

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Supporting Response Efforts to the Train Derailment and Chemical Spill in East Palestine, Ohio

February 16, 2024

The President. Good afternoon, folks. Mayor Conaway, thank you for the welcome and, more importantly, for your leadership. I really mean it. We talked outside there.

Mayor Trent Conaway of East Palestine, OH. Thank you, sir.

The President. You've been through hell.

And I also want to thank the EPA Administrator here with me, EPA Administrator Regan, as well.

We just concluded a briefing about the herculean efforts—and that's not a hyperbole—the herculean efforts that were made in the year since this tragedy. But what's happening in the morning, the evening of, and the next day and the weeks in following is amazing. It's absolutely amazing what this community rose to.

You know, I want to thank the folks of East Palestine to know—I want them to understand that we're not going home, no matter what, till this job is done. And it's not done yet. There's a lot more to do. The vast majority has been done, but we're going to stay until the very end, every need is met.

And I want to—we continue to hold Norfolk Southern accountable and make sure they make your community whole now and in the future. And what they do not make whole, what they cannot make whole, what isn't made—the Government will make whole. We have an obligation. We have an obligation.

I can already see this derailment won't define you. It just—it defines you in a different way: your courage, the resilience of this community, and the compassion that you've shown for all your fellow citizens.

Let me be clear: While there are acts of God, this was an act of greed that was 100-percent preventable. Let me say it again: An act of greed that was 100-percent preventable. We were pushing railroads to take more precautions, to deal with braking, to deal with a whole range of things that were not dealt with. Norfolk Southern failed its responsibility.

You know, multimillion-dollar railroad companies transporting toxic chemicals have responsibility to do it safely. And, again, Norfolk Southern failed.

My administration was on the ground within hours, working closely with the Governor, the mayor, the Senators, the House Members, community leaders to make sure you have everything you need.

My administration ordered Norfolk Southern to clean up the mess it created and ensure it was done right. That includes an Executive order I signed to continue our priority to hold Norfolk Southern fully accountable for this disaster and any long-term effects that are able to be identified as time goes on, not just here but also in Darlington, Pennsylvania, where I just visited a few hours ago—an hour or so ago.

Working with the State, we've tested the air, the water, the soil quality; deployed teams of health experts; provided emergency loans for local businesses. But it's not done yet. There's more to do.

Today I'm announcing the award of six National Institutes of Health grants to some of America's best research universities to study the short- and long-term impacts of what happened here. That includes just north of here at Case Western University, so you'll have a top researcher with you as long as you need, as long as has to go on.

I also want to restate my support for the bipartisan rail safety—bill—Senator Brown, Senator Vance, and the Congressman from Pennsylvania and others—that require stronger protective measures when trains are carrying hazardous waste.

Storage tank cars—we argued about this for years—they should be stronger. They should be able to survive crashes without exploding. Undated [updated; White House correction] brakes that meet higher safety standards. The fact of the matter is, there was a lot of discussion ahead of time, before this occurred, about the safety of the braking systems of many of these railroads—trains.

More staffing on trains so that there are more people to respond immediately to a crash and to do so much more—[inaudible]—safety of transportation.

And it's important that the Senate follow the House and pass the tax reform bill, which makes sure that folks who don't get hit with a tax—a surprise tax bill for compensation owed them by the railroad, that's not taxable income to them. We've got to make sure that that occur, that no one is taxed for anything that is reimbursed or received from Norfolk Southern.

It's not right. I support the tax—this tax reform bill, and we've got to get it done.

All told, we've done in 1 year what would typically take many years, and we're going to keep going.

Like I said, your compassion and resilience of the leadership of this community and the people of this community—the courage of your firefighters, law enforcement officers, first responders who run into danger to save others—they deserve the care and resources we owe them to be followed and their health needs followed as well. Because that's what we do.

It doesn't matter if you're Democrat or Republican or Independent. What matters is we're all Americans—everyone, everyone. We look out for one another. We leave no one behind. And we come back stronger than before.

That's what you're doing here. That's what's happening right here in this community. That's what's going on downtown, in your parks as well. You're now—your downtown is reopened, and the parks are reopened. Students were frustrated: Opposing schools wouldn't travel here for sports events, but now you're playing home games again, finally.

That's pride. That's also progress. But we have other obligation, and that's here—to stay here as long as it takes to get everything done and be sure no one is left behind.

In moments like this, let's remember who we are. We're the United States of America, for God's sake. We have obligations to one another. There's nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together. And we're going to stay here and do it together as long as it takes.

May God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

We have a lot to do.

Now, let me turn this over to EPA Administrator, Michael Regan, and he'll have a few things to say as well.

Michael.

[At this point, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael S. Regan made remarks; no transcript was provided.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:39 p.m. at Brave Industries. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. R. Michael DeWine of Ohio; and Rep. Christopher R. Deluzio. He also referred to H.R. 7024.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Train derailment and chemical spill response efforts in East Palestine, OH.

Locations: East Palestine, OH.

Names: Brown, Sherrod C.; Conaway, Trent; Deluzio, Christopher R.; DeWine, R. Michael; Regan, Michael S.; Vance, J.D.

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