some form of assistance.

JOHNSON: And so some of the challenges may be making sure they get properly registered for the assistance that they'd be eligible for.

HADDOW: Right. The most important thing is that they register. And then if they feel like there's been a lag in time since they heard from somebody, then they can call the help line [1-800-621-FEMA (3362)], and they have their registration number. And the help line should be able to track down the status of their claim.

JOHNSON: Right. And someone in that situation has to just be able to demonstrate that they were living in an affected community?

HADDOW: Yeah. I mean, everything is driven in FEMA by where you live and the damage or problems caused by the event. So if you lived in Orleans Parish or St. Bernard Parish in Louisiana or whatever the counties are in Mississippi or Alabama, you're eligible for assistance. And you establish that when you register.

JOHNSON: George, do you have other advice for folks in communities across the country with substantial numbers of evacuees, in terms of how they interface with FEMA, how to most effectively take advantage of what's available?

HADDOW: Well, I think it's a difficult time for FEMA right now in that they're stretched very thin, the employees as well as their contractors and their search employees. And depending on what Hurricane Wilma does in the next three or four days, they may get stretched even thinner. I think the key to working with FEMA is always to develop personal relationships with the case managers and the folks on the grounds that are assigned to helping families. There are some issues with the fact that a lot of these people rotate out after two or three weeks just because there is such an intense working period that it's the only way for them to stay sane.

But it's a difficult process. And there is going to be a lot of holes that end up being identified. One of them that's consistently identified is that you have a displaced family that doesn't have a car, and therefore can't get to work or can't go out and find a job. How do you deal with that? So I think if you're a community or you're someone who is hosting a displaced family, you want to explore and max out on whatever you can get from FEMA. But you also want to explore what the local faith-based and Red Cross, Salvation Army, Mennonites can do for you and how they can help, and then ultimately, the community at large. And I know that there is a lot of folks who have contributed a lot of money and a lot of goods and services, and I think that will continue because that's the country that we very fortunately live in. And just understanding what's available in matching your needs with the folks whose job it is or whose service they've taken on to provide for those needs.

HOLDEN: I just wanted to say, George, in regards to faith-based -- we're now faced with a major question here. For example, in order -- the rules from FEMA to us, FEMA has said, okay, the faith-based organizations, for you to be reimbursed, the city has to sign a contract with you. And it's like the city is applying for this assistance. The city serves somewhat of a pass-through.

So we asked the question. We said, what happens if a faith-based organization has provided services? They send that bill to us. We send it on to the proper authorities through the state to FEMA. FEMA now says, "Well, I am not going to pay that full amount of money that you're asking for because we're disallowing this expenditure." And now we are caught somewhat in a situation whereby we are seen as the bad guys because we are processing this stuff, and it's now FEMA saying you cannot pay that faith-based organization all of those dollars because they do not qualify. So we are finding ourselves now navigating through a whole new other maze. We asked, what happens if we assume or sign a contract with that faith-based organization? Who is responsible in terms of liability? Can we write a contract that says, "We will reimburse you based upon the cost that FEMA deems allowable?" We are told, "No, you cannot enter into any contingency contract whatsoever with those faith-based organizations."

HADDOW: Yes, and I think this is a situation that arises in almost every disaster. What is eligible? Who are the eligible grantees and sub-grantees? And it seems that in my experience, it

changes depending on what region of the country you're in and which administration is in charge of FEMA in the federal government. And I sympathize with your plight because it is a plight in terms of -- you hear one thing and you think that gives you the go-ahead to engage in a contract with a faith-based organization. And all of a sudden, you find out when they look at the bill that they won't pay you this or they won't pay you that. There is a lot of miscommunication and there is a lot of disinformation.

And I think the only thing that can mitigate that is to make it as clear as possible and get as clear as possible information -- and obviously, you've already gone down this road, so I may be too late even for that. But for other communities, just to get the information as clearly as you can from FEMA. But unfortunately, this is an experience -- and I've heard this before -- just that there are human beings involved in this chain, and some of them look at regulations one way and some of them look at regulations another way. And you have to understand how these folks are going to look at it and how their superiors are going to look at it. And that's a daunting task. I know that doesn't help you, but that's unfortunately what I think happens. And it seems to happen in every disaster.

