

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024*

**Remarks Following an Operational Briefing on Hurricane Helene Response and Recovery Efforts and an Exchange With Reporters**  
*September 30, 2024*

*The President.* Well, folks, good afternoon.

I just received a briefing from Governor Cooper and FEMA Director Criswell and the staff and—to provide me with a firsthand account of the historic impacts of Hurricane Helene.

I want to express condolences to all the families—to all the families—whose loved ones have died or are missing. Matter of fact, it's almost equally as bad missing—not knowing whether or not your brother, sister, husband, wife, son, daughter are alive. And we want you to know that a lot of us have experienced that and we understand what you're going through.

And, to the survivors: And I want you to know the administration is going to be there—and we just talked about this—until we finish the job. It's going to take a hell of a long time and a serious amount of assets.

With Federal support, the State has reopened 220 roads, which are going to help responders reach people and get the support they need quickly. Right now thousands—thousands—of Federal personnel are deployed in your communities, supporting search and rescue, debris removal, power restoration, and getting cell networks back online so folks can connect to their loved ones. We've—we deployed 30 Starlink receivers, and there are 10 more on the way to western North Carolina.

And FEMA is on the ground, supporting the communities and registering people for disaster assistance. And talking with the Governor, it's going to take a while. Right, Gov? It's going to be a long time. And we—there are thousands of line workers working around the clock to help get power back up in—North Carolina.

Additionally, Governor Cooper and I have spoken about my traveling to North Carolina and—to survey the damage as soon as I can, without taking resources or diverting resources on the ground. And we're going to stay as long as it takes when we get this thing going.

But I'm going to North Carolina on Wednesday. It's the plan now. We're going to be landing in Raleigh for a briefing with the emergency operations center, and I'll then do an aerial tour of Asheville. It's too much for me, in terms of interrupting access to help there, to land in Asheville—and to survey the damage other than—other than through the air.

And then, it's my plan to travel to Georgia and Florida as soon as possible after that.

And I don't know. Governor, do you want to add anything?

*[At this point, Governor Roy A. Cooper III of North Carolina spoke via videoconference as follows.]*

*Gov. Cooper.* Yes, thank you, Mr. President. We appreciate the resources that are coming our way.

This has been a devastating storm, as you know, and we're grateful to have had Administrator Criswell here on the ground all day today. And she's going to be staying and making sure we surge assets into the area to get people food and water and to get the power back on.

And obviously, we are grateful for the search-and-rescue teams as well.

Thank you so much.

*The President.* Well, thank you.

Any questions on this issue?

### *Federal Disaster Assistance/Hurricane Helene Response Efforts*

*Q.* Sir, is it your sense from the Governors you've spoken to that they have all the resources they need right now? Or are there things they need immediately?

*The President.* They need things immediately. They're getting them immediately. Some access—it's a matter of getting access to the people who need it.

And so that's why we're talking about land bridges, to be able to get the Defense Department in there to get water, for example, from a place that, in fact, they can't get to because the roads are gone, the roads are closed.

We've contacted the—we have the Defense Department agreeing to—that they're going to—they're providing for helicopters from the base there to get as much in as we can. It's going to take a long time.

But, Gov, what am I leaving out that you need? Or——

*Gov. Cooper.* We've talked about a lot of resources that we need: medical, making sure that we are getting additional——

*The President.* Yes.

*Gov. Cooper.* ——helicopters for land bridges, search and rescue.

All of those things are happening now. We just know that the commodities are going to have to continue in for weeks, because—for example, Asheville, the largest city here and—but that supplies a lot on the water—their water system is completely down. So getting water in here on a sustained basis is going to be critical.

And we are discussing the strategies to continue those efforts and to surge those efforts.

*Q.* Mr. President——

### *Hurricane Helene Response Efforts*

*Q.* Mr. President and—Governor Cooper, Donald Trump has accused both of you of ignoring the disaster——

*The President.* He is lying. Let me get this straight: He's lying, and the Governor told him he was lying. The Governor told him he was lying. I've spoken to the Governor, I've spent time with him, and he told him he's lying. I don't know why he does this.

And the reason I get so angry about it—I don't care about what he says about me, but I care what he—what he communicates to the people that are in need. He implies that we're not doing everything possible. We are. We are.

And you—and you spoke to the Gov—I assume you've heard the Republican Governor of Georgia talk about that he was on the phone with me more than once. So that's simply not true, and it's irresponsible.

I don't know what the Governor wants to say about it, but let me tell you what I think.

