

## STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE KEVIN ANDERSON

Thank you very much. I'd also like to thank each and every one of you for being here today and taking the time to follow up on the response, a response that played a critical role in our recovery, albeit not perfect at times.

But I'd also like to echo Commissioner Hamman in recognizing Congressman Donalds. I mean, I think it was within 12 hours of the storm landing, his feet were on the ground. He was in our community, meeting with us, and seeing what needed to be done.

So, thank you, Congressman, to you and your staff.

I'm going to do my best not to repeat what the commissioner said, because it's basically the same stuff. What I do want to say is that, you know, our area, Fort Myers, Lee County, southwest Florida, we're not just a dot on a map. We're like every other community in this country. We're comprised of people and businesses and schools and churches and all of that that goes together to make a community.

I stood at the door of my balcony I live in a condo in the heart of downtown, three blocks from the Caloosahatchee River. And, fortunately, we're about 15 miles upstream from the Gulf of Mexico, so we didn't suffer like the barrier islands and the beaches did. But I stood there looking at our downtown.

Now, as the Congressman mentioned, I was in law enforcement, did 24 years in Fort Myers. I know what downtown was like when I started as a police officer. It was blighted. We didn't even like going down there after dark. That's how bad it was.

Now it's a very vibrant, active part of our community. And I stood there, and I watched the waters come in from the river to the point where it covered a FedEx box. And I'm thinking I still had the television on. I'm listening to the weather, and they're saying twice as much water is going to come in on the back side of this storm. And I stood there helpless thinking, What is this going to do to our downtown, the city, and the region for that fact? Fortunately, when the eye passed, the water receded, and so we only most places that got it the worst had about 4 feet of water.

The very next morning at sunrise, the people the people of southwest Florida are strong and resilient. They were back in their businesses cleaning things out. In fact, the owner of the downtown House of Pizza came in at midnight, stayed there all night long. He was open on Thursday, had a line around the block, four hour wait for a pizza.

But, the people in line waiting, they didn't complain. They were all happy to be able to get a hot pizza. And that got the rest of the businesses downtown clearing their businesses out, which meant the debris piled up quickly. And we're talking food, construction, and demolition materials, garbage, and all of that, which pose a real safety and health issue. Not only that, but a psychological issue.

Think about you coming by your business or you coming by your house, and there on the side of the road is your life, your memories, your keepsakes, antiques, all kinds of things just piled up there as trash. It has a real psychological effect. So that was our first challenge, was getting the okay to pick up the debris.

The State of Florida told us, Don't wait on the Federal Government; get going. And that made all the difference in the world. We spent several days cleaning up our downtown. And that really, I think, was a catalyst for a great recovery, because it motivated people, showing them, hey, it was a bad hit, we were knocked down. We weren't knocked out. We were rising from the rubble. We were rebuilding already.

And we are very thankful to the Federal Government and all the agencies that showed up. But I must sum it up in one little phrase. And I think, and this is not meaning to be disrespectful to the gentleman from FEMA, but process versus purpose. All of the Federal agencies have great processes, but it prevents them, at times, from fulfilling the purpose.

And, while their process is designed to help those who have been displaced from their home, lost a loved one, lost their business, whatever it may be, it often prevents them from fulfilling that purpose. And who is stuck there is those who are suffering the most.

Thank you.