

**TESTIMONY OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE CLAY SCHEXNAYDER**  
Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship  
An Examination of the Federal Response and  
Resources for Louisiana Flood Victims  
Thursday, September 15, 2016 at 10:30 am

As you all know it all began on August 10th. The day the low pressure rain system settled slowly above us like a slow freight train. This came as a shock to everyone as no one understood this low pressure would bring with it one of the worst federal disasters in our country's history.

I began to institute immediate preparation to make all necessary phone calls to local officials, police, wildlife and fisheries, faith based groups and the citizens of my district to find out the immediate damage. Slowly things began to deteriorate as we began to experience our first major signs of trouble when the Chief of Police from Port Vincent reached me to inform me that he had run out of all sand and sandbags in that area. The next phone call I then received was from the Fire Chief of French Settlement who informed me that we had reached the same dilemma in French Settlement as we had in Port Vincent.

My first priority was to get out to the people in my district who were experiencing these dilemmas. I drove out to both French Settlement and Port Vincent to solve the issue with our sandbags all while multitasking, making phone calls to EOC. At this time and point I understood it was ultimately up to me to resolve this issue and I made several calls to contacts and friends through the surrounding parish areas of whom I got direct responses and resolved the sand and sandbag issues in both Port Vincent and French Settlement. Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how you look at it, I rounded up local volunteers and rescue team to save people, animals and families as we implemented our own flood rescue and response team, even as the waters continued to rise by the hour and a heavy and steady flow that rose and rose with no end in sight and no one but our group of local rescuers to salvage what we could.

I then proceeded to make calls to the EOC and Baton Rouge Homeland Security to get immediate help for the parishes in my district that were experiencing a total loss of everything including nearly their life. I understood however as I have been told to always go through proper protocol and contact EOC to get the help you need for your disaster response. We are here witnessing one of the worst storms in the last 1,000 years. We began to gather local neighbors to form rescue, relief and recovery efforts to anywhere I could find. We gathered up water, food, and other

necessities to get by in life and with cooperation from neighbors, local businesses and other faith based organizations, we were able to be that one bright spot. We brought hope to them when no one else took time to address what was currently taking place all in a 4 day period on about 8 hours of sleep.

Understand that I too am a small business owner of Car Craft Automotive who suffered major damages but my priorities lie with my district, yes district, for I am also a state representative representing the parishes of Ascension, lower Livingston, St. James and St. John, 3 of the 4 which flooded. My district is south of upper Livingston and Baton Rouge where all the water drained down through our canals which overflowed down into Maurepas. As Baton Rouge and upper Livingston's water was receding we were soon to be forgotten about as water levels rose in 1 day to 8 feet.

Just to put some perspective to this, we were out rescuing, and bringing supplies to lower Livingston on Hwy 22 for 8 miles that morning and the highway was totally dry. After we delivered supplies, the rest of the day we proceeded to head back and before we knew it, the whole 8 miles was under about 5 feet of water. At that time, I knew we were in a dire recovery need. We then began approaching homes we had just passed earlier with just some wet spots in the yard now having 5 feet of water in their home. We managed to save a lot of people's lives but at what cost. Most everyone lost everything but their life. I still ask myself today how can we not be more organized so that so many people don't have to suffer. If we don't learn from our history we are doomed to repeat it.

As we finish this rescue, we headed down to Hwy 61 to Hwy 22 in Sorrento and as I passed the business to the right, I looked around and could not contain myself and was overwhelmed with emotion. You see, at that corner of that intersection, was my livelihood, my place of business, Car Craft Automotive, that provided for me and my family and friends for nearly 20 years. I had been so busy helping others, I hadn't realized I was in the same boat with them. All my equipment in my shop destroyed worth 100 of thousands of dollars, my parts, stock, my computers, all my records and documents. And I worry about my workers now and their houses that were affected.

I pledge to continue to help build back my business, but not only my business, my district and so many others who are going through the same tragedies I am and some are in much worst situations. I will work to bring back my business and my community but it's tough when you also have gone through the loss of a business, friends businesses and homes and families houses.

As a leader, I feel it is my obligation to see this through but I can't say it's easy when everyone thinks you have all the answers.

When people have been denied, FEMA has instructed them to appeal. These people can't wait for appeals. They're out of their homes, some living in tents, and ready to get back to a normal life as possible.

Flood victims go days, some weeks, without hearing back from FEMA about requests for housing and other aid.

Some are told it's on them to keep pushing the federal agency. That's hard since they have a lot on their plate right now.

The process is designed to exclude people before we help them.

Communication between state, some local officials and FEMA has been a big problem. I myself in my district didn't receive supplies of water and food for over a week. We went in and had these things donated and I still have no FEMA contact.

Sometimes I was told it has to go through the EOC but sometimes you can't get in touch with them. I had this same problem during Isaac where we could not get help and we rescued 3400 people. We needed high water vehicles and boats. Luckily we were able to get help from local sheriff's departments and the wildlife and fisheries. The sad part was less than a mile away is a National Guard Army with high water vehicles and more but because we couldn't get a request to the EOC they wouldn't help.

Some residents I have talked to have received \$2,000 maybe \$5,000 in assistance from FEMA. That's not good when the max is \$33,000 and even that won't put them back whole but it's a start.

I would say 75 to 80% of my district is not in a flood zone and haven't had water in over 40 to 50 years. We've got to get a package that works not just throw money to FEMA. We need to make sure it works for the people that need it.

Not counting my farmers that have lost their homes, equipment and crops. The state estimates \$110 million in damage and \$80 million for the March flood.