

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2017

Remarks at Briefing on Hurricane Harvey Relief Efforts in Corpus Christi, Texas
August 29, 2017

Governor Gregory W. Abbott of Texas. Well, I want to welcome the President of the United States to the great State of Texas. I want to express my gratitude for our fellow Texans and especially the people of Corpus Christi for giving the President such a warm welcome on his ride over here, showing the gratitude that we all have for the President.

I want to express my deep gratitude to the President and for him and his entire Cabinet and staff for what they have done over the past couple of weeks. A lot of people see what happens in front of the camera. I want to reveal in just 1 minute what's been going on behind the scenes, behind the camera, for the past 2 weeks.

About 10 days in advance of the hurricane even coming into the Corpus Christi area, members of the President's Cabinet and the President himself were in contact with me and my office prepreparing for this catastrophe that was coming our way. And every step of the way—as the hurricane came across the shore, as the flooding began in Houston, Texas—the President and his Cabinet remained in constant contact with me and my staff. And they all had one thing to say: Texas, what do you need? How can we help? You can count on us.

What I have learned is, we can count on the President of the United States and his staff for helping Texas. Texas has been tested, but our response to this challenge has been made much more effective because of the very effective way the President and his staff has helped Texas respond to this challenge. So, Mr. President, thank you. Thank you. Welcome to Texas.

The President. Thank you. I appreciate it. That's so nice, Governor, and it's really my honor. This is a very special place in a special State. And Senator Cruz and Senator Cornyn, thank you very much—Senator Cornyn—for being here. We appreciate it. I know it was hard to get here for both of you—you were trapped in various locations—but we appreciate you both being here.

I want to thank my staff, my Cabinet. We have quite a few of our Cabinet here. You know Ben Carson, obviously, from HUD, and Tom Price and Linda McMahon—Small Business. Small business, which is now big business—*[laughter]*—because you'll be—when you add them all up you're going to be helping a lot of the people in Texas and doing a fantastic job. Thank you very much, Linda.

But we have had a tremendous group of folks. Our Acting Director, Elaine, thank you very much for the job you've done. And a man who has really become very famous on television over the last couple of days—*[laughter]*—Mr. Long, we appreciate it very much. You have been just outstanding.

And I can tell you that my folks were just telling me how great your representatives have been in working together. It's a real team, and we want to do it better than ever before. We want to be looked at in 5 years, in 10 years from now, and say this is the way to do it.

This was of epic proportions. Nobody has ever seen anything like this. And I just want to say that working with the Governor and his entire team has been an honor for us. So, Governor, again, thank you very much.

Gov. Abbott. Yes, sir.

The President. And we won't say congratulations. We don't want to do that. We don't want to congratulate.

Gov. Abbott. It's too early.

The President. We'll congratulate each other when it's all finished. But you have been terrific, really terrific. It's a great honor. And you've been my friend too, for a long time.

And with that, maybe you could say a few words.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Brock Long. Thank you, Mr. President. So the whole community is coming together. You know, right here where the brunt of the category 4 hurricane winds came in just north of Corpus Christi, we're already starting to effect recovery. Recovery is a slow process, but rest assured that we're doing everything we can to unify our efforts down to support the local responders, the first responders that we have here.

Yesterday I put eyes on the ground down in Rockport. We already have points of distribution flowing. We're working in conjunction with the Governor's National Guard where FEMA is supplying meals and water, and the National Guard is helping to run those distribution points. That's how this system works. While all eyes are on Houston and so are mine, we've got a long way to go. We're going to have to set up expectations of the citizens, and we're going to have to continue a unified effort down to help the State of Texas ultimately recover.

So, very quickly, the objectives stay the same. The event, unfortunately, to the north of us is not over. We're still in a lifesaving, life-sustaining mission. We're very aware of the issues at the Convention Center, but let me be clear: This is not the Superdome. The Convention Center—we are sustaining food. They have food, security. I have an incident management team inside the city of Houston as we speak, and more and more people are being moved to shelters to stabilize the situation.

The next thing is, is that we're pushing commodities. Once the water goes down, we'll continue to push not only commodities, but also help to get people registered in the system to receive assistance from all of us. The—you know, assistance doesn't just come from FEMA, it comes from many organizations who are represented here today by Secretary Price, Secretary Carson, and others.

The next thing is, is that we're looking at power restoration. We're maintaining security. You know, Ms. Duke, you've mobilized the Homeland Security Search Capacity Force. With that comes law enforcement to make sure that we're overcoming and anticipating any security needs that we have.

And then, also with Secretary Price over here, we're working with not only the Governor's disaster medical teams, but we're also sending Federal disaster medical teams in, not only to the Convention Center today—there's already some on site—but there's going to be multiple areas, not only for crisis counseling, but also to make sure that we're meeting access and functional needs.

The access is a challenge to getting all the supplies in, once the roadway systems come out. We've amassed quite the Federal force to be able to support the local and State efforts. For example, the Governor pulls 12,000 National Guard troops in. We're pulling units out of Fort Hood as the Federal Government and Federal DOD forces are coming in as well. We've pulled several hundred trucks and staff just from assets right here in the State of Texas, and that's how the system works.

This recovery is going to be frustrating. We're going to be here with you to help you guide through it. It's going to be tough to navigate all of the programs that become available, but we're here to help.

So with that, I'd like to pass it along to our friends at the Coast Guard.

