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Mr. Chairman:

I want thank you and the committee for inviting me to speak, and I want you to know how proud I am of you and the entire Louisiana delegation for working together with the president and our state officials to help the hundreds of thousands of Louisiana families and businesses that have been displaced by the thousand year flood event.

I run a motion picture studio facility located in the heart of Baton Rouge. It is actually the largest design-built studio in the Gulf South. We have hosted everything from NBC Universal's "Battleship" and "Oblivion" to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's "Fantastic Four." We are a small business that rents stage space and solves problems for productions. Our guest list contains names like Morgan Freeman, Chris Pratt, and Tom Cruise.

But in the pre-dawn hours of August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016, as officially designated shelters began taking on water, we were called upon to open our stages to host VIPs of a different kind: members of our own community who were seeking shelter, many of whom had just been rescued from rooftops with nothing more than the clothes on their backs.

Now, it is worth noting that film industry has a proud history of offering up assets like generators, mobile kitchens and HVAC systems in times of disaster. It certainly occurred after September 11<sup>th</sup> in New York and after Katrina in New Orleans. In 2011, as head of the Louisiana Film Entertainment Association, I actually signed an informal agreement saying Louisiana's film industry would be on call to help the Red Cross in the event of a disaster. In 2012, Celtic Studios owner Michael O'Connor gave me permission to put that agreement to good use when over 500 Red Cross volunteers sheltered with us in the aftermath of Hurricane Isaac.

But the thousand-year flood we experienced in Baton Rouge was really something entirely different. Thankfully, Mr. O'Connor had given me the green light to do whatever was necessary to help. There was no state or federal contract in place in advance. It was simply the right thing for us to do as human beings. There was no prep time when the Office of Emergency Preparedness called me at 3:05 a.m. And the only script I had to go by when the buses started rolling in just after 5:00 a.m. was something I had learned about at LSU: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

With no time to prepare, meeting even the most basic physiological needs was a struggle. Initially, all we could offer was an air-conditioned shelter from the storm and mosquitoes, a few restrooms, and a water fountain. Safety needs were met thanks to the handful of local law enforcement officers that accompanied those seeking shelter. However, some of the first evacuees to arrive were the elderly and the infirm, diabetics who needed insulin, and mothers with infants who needed formula. And more than a few people showed up with their pets which was quite alright because Celtic has always had a very friendly pet policy.

A number of evacuees that I encountered had not slept or eaten in more than 24 hours. Aaron Bayham, our director of studio operations, and I scrambled around the studio scavenging for all the chairs and snack food we could carry. But as the buses kept arriving, we were quickly overwhelmed. Because our

cell service went out around 4:30 a.m., I decided to jump on the studio's Wi-Fi and send a Facebook message out to the media and the community. Within minutes, a local news station read my post on the air. Within the hour, dozens of people from the community showed up in force with blankets and pillows, food, and dry clothes. Off duty doctors and nurses came. They didn't ask for official permission. They just came.

Celtic quickly became a "Who's Who of the Baton Rouge Business Report's Forty Under 40." Young entrepreneurs were some of the first on the scene to volunteer. They used their superior organizational and communications skills to bring order to the chaos, solving small town problems like traffic flow and waste disposal. The number one question that morning was "Who is in charge here." But the truth is we all were. And to say the Baton Rouge community came together and responded in a big way to the worst natural disaster this area has ever seen (after what had already been an incredibly tough summer) might be the understatement of the year.

State and parish workers trickled in throughout the day which brought in needed experience in dealing with emergency situations. Governor Edwards called me personally to thank me some time after noon, and together we prioritized getting the stages even cooler by bringing in film industry vendor CAT Entertainment Services. When I asked the Governor for more State Police and National Guard, he simply replied, "Done." Within an hour, a cavalry of men and women in uniform began to arrive, and the calming effect they had on everyone was almost immediate. Their presence alone was enough for everyone to know that for the time being, we were all going to be okay. And after I sent him a tweet, one of the most memorable figures from Katrina, Louisiana's own retired Lt. General Russel Honoré, showed up that afternoon and gave us all tons of priceless advice.

Celtic took in over 4000 evacuees at the high water mark that first day. At least 2500 people with nowhere else to go sheltered with us that first night, and our last evacuee guests did not leave until 12 days later. The outpouring of love for one another from the Baton Rouge community that I witnessed for almost two weeks is something that I will never forget.

"Love," by the way, is also one of the needs on Maslow's Hierarchy, and it is arguably the most important. And it is the reason why a lot of people simply will not evacuate without their pets. I am told a number of evacuees actually decided to get out of harm's way because they heard on the news that we were accepting pets. I am proud to say that for more than a week, dozens of evacuees literally bunked with their furry best friends at our studio.

Even as Blackhawk helicopters were landing on our backlot area dropping off evacuees, chefs were showing up to begin cooking massive amounts of jambalaya. The abundance of donations within 24 hours was so vast that we literally ran out of room and had to send goods to other shelters.

