



BILL WHITE
MAYOR

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF HOUSTON
TEXAS

September 22, 2008

Via Facsimile 404-657-7332
Governor Sonny Perdue
State of Georgia
Office of the Governor
Atlanta, Georgia 30334-0900

Dear Governor,

The people of my community do appreciate the contributions from those who came from Georgia to assist in the relief efforts following Hurricane Ike.

On Sunday September 14th, Secretary Chertoff had asked local officials to assume responsibilities for management to numerous points of distribution (PODs) within the City of Houston and Harris County, which we did.

On Tuesday, September 16th, I began inspecting operations at points of distribution for meals, water, and ice. Many public employees and volunteers had labored throughout the night to open those sites by 9:00 a.m. the next morning. At the first location I visited, at approximately 9:30 a.m., there were several hundred people waiting in cars and standing in line for needed supplies. Individuals had been without power and the City was under an official "boil water" order pursuant to state regulation. The elected representatives, law enforcement, volunteers, a FEMA representative onsite and the citizens waiting in line were concerned because they could get no information concerning when supplies would arrive and a federal site administrator had ordered two trucks of supplies to return the prior evening back to the logistics center at Reliant Park. This occurred despite the fact that the site was secured by police and truck drivers were willing to sleep in the cabs.

I learned that this same type of situation existed at most points of distribution in our city and county, with long lines of people both standing and driving, and local employees and volunteers with no word whatsoever when the supplies would arrive for sites that were supposed to be open by 9:00 a.m.

I traveled to Reliant Center, a mustering area for the 18-wheelers. Dozens were parked and idling. I went to a portable control unit and asked when I might find out how many supplies had been sent to POD sites where thousands of citizens had waited in line since early in the morning and hundreds of volunteers had gathered to provide relief. The individuals within the control trailers said they did not know what trucks had left the lot for what destination. They directed me to a table at the gate. There was a huge parking lot full of 18-wheelers with trailers. There were no trucks waiting at the gate to be dispatched. I was told that no convoys had been sent during the nighttime hours and that deliveries to a multi-county area had not begun until 6:00 a.m. And, yes, I did express in no uncertain terms that we needed to do a better job of getting the supplies to the places where people had been waiting in line for hours, with no idea when those supplies would arrive.

I was not escorted from the site. Instead, I drove with one convoy of trucks to a site where about 100 volunteers and many thousands of people had been waiting in line. I called our county judge, Ed Emmett, from the site and asked if he would go to Reliant and review the operations so that we could account and report to the sites concerning the estimated time of delivery for various shipments. I also asked him to set up procedures by which the supply could occur during the night before it was needed, when traffic was lighter. Ed has a background in logistics. He called me when he arrived at the site, where he identified the same problem and undertook to set up a new set of procedures to ensure that the people who were in desperate need of supplies would not wait in line for hours and hours again. He had to set up a table and develop effective supply and re-supply procedures from scratch.

I did use words that I have never used in the Sunday school class I teach, but which were closer to the vocabulary General Patton used when he was trying to keep his army moving. The anger and frustration I expressed were intended to give voice to the suffering of those waiting in lines because of improper procedures. They were never intended to pass judgment on the personal worth of those laboring at Reliant Center. In fact, with the new procedures implemented by Judge Emmett and a senior logistics officer at FEMA who arrived onsite for the first time that Tuesday, by early Wednesday morning, all of the points of distribution in the City of Houston, Harris County, and surrounding counties were stocked with goods and services.

If there were employees of the State of Georgia offended at my outrage in seeing most of our supplies in a parking lot with no central accounting for when and where trailer loads of supplies were being dispatched and no communication with

the individual sites about when supplies would arrive, please assure them that my remarks were not directed at them as human beings. Under detailed questioning by our local press concerning the unnecessary delays in supply operations on that Tuesday, I did assure them that the problem would be fixed and did not assign blame.

I apologize to anyone who believed my anger was directed at them, as opposed to the results of a supply system which simply did not work and left dozens of trailers in a parking lot, while tens of thousands of citizens, volunteers and employees waited throughout this region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill White". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bill White
Mayor

cc: Secretary Michael Chertoff
Governor Rick Perry
County Judge Ed Emmett