Good afternoon. It’s great to be in Los Angeles. There’s a very little known fact about me that doesn’t get a lot of airplay. My bio says I’m from Tucson, Arizona, but I was born in Los Angeles. My father was underway on a Coast Guard cutter out of Terminal Island when I was born. He had another name picked out for me, [but] my mom picked Thad. So I was born in Los Angeles, my mom named me, my dad was at sea – and I’m here today. And it’s great to be here today. Thank you very much.

It’s also great to be affiliated with RAND. They are an institution in Southern California. They embody some of the best research, non-partisan thinking and divining of answers to questions that some people put in the “too hard to author” category, as we would say in the Coast Guard. One of the reasons I elected to affiliate with RAND when I retired: I didn’t want to go to a defense contractor. I didn’t want to go to a consulting firm. I didn’t want to keep my clearance. I wanted an office and a good computer system, and some people around me that I could trust and respect, and that all spelled RAND.

So I’m happy to be here. I actually operate out of our Arlington office, and when I have the occasion to be out here I slip into Santa Monica and renew
acquaintances there. What I thought I’d do today was talk a little bit about a number of incidents and try and draw some thematic similarities and differences between them. Over the last ten or fifteen years, I’ve been able to experience personally some very extraordinary events, that some people would call asymmetrical; anomalous; unexpected.

Notwithstanding any of that, people rarely get a chance to witness these kinds of things unfolding. And while we don’t want these things to happen, we need to prevent them. We need to do our best job at responding and recovering. I consider myself extraordinarily lucky and honored to have been asked to try and help when these things have occurred. To just give you a rundown – because I’m not going to go through everything – I was the Atlantic commander on 9/11, when the planes hit the towers, and the Pentagon, and the unfortunate plane that hit the fields of Pennsylvania. That was a major aviation event.

For the Coast Guard, it was one of the biggest maritime events in our history. We had closed Boston Harbor because the planes took off out of Logan. We closed New York Harbor. We closed the Potomac River North of the Woodrow Wilson Bridge. And at that point, at least in New York, we had over a million people trapped in lower Manhattan that had to be evacuated by boat. The only way we could re-supply ground zero was by bringing commodities in by vessel and transporting them to ground zero.

So while we were closing down the airways, there were literally thousands of Coast Guard people working on the water in and around New York. Trying to mobilize all that very quickly, make that happen, was a significant issue for the Coast Guard, but we learn every time we do these things.

Following that, as was noted, I was asked by the President to go down during Hurricane Katrina – I’ll talk about that in a minute. But another issue I want
to talk about today happened a year ago on the 12\textsuperscript{th} of January – the earthquake in Haiti. I kind of want to walk you between what happened in Haiti and what happened in New Orleans and the oil spill. They may not seem like the same events, but I think if we don’t understand the lessons learned and improve each time we’re not going to be as prepared and we’re not going to serve the country well for positions or responsibility trying to respond to these events moving forward.

So if I could, I’m going to start off with a couple of brief comments about New Orleans. Just to set the scene for you, the storm came ashore on the 29\textsuperscript{th} of August, 2005. It was a Monday. I got the call from Secretary Chertoff, who was the Secretary of Homeland Security at the time, to go to New Orleans to assist Mike Brown – the administrator of FEMA – to deal with what was going on in and around New Orleans. By that time we had had the melt down at the Super Dome, people had moved to the Convention Center, we had a similar issue at the Convention Center. There was a lot of chaos associated with the response; a lot of shrinking of public confidence in the ability of the government to do anything about it.

I talked to my wife. I said, “Should I do this?” I said, “I don’t think there’s a chance I can improve anything – the windows have closed on a lot of opportunities we may have had to positively impact this event earlier.” My wife looked me squarely in the eye and she said, “You have told people for over thirty years throughout your service in the Coast Guard that your definition of leadership is ‘the ability to reconcile opportunity and competency,’ and you’re not going to go?”