We operated the shelter with a very simple philosophy--you cannot spoil someone who has lost everything enough. Some of the donated amenities that our guests enjoyed included free snow cones, ice cream bars, smoothies, gourmet coffee, bouncy houses for the kids, live music in the dining hall, a DJ, free movie screenings, and a visit from the LSU football team including autographs from Heisman Trophy frontrunner Leonard Fournette. A group called Emergency Arts gave kids an opportunity to paint and express their feelings through the creation of art. We even had a yoga instructor give a class or two for the evacuees. I suggested they hold it outdoors and call it "Hot and Humid Yoga."

We also hosted the first church service in the history Celtic Studios on Sunday, Aug. 21<sup>st</sup>. It was an ecumenical service that featured a full gospel choir. If there is anything more powerful than attending a church service with people who have lost everything but their unshakeable faith, I don't know what it is. In fact, this event has strengthened my own faith that all things, good and bad, happen for a reason. I say that because it was an unfortunate change in our film incentives combined with competition from foreign nations that caused a severe downturn in Louisiana's film industry, and that downturn resulted in our stages being empty on August 14<sup>th</sup>. Oddly enough, the last time the cameras rolled on our stages was on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, exactly one year prior to the very day that buses rolled in with evacuees. That Celtic Studios, which rests in the one the few areas proven not to flood in Baton Rouge, was open and available when our community needed it most was truly a blessing in disguise.

But of all the comforts that we offered to our guests, the one that I will remember the most was the impromptu hair salon we dubbed "Chateau Evacuee." A local hair stylist named Lee Caro reached out to me and offered his services to the evacuees. As luck would have it, we had an abandoned hair salon on the lot that still had the barber chairs and sinks. Lee gathered a number of other local stylists, and before it was over, they had given the evacuees more than 300 new hairdos, some of which resulted in tears of joy. That is because some of our guests were so poor and disabled, they had been unable to receive a decent haircut for years. While hairdos might not be the most important need on Maslow's Hierarchy, self-esteem and dignity are most certainly human needs. When you look good, you feel good. My advice to anyone with a shelter is to always remember that it is the little things that mean a lot. To me, Chateau Evacuee is one of the greatest reminders of just how far we have come from the images we saw outside the New Orleans Convention Center in the days after Hurricane Katrina.

I remember a line that actor Danny Glover used just after Katrina. He said, "Katrina didn't cause all of the poverty we are seeing; it exposed it." That stuck with me because it was the truth. The same can be said with Baton Rouge's thousand year flood. While the flood waters truly did not discriminate and affected everyone, regardless of their socioeconomic status, the majority of the evacuees who stayed with us for more than a week were the poor and working class. Many had everything invested in their homes or their small businesses that were built in areas that Army Corps of Engineer Maps said would likely never flood. Only 12% had flood insurance because most lived in areas where flood insurance was not required. And despite all of their losses, more than a few of our evacuee guests got up every morning, left the shelter to go to their jobs, and came back to the shelter to be with their families at night. If you live in Louisiana, you know there is nothing surprising about that kind of dedication and work ethic. That is just who we are as a people.

I am afraid that without an extraordinary federal response, we are going to see a pocket of poverty in Louisiana that looks more like something you would find in the Third World. The Red Cross is returning hundreds of still-homeless evacuees to shelter with Celtic because FEMA is simply not moving fast enough. While we certainly need aid, we need action, not words. That means less red tape, not more. That means federal tax breaks, not higher state taxes for Louisiana residents. New Orleans eventually came roaring back after Katrina thanks to economic development. In fact, Celtic Studios was partially built thanks to federal and state initiatives implemented over a decade ago. Help us work our way back to prosperity. Lighten the load of our federal tax burdens, and we will rebuild faster.

If that which doesn't kill us makes us stronger, then the people of South Louisiana must be some of the toughest on Earth. But beneath that toughness lies a lot of heart, and it was average citizens like the Cajun Navy and countless volunteers who showed that heart time and again and truly minimized the loss of life when the chips were down. The national media largely ignored America's worst natural

disaster since Superstorm Sandy because we succeeded in minimizing the loss of life on our own. However, I truly hope that Congress will recognize the severity of our situation and the extreme loss of property we have suffered in Louisiana and will not forget us as we begin to pick up the pieces. And maybe even Hollywood will recognize that what we have experienced here would make one heck of a good movie.

At the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs is something called "Self-Actualization" which means achieving one's full potential. To achieve our full potential as a nation, we must be willing to do whatever it takes to get an American state back on its feet after a natural disaster. Today it is Louisiana, but tomorrow it could be your home state. That is why I am asking you to borrow a page from our playbook at Celtic Studios. That same page is in a lot of good books. At the top of that page, it says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." That is just what we do as Americans. That is what we do as decent human beings. And that is what I pray the U.S. Government will do for victims of Louisiana's thousand year flood.

Thank you, and Geaux Tigers!