



My Next Mission: America Needs a Culture of Preparedness

General Russel Honore

America needs a culture of preparedness.

After more than 37 years of uniform service to the U.S. army and our nation, I will spend the second half of my life committed to a new mission: Creating a "Culture of Preparedness" in America. Every effort I take will be committed to this cause - whether it is my new web site (<http://www.generalhonore.com/>), public speaking/lectures, fund-raisers, or the books I have written or will write.

The urgent need for this movement is one of the lessons I learned through personal experiences during my last few years in the Army. The U.S. had a Culture of Preparedness during the 1960s, when every home, government agency and institution did something to prepare in the event of a nuclear attack from the former Soviet bloc. Once that threat was all but gone, we abandoned our readiness.

We are seeing that more state governments are struggling in response to recent disasters. Recent Red Cross data shows that for every dollar spent on preparedness, it saves 6 to 9 dollars during disaster response and recovery. As many have seen, disasters cause drama, drama for state governments especially when plans don't execute or the storm trumps the states capability to deal with the disaster response. "Blame the Federal government and FEMA", that is the get-out-of-jail- free card that the state governments have. We can do better.

During this post-9/11 and Hurricane Katrina era, there has been more emphasis placed on government/FEMA preparedness, but the vast majority of Americans have not grabbed onto the need to be prepared at home and at work for potential disasters. One of the harshest lessons learned from recent disasters, especially Katrina, is that you are your own first responder.

We need to prepare ourselves, our families and our homes. In many cases, family and personal preparations can be fairly simple. All it takes is a shift in our thinking. Here's an easy three-step jumpstart: Step 1: Have a plan to evacuate; Step 2: Have an emergency evacuation kit and three days' supply of food and water on hand at your home; and Step 3: Have a weather radio or some other means of staying informed. (When Granny's birthday comes around and you're thinking of giving her one of those silver picture frames with a photo of the kids, give her a weather radio instead).

Of course, on a national scale the task is far more complex. The recent series of disasters in the United States and around the world have demonstrated with startling clarity that we are living in a "new normal." In this new normal, we need a preparedness that is ingrained and intertwined in every part of our daily lives, but is mostly common sense and based in the American spirit.

To create a Culture of Preparedness, we need to focus "left of the disaster," which means investing in preparation. We can start by personally being Red Cross Ready www.redcross.org and making first aid and pandemic prevention and response required courses on a high school and college level.

We need to create a national preparedness plan, with a local civil defense corps. Government has to set standards for institutions like nursing homes and hospitals (they should be evacuated well before the

general population). We need dual-trained teachers who can be disaster responders. We need generators in drugstores in each geographical area (if power is lost, people can still get medicine) and gas stations along all interstate highways. We need cell-phone towers that can be lowered before a storm and then raised after the storm.

We have to optimize technology. We need to issue disaster assistance cards which can easily be activated and provide financial assistance to those who need it. Secondly, all state employees should be trained to register folks for relief following a disaster, which currently few states are trained to execute when needed. Officials also need to be mindful to pre-position food water and tarps in communities, as well as use local businesses to serve as a large part of the area's disaster response. Each area affected should have assistance locations and they should be well marked. They shouldn't block major roads and supplies should be given to anyone who shows up, no matter what county they are from.

Cities should utilize resources and use local businesses as an integral part of the disaster response. Businesses should be aware of response logistics and local governments should have pre-arranged contracts with local businesses to provide emergency goods and services. One idea would be to have local businesses provide hot meals at fixed prices – approximately 8 dollars each.

Officials should also think of the residents in disaster areas as resources as well. School systems in each state should integrate disaster preparedness and first aid into to its curriculum and every college graduate should be first aid certified. ***We need to involve the members of our communities, where we can create a civilian response corps in each community. I like to call them “men of consequence” – those who volunteer their time and talent to create resilient communities.*** These volunteers would be prepared and trained to clear debris from roads and help shore up levees. They would be taught how to operate distribution points and help evacuate communities.

A very important point that I must make is that local officials must assure that residents in our communities have power. It is imperative that that various laws are passed that will require gas stations and drug/grocery stores to have generators. When cities lose electrical power, our quality of life regresses back 80 years - people have no television, no running water or working sewer, no internet or cell phones. Facilities such as hospitals, courthouses and emergency response stations should have mandatory generators on the 2nd floor in order to protect the power source. As we saw during Hurricane Katrina, many City of New Orleans public buildings did have generators – but unfortunately they were in the basement or at ground level which did not serve them in the disaster.

Lastly, officials need to improve evacuation contra flow. We need full use of interstate highways. The federal government owns the flow on the interstate but during hurricane Gustav, unfortunately, we saw city, state and county officials blocking traffic on interstate highways. This policy needs to be reviewed and having surrounding states reroute traffic to protect the flow of tourist traffic to local resorts is unacceptable. As I am sure you will agree, going 40 miles in 12 hours is another disaster in the making.

Will these things be expensive at a time of economic hardship? Of course, but for every \$1 spent on preparedness we can save up to \$9 in response costs after a disaster.

It's time for America to wake up to this reality. Our task as Americans is to be ready. We need to create a culture of preparedness in America. Our forefathers knew how to take care of themselves, their families, and the communities in which they lived. As citizens, we need to be prepared to do that same - we cannot wait on the federal government to do it for us.

In this new normal, we have only two options: We can exist in fear and dependency, or we can do the responsible thing and live comfortably in a culture of preparedness.

I hope my Website and my ongoing efforts will help this become reality.

Retired Lieutenant General Russel Honoré serves as Emergency Preparedness contributor to CNN Worldwide. He focuses exclusively on disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities, with multi-sector integration of emergency management.

Before retiring, LTG Honoré commanded Joint Task Force-Katrina. In that capacity, he led the Department of Defense response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, and directed the operations of over 22,000 Service members, 200 aircraft, and 20 ships. In accordance with the leadership and priorities established by LTG Honoré, Joint Task Force-Katrina collaborated with Federal, State and local authorities to coordinate and conduct all response, recovery, and mitigation operations.

Lieutenant General Honoré is a native of Lakeland, Louisiana and retired on February 29, 2008, following 37 years of active service with the United States Army. He continues to speak and consult nationally on Building a Culture of Preparedness.

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