JOHNSON: I have another question from St. Louis, which is about the timeframe for assistance in the Gulf region. And the questioner says that in some states, displaced Katrina evacuees are only receiving two months of rental assistance from FEMA, and after that they are told they are on their own. Does this fit, Mr. Mayor, with what you're seeing in Baton Rouge? And George, does this sound right to you in terms of the timeframe in which help is available?

HOLDEN: Well, I'm not familiar with that two-month window. Some people have been given rental assistance for more months than the two months. And some people now are actually receiving what is the equivalent of a buyout of their house by I think \$25,000 - 26,000 that they are eligible for and taking that, and now trying to use that money to move somewhere else.

I think what happens though is there are still a lot of questions out there because the amounts of money now you end up with other family problems. For example, we have gambling boats. And so you watch as some people, once they get these dollars, they do not go and buy food and the basic necessities. They want to go and gamble that money or buy alcohol or some of those things. So you really are putting money there. They are taking the money and the money is not actually going towards the family unit. It's now exacerbating a problem that was there and we're finding that that's when a number of people try to come back and say, "We need some additional assistance," or they're probably telling FEMA the same thing. "This money is not taking care of all of my needs." But they're not letting FEMA know really what else is going on in their life.

HADDOW: Yeah, and this is a difficult situation, again, in all disasters. My understanding of how the temporary housing is working in this disaster -- and again, this is a policy that I think has been made up on the fly for this disaster -- is that there was a check that went out to folks at least in the New Orleans end of Louisiana -- Southeast Louisiana area. Some economist, or whatever, looked at the market value of rent and came up with the number \$2,350 and that was supposed to be able to cover three months worth of rent and that was called "transient housing." And then if you needed temporary housing or traditional temporary housing, I think there was supposedly 18 months of that money available, based on the actual rent that you were paying in an apartment or another form of living -- a trailer or something like that. I don't think they've

started the buyouts yet.

The problem that this disaster has been plagued with from the very beginning is information and information dissemination. And I don't think FEMA -- this FEMA -- is doing a very good job of communicating what exactly its programs can do, who exactly is eligible. And I think there has been a lot of confusion, starting with debit cards and now transient housing, now temporary housing. And it's going to continue. I think they've not done a good job of communicating, not only with the public itself, but also with the leaders like the Mayor who are trying to assist people and how they can assist people.

So it's a situation where individual families need to just take charge. They should be assigned a case manager, although I'm not sure that that system has been set up yet, which is unusual this late in a disaster. There should be a housing program that's been announced. FEMA hasn't developed that yet that I know of. So I think that these situations where the federal government is the source of income and the source of revenue and the source of resources for these folks at this time, is putting out confusing and mixed messages.

JOHNSON: What in your view, George, is the best source of information right now? Is there a FEMA website that is a good place for people to go?

HADDOW: I think the best source is first if you register, and then you go back to the help line. And then you request a case manager -- someone that can manage it. Because I've already gotten calls from friends whose families were assigned a trailer where there are ten of them and the trailer fits three people. And traditionally then you would go to your case manager and say, "Look, we need a larger trailer." But I don't know that those people have been assigned to people. There are a lot of things that haven't worked very well in this disaster. It started with the response, and there seemed to be a lot of issues in the recovery. And I think that individuals need to push. I think community leaders are going to need to push. And ultimately someone is going to have to -- there are going to have to be decisions made at the higher levels and they're going to set some policies, and then they have to communicate those policies.

JOHNSON: So, for the individuals they register and follow that process. And for city officials who are looking for FEMA guidelines and information -- I know that at www.firstgov.gov, there is a consolidated federal website around a range of things.

HADDOW: Right, but someone like Mayor Holden should have a contact at the state that they're working with. And the state people are working with the FEMA people.

JOHNSON: So working back through that structure.

HADDOW: But even that is going to be difficult because, as I said, the state people as well as the FEMA people are going to start rotating. You're going to get a new face.

JOHNSON: I see. Well, we only have a few minutes left. And I want to make sure to get your reflections on lessons from Katrina, and in particular lessons around disaster planning and emergency preparedness at the community level. Mayor, knowing what you know now -- had you known then, whatever -- are there things you would encourage other communities to look at closely before a next disaster strikes?

HOLDEN: Well, the first thing I would say is making sure that you have a plan that's viable. In spite of what you think, have that plan evaluated even by an outside person to look at it, to give you an objective view.