Well, with that kind of spousal support I packed my bags and it was six months before I was relieved. But I came back and forth, and I saw her periodically. I got on a plane and I flew to Baton Rouge on the night of the 5\textsuperscript{th} of September, which was one week after the storm came ashore – it was
Labor Day; a Monday. The next day I flew into New Orleans, and I was absolutely stunned at what I saw. The city was completely silent. It was full of black water. There were still helicopters buzzing around because we were still doing search and rescue. We were into the very sad process of remains recovery. We were trying to repair the levies. And I realized as the helicopter landed that at a very national level, we had gotten a problem wrong.

One of the things I’d like to talk to you about crisis response here today is, if you don’t get the problem right to begin with, and you don’t have the objectives correct, you’re going to apply resources in the wrong areas. You’re going to fail to see what you need to do. But most importantly, you won’t achieve the affects the public is expecting you to achieve, as a government, with the whole-of-government response. You’re going to get into a downward spiral of confidence from the American public.

Flying into New Orleans, I realized that we weren’t dealing with a hurricane anymore. I’m a big devotee of a professor at MIT called Peter Senge who wrote a book about 20 years ago called *The Fifth Discipline*. He talks about learning organizations and how you build personal mastery over a career. One of the things he talks about is “mental models” like, how do you understand what’s going on? And, can you create a new mental model when you have to, that can be the basis for decision making and critical thinking when you really need to?

And I decided that we got the mental model wrong. Everybody was thinking we were dealing with a hurricane. And if we were dealing with just a hurricane – if the levies had not collapsed – ground zero would have been Waveland, Mississippi, which had 25 feet of water come over and wipe them off the face of the earth – went five miles inland and overtopped Interstate 10. But the fact of the matter is that the levies collapsed. When the levies collapsed we had a different problem, and our failure to recognize that we
needed to do something different and think differently, I think, was the biggest problem we had in that first week following the Hurricane.

Allen’s mental model of what happened in New Orleans is that we the equivalent of a weapon of mass effect used on the city of New Orleans without criminality. That’s a mouthful. Let me decrypt it for you – the world according to Allen here:

If terrorists had blown the levies, the special agent in charge of the FBI office in New Orleans would have been in charge – we’d have done recovery. But the recovery in assisting the mayor and the governor of Louisiana, we would of done that, but the primary thing would have been dealing with the terrorist attack that compromised the levies. That did not happen, and because that did not happen the legal authority for the response in New Orleans rested with the state and local authorities.

I’m not here to teach you constitutional law but the 14th amendment states that all powers not granted to the federal government are reserved to the states. And the federal government does not have the power to dictate local response to states and communities. In the week following the landfall of the hurricane, there was active discussion in the Pentagon, in the White House, and elsewhere – because I was privy to some of it – as to whether or not we should invoke the Insurrection Act, which allows you to declare martial law, come in, kind of take over.

The problem was, we had not lost the leadership in the government. We had a standing mayor; we had a standing governor, and I’ll use a military term right now, what happened was we did not have “decapitation.” But we lost “continuity of government.” Usually, when you lose continuity of government you have decapitation. So what had happened was, we had forces flowing into New Orleans for eight days. Urban search and rescue teams, state
policeman there under mutual-assistant pacts, Coast Guard – we saved 33,000 people in seven days in New Orleans.

But they were all self deployed. They didn’t report to anybody other than their chain of command back to their original agencies, because New Orleans and the state did not have the infrastructure to accept those resources and apply them to mission effect.

So the notion is, we lost continuity of government without decapitation, and therefore – my characterization – it was equivalent to a weapon of mass effect used on the city without criminality. There was not a legal case for Federal preemption, but the local authorities couldn’t exercise their legal authorities with the resources provided. Once I knew that, we could figure out what to do – sounds pretty complicated, but in fact it wasn’t.

