

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks Prior to an Operational Briefing on the Impacts of Hurricane Helene in Raleigh, North Carolina

October 2, 2024

Thank you, Gov. Good afternoon, everyone.

I don't have to tell this group that Hurricane Helene has been a storm literally of historic proportions. The damage is still being assessed, but—and many people are still unaccounted for.

So I'm here to say the United States, the Nation, has your back. The Nation has your back. We're not leaving until you're back on your feet completely.

You know, we're in a situation where earlier this morning I met with State and local police in Greenville, South Carolina. Then I took an aerial tour of western North Carolina to survey the damage. And I came here in Raleigh to receive a briefing from all of you and—who have been working nonstop to provide the support that you need and the survivors need.

You know, it goes—my heart goes out to everyone who has experienced the unthinkable loss. But we're here for you.

And I want to thank Republican Governor of South Carolina and the Democratic Governor of North Carolina and all of the elected officials who have focused on the task at hand. In a moment like this, we put politics aside. At least we should put it all aside, and we have here. There are no Democrats or Republicans; there are only Americans. And our job is to help as many people as we can as quickly as we can and as thoroughly as we can.

You know, that's why even before the storm hit, I directed the entire Federal Government to use every possible resource to help communities across the Nation—across the region get ready. We deployed over 1,000 first responders throughout the Southeast. I immediately approved emergency declarations as soon as I received the requests from your Governors. And today I approved the request of Governor Cooper for the Federal Government to cover 100 percent—100 percent—of all the costs for debris removal, emergency protective measures for 6 months—all the costs. *[Applause]* Well, this really matters.

There are 70 North Carolinians who are dead and 100 more who are unaccounted for. And much of Asheville is underwater.

It was—I've flown over an awful lot of storm-damaged areas since I've been President. Matter of fact, most of—many of them forest fires. And I—we've—with—the FEMA director and I have flown over more forest that's been taken down to the ground because of fires and a whole range of other reasons than makes up the entire State of Maryland. And so I've seen a lot.

But we're looking at Asheville and just imagining what it must have been like sitting along those rivers and streams as all that rain came down. What, 19 inches of rain? Something like that. An incredible amount of rain. Watching homes—you could see homes that are moved from—clearly from one side of the river, down the river, to another side of the river.

And I can only imagine what it's like to have been in one of those homes. And much of Asheville was underwater. Much of it was underwater. What a beautiful, beautiful part of the country. I've been to Asheville before. It's a magnificent part of Appalachia. Much of it was underwater.

Communities like Chimney Rock are reduced to piles of wood and debris. I mean, that's—you look down, that's what you see, as we flew over in the—circled in the helicopter.

And this is going to pay for—this will pay for the urgent work we need to clear landslides, to provide shelters, and supply food and medicine.

But today I'm also directing the Department of Defense to move up 1,000 soldiers to reinforce North Carolina's National Guard, because they need additional assistance. These soldiers are out of Fort Liberty here in—right here in North Carolina and are available for responsive operations starting today—starting today.

They're going to spend—they're going to speed up the delivery of lifesaving supplies like food, water, and medicine to isolated communities over what the Pentagon calls "the last tactical mile"—"the last tactical mile."

Simply put, we've got the capabilities to get the job done, and we're going to get it done as fast as possible.

I've also directed the development of Starlink—a deployment of Starlink satellites. Fifty are in place right now and more are going to be put in place so people in places like Canton can call for help and reach the ones that love—the loved ones who they're not sure whether anybody—on the other end of that phone because there's no cell service.

And on top of this, the FEMA teams are offering free temporary housing and hotel rooms for eligible residents. They're continuing to send helicopters and trucks to deliver hundreds of thousands of meals and liters of water in communities every single day.

And they're knocking—literally knocking on doors and visiting shelters to register folks so they can receive assistance to buy the urgent needs that they have because they've lost everything, like prescriptions and baby formula and essentials. This is a direct assistance that is being delivered here today, not later, but today.

And so—but, folks, it's going to take—cost us billions of dollars. It's going to cost billions of dollars to deal with this storm and all the communities affected. And Congress has an obligation to ensure the States have the resources they need.

Let me close with this. Nobody can deny the impact of climate crisis anymore. At least I hope they don't. They must be brain-dead if they do. Scientists report that with warming oceans powering more intense rains, storms like Helene are getting stronger and stronger. Not going to get—they're not going to get less; they're going to get stronger.

Today, in North Carolina, I saw the impacts of that fury: massive trees uprooted; homes literally swept off their foundations, swept down rivers; you know, families that are heartbroken.

But there are also neighbors helping neighbors. That's the other thing we were talking about coming over here in a automobile. It's amazing when people step up when people are in need, because they're neighbors. I think we underestimate that.

That's why one of the things I did with all the—all I put in place in terms of everything from the Recovery Act on down is that we've actually invested more funding under my administration in the so-called red States than blue States, because the need was greater; they're larger States with larger territories.

Because this—everyone—this is about America. It's not about one State or another, Democrat or Republican. It's about America.

Volunteers, first responders are standing side by side, people leaning on each other to pick up the pieces that are left over. And that's the best of America.

I firmly believe—and I'm saying this, saying this, saying it for 3 years—there's nothing beyond our capacity to do—nothing, nothing, nothing. This is the United States of America, for God's sake. Whenever we work together, we've never failed to get something done.

So I thank everyone who has been working tirelessly and cold, wet, and hungry to get the job done. And Kamala and I are here until the end.

And I want to—God bless you all.

And I'd like to turn it now over to Director Will Ray.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:05 p.m. at the Raleigh Emergency Operations Center. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Roy A. Cooper III, who introduced the President, and Emergency Management Director William Ray of North Carolina; Gov. Henry D. McMaster of South Carolina; Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Bennett Criswell; and Vice President Kamala D. Harris. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 3.

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