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Testimony
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Senate
Environment and Public Works

Post-Katrina Clean-Up and Reconstruction Management

Statement of Thomas Jackson
President
Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority
Committee on Senate Environment and Public Works
February 26, 2007

Good Morning Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Thomas Jackson. Thank you for the opportunity to be here. I appear before the committee today on behalf of the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East recently convened Board on January 10, 2007.

At the first meeting of the new Authority East Board, I was elected President and have been serving in that capacity since. I am also Past National President of the **American Society of Civil Engineers** (ASCE) and have served for the past year and one half on the ASCE External Review Panel (ERP) providing external review of the Interagency Performance Evaluation Taskforce (IPET) investigation of the New Orleans area hurricane protection system performance during Hurricane Katrina.

I am a registered Professional civil engineer in several Gulf States and a Diplomate with specialty certification in water resources engineering. I am recently retired from DMJM Harris as Senior Vice President and Chief Engineer of the firm. I might add parenthetically I am also a lifelong resident of New Orleans and Jefferson Parish so I am very familiar with this area and the problems in storm protection that we have had over the years.

My report to you today will focus on the current status of hurricane protection within the jurisdiction of the SLFPA-East, including the East Jefferson Levee District, the Orleans Levee District, and the Lake Borgne Basin Levee District.

My discussion will focus on the condition of our hurricane protection system with respect to the pre-Katrina authorized level of protection rather than the 100 year storm level of protection needed for the FEMA flood insurance program.

I will begin with the Lake Borgne Levee District which encompasses St. Bernard Parish. This District was severely impacted by Katrina with the virtual destruction of the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) levee. This levee has been rebuilt by Task Force Guardian to approximately 2 feet above pre-Katrina authorized levels to account for subsidence of this newly built levee. However, no specifics have been given by the Corps regarding armoring this levee to protect it from wave action, or overtopping and erosion on the protected side.

The Bayou Dupre Control Structure on the MRGO levee must be raised approximately 2.5 feet to the pre-Katrina authorized elevation. This project is being analyzed by the Corps to determine the feasibility of implementing this interim fix or proceeding directly to the 100-year elevation.

Raising Highway 46 crossing and Bayou Road floodgate. The elevation of Highway 46 as it crosses the federal levee in Verret is about three feet below the pre-Katrina authorized elevation. The floodgate and associated floodwalls are also too low. The eight miles of the Verret to Caernarvon Levee must be raised to get it back up to pre-Katrina authorized elevation.

All of this work is supposed to be funded with the third Supplemental Appropriation. It should be noted, however, that the Corps has informed the District that not enough money is left in this category of funds to complete these projects. As proposed by the President's 2008 budget, transfer of 1.3 billion dollars to the west bank projects without additional funding, many of these east bank projects will go unfunded.

The Lake Borgne Basin Levee District is unusual in that the District has the responsibility for construction, operation and maintenance of the major canals and pumping system in St. Bernard Parish. St. Bernard Parish was included in the Corps Pump Station Storm Proofing Project which has provided projects for the storm protection of pumping stations in Orleans and Jefferson parishes, but no work has been done in St. Bernard.

We have been told that there were limitations on the total funds provided for this work and under the law the authorization and appropriations go hand in hand and when funds ran out so did the Corps authority to storm proof pumps. Additional funds and authorization will be required.

These stations are very vulnerable and provide very little protection for the operators during a storm. The drainage canals throughout St. Bernard Parish are clogged with swamp grass that floated into homes and drainage canals by hurricane Katrina. This grass is blocking drainage in the canals and breaking trash rakes and pumping equipment and needs to be removed as soon as possible. Continuous pleas from our Executive Director to the Corps and FEMA have gone unanswered on this issue.

The East Jefferson Levee District suffered the least damage from Hurricane Katrina of the three Districts under the SLFPA-E. However, I-walls found to be of questionable stability are located as transitions on each side of the lakefront pumping stations, and have only been temporarily repaired. In addition, I-walls at the north-west corner of the District have only been temporarily shored with steel sheet piles.

