

The storms of the past two weeks have challenged the people of Mississippi and our neighbors along the Gulf Coast. Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili remind us of the power of natural forces and the respect we must have for them.

It is due to our respect for those forces that we take action quickly. As the recent storms grew in intensity and proximity to Mississippi, they were closely monitored. The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) worked closely with federal emergency officials and the National Hurricane Center to prepare for the impact of the storms.

In the end, our top priority is the safety and security of the people of Mississippi. To meet that priority, we declared a state of emergency well ahead of the arrival of the storms.

When a state of emergency is issued, a massive chain of events is put in motion. Local officials are given broader authority to enact emergency measures in their areas. MEMA can deploy their emergency responders to the front lines of the storm in preparation of meeting local needs.

And, the declaration of a state of emergency also automatically puts into place consumer protection measures designed to protect citizens from those who would try to profit from disaster.

The effectiveness of state of emergency declarations would be greatly lessened if we waited until the storms hit Mississippi. Simply put, they would be too little, too late. To save lives, resources must be in place before they are actually needed.

In addition to the state of emergency declarations for Tropical Storm Isidore and Hurricane Lili, executive orders were issued directing the call-up of the Mississippi National Guard.

There is no doubt that the deployment of our “citizen soldiers” during Isidore helped save lives. Guard personnel were out in force evacuating people from flooded areas accessible only by heavy military trucks. In one night, nearly 600 people were removed by the men and women of the Guard.

One photo of a National Guard soldier carrying a 10-month old little boy to safety told the entire story of the work these great soldiers carried out during Tropical Storm Isidore.

In addition to the resources marshaled by the state of emergency declarations and the deployment of Guard personnel, hundreds of emergency management professionals and local volunteers staffed emergency operations centers. The good work of these people before, during and after natural disasters cannot be emphasized enough.

When it comes to storms like Isidore and Lili, we will not do anything that would put the lives of Mississippians at risk, and that same commitment applies to those evacuating from our neighboring states. Our shelters and our roads are always open to them, but we cannot implement plans that take away substantial resources from our own communities and put our people at risk.

Our ability to take on the challenges presented to us by nature is enhanced by our level of preparedness for any situation, and we’re ready for whatever comes our way.