When I got to New Orleans on Tuesday the 6th of September, I sat down and had a meeting with Russ Honoré. You all remember Russ, that crazy Lieutenant General in the Army? Told the press not to get stuck on stupid – became an instant bumper sticker everywhere in the South. He and I got together; we made a couple of agreements. Number one, we weren’t going to fight in public because that was not the reason why we were there.

Number two: in military terms, I was the supported commander and he was the supporting commander. And at one point we had 80,000 uniformed boots on the ground in the gulf. That’s a tremendous amount of resources – what do you do with them? Now that we had established the problem, how do you give effect to a government that doesn’t have any infrastructure to go about fixing the problem? Here is what we did: We divided New Orleans into sectors. We assigned each sector to one of Russ Honoré’s components. For instance, the central business district was assigned to the 82nd Airborne. The garden district and areas to the West were assigned to the National Guard.
The lower 9th Ward and St. Bernard Parish, which in my view were hit the hardest – they had the original storm surge; they had the back flooding when the industrial canal broke and flooded over the 9th Ward into St. Bernard Parish, and then Murphy Oil had a million gallon crude oil tank that came off its foundation and slimed St. Bernard Parish – like a triple whammy. It was so awful down there; we gave that to the Marines.

Then what we did was, we commenced what we called a “hasty sweep.” We went through the city and we touched every building. Here’s how we did it: We created teams of 30 or 40 people; we got rubber boats; we got high water vehicles and we provided safety, security, logistics, and access to local policemen and state policemen that could go touch every house and see if anybody needed to be saved.

We started dealing with the very, very difficult challenge of remains removal. The way we did that was, every time we found a set of remains, we left a military person there with them – nobody was left alone once we found them – until we could get mortuary services there to bring them back to a mortuary that we built south of Baton Rouge. And we commenced the sweep of the city.

Every night we made a plan on what we would do the following day and we’d present it to the mayor. We were there to support him and empower him and his people to carry out their law enforcement functions without supplanting him or assuming his legal authority. But we didn’t know how to do that unless we defined the problem correctly, and that gets back to understanding that you had the effect of a weapon of mass effect but you had a standing government that needed to be empowered with the infrastructure that the Federal government could provide – and that’s how we moved forward in Katrina.
Well something that stuck with me for a very, very long time – if I could fast forward to the 12th of January last year – we had an unprecedented earthquake hit Haiti. You’re saying, “Why is the Commandant of the Coast Guard talking about Haiti?” Well, we had Coast Guard cutter stationed off of Haiti and Cuba as we do 24 hours a day because of illegal migration. And because of that, the next morning, sailing into Port-au-Price Harbor was a small number of Coast Guard cutters.

We were never going to be consequential in the overall disaster because it was so large and so dramatic. But we were the first on scene. We passed back reports. Our people went ashore, and they were absolutely astounded at what they saw. We had mechanics, electricians, boatswain’s mates going ashore and rendering first aid and actually taking fractures and setting them or splinting them with tree limbs. This was Civil War medicine folks; absolutely extraordinary.

Because the Coast Guard was involved and first on scene, we were called into the White House the next day. I went with Secretary Napolitano and Craig Fugate at the cabinet meeting where the President met and tasked everybody what to do. Hemispheric partners, they’re important to us. We’ve got a migration issue with Haiti. We’re going to go down there and throw everything we’ve got at this problem. Now the long-term recovery of Haiti was already a problem internationally and will continue so I’m going to focus on just the response and what we were able to do there.

Secretary Napolitano, my boss, was anxious to do something because, when you go talk to this President – you come out of a meeting with him – you’ve got what I would call your operational and political endorphins raised. Probably maybe a better way to state it is that you come out of a meeting with this guy and you’re one of the Blues Brothers – you’re on a mission from God. Remember the movie? The question always is, whether it’s New Orleans
or whether it’s Haiti, is to create unity of effort. Especially in a situation where DOD is not the monolithic response entity; they’re supporting... how do you get everybody to work together, even though sometimes we don’t have statutory authority to order anybody about?

