BLANCO: FEDS COULD HAVE HELPED MORE

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It was Friday Aug. 26, 2005. Three days before Katrina, the worst hurricane in the nation’s history would hit Louisiana. Gov. Kathleen Blanco had just driven back to Lafayette from Baton Rouge to check on her home and take care of some errands.

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10 YEARS AFTER HURRICANE KATRINA

Evacuee Sarah Shoemaker of Violet Louisiana (right) gets comfort from then-Gov. Kathleen Blanco.

Honored to come into Louisiana and the National Guard would remain under the control of the governor.

“They can say all day long that federalization delayed their effort,” she said. “That was their choice, not ours.”

In addition to communication problems with the White House, Blanco said communication with Noggin was almost nonexistent. She said the mayor had got himself virtually unavailing, only stepping out of his quarters to do short press conferences.

Blanco said he believes he became paranoid, helped along by New Orleans Police Chief Eddie Compass and others who were feeding the rumor mill.

Ten years later, many wonder if New Orleans is ready should another Katrina hit the area. Blanco is convinced the city is much better prepared to handle it.

She points to several examples:

- The improved levees. Pump stations have been moved and billions have been spent reinforcing the canals.
- Lake Bourge. The lake now has a new, multi-billion dollar water control installation.
- Evacuations. New Orleans has developed a system where people who need help evacuating can go to points in their neighborhoods and a city-assisted evacuation will shuttle residents to safety.

In the end, the outrage over what many called a too-slow response resulted in Blanco’s decision not to seek a second term.

This month, with the 10-year anniversary of Katrina approaching, Blanco looked back on a few of the lessons she learned from that time.

“I learned that when disaster strikes, the people nearest will be the ones who help it,” she said. “So prepared to deal with it. And also, when you are dealt a bad hand, make it work for the greater good.”