

Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2024

Remarks on Hurricane Milton and Federal Support to State and Local Officials in Impacted Areas and an Exchange With Reporters

October 10, 2024

The President. Good afternoon.

Q. Good afternoon.

The President. I'll be brief. Last night Hurricane Milton made landfall, as we all know, on the west coast of Florida. It brought hurricane winds, heavy rains, including 10 to 20 inches of rain in the Tampa area overnight.

Storm surge measurements are still being taken, but 38 tornadoes ripped through 13 counties. Four deaths have been reported thus far.

It's too early to know the full account of the damage though, but we know lifesaving measures did make a difference. More than 80,000 people followed orders to safety—to safely shelter last night. And we've had search-and-rescue teams at the ready for any calls for help this morning.

There are still very dangerous conditions in the State, and people should wait to be given the all-clear by their leaders before they go out. We know from previous hurricanes that it's often the case that more lives are lost in the days following the storm than actually during the storm itself.

Vice President Harris and I have been in constant contact with the State and local officials. And we're offering everything they need. I must have spoken to somewhere between 10 and 15 mayors and county executives and all the Governors.

And, in fact, starting this morning, we are getting direct assessments from the storm of FEMA and Director Criswell as well, also Florida Governor DeSantis, with whom I had a chance to speak.

And the Vice President and I have just convened a meeting this morning with the leaders of the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Defense, including NORTHCOM Commander, who has responsibility for providing defense support to civilian authorities—and that, apparently, is going very well—as well as from the Coast Guard and FEMA, we've received reports.

We focused on what the American military can do like no one else can: provide emergency support for communities in need and we're required by the Governor in a Federal—and—required by the Governor in the affected States. And I've spoken to all the Governors—not today, all of them, but I've spoken to all of them thus far. And how we can be ready to go in an instant when the call comes.

At my direction, Defense Secretary Austin has provided a range of capabilities both to Florida for Hurricane Milton as well as the States impacted by Hurricane Helene. And the more capabilities are available, we assess the pressing needs, we can get whatever they need.

To the service men and women who are on the ground responding to this—these disasters: Thank you. Thank you for—your professionalism, your dedication to every mission you're given. And you're repeating it again.

This is a whole-of-Government effort that also includes the Department of Energy and Department of Transportation, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the

Department of Housing and Urban Development, which is providing mortgage relief for impacted homeowners.

As directed, FEMA is going to open disaster recovery centers all across the impacted communities right away so there's one stop for the residents can go to to learn about the support they might need. And that—it will be advertised where those places are.

Three million people are without power. But more than 40 million [40,000; White House correction] power workers—powerline workers have come from around the country, from Canada to Florida, to restore power across the State.

In addition, the Federal Aviation has authorized Florida Power and Light to fly large drones before other manned aircraft can get up in the sky to quickly assess the damage on the ground so ground crews can restore power as quickly as possible.

The Coast Guard and the Army Corps of Engineers are assessing how fast they can reopen the Port of Tampa to get fuel, food, water, and other basic goods flowing into the area again and quickly