

August 14, 2006

by facsimile: (202) 456-7015
and Federal Express

The Honorable George W. Bush
President of the United States of America
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

On behalf of the citizens of El Paso, I want to thank you and FEMA for the prompt response in our local time of crisis. The recent "500 year" flooding events in our El Paso County and in Southern New Mexico were unprecedented and our community is going to need all the financial assistance that our local, state and federal governments and agencies can provide in order to rebuild. Since Thursday, July 27, El Paso County has received nearly twice the average annual rainfall for the area. Preliminary damage assessments made by local officials on major impacted areas are as follows:

- Public Infrastructure - \$21 Million
- Private Property (residential & commercial)- \$77 Million
- Flood control/landfill - \$3.5 Million

1515 homes damaged in the County

- 766 homes minor damage
- 455 homes major damage
- 295 homes have been destroyed

53 commercial properties damaged

- 14 minor damage
- 24 major damage
- 15 destroyed

Drainage facilities damaged

- 17 drainage channels
- 3 pump stations

Roadways & streets damaged

- 100 damaged roadways

The FEMA teams have completed their reports and we understand that the documentation is on its way to you for a final decision regarding a federal disaster declaration. I am writing today because I understand that some very vital information is not going to be included in the FEMA reports that should weigh in to your decision. The degree of damage reported by FEMA is vastly different than assessments prepared by the City, County and outlying jurisdictions. The FEMA report does not include the following:

- 55 collapsed or damaged retaining walls that impacted the foundation systems of homes. These properties may be declared unsafe for habitation upon further inspection of the City's Building Official.
- 217 collapsed or damaged masonry walls that separate terraced properties.
- 41 homes within the Mowad Subdivision that were inaccessible to the teams due to flooding. The FEMA teams indicated that this would be a notation in the report but our local officials feel strongly that the homes will all either be total losses or be considered severely damaged.
- 100+ homes that had water in the crawl space below the floor level, but not within the actual dwelling. This condition severely impacts the foundation and bearing soil.
- Adobe structures with standing water between 2-3 foot levels (not classified as destroyed). These types of base adobe courses will crumble and cause the walls to fail.
- Homes and businesses where 1 to 4 feet of water "ran through" the structure and drained off were not counted as major or destroyed, primarily due to the fact that they were not "under water" at the time of inspection. They were rendered uninhabitable by the rush of water damage; however the FEMA teams stated that they were not flooded presently and they could now be occupied.
- Homes and businesses where cleanup had begun and no visible water damage could be seen at the time of the inspections. Although destruction in adjoining properties was evident, FEMA teams discounted damage to properties that have been cleaned up.

City staff that accompanied the damage assessment groups have reported that the FEMA teams continually compared the local damage to that of other disasters (Katrina & Rita) and seemed to be minimizing the severity of the conditions in our community by comparison. While we certainly appreciate the fact that the hurricanes did result in loss of property that far exceeds that which has been suffered in El Paso County, we hope that when making your determination you will keep in mind that the losses suffered by our community are equally devastating to the individuals who will have to rebuild homes and businesses without the benefit of flood insurance.

The short evaluation period did not allow for a thorough and comprehensive review. The FEMA teams talked about timeliness of preliminary reporting and we have also asked for expedited processing. However, we do not want our haste to result in a finding that our community does not qualify for disaster aid simply because the investigations conducted by FEMA were primarily "windshield" field assessments and because vital pieces of information were not included in these initial reports.

We have been advised that FEMA reporting does not look at local demographic profiles. As a fellow Texan, you know El Paso County is very different from the rest of the State of Texas and other cities of comparable size in the United States. The First Lady's ties to Canutillo, one of the hardest hit communities, should give you a personal perspective into the issues I am bringing to your attention.

In closing Mr. President, I would humbly request that you allow me the honor of spending a few minutes with you to personally ask that you find we qualify for federal assistance to recover from this natural disaster.

Warmest regards,

John F. Cook
Mayor of El Paso, Texas

cc: Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison
Senator John Cornyn
Congressman Silvestre Reyes
Congressman Henry Bonilla
Governor Rick Perry
Senator Eliot Shapleigh
Representative Norma Chavez
Representative Inocente Quintanilla
Representative Pat Haggerty
Representative Paul Moreno
Representative Joe Pickett
Judge Dolores Briones
Mayor Art Franco, City of Anthony
Mayor Dale Reinhardt, City of Clint
Mayor Raymond Morales, City of Horizon City
Mayor Trini Lopez, City of Socorro
Mayor Madeleine Praino, Village of Vinton
Mayor Ruben Segura, City of Sunland Park
El Paso City Council Members
Joyce Wilson, City Manager