

Remarks Following a Tour of Tornado Damage in Moore, Oklahoma
May 26, 2013

Good afternoon, everybody. Obviously, a picture is worth a thousand words, and what we're seeing here, I think, gives you some sense of what the people of Moore and the people of Oklahoma have been dealing with over these last several days.

There are a couple of acknowledgements that I want to make, but let me begin by just saying that whenever I come to an area that's been devastated by some natural disaster like this, I want to make sure everybody understands I'm speaking on behalf of the entire country. Everywhere, fellow Americans are praying with you, they're thinking about you, and they want to help.

And so I'm just a messenger here today, letting everybody here know that you are not alone, that you've got folks behind you.

Obviously, the damage here is pretty hard to comprehend. Our hearts go out to the families who have been impacted, including those who have had loved ones who were lost. And that was true for the parents of some of the children here at Plaza Towers Elementary school.

There are a number of people I want to especially thank, because they've engaged in some heroic efforts in dealing with this disaster. First of all, Governor Mary Fallin, thank you so much for your quick response and your outstanding work. Mayor Glenn Lewis, the mayor of Moore, who has been mayor here before when there was a disaster, and because of his strong spirit and sense of community has been able to help lead the community through this disaster. We very much appreciate your work.

Representative Tom Cole, not only is this his congressional district, but more importantly, this is his hometown. And so for him, this carries a special sadness, but also a resolve in terms of trying to make sure that the city of Moore bounces back. Mayor Mick Cornett, Oklahoma City, a neighbor and friend, we appreciate him being here. Craig Fugate is here, and obviously we are very proud of the work that he and his FEMA team have done. Susie Pierce, superintendent of schools here, thank you for your leadership.

Amy Simpson, I want to especially commend, Plaza Towers Elementary school principal, as well as Shelley McMillin, the Briarwood Elementary school principal. They were on the ground when this happened, and because of their quick response, their keeping a level head, their putting kids first saved a lot of people. And they're still going through some tough times. I can only imagine being their husbands, who are here, and the panic that I'm sure they were feeling when the tornado first struck. But I know that they could not be prouder of their wives for the outstanding work that they did in this amazing situation.

I want to thank Chief of Police Jerry Stillings and all the first responders in this area who were some of the first folks on the scene who were putting themselves at risk to save other people's lives. That's what first responders do, but sometimes, we take them for granted, and it's important we don't and we remember moments like that. That's why it's so important that we continually support them.

At my direction, Craig Fugate arrived here on Tuesday. FEMA was on the ground even before Monday's tornado hit. And their teams have now completed searches of more than

1,200 buildings. We've helped to register more than 4,200 people for disaster assistance, and we've approved more than \$3.4 million in direct aid. Obviously, there's a lot more to come. But it's not just a Government response. We've seen incredible outpourings of support from churches, from community groups who are helping folks begin to recover.

This area has known more than its share of heartbreak. But people here pride themselves on the Oklahoma standard, what Governor Fallin has called, "Being able to work through disasters like this, and [to] come out stronger on the other side." And that's what we've been seeing this week.

From the forecasters who issued the warnings to the first responders who dug through the rubble, to the teachers who shielded with their own bodies their students, Oklahomans have inspired us with their love and their courage and their fellowship.

Neighbors have been offering up spare bedrooms and couches for those in need of shelter. Universities have opened up their buildings for temporary housing, and local companies have pitched in.

So this is a strong community with strong character. There's no doubt they're going to bounce back. But they need help, just like any of us would need help if we saw the kind of devastation that we're seeing here. We have about 1,200 homes that have been completely destroyed, but we've got 12,000 that have been damaged in one way or another, and that's a big piece of business. And along with the schools, we've got a hospital that has been destroyed. It's going to take a long time for this community to rebuild.

So I want to urge every American to step up. If I've got one message for folks here today: Go online, donate to the American Red Cross. And if you're from the area and you need to register for disaster assistance, you can call 1-800-621-FEMA. That's 1-800-621-FEMA. Or you can go to disasterassistance.gov. [Disasterassistance.gov](http://disasterassistance.gov) on the web. Either way, I guarantee you, if you've got some significant damage and have been impacted, go ahead and reach out, and there are going to be professionals there who are ready and willing to provide you the assistance that you need.

We know Moore is going to come back stronger from this tragedy. Your mayor said that you're already printing new street signs.

Mayor Glenn Lewis of Moore, Oklahoma. Yes, sir.

The President. And I want folks affected throughout Oklahoma to know that we're going to be with you every step of the way.

On Sunday, the first deadly tornadoes touched down about 40 miles from here. And I mentioned this the day afterwards—there was a story that really struck me in the press—in the rubble was found a Bible, open to the words that read: "A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, and a cover from the tempest." And that—it's a reminder, as Scripture often is, that God has a plan, and it's important, though, that we also recognize we're an instrument of his will. And we need to know that as fellow Americans, we're going to be there as shelter from the storm for the people of Moore who have been impacted.

And when we say that we've got your back, I promise you, we keep our word. If you talk to folks in Alabama who have been affected over the last couple of years; you talk to the folks at Joplin, who I know have actually sent volunteers down here to Moore; if you talk to folks in New Jersey and New York, they'll tell you that when we say we're going to be there until you completely rebuild, we mean it. And I want everybody to have that confidence.

So again, to all the people here behind me, I want to say how proud I am of them, how grateful I am for their service. I want to make one final comment. A lot of the first responders talked about the training that they've done, in part through some Federal grants, to prepare for disasters like this. And as a consequence, when it actually happens, they know what to do, they're not losing time, they're able to go through all the drills and the training that they've gone through.

Training, education, both for citizenry, but also for first responders, is absolutely critical. And we've got to make sure that those resources remain in place. So I know everybody in Congress cares deeply about what's happening, and I'm confident that resources will be forthcoming when it comes to rebuilding. But remember that it's also the ongoing training and equipment, that we're making sure that those things are in place. We can't shortchange that kind of ongoing disaster response. We can't just wait until the disaster happens. That's how, in part, we were able to save a lot of lives, and I want everybody to keep that in mind.

So, with that, let me just again say thank you to everybody here. Madam Governor, thank you for your leadership. And may God bless the people of Oklahoma and obviously continue to bless the United States of America.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:57 p.m. in front of the remains of Plaza Towers Elementary. In his remarks, he referred to Matthew C. Shipman, husband of Amy D. Simpson, principal, Plaza Towers Elementary in Moore, OK; and Michael McMillin, husband of Shelley Jaques-McMillin, principal, Briarwood Elementary in Oklahoma City, OK.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Moore, OK, tour of tornado damage.

Locations: Moore, OK.

Names: Cole, Thomas J.; Cornett, Mick; Fallin, Mary; Fugate, W. Craig; Jaques-McMillin, Shelley; Lewis, Glenn; McMillin, Michael; Pierce, Susan; Shipman, Matthew C.; Simpson, Amy D.; Stillings, Jerry.

Subjects: Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Natural disasters : Oklahoma, tornadoes; Oklahoma : Governor; Oklahoma : Tornadoes, damage and recovery efforts; Red Cross, American.

DCPD Number: DCPD201300366.