Secretary Napolitano was very anxious to do something in Haiti. But as I told her when we had a couple of conversations, “You are the Secretary of Homeland Security.” And the way we were trying to help Haiti was through the U.S. ambassador, who was the principle Federal official for the United States dealing with President Préval, and USAID helping the ambassador.

The similarity between Haiti and New Orleans was as follows: They lost continuity of government without decapitation. They had the equivalent of a weapon of mass effect used on the country without criminality. Except in this case, we could not presume the prerogatives of a sovereign country. So I sat down with Secretary Napolitano. I said, “Let’s do this: Let’s not rethink what needs to be done down there. Let’s take the solution that Russ Honoré and I put together in New Orleans and give it to the U.S. ambassador.

“Let us put together an incident management team. Let’s get a senior executive from FEMA. Let’s get a one-star Coast Guard admiral, put everything on a C-17, including satellite communications, fly them to Port-au-Prince and put them on the ground at the U.S. embassy.” And that’s what we did.

There was a Lieutenant General from U.S. Southern Command, Lieutenant General Keen, who was already down there. He was the equivalent of Russ Honoré. The only difference is we were dealing with a sovereign country. Another complicating factor is we had a U.N. Mission there. They were decapitated. Their senior leadership was killed in the earthquake. So,
ultimately the long-term goal was to return long-term recovery to the U.N., and have the recovery be a bridge to that.

Two final things I would say about the Haitian operations. One was, we elected to use the NGOs that were in place to be the distribution method for the supplies that were coming in. One of the reasons we did that is there’s a traditional relationship between those organizations and Haiti and there are well over 200 that were already there. And all we had to do was create a way to get the commodities in and get them to the NGOs and have them distribute it to the retail end, if you will.

I want to talk about non-governmental organizations when I finish.

The other thing that was significant about Haiti was taking control of the airspace. In a meeting in the cabinet room with the President, the statement was made that we could not be effective in supporting this operation if we couldn’t increase the through-put at the airport. Haiti has an airport with one landing strip – daylight qualified only – and it was taken down hard in terms of the communications equipment.

The Port collapsed. You couldn’t get containers in. There was no way to get shipping, and it was a 12- or 14-hour overland ride for trucks from Santa Domingo. President Clinton went to Haiti – met with President Préval – asked if we could take the airspace for 72 hours to demonstrate that we could control it and increase the throughput. Once they found out what we were able to do, they gave us total carte blanche to run the airspace.

We had to demonstrate we could do that with equal access to the other countries that had concerns, so if you had the vice president of Bolivia that got airborne with a plane load of supplies and said, “I’m six hours out,” we had to accommodate that and not project to the rest of the world that this
was a U.S. show only. To do that we set up a team over at the USAID working with Dr. Rajiv Shah, director of USAID who, by the way folks, when this happened – this guy is in his late thirties. He’s a doctor working for the Gates Foundation. He’d been on the job like ten days when this happened, but demonstrated extraordinary leadership coming out of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

When we set up a team to manage the landing slots; once we prioritized the landing slots, we gave that to the Air Force. They took it over and checked the airplanes. At the height of the airlift coming into Haiti, we were handling 160 aircraft a day – extraordinary. And I could dwell on Haiti, but I’m not going to do that. I’m going to jump to the oil spill now.

Hi Buzz [Aldrin, in the audience]. How ya doing? You and I have run into each other over the years. We’ll have to get together when this is over.

The oil spill... What made the oil spill different? The following issues: I’ve been asked to compare the hurricane to the oil spill, and I tell everybody that the oil spill – forgive me Buzz – is closer to Apollo 13 than the hurricane. The reason is there was no human access to the problem. Everything we knew, we knew from remotely operated vehicles or remote sensing. And everything we did to solve the problem had to be done remotely from a command center that was established in Houston by BP to bring back all the remote feeds from the remotely operated vehicles (ROVs).

