

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

**Remarks on Hurricane Helene Response and Recovery Efforts and an Exchange
With Reporters in Ray City, Georgia**

October 3, 2024

The President. Good afternoon, everybody. Hey, family. How you doing? Good to see you.

Folks, a week ago, Hurricane Helene became one of the strongest hurricanes ever—ever—to hit Florida and this part of Georgia. Roofs ripped off the buildings; massive trees crashed into powerlines, setting off loss of heat—electricity; flooding wiped out homes. We were just down in Florida to see homes that were—I mean, just wiped away. Just—there was an entire island gone.

Families—they lost everything including—including loved ones, including family members.

And I know it isn't the first time. Just over a year ago, a major hurricane hit these same communities. A couple months ago, Hurricane Debby did the same thing. Three in a row. Three in a row. You've been through hell. Three in a row.

And I want you to know: I see you, I hear you, I grieve with you, and I promise you we have your back. We're going to stay until you're restored.

Earlier today I was briefed by Florida officials on the damage, and I met with first responders who have been working nonstop to provide aid and support to survivors. I did a walking tour of Keaton Beach with a bipartisan group of officials to survey what a 15-foot surge—15-foot surge—some places it went as high as three stories—does to a coastal community.

Then I came here to Georgia to meet all of you, to see firsthand how you're doing as well, because we're really in this together. We're—it's separate States, but we're the United States of America.

I want to thank Governor Kemp, who I spoke with again this morning, and Senator Warnock, who is behind me; and Senator [Representative; White House correction] Austin Scott, Representative Sanford Bishop—old friends.

In moments like this, it's time to put politics aside. Again, it's not one State versus others, it's the United States. You know, there's no Democrats or Republicans out here. It's what we do to make sure we are—restore the economy. Only Americans are here. And this been—I've been committed to being President for all America.

In fact, all the major bills we've gotten passed, from over a trillion-dollar bill relating to infrastructure to \$368 billion bill on dealing with climate; a whole range of bills we got passed. Well, guess what? The fact of the matter is, more money from those bills has been spent in red States—red States—than in blue States—more in red States than blue States. As I said, I—didn't matter where it was or who needed help. Not based on party. Who needed help?

And I mean this sincerely. Check it out.

Our job is to help as many people as we can—as many as we can. And also, by the way, when you do that, I hope we begin to break down this rabid partisanship that exists. I mean that sincerely. There's no rationale for it. There's no rationale for it.

And so it doesn't matter who we help, it's who's needed help. And look, we're going to help as many people as we can.

That's why, days before this storm hit, I pre-positioned extensive resources on the ground throughout the Southeast—extensively—first responders, search-and-rescue teams, food, water, ambulances.

Before Helene had made landfall, I also immediately improved [approved; White House correction] emergency declarations your Governor and others asked for and—so all of us could focus on the first responders and standing up emergency operations centers. That was the focus.

And yesterday I approved Governor's request—Governor Kemp's request for a Federal Government to cover 100 percent—100 percent of the cost for debris removal, emergency protective measures for 3 months—100 percent. I must tell you, your Senator had a little bit to do with that when he called me——

Senator Raphael G. Warnock. Thank you.

The President. ——beforehand.

But all kidding aside, we're doing the same for Florida as well, as well as we're doing for North Carolina.

Folks, this is going to pay for the urgent work to clear the mud, remove the downed trees, provide temporary housing.

And, on top of this, the Department of Agriculture—and I have with me the Secretary of Agriculture today—is on the ground to support farmers, ranchers, and small businesses impacted by this storm.

And FEMA teams are knocking—literally knocking—on doors to register folks so they can receive assistance to buy what they urgently need, from prescription drugs, if they lost everything—for example, I was just down in Florida. One home—what people really worry the most about is not just losing their home, it's they lose everything that mattered to them. They move—they, you know, lose that picture of their mom and their dad when they were kids. They look—I mean, all things that are personal. They look at family jewelry, the ring that was—the engagement ring, all those things.

And I was with one rescuer who said there was a young family who had—their entire—their entire home was lifted up and taken out into basically what we'd call a bayou—it's not a bayou, but it's flat space on—out in the middle of a marsh. They went out there—they cut a road through with their vehicles that they got out there. They went in, and all they wanted to do was just receive—get back what they—they'd lost. They lost their home, but they were more—even more concerned about the personal things that mattered so much to the families.

