

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

Remarks in a Briefing on Hurricane Dorian

September 1, 2019

Shootings in Midland and Odessa, Texas

The President. I want to begin today by addressing the heinous shooting that took place on Saturday in Odessa, Texas. On behalf of all Americans, I'd like to express my deepest sympathies and sorrow for the victims and their families. We ask God to comfort and heal those who are suffering, and we hope that there will be a full and quick recovery of the injured.

Today we also recognize the courageous actions of local law enforcement. I can pretty much say, as usual, they were incredible, several of whom were very seriously injured and wounded as they fought to end this monstrous shooting and save lives. I've spoken to Attorney General Barr, and we will provide all possible support from the Federal Government in the aftermath of this wicked attack.

My administration is committed to working with Congress to stop the menace of mass attacks. They've been going on for a long time, decades now. And we want to do the best we can to reduce them. It would be wonderful say—to say "eliminate," but we want to substantially reduce the violent crime and, actually, in any form, any of its evil forms. This includes strong measures to keep weapons out of the hands of dangerous and deranged individuals and substantial reforms to our Nation's broken mental health system.

Our goal must be to identify severely disturbed individuals and disrupt their plans before they strike. To reduce violence, we must also ensure that criminals with guns are put behind bars and kept off the streets. Public safety is our number-one priority, always wanting to protect our Second Amendment—so important.

Hurricane Dorian

We're here at FEMA Headquarters to receive a briefing on Hurricane Dorian. I want to thank Acting Secretary Kevin McAleenan for the incredible job you've been doing. Kevin, thank you—in many ways, by the way. Acting FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor. Peter, thank you very much. Secretary Elaine Chao. Secretary Mark Esper. Thank you. Thank you. Secretary Alex Azar. Thank you very much, Alex. And all the good news coming out of your administration on drug pricing. Coming way down. We really appreciate it. It's gone a lot further down.

Administrator Andrew Wheeler. Thank you, Andrew. Dr. Neil Jacobs. Thank you. Thank you, Neil. Good job. Senator Rick Scott is here in person—thank you—came up from Florida. We appreciate that very much. Thank you, Rick—and many other senior officials and political folks and military leaders for joining us in person or by phone.

The safety of the American people must always come first. My staff and I receive frequent updates to ensure that we are fully prepared. And we are fully prepared. But we really, basically, I don't think, ever seen anything like this hurricane.

I want to thank the Coast Guard. Karl, I know that they're really ready.

Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard Admiral Karl L. Schultz, USCG. Yes, sir.

The President. I don't know this—I don't know how they can come into this one. They're going to have to come in from the outside I guess, but this—because this looks monstrous, right? But I want to thank what—the job you did in Florida, Texas, and Puerto Rico was incredible. This could be bigger than all of them, in terms of the power of what we're looking at.

It's a—one of the largest we've ever seen. Its effects will be felt hundreds of miles or more from the eye of the storm and long before it potentially makes landfall. It's going to go out hundreds of miles. We expect that much of the Eastern Seaboard will be ultimately impacted and some of it very, very severely.

My administration is coordinating closely with State and local authorities. Today we're joined on the phone by some great people that have been working very, very hard: Governor Ron DeSantis of Florida. Thank you, Ron. Governor Brian Kemp of Georgia. Brian, thank you very much. Governor Henry McMaster of South Carolina. Thank you, Henry. And Governor Roy Cooper of North Carolina. Thank you very much, Roy.

The Federal Government stands ready to assist their readiness, response, and recovery operations. And, I will say, the States—and it may get a little piece of a great place: It's called Alabama. And Alabama could even be in for at least some very strong winds and something more than that, it could be. This just came up, unfortunately. It's the size of—the storm that we're talking about. So, for Alabama, just please be careful also.