Then -- you know, in New Orleans, we saw a number of things. For example, when people were stuck on the Interstate, and I'm sure that picture was flashed across the whole world, primarily when evacuees just kind of walked to various points, waiting for some transportation. Well, at that point, it was survival of the fittest because you're hearing the stories whereby people were pushing kids out of the way, families ended up separated and those things occurred. So you have to set up some type of order at whatever evacuation point is occurring.

The best thing I would try to do is have deployment points already identified. I would have pretty much some record of which population base is the most vulnerable population that really needs quicker action in order to take care of people. I would begin to take my assets and analyze the assets, what you have, what you have available, what you can and cannot do, and try to make sure you relate those either to the governor's office. But we have constant meetings in regards to the Office of Emergency Preparedness.

But again, when the storm came, the magnitude was such that it overwhelmed the system, and we found out that people really didn't go by the plans that were on the books. For example, here we say, well, when it comes down to evacuations, you start in North Louisiana and work your way in terms of placing people, and work your way back south. Well, in this case, they started in Baton Rouge, which is south. And then we saw ourselves with 15,000 people just in one shelter. And so I would say to make sure your state follows whatever plan it has. Make sure that plan again is followed in an orderly manner. You have to make sure there is a transportation component. You have to make sure that there is a health care component. Because we found out that people were placed on buses. Some were dropped off at a triage center and they should have been brought to a shelter, but the population was all mixed in. And so there are a number of things there that need to be tidied up or you need to take a look at.

But again I would say, in many cases, don't try to do it by the book because the book really doesn't have an answer for everything that you will face. And you have to step forward and be innovative enough to put things in place to take care of damages like this.

And the other point that I made very clear to the Senate Homeland Security Committee is that FEMA or these agencies cannot just look at the point of impact being New Orleans. They have to look down the line and say, well, if all of these people now move to another city, what should I have in place in order to take care of that city? And I think all of those problems have to be resolved or else we will find ourselves in continuous chaos.

JOHNSON: George, thoughts about, particularly on this question of families and children and their particular vulnerability? Things that communities can be thinking about as they proceed with their own, or reexamine, and the Mayor has urged them to do, their own disaster plans?

HADDOW: Well, I think the Mayor -- I agree with everything he said 100%. And I think when you're examining your current disaster plans, you ought to examine who the authors of those plans are. And I would bet that for the most part, they're individuals and they're consultants that wrote the plan.

I think that it would be a very wise move by any community to re-author their plan. And the way to do that is in four simple steps. One is, you bring everybody in the

community together. You create a community partnership around emergency preparedness. And this obviously would work for natural hazards as well as the ongoing terrorism threat. And that partnership includes the businesses, the unions, the small businesses, the universities, the community organizations, the faith-based organizations, the elected officials, the government officials.

And the next step is that that partnership identifies what the risks are in the community and ensure that everybody in the community understands what those risks are. And that includes creating communication systems that get the information out through trusted local leaders, as opposed to just relying on television and the radio to get the information to people.

The third step is the partnership sits back and identifies what they can do about these risks and what they need to do to prepare their citizens in order to deal with these risks if an event should occur.

And then the fourth step is to go out there and implement a prioritized plan that's going to reduce the impact of future events. It's going to ensure that everyone in the community, every family, every individual is prepared and ready in the case of an event occurring, and that you have the relationships that are established with the federal and state counterparts to be ready to perform.

But I think the way to solve the problems that happen in disasters are not after the disaster occurs. It happens before the disaster occurs. So I think communities around this country have got to recognize that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and they're becoming more severe. And that we have additional risk in terms of terrorism and what that might mean to any given community. And start dealing with these issues now on an every day basis, as opposed to three days or a day after the event occurs.

JOHNSON: And both of your comments about the crucial step of going from having a plan on paper to something that you actually can play out in place.

We've reached the end of our time. I want to thank both of you, Mayor Holden, George Haddow, for your time and insights over the course of the past hour. We really appreciate your making the effort to do this and to be with us. Thank you.

HADDOW: Thank you, Cliff.

JOHNSON: This is the end of our monthly audioconference. For folks who are interested in looking at future audioconference offerings, you can go to our website, which is www.nlc.org/iyef. And you will find a slate of audioconferences scheduled between now and June 2006. I hope you can join us again. Thanks for being with us today, and best of luck. Take care.