That was the only place that you could everything that the ROVs were seeing together at one place. Each ROV operator could only see what they were seeing. This all came back together at a place called the “Highly Immersive Video Environment” in Houston, “the HIVE” that BP put together to bring it all back, and there’s a guy sitting at a counsel in the middle seeing every
ROV feed and orchestrating what happened at the oil head. It was extraordinary.

And I’m not relieving BP of any blame; or TransOcean; or Haliburton or any blame for this. All I’m telling you is, once they were presented with a problem, how they ultimately solved it resembled more how we would solve a problem with debris in space or something like that than it did the hurricane.

Second issue: I didn’t have to worry about legal authorities. There is clear Federal preemption in an oil spill. It is not a responsibility to state and local governments to do that. The well itself is 45 miles south of the entrance to the Mississippi river in Louisiana. It was not in state waters. Oil is agnostic to state boundaries. We had oil coming to the surface every day for 85 straight days under different wind, current and tide conditions. We did not have a monolithic spill. We had hundreds of thousands of patches of oil that threatened five states – and the requirement to have booming equipment and skimming equipment to protect five states simultaneously was never anticipated by any response plan.

So you could talk about the flow rate, whether or not we got it right early on, or whether or not the response plans were correct. In my view they were not consequential in the long run because what the oil did when it came to the surface required us to defend the entire Gulf of Mexico simultaneously, put a huge strain on the industrial complex – producing boom and skimming equipment – but more importantly required us to create unity-of-effort across five states, two FEMA regions, with five Republican governors and a Democratic administration with midterm elections approaching. Other than that it was not difficult.
I’ve been interviewed extensively over the last two weeks approaching the anniversary, and I can tell you right now – because I’ve already given it up to the press – this is the most political event I’ve ever been involved in. A couple of problems I had, number one was what I call “cognitive dissonance” by local political leaders who had never dealt with a large oil spill before, that didn’t understand that there was going to be a federal on-scene coordinator, coordinating what was being done in their backyards.

That was very difficult for them to understand, especially in Louisiana. So we were managing that while we were trying to martial everybody together and create unity of command for the oil spill. Let me make a couple of comments and get to the Q & A. Just a couple of key things regarding the oil spill: The ability to create unity-of-effort across five states at the Federal level was a significant challenge. But beyond that, one of the real challenges we dealt with: BP came in, and in an effort to mitigate the economic impact of the oil spill, was to put thousands of vessels on payroll to help us clean up the oil.

They were called “vessels of opportunity,” and that seemed like a good idea. But I have equated these vessels, which I would call a water-born militia, to the folks that showed up at Concord before our revolution. They showed up with passion, commitment, and resources, except some of them had a musket and some of them had a knife. We had to form them up into companies, teach them to march, and hopefully beat the British, right?

We were given thousands of vessels with different communications capabilities, and we needed to put them to work. We did not have an advanced communications or control system to be able to apply them to mission effect. In order to create that continuity of government I talked about in Haiti and New Orleans. That led to one of the most consequential moments in the entire spill, in my view. I was in Pensacola, Florida. I’d flown down there on Air Force One with the President. We were on our way back.
He was going to give the address that night to the nation in the Oval office. He was talking with his staff and I was kinda lost in my thoughts. I was sitting just outside the office of the forward part of the plane trying to figure out what am I going to do when I got back?

Somebody bumped into me. I looked up and it was the President. He sat down. The first thing he said: “Do you have enough resources?” I said, “Mr. President, it is not an issue of resources. Between BP and the United States we got money. It’s a matter of industrial base supply-chain issues. I’m working through that. There’s nothing you or I can do right now to make that happen any faster. We can do things in the future. But that is not the issue.”

And he says, “Well what is it you need?” And I said, “I made a mistake, I think. I probably should have taken control of the airspace on day one like we did in Haiti.” And he said, “Why?” I said, “Well, we’ve had eight near-mid-air collisions. With all the helicopter flying logistics to the rigs, spotter planes for the skimming and situ-burning dispersives and so forth, Coast Guard, press, NASA and NOAA planes flying with sensors, hugely complicated air space.”