And so this is going to pay, as I said, this hundred percent to clear all the things that are—needed to be cleared.

And on top of this, the Department of Agriculture is on the ground supporting ranchers, farmers, and small businesses. And, as I said, the FEMA teams are knocking on doors to register people so they can receive assistance.

Think of all the people out there throughout the country, here in the Southeast, that have—they need prescriptions filled; they don't have the money. They've lost everything. They don't have any way to fill their prescriptions. Or baby formula—they can't afford it. They don't know where to get it, how to get it.

And so we're registering folks so they can receive this assistance and buyers—needed things they badly need.

This direct assistance is now being delivered—it's being delivered now, directly, with more to come.

But, folks, this entire project is going to cost billions of dollars—not tens of thousands, not millions, not a billion—billions of dollars, because it comes through—it goes through so many States.

You know, and Congress has an obligation, to me—it seems to me to ensure that States have the resources they need.

Let me close with this. I'm standing here beside Buck, the owner of this pecan farm. This afternoon, we talked—we got a chance to talk a little bit, and he showed me what he lost—talked about what he lost—and his dad—acres of orchards wiped out, trees uprooted, debris everywhere. Decades of progress gone in a single instant. But through it all, Buck hasn't lost hope.

In fact, he reminds me of another Georgia farmer who just turned a hundred years old. President Jimmy Carter once said, "Tremendous progress can be made if we persevere through difficult challenges." This is a difficult challenge we're facing. This storm is extremely difficult for our country.

To all the first responders, police officers, and volunteers who ran toward danger; to all the survivors and families who had their lives and livelihoods torn apart: We've got to get—we've got a lot of work ahead of us.

I was with a—as I said, I was down in Florida today, and a gentleman walked and he handed me a small pamphlet, a book that his wife had just written about how they lost their son. Their son died last time out in their home. You know, a lot of people are in real trouble.

But I want you know, as I said, we see you, we're with you, and we're going to preserve and persevere to get through all of this.

Because, folks, this is the United States of America. We're not 50—we're the United States of America. And there's not a damn thing we can't get done—nothing beyond our capacity—when we work together and put politics aside.

So God bless you all.

And now it's my honor to introduce Buck, who's going to say a few words. Buck, the podium is yours.

[At this point, Shiloh Pecan Farm Property Manager Buck Paulk, Secretary of Agriculture Thomas J. Vilsack, and JFD Farms and Distribution Company Owner Derrick Dawson made remarks; no transcript was provided. The President then returned to the podium and spoke with reporters as follows.]

Funding for Federal Disaster Assistance

Q. Mr. President, Speaker Johnson has said a supplemental can wait until after the election. What kind of timeline do you have in mind, sir?

The President. We can't wait. We can't wait. People need help now.

Thank you.

Georgia Disaster Assistance

Q. Mr. President, some South Georgia counties are still needing approval. Will that get approved?

The President. Yes.

Q. Yes?

The President. We're going through the process. It approves almost everything that's been put forth. I imagine every county in this State will be funded.

Q. Every county. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:19 p.m. at Shiloh Pecan Farm. In his remarks, he referred to Sheriff Ashley Paulk of Lowndes County, GA, father of Mr. Paulk. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 4.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Helene response and recovery efforts in Ray City, GA; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, Ray City, GA.

Locations: Ray City, GA.

Names: Bishop, Sanford D., Jr.; Carter, James E., Jr.; Kemp, Brian P.; Paulk, Ashley; Paulk, Buck; Scott, J. Austin; Vilsack, Thomas J.; Warnock, Raphael G.

Subjects: Climate change; Disaster assistance, Florida; Disaster assistance, Georgia; Disaster assistance, North Carolina; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); Florida, disaster assistance; Florida, Hurricane Helene damage and recovery efforts; Georgia, disaster assistance; Georgia, Governor; Georgia, Hurricane Helene damage and recovery efforts; Georgia, President's visit; Natural disasters, Hurricane Debby; Natural disasters, Hurricane Helene; North Carolina, disaster assistance; Presidency, U.S., former President Carter, 100th birthday; Secretary of Agriculture.

DCPD Number: DCPD202400872.