I ask everyone in Hurricane Dorian's path to heed all warnings and evacuation orders from local authorities. It looks like they're going to have to be giving them, unfortunately. And I wish you'd watch. It's been lurking. It's just been building out there. It's been moving very slowly. And it's a bad thing, not a good thing. The slower it moves, the bigger it is and the bigger it gets. But we want to minimize any unnecessary risks for the public and our brave first responders.

I've been working very hard with Governor DeSantis of Florida on getting fuel, getting gasoline brought in, because they've never seen anything like it, the rush to get so much. And again, the Coast Guard and the Army and the Marines, they've been incredible. We've gotten tremendous amounts of gasoline brought in very quickly.

Americans are strong, determined, and resilient, and we will support each other. And we will work very hard to minimize whatever the effect of what's coming at us. We don't even know what's coming at us. All we know is, it's possibly the biggest. I have—not sure—I'm not sure that I've ever even heard of a category 5. I knew it existed. And I've seen some category 4s; you don't even see them that much. But a category 5 is something that I don't know that I've ever even heard the term, other than I know it's there. That's the ultimate. And that's what we have, unfortunately.

So with that, I'd like to maybe ask Kevin if he'd like to say a few words. And we'll go around. And if anyone has any suggestions or questions, I'd love to take them. Thank you.

Kevin.

Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin K. McAleenan. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for convening us today, for your focus on our readiness for this storm, and for amplifying FEMA's messages on preparedness throughout the week. Thank you also to our Cabinet partners and our State Governors for joining us for the briefing today. I think what you'll see in here from our conversation is really outstanding teamwork across the Federal Government, but also with our partners that we're supporting, the State and local level, to be ready for this massive storm.

For our briefing today, we're going to start with an update on the forecast from Ken Graham, the Director of the National Hurricane Center, and then we'll go to our Governors DeSantis, Kemp, McMaster, and Cooper for updates on the State preparedness, and then Acting Administrator Gaynor will talk about the Federal effort to deploy resources and be ready. So we'll go ahead and start with the National Hurricane Center.

The President. Please.

Acting Secretary McAleenan. Thank you, sir.

[At this point, National Hurricane Center Director Kenneth Graham delivered remarks via videoconference as follows.]

Director Graham. Yes, Mr. President, wanted to give you the latest update on Hurricane Dorian, and it's all been about communicating that threat to the Bahamas and also along the southeast coast of Florida. So I wanted to thank you for being able to get some of that information out, retweeting and tweeting out information to make sure citizens are prepared for this storm.

Wanted to start with the NOAA satellites, just giving us an incredible amount of information. You look at the structure. The structure is just a textbook case of a very powerful hurricane: 180 miles an hour, a dangerous situation, and moving west at 7 miles an hour. So a very slow storm.

You can see the eye right here, very powerful, moving to the Bahamas, bringing devastating winds, devastating rainfall. They can see, in some cases, up to 30 inches of rain and some of the storm surge getting up over 20 foot. So a very dangerous situation for them, and the sheer size of this storm really points to some of the impacts as we move along and get more information on the forecast. The Hurricane Hunters, I wanted to definitely take the time—the Air Force Hurricane Hunters, and the NOAA Hurricane Hunters. We're all trying to get away from the storm. These are the men and women in the aircraft that are flying right through the middle of the storm, out and running patterns for us to get the latest information. So these forecast updates on the intensity has been coming from the data that we're getting from them, so just want to thank them: true heroes, getting the information that we need to make the forecast.

Speaking of this forecast, you know, a couple of things to note here: Really, we're looking at a forecast really slowing down. We expect the storm to slow down with time and some of these impacts stretching well away from the center, in this case, well over a hundred miles from the center. So it's just not about the center. You see maximum stretch well outside of that center as well, and the track's been really focused on.

It—a couple of things with the track: We've had a high-pressure system out in the Atlantic, and that's what's caused the system to continue to move west. However, a fast system, if we had a fast system, it would have continued to move in that direction. Because of this slowdown, the inherent characteristics of these storms, sometimes they just slow down. And it's allowing a small trough to steer—these things are steered by things thousands of miles away—that is allowing it to slow down and eventually turn.

The big question is: Where is it going to make that turn? And that's why we have the forecast cone. It's such an important part of our forecast, because we really tell the general public, not to just necessarily just focus on that center line, where that is; we tell them focus on the cone, because that's based on our average error over the last 5 years. So the easy way to think about it is, the center could be anywhere inside that cone, so that allows for the—*[inaudible]*—for small changes, to put this right along the coast.

We could also see landfall moving northward. So that's why we really tell people to really pay attention and be ready with time, and we're going to be dealing with this hurricane all week. Look at the timeframes here. This is 8 a.m. Monday. That's 8 a.m. Tuesday, very devastating for the Bahamas since this is so slow.

That's Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. So we're going to see impacts in Florida, Georgia, and also the Carolinas with time. And the rainfall is something we want to talk about. We'll have storm surge impacts; we'll also have some rain, in addition to the winds, and some of this rain—this is a message that we're keying with the general public.

You see these values of 6 to 8 inches, in some places more. But little teeny changes in that track can bring some of these higher values on shore. Right now we're thankful, most of those are offshore, but a small change does not—small changes in that forecast can give you a little wobble that causes that change, to bring some of these high values onshore.

So we're keeping everybody ready, we're doing the interviews, we're talking to the emergency managers. I just can't explain how—what a tight relationship, a close relationship NOAA has, and the weather service, with the FEMA, the State emergency managers, the Governors, and also the local county—[inaudible]—emergency managers out there. They're our partners, and we're all in this together. So that concludes my briefing, Mr. President.

The President. Could I just ask you, 2 days ago, we were given a really comprehensive briefing, and they seemed to think—almost every prediction was—that it was going to go right through Florida and into the Gulf. Actually, right across Florida. Does that not have a chance of happening now, or what do you think? I mean, everything seems now, it goes up north. What do you think the chances it goes directly straight as the original predictions were?

Director Graham. Yes, this is—this well inside this cone, just kind of gives the variability in that, that forecast track. And what's happened with time, once it slowed down, the forecasts had to nudge to the north, because now it has that influence with that trough. Teeny changes can make a big difference in the eventual movement of these storms, literally thousands of parameters that we're trying to measure and put into the computer models to be able to get these tracks.

So a small—[inaudible]—a small change can cause that forecast track to nudge a little bit. That's why there's so much uncertainty, and we spend a lot of time talking about the actual cone. Because you look at the last 5 years, and that's the forecast error possible with that track. So we try to communicate these uncertainties, and it does happen, especially when you're measuring thousands of parameters, trying to get that into the model, you can have these small changes.

The President. How certain are you that it will go north?

Director Graham. Every single computer model that we have is pulling this to the north, but the big question we have is about where that center is going to go, and that's why we're really trying to communicate the edge of that cone. That landfall literally could be right on the coast anywhere in Florida and even up the Carolinas. We could see a landfall too soon, where you can have some damage and right along the coast, but we're trying to communicate, even if it's offshore, look at the size. I mean—[inaudible]—the NOAA satellite, how big the storm is, even if it's offshore, that can create some devastating impacts to them up on the coast. We're trying to communicate that size and really trying to focus people on this large system and not just the center.

The President. Great job. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:31 p.m. at Federal Emergency Management Agency Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Environmental Observation and Prediction Neil Jacobs.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Dorian, briefing.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Azar, Alex M., II; Barr, William P.; Chao, Elaine L.; Cooper, Roy A., III; DeSantis, Ronald D. ; Esper, Mark T.; Gaynor, Peter T.; Graham, Kenneth; Jacobs, Neil ; Kemp, Brian P.; McAleenan, Kevin K.; McMaster, Henry D.; Schultz, Karl L.; Scott, Richard L.; Wheeler, Andrew R.

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