THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

NOV 17 2005

TO: USPHS Commissioned Corps Officers

SUBJECT: Response to Hurricane Katrina

It is at times of National tragedies that we see the promise of the great Nation that was envisioned by our Founding Fathers more than two-centuries ago. As George Washington wrote "we must never despair; our situation has been compromising before; and it changed for the better; so I trust it will again; if difficulties arise; we must put forth new exertion and proportion our efforts to the exigencies of the times." His words ring true today. The officers of the Commissioned Corps have led the way in the public health response to the devastation inflicted on the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina. Your response vividly demonstrates the importance of you maintaining your individual and our Corps' readiness.

As your Secretary, I have been impressed with the enthusiastic response of the Corps to alleviate the suffering of the citizens from the impacted communities in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. Once the potential need was identified while Hurricane Katrina was still growing in the Gulf of Mexico, each of you indicated your desire and availability to deploy. Many officers were pre-staged around the projected landfall area, many more of you moved into the area as the storm moved through, still others of you will relieve those who were among the first Federal assets in the area, and others have helped coordinate the response from remote locations. To date, more than 1000 Corps officers representing each of the professional Categories have engaged in activities that are directly related to the relief effort.

A large contingent of you were not deployed during the response; instead, you continued to support the mission of your agencies, the Corps and the Department, often times accepting additional responsibilities while fellow officers were on deployment. Your sacrifices in the weeks since the hurricane struck the Gulf Coast has enabled us to respond effectively to the disaster while continuing to serve the public health and medical needs of all Americans. We have put forth new exertion and proportioned our efforts to the exigencies of the times just as George Washington had asked.

I am proud to work with such dedicated and compassionate public health professionals.

Michael O. Leavitt