And on the surface around the surface area of the well at one time we had 35 vessels within one mile and 20 ROVs operating simultaneously. And the fact we didn’t have a major marine casualty or an air event just astounded me. And I told the President, “Tomorrow morning I’m going to talk to (Admiral) Mike Mullen, (General Norton A.) Norty Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, and (Admiral James A.) Sandy (Winnefeld, Jr.), U.S. Northern Commander. I’d like to take control of the airspace and manage that just like it was a battle space. That will allow us to bring the surveillance and reconnaissance information back, consolidate in one place – Tyndall Air Force Base, in this case – and then be able to tell those fisherman, be able to tell them where to go with a high degree of accuracy.”
And the President leans over and he goes, “Thad, do what you gotta do. But there are no do-overs in this.”

“Mr. President I get that. I get that.”

So the next morning I got up and I wrote about a three page e-mail. I followed that up with extensive plans, and we basically re-wickered the response doctrine to allow for the more expansive area we had to cover. That became a 35-page document that I reissued every week and added... everything I told everybody, I just added into the operating procedures that we were building. And the day I left on 1 October I gave it to the National Response Team which is the inter-agency team that oversees the oil response and it was 560 pages. So I captured everything we did in the tentacles of that. I’ll go quick here back to New Orleans.

So a couple of comments. You have to have unity of effort, number one. Number two, there has to be a Federal face of the response that can deal with the press, and that is accountable. That creates confidence in the American public that there is a whole-of-government response in progress, and that they can have confidence as citizens that their needs are being met.

There is always going to be public participation in one of these events. We will never have an event again that does not involve public participation. And I mean that in its widest sense. I mean non-governmental organizations; faith-based organizations; private sector; folks that start a chat room on the internet; bloggers; tweeters; crowd-sourcers. All that’s going to happen in the future and we have to be prepared to deal with it.

Now during the oil spill we created an internet site based on the GIS system. You could go in and click what data you want, it would show you how many beaches were oiled; where the response equipment was; where we could find
oiled turtles; where the wildlife recovery centers were; where you could go file a claim. Were going to have to fill that space immediately because the 7-by-24-hour news cycle and the ability of people to self-report and self-organize will overtake the government unless we demonstrate that we can do it and we can do this together.

If you don’t believe me, we just had a mid-level executive from Google consequently impact what happened on the streets of Cairo. The number one way the Japanese learned about how their families were doing, here and there was through Facebook.

I’ll leave with this comment and we can go to questions. I was talking to John Holdren a while back. He’s the Science and Technology advisor to the President. He gives a wonderful presentation on climate change. And when he’s done he looks around and he says, “You know we have three ways to deal with climate change. We can suffer, we can adapt, or we can manage.”

I would submit to you the 7-by-24-hour news cycle; high-speed computation; the way we’re managing spectrum and the internet, have created the sociological equivalent of climate change. And we have three ways to deal with it, we can suffer, we can adapt, or we can manage. The problem is, you know, all of us senior citizens in the room – including me – didn’t grow up in this environment. It takes a considerable amount of learning to understand what’s going on, or else we have to be handcuffed to a 14-year old for a week.

How many of you have your devices fixed by your grandkids in your house? Alright, there are some issues here. But I have to tell you, we’re going to have public participation because we can’t stop it. There’s no barrier to entry. There’s no barrier to entry. So if you don’t occupy that space, somebody will. And they may be right; they may be wrong. Because the fidelity; the
robustness; the accuracy, the honesty of anything that’s on the internet rests with who? The reader... the reader. Anything you say, or is reported becomes a sociological equivalent of non-biodegradable plastic. They will find a disk 1,000 years from now and say what is this idiot Allen saying about oil in the Gulf of Mexico? It will be our sociological equivalent of arrowheads. We’ve got to take that into account moving forward.

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