U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area Commander Vice Admiral Karl L. Schultz, USCG. Mr. President, good afternoon, sir. This is where your Coast Guard serves at its best. We've got a bias for action. We are here in the State of Texas to support the State of Texas and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the lead Federal agency. Sir, we have full Coast Guard—men and woman from across the country; capabilities—helicopters, fixed wing, response and incident management specialists—and they're on deck, sir, in Texas getting at the task at hand. I'd be remiss, sir, if I did not tell you that as you look, obviously, at the landfall here, phase one was down here. And we've been out and we've seen—[*inaudible*—]and our local folks can speak more about that.

Up in Houston, we are all in with the challenge there. We've brought everything to the fight. The weather for the next couple of days is going to remain challenging. We will probably see average rain falls for the year of 50 inches before week's end. And I don't think we know what that looks like, so let me tell you, the Coast Guard, the Department of Homeland Security team, with the DOD forces, National Guard, I spent Sunday and Monday with the Governor at different locations. We are seamlessly lashed up with the State. We are getting better at it every day. It is a problem of catastrophic proportions, sir, I don't think we've done before. But I can tell you we're all in, we're aligned, and I'm very encouraged, sir, about how this thing is going to go forward, just in terms of cooperation. With that, sir, I'd just like to give Captain Tony Hahn a couple moments here. He's the local here to give you a perspective on what life has been like here.

The President. Thank you.

Vice Adm. Schultz. Yes, sir, Mr. President.

Air Station Corpus Christi Coast Guard Sector Commander Captain Tony Hahn, USCG. Good morning, Mr. President. Tony Hahn, sector commander here at Sector Corpus Christi and also the incident commander for our unified command comprised of 150 Federal, State, and local agencies. And we also—[*inaudible*—]partners there, to make sure we're covering all of our bases, and we're meeting protocol. And I want to walk through a timeline of our activities that we have done over the course of Hurricane Harvey, just to let you know where we are at.

So, on Tuesday, the storm shifted and became a hurricane. And our job is to really assess the ports here and the immediate need to get our assets out of there. And that's what we started doing on Wednesday. We started making preparations for lockdown facilities. We get assets and our deep-draught vessels off the seas so they don't—[*inaudible*—]according to conditions. Thursday, we moved to evacuate all of our forces. We push our forces out of harm's way and our people so we can come back in after the storm to help as soon as we can. On Friday, we moved our boats and aircraft away from the storm so that we can immediately respond.

So now we're—Harvey was upgraded to a category 4 hurricane, and our team was bunkered down in Robstown, Texas. We do a continuity of operations in Robstown, about 20 miles or so from here. And we've practiced that many times so that we were ready to do that. When Harvey made landfall, several ships in the Port of Corpus Christi broke their moorings, and mariners in distress were calling us for help. At that point, we had to wait until the parameters changed so we could send our helicopters north. And we saved 19 mariners lives that night.

Later, on Saturday morning, we began our port assessments. And the conditions weren't good for getting boats on the water. [*Inaudible*—]and among the damaged, we noted a grounded drill ship in the front of the Corpus Christi channel. So that's a major challenge for us. We continued overflights and responded to search-and-rescue calls on Saturday when the weather conditions wouldn't allow us to move down on the water—[*inaudible*—]but we're working on that. So Sunday, now the storm shifted to a tropical up to Houston. So we surged all our search-and-rescue resources out of Alice, Texas, up to Houston. And then, we're helping every way we

can with that effort by surging resources. We are using our fixed-wing assets down here to run logistics runs all over the State to make sure that the operations commanders in Houston get what they need. Additionally, we brought our boats up from the south so we can start our operational activities here now that the storm is done.

[*At this point, Capt. Hahn continued his remarks, concluding as follows.*]

Right now our biggest challenge right now is potential shoaling. And that will be part of our dredging operation, sir. And we're really looking at it closely. And with that, Mr. President, I'll believe I'll conclude.

The President. Well, I want to tell you—and I can speak for the Governor because we spoke about it—and we are very proud of the Coast Guard, the job they've done, the lives you've saved. We're very, very proud of you. Thank you very much.

Vice Adm. Schultz. Thanks, Mr. President. Mr. President, about a couple thousand rescues a day, rolled up with everybody else who's in this, this economic issue in the ports, we're in with the Border Protection agency, with the facilities owners, the pilots on the waterways. The conditions right now are not amenable to getting ports open. We recognize that is a national priority. We will keep at that and collectively—[*inaudible*—]as soon as possible, sir.

The President. Fantastic.

Administrator Long. Mr. President, at this time, before the press pool pulls out, there's information that I'd like to share in regards to how citizens can get involved. So here again, it's the whole community—neighbors helping neighbors in need, and helping Texas overcome.

So very quickly, if you would like to register for assistance underneath the Governor's declared counties—there's 18 declared counties for individual assistance underneath the President's disaster declaration—that's the disasterassistance.org. That puts in—excuse me, disasterassistance.gov—I apologize—disasterassistance.gov. That's the FEMA individual assistance center—system.

There's also ways, if you're looking to volunteer: NVOAD.org—N-V-O-A-D.org. There's also, within the State of Texas, onestarfoundation.org. There's also—and we'll leave it at that, and redcross.org as well.

So thank you, and at this time, this concludes the press briefing.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. at Annville Fire Station 5. In his remarks, he referred to Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine C. Duke.

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