

## **Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing**

### **“An Oversight Hearing on Gulf Coast Reconstruction Contracting”**

**Paul Mullinax**

Independent Owner-Operator  
Refrigerated Tractor-Trailer

October 17, 2005

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, my name is Paul Mullinax, and I am an independent owner-operator of a tractor and a refrigerated trailer. My involvement with FEMA’s hurricane relief effort began on September 2, via a phone call from my broker instructing me to drive to Newburgh, New York, to pick up a load of ice for delivery to Carthage, Missouri. At the time I was in Binghamton, New York, where I had recently made a delivery and emptied my trailer.

When I arrived in Newburgh, I picked up a full load of ice with instructions to deliver it as soon as possible to an ice storage facility in Carthage. Upon arrival in Carthage, at approximately 10:30 a.m. on Sunday, September 4, I checked in with security at the ice storage facility. They informed me that the facility was closed. I asked the security guard what time on Monday the facility would open, and he instructed me to park my rig and to check in with the Army Corps of Engineers. When I asked why, he said that I would not, in fact, be staying in Carthage.

When I checked in with the Army Corps of Engineers, they instructed me that I would need to take my load to Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama. I called my broker to inform him that I needed to move the load to Alabama, and to ask him whether the client paying for the delivery would approve the extra expense. Thirty minutes later, my broker told me that I had approval, and I returned to the Army Corps officials to be signed out and to receive a map to Maxwell Air Force Base. I saw that I was the 60th truck on his list. I heard him say that the next 100 trucks would be sent to Jackson, Mississippi, meaning that at least 160 trucks had been unnecessarily routed through Carthage.

I would estimate that stopping in Carthage added roughly 740 extra miles to my trip, and the government paid me and every other truck that went to Maxwell an extra \$1,500 each to cover that distance. The Army Corps could have saved the time and the expense simply by calling my cell phone, a number I know they had, while I was on the road. Once I got on the road to Maxwell, I discovered that the Mapquest directions that the Army Corps had given me included roads on which I could not travel in a truck my size. Nonetheless, after some re-routing, on the morning of Monday, September 5, I arrived at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama.

When I arrived at Maxwell, two security guards waved me on to the base and instructed me to follow arrows to a check-in point. To my surprise, they did not ask for ID, nor did they inspect my load. I told my wife, who was traveling with me, that I expected they would do so at the check-in point; as a former United States Marine, and having made deliveries to military bases over the years, I thought that they would at least quickly screen drivers and tractor-trailers before parking them on the runway. They did not.

At the check-in point, a civilian with the Army Corps of Engineers signed me in, gave me a sign that read “ice” to place in my windshield, and instructed me to follow a golf cart to where I should park. I had no idea, when I parked the truck, that I would be there for the next 12 days, with my refrigerator unit running the entire time. When I arrived, roughly 100 other trucks were already staged at the base. Those trucks were carrying ice, water, MREs, cots, blankets, and approximately 15 to 20 large, industrial generators. Each night roughly 15 trucks would be dispatched from the base, but another 30 would arrive.

Many of the truckers at Maxwell, myself included, were watching news reports from areas affected by the hurricane. I couldn’t understand why we were sitting with trucks full of emergency supplies while local officials appearing on television asked for the same commodities we were hauling. When I and other drivers asked FEMA and Army Corps officials why we couldn’t deliver our supplies, no one had an answer. Usually they said, “I’ll check on it,” but never returned. So once again we waited. And waited. And each day we waited, the government would pay anywhere from \$600 to \$900 per truck. For 150 trucks, at Maxwell alone, that comes to a minimum of \$90,000 each day, and as much as \$135,000.

On my tenth day at Maxwell, I checked in with the Army Corps of Engineers and asked why I was waiting and when I would be leaving. At that time, they instructed me to take my load of ice to Idaho. I asked the young Army Corps worker why they needed me to take my load of ice to Idaho, and noted that no hurricane had hit Idaho. He responded by saying that he could have the National Guard escort me and my truck off the base. I told him that I would not drive to Idaho, then turned and walked back to my truck. The National Guard never arrived.

On my twelfth day at Maxwell, I was told to drive my load of ice to a storage facility in Gloucester, Massachusetts. At that point I called the national headquarters of IAP, the company that holds the FEMA contract to deliver ice, and offered to purchase my load of ice for \$1,500. When the IAP representative on the phone asked what I would do with the ice, I told him that I would drive to Biloxi, Mississippi, and give it away to anyone who needed it. He asked who would sign for it. I told him that I didn’t care, and that he shouldn’t care either once I’d paid him for the ice. He told me no, and that they wanted me to take the ice to Gloucester. Rather than cut their losses and accept \$1,500 for the load of ice, they paid me roughly \$2,500 to drive the ice to Massachusetts.

Arriving in Gloucester, Massachusetts, on the morning of September 18, I discovered what I estimated to be another 120 to 130 trucks full of FEMA ice in line ahead of me. They filled the town of Gloucester, overwhelming the local police and exciting the local media. I had

to wait until 8:00 p.m. the next night to be off-loaded. In total, I had FEMA's ice in my refrigerated trailer for 17 days, with the refrigerator unit running 24 hours a day the entire time. Not a single cube of the ice I was hauling went to a hurricane survivor. Bottom line: from September 2 to September 19, transporting my one truckload of ice from New York to Massachusetts cost the taxpayer in excess of \$15,000. FEMA is now paying to store all of the ice from all of the trucks that arrived in Gloucester, a fishing town that already produces 70 tons of ice each day. Moreover, I was one of at least 150 trucks in the Maxwell staging area, and Maxwell was one of four staging areas of which I am aware. One of my colleagues passed through all four of them and, at the end of 12 days, eventually delivered his ice to Idaho.

While I was being unloaded in Gloucester, where people were getting impatient and tempers were running high, the truck to my left emptied first and, in a hurry to put the whole experience behind him, pulled out too quickly and too far to the right. His trailer took off the front end of my truck, doing \$14,000 in damage and stranding me in Massachusetts for another 28 days while waiting for my truck to be repaired. It's still in the shop, but I'm hoping it'll be ready when I return to New England this evening.

If I had one idea to share with the Committee, based on my experience, it would be that FEMA should have a transportation command and control center. A wall map, a list of cell phone numbers, and a small staff could have saved the taxpayer millions of dollars and more efficiently delivered assistance to those who needed it. The left hand would have known what the right hand was doing.

Thank you, and I stand ready for your questions.