

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

**Remarks on the Collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, Maryland,
and an Exchange With Reporters**
March 26, 2024

The President. Hello, folks. Sorry to keep you waiting. I was waiting to talk to the last member of the delegation in the region.

Good afternoon. Before I leave for North Carolina, which I'm going to do in a few minutes, I want to speak briefly about the terrible incident and accident that happened in Baltimore this morning.

At about 1:30, a container ship struck the Francis Scott Key Bridge, which I've been over many, many times commuting from the State of Delaware either on a train or by car. I've been to Baltimore Harbor many times. And the bridge collapsed, sending several people and vehicles into the water, into the river.

And multiple U.S. Coast Guard units—which are stationed very nearby, thank God—were immediately deployed, along with local emergency personnel. And the Coast Guard is leading the response at the port, where representatives from the Federal Highway Administration, the FBI, the Department of Transportation, the Army Corps of Engineers, as well as Maryland officials and Baltimore Police and Fire—they're all working together to coordinate an emergency response.

Officials at the scene estimate eight people were unaccounted for still—not still, were unaccounted for. That number might change. Two have been rescued, one without injury, one in critical condition. And the search-and-rescue operation is continuing for all those remaining as we speak.

I spoke with Governor Moore this morning as well as the mayor of Baltimore, the county executive, United two—both United States Senators, and the Congressman. And my Secretary of Transportation is on the scene. I told them we're going to send all the Federal resources they need as we respond to this emergency, and I mean all the Federal resources. And we're going to rebuild that port together.

Everything so far indicates that this was a terrible accident. At this time, we have no other indication, no other reason to believe there was any intentional act here.

Personnel on board the ship were able to alert the Maryland Department of Transportation that they had lost control of their vessel, as you all know and have reported. As a result, local authorities were able to close the bridge to traffic before the bridge was struck, which undoubtedly saved lives.

And our prayers are with everyone involved in this terrible accident and all the families, especially those waiting for the news of their loved one right now. I know every minute in that circumstance feels like a lifetime. You just don't know. It's just terrible.

And we're incredibly grateful for the brave rescuers who immediately rushed to the scene.

And to the people of Baltimore, I want to say: We're with you. We're going to stay with you as long as it takes. And like the Governor said, you're Maryland tough, you're Baltimore strong, and we're going to get through this together. And I promise: We're not leaving.

Here's what's happening now. The search-and-rescue operation is our top priority. Ship traffic in the Port of Baltimore has been suspended until further notice. And we'll need to clear

that channel before the ship traffic can resume. The Army Corps of Engineers is on the spot and is going to help lead this effort to clear the channel.

The Port of Baltimore is one of the Nation's largest shipping hubs. And I've been there a number of times as a Senator and as a Vice President. It handled a record amount of cargo last year. It's also the top port in America for both imports and exports of automobiles and light trucks. Around 850,000 vehicles go through that port every single year, and we're going to get it up and running again as soon as possible.

Fifteen thousand jobs depend on that port. And we're going to do everything we can to protect those jobs and help those workers.

The bridge is also critical to—for travel, not just for Baltimore but for the Northeast corridor. Over 30,000 vehicles cross the Francis Scott Key Bridge on a daily basis. It's virtually the—well, it's one of the most important elements for the economy in the Northeast and the quality of life.

My Transportation Secretary is there now. As I told Governor Moore, I've directed my team to move heaven and earth to reopen the port and rebuild the bridge as soon as humanly possible. And we're going to work hand in hand with the support of Maryland—to support Maryland, whatever they ask for. And we're going to work with our partners in Congress to make sure the State gets the support it needs.

It's my intention that Federal Government will pay for the entire cost of reconstructing that bridge, and I expect to—the Congress to support my effort. This is going to take some time. And the people of Baltimore can count on us, though, to stick with them at every step of the way until the port is reopened and the bridge is rebuilt. You know, we're not leaving until this job gets done—not leaving until then.

So I just want to say God bless everybody who—everyone harmed this morning and their families, and may God bless the first responders, who—many of whom risking their lives.

And I'm going to—the reason I'm not going to take a lot of questions—there's remaining issues that are open that we've got to determine what's going to happen in terms of the rescue mission and the like. But I'll—I'm——

The President's Schedule

Q. Do you plan to go to Baltimore, sir? And if so, how quickly?

The President. I do and as quickly as I can. That's what we're working on——

Bridge Reconstruction

Q. You said the Federal Government is also going to pay for the repairs. I'm just curious: This was a ship that appears to be at fault. Is there any reason to believe that the company behind the ship should be held responsible?

And then, also, you mentioned——

The President. That could be, but we're not going to wait if that happened. We're going to pay for it to get the bridge rebuilt and open.

Q. Mr. President——

Israeli Military Operations in Gaza, Palestinian Territories

Q. What did you make of Israel's decision not to attend this meeting this week?

The President. Oh, I don't want to get into that now.

Q. Regarding Rafah.

The President. We'll have plenty of time to talk about Rafah.

Q. You mentioned the port——

Q. Mr. President, on the abortion——

The President. Thank you. Thank you.

Q. Can I ask about cars?

Q. About the port——

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:46 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Brandon M. Scott of Baltimore, MD; County Executive John Olszewski, Jr., of Baltimore County, MD; Sens. Benjamin L. Cardin and Christopher Van Hollen, Jr.; Rep. Kweisi Mfume; and Secretary of Transportation Peter P.M. Buttigieg.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Collapse of Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore, MD; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Buttigieg, Peter P.M.; Cardin, Benjamin L.; Mfume, Kweisi; Moore, Westley W.O. "Wes"; Olszewski, John, Jr.; Scott, Brandon M.; Van Hollen, Christopher, Jr.

Subjects: Army Corps of Engineers, U.S.; First responders, service and dedication; Gaza, conflict with Israel; Israel, military operations in Gaza; Maryland, collapse of Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore; Maryland, Governor; Secretary of Transportation; U.S. Coast Guard.

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