### *The President's Monitoring of Hurricane Helene*

*Q.* Mr. President, in retrospect, do you wish that you had put more resources in North Carolina, knowing what you know now?

And do you wish that you had spent the weekend here in Washington rather than in Delaware?

*The President.* Come on, stop that game, will you? Why I was in Delaware—it's 90 miles from here, okay? And I was on the phone the whole time working on that.

And the resources——

*Q.* Sir——

#### *Response Efforts/Hurricane Helene Damage*

*The President.* The question is not whether we get more—this is a list of every resource we're getting in there, but the question is how to get it in. It's hard to get it from point A to point B. It's hard to get it if some of these roads are wiped out, communities are wiped out. There's no ability to land. There's no ability to get trucks through. There's no ability to get a whole range of things through.

So I mean—anyway——

*Q.* Mr. President, can——

*The President.* If I sound frustrated, I am.

#### *Death Toll From Hurricane Helene/Hurricane Preparedness Efforts*

*Q.* Can you talk a little bit about the death toll? We were speaking in the briefing today about it could be as much as 600, maybe 700. That's such a huge number for the United States of America.

*The President.* Well, first of all, the death toll, the confirmed death toll is high enough of well over 100. Okay?

There are roughly—is it—correct me if I'm wrong, Gov or Deanne, but there are about 600 people still unaccounted for, if I'm not mistaken. Is that about right?

*Gov. Cooper.* Well, we know, Mr. President, because cell phone service is down——

*The President.* Yes.

*Gov. Cooper.* ——that there are a lot of people that haven't been able to get in touch with them.

But what's happening now—and we're getting assistance from you to coordinate even more efforts—is, we're doing door-to-door welfare checks on people to make sure that they are accounted for.

We know there will be more deaths, because this was an unprecedented, devastating storm that was something that people in North Carolina, in western North Carolina, have never seen before.

So we are working as hard as we can to get in touch with everybody and to make sure that we are telling relatives where—that people are safe and also making sure that search and rescue—because we have rivers that are still rising. The danger is still occurring for a lot of people.

*The President.* And by the way, as the—FEMA can tell you, they have pre-positioned an awful lot of material, an awful lot of material throughout that area, from the Bend all the way up into Tennessee.

And so the idea that we weren't prepared—the question is, no one knew exactly how devastating it would be. We knew it would be significant, and we've got a lot already in place, but there's more.

But here's the point. I'm going to be asking the American people to continue to help fund the needs of these people. It's not going to be one hit and it's over. It's going to take a hell of a long time. It's going to cost a hell of a lot of money. But this is United States of America, and we've got to do it.

#### *American Red Cross*

*Q.* Sir, what can Americans do right now——

[*Several reporters began speaking at once.*]

*Q.* Sir, Americans that want to help, what can they do right now to help?

*The President.* Americans——

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

*Q.* If people want to help——

*The President.* If people——

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

*The President.* If people—if people——

[*Several reporters spoke at once.*]

*Q.* You guys, the President is still taking questions.

Go ahead, sir.

*The President.* If people want to help, there's means by which they can contact—who should they contact?

*Homeland Security Adviser Elizabeth D. Sherwood-Randall.* The American Red Cross.

*The President.* And contact the American Red Cross and get as much—they'll get information.

*Homeland Security Adviser Sherwood-Randall.* It's an excellent way of contributing, which works very closely with FEMA.

*The President.* And by the way, as the Governor said, we're working on making sure that the—that the hospitals are up and running, that they have the capacity to deal with the concerns of people and the needs.

So there's a lot to do, and this is just beginning. And we've been through this before but not—not like this. This is the worst ever.

#### *Hurricane Helene/Climate Change*

*Q.* Is this storm a consequence of climate change, Mr. President?

*The President.* Absolutely, positively, unequivocally yes. Yes, yes, yes.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:08 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Brian P. Kemp of Georgia. A reporter referred to former President Donald J. Trump. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 1.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Helene response and recovery efforts, operational briefing; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Cooper, Roy A., III; Criswell, Deanne Bennett; Kemp, Brian P.; Sherwood-Randall, Elizabeth D.; Trump, Donald J.

*Subjects:* American Red Cross; Climate change; Department of Defense, disaster response capabilities; Disaster assistance, North Carolina; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); Georgia, Governor; Homeland Security Adviser; Natural disasters, climate change impacts; Natural Disasters, Hurricane Helene; North Carolina, disaster assistance; North Carolina, Governor; North Carolina, Hurricane Helene damage and recovery efforts.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD202400850.