The 10-mile lakefront levees in East Jefferson are two to four feet below pre-Katrina authorized grade and are in the process of being raised to the pre-Katrina authorized levels. On the West Return Floodwall along the St. Charles/Jefferson Parish line from Armstrong Airport north to the Lakefront the I-wall sections of this floodwall have been or are in the process of being improved with interim

protection only. This entire section of floodwall is approximately two feet below the pre-Katrina authorized levels. It is our understanding that the Corps plans to raise this flood wall only once to the 100-year level. In the meantime this long section of protection is two feet below pre-Katrina authorized levels during the coming storm season.

The levee along the 17th Street Canal from the temporary gates and pumps at the lakefront to Pumping Station number 6 is constructed of I-wall and has been declared to be safe only up to a maximum water level of 6.0 [feet]. This flood wall is still of concern during the operation of Pumping Station 6 and the lakefront temporary pumps during hurricane tidal surge.

In Orleans Parish, the outfall canal levee and I-walls along 17th Street Canal, and the London Ave. Canal were breached during Katrina. Temporary closures are in place and temporary floodgates built at the lakefront to prevent hurricane tidal surges from entering these canals. However, pumping operations during storm surges will raise these canal levels at or near the maximum water levels against these floodwalls that are considered safe with a factor of safety of 1.3.

Permanent pumping stations and flood walls are needed to alleviate this temporary fix. This project has been postponed pending the decision on the President's request to transfer \$1.3 billion to the west bank projects. Planning and construction of these projects at the three outfall canals is vital to the ultimate protection of the community, and funding must be restored or replaced as soon as possible.

The 5.2 miles of lakefront levees in Orleans parish west of the IHNC are approximately 1 to 2 feet below pre- Katrina authorized levels. The 12-mile lakefront levee from the Lakefront Airport to South Point also needs to be raised one to two feet to bring it to pre-Katrina authorized levels.

In addition, the 13 mile levee south of South Point along Bayou Sauvage and then back west along the Gulf Intercoastal Waterway (GIWW) to the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal (IHNC) needs to be raised one to two 2 feet to bring it up to the pre-Katrina authorized level. Highway 11, highway 90 and the CSX railroad floodgates all need to be raised as much as five feet.

The Corps is completing the last of three earthen levee raisings on the IHNC to meet pre-Katrina authorized level. There are sections of I-walls that have subsided on the IHNC, but weren't damaged by the storms. TFG replaced breeched floodwalls on the IHNC with new T-walls[,] which are designed to hold water all the way to the top of the wall. The older remaining I-walls were only designed to hold water with a two-foot freeboard at the top.

The new T-wall was built to the new datum, which was up to two feet higher than the old datum, so in the end we have a new T-wall next to an old I-wall[,] with the T-wall able to hold back four to five feet more water than the older I-wall. Should we have another storm there is a potential that the older lower I-wall could fail or be over topped during the next storm.

The IHNC corridor must be closed from hurricane tidal surges to provide pre-Katrina authorized level of protection. The Corps has developed plans to accomplish this with gate closures across the GIWW and MRGO and the IHNC at Lake Pontchartrain. These gates are still in the planning stages with construction starts scheduled for the fall of 2008, providing funding is available. Meanwhile, the protection along this corridor is spotty at best.

While this report paints a rather bleak picture, the Corps is proceeding to complete pre-Katrina authorized protection under the Task Force Hope program. Funding has now become an issue because of the inflated costs of construction in the area, post Katrina.

It is urgent that the Congress provide additional funding for completing the pre-Katrina authorized level of protection this year. Funding for the 100-year event must be approved and that program started immediately. The Corps must be given flexibility in spending within the jurisdiction of the SLFPA-E so that sufficient protection can be constructed as soon as possible.

Many flood walls should not be raised twice, once to pre-Katrina and then to 100 year levels. They must be raised immediately to the 100-year level as soon as that elevation is established by the IPET scientists. Until then, the protection for the New Orleans East Bank area is less than Congress authorized with the Lake Pontchartrain and Vicinity Hurricane Protection Plan in the 1960's. The people of this community deserve better.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this report on the status of the hurricane protection system for the Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority-East. I will be happy to answer any questions at the proper time.

THOMAS JACKSON
President
Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority

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