

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021*

**Remarks on Hurricane Ida Response Efforts During a Tour of Damaged Areas in LaPlace, Louisiana**  
*September 3, 2021*

*The President.* Thank you. Let me start off by thanking the folks here in this neighborhood for letting me come in and see what's going on. Councilman, thank you. Thank you for everything.

Folks, look, it's—I'm grateful for the Governor asking me to come on down to visit and to see what—visit. And I want to thank him for his leadership as well.

You know, we just came from an emergency operations center here in St. John's Parish. And we just walked this neighborhood. I'm going to finish walking it up that way as well. But the fact is that we—you know, there's a lot—we just—to see just exactly what's happened on the ground, see what's going on in people's homes.

A lot of people here, for example, because they don't have cell connections, are unaware of what available help there is right now to get them. The FEMA Director and I were just talking to them. We're going to make sure we have someone coming through here, going door to door, letting people know what's available to them right now, because they can't connect online.

And with the Governor and mayors and Members of Congress, community leaders, all the folks that are here, we've been working together to deliver millions of meals and liters of water.

And I know you all are frustrated about how long it takes to restore power. It's dangerous work. Twenty-five thousand linemen from around the country have come here to Louisiana to help; crews from 32 different States are helping. And two of them lost their lives in the process of trying to get power back up.

And we're going—we're working 24/7 with the energy companies who we met with the heads of today. And we're going to deploy even more Federal resources, including hundreds of generators—and there's more come—to restore power as fast as we possibly can, faster than anything that happened during Katrina.

And we're also working on the cell phone—with the cell phone companies so you can call your loved ones, call for help regardless of where you are, and make sure the people you know and you love, you haven't been able to talk to lately, be able to know whether they're okay.

We're moving quickly to keep gas flowing to the pumps, including—I've gone into the Strategic Petroleum Reserve—that's what's been set aside—the crude oil—providing flexibility for—and providing flexibility for how many hours truckers are able to drive and transport gas and fuel. Because there's a law in America: You can't drive, for safety reasons and beyond, so many hours a day. But we need more movement of this fuel. And we're expanding the supply of gasoline that can be sold in the State of Louisiana.

And there's much to be done. We're working around the clock with the Governor and the elected officials here until we can meet every need you all have.

In fact, reports suggest that some insurance companies may deny coverage for living assistance unless the homeowner was under a mandatory evacuation order. And so you paid your insurance premiums. You're supposed to get payments for additional living expenses in the case of an emergency. Well, but the insurance companies are saying: "No, no. No, we won't pay you what we owe."

Well, we're putting as much pressure as we can. We know all the parishes that issued strong "voluntary" evacuation orders at first, and many didn't have enough time to make that order "mandatory," as the storm moved so fast. And you know, even with "voluntary" evacuations ordered, folks felt safest leaving their homes in many cases.

No one fled this killer storm because they were looking for a vacation or a road trip. So, folks, they left their home because they left it—they felt they had to flee the risk death. There's nothing "voluntary" about that.

And so I am calling on private insurance companies: Don't hide behind the fine print and a technicality. Pay what you owe your customers. Cover temporary housing costs in natural disasters, and help those in need. That's what we should all be doing now. And that's what we are doing.

So far, we have provided, with the Governor's help as well, \$100 million in critical assistance directly to people in Louisiana by putting \$500 in their bank accounts once they've contacted us. That's what we're going to come and let all you people know exactly how to do that; that will happen.

And secondly, as the Governor's request, FEMA is helping with—fancy phrase—transitional sheltering assistance, meaning a place for you to be safely able to sleep at night and be secure, like covering your hotel bill you racked up because you couldn't stay at home during the hurricane or because your home does—is not livable now.

We're making sure this kind of relief is equitable. For those hardest hit, the resources they need have to be—get to them. And so no matter who you are, if you live in an affected area, please visit [disasterassistance.gov](http://disasterassistance.gov) once you're able to use your cell phone, or call 1-800-621-F-E-M-A-FEMA. That's 1-800-621-3362.

And, folks, Hurricane Ida is another reminder that we need to be prepared for the next hurricane and superstorms that are going to come, and they're going to come more frequently and more ferociously.

I've been working closely with the Governor and our colleagues in Congress in both parties on my Build Back Better plan that will modernize our roads, our bridges, our water system, sewers and drainage systems, and power grids and transmission lines to make sure they're more resilient.

I walked through the backyards here—so many telephone lines are down. So many telephone poles are down. So many of the—of the way in which we transmit energy is lost because they're all wooden telephone poles. We know, for a fact, if they're underground, they're secure. It costs more money.

We've got to not just build back to what it was—put the same old poles up—we've got to build back better, we've got to build back more resiliently, and we've got to make sure we do the same thing across the board.

Think about how that \$760 million West Shore project here in Southern Louisiana will build miles of new levees, pumping stations, and drainage structures to provide protection for 60,000 folks in the area. That will change their lives in future storms. I told the Governor that he has my full support—and I mean it sincerely—he has my full support to get this project done.

And, folks, I know you're hurting. I know you're hurting. I know the folks in Lake Charles, who I visited earlier this year, are still hurting from Hurricane Laura. I want you to know: We're going to be here for you. And with regard to Lake Charles, I've put in a request in the new—in the budget to provide for help for recovery for Lake Charles as a consequence of Laura and Delta—two storms that they still haven't been—gotten the needs that they—met that they have.

This isn't about being a Democrat or Republican. We're Americans, and we'll get through this together. We just got to remember: We not only have to build back, we have to build back better than it was before—better than it was before—so when another superstorm comes, it's not the damage done.

So thank you all very much. I'm going to see the rest of the folks in the neighborhood here.

But every time I'd walk out of my grandpop's house up in Scranton, Pennsylvania, he'd yell, "Joey, keep the faith." And my grandmother would yell, "No, Joey, spread it." Let's spread the faith. Okay? Let's get this done together.

Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:51 p.m. in the Cambridge residential neighborhood. In his remarks, he referred to Councilman Robert Arcuri of St. John the Baptist Parish, LA; Gov. John Bel Edwards of Louisiana; and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Bennett Criswell.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Ida response efforts :: LaPlace, LA, tour of damaged areas.

*Locations:* LaPlace, LA.

*Names:* Arcuri, Robert; Criswell, Deanne Bennett; Edwards, John Bel.

*Subjects:* Business and industry : Corporate responsibility; Communications : Broadband and wireless technologies; Energy, Department of : Strategic Petroleum Reserve; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Climate resilience, strengthening efforts; Homeland Security, Department of : Emergency Management Agency, Federal; Infrastructure, national improvement efforts; Louisiana : Governor; Louisiana : Hurricane Ida, damage and recovery efforts; Louisiana : President's visits; Natural disasters : Hurricane Ida; Natural disasters : Preparedness efforts; Natural disasters : Response and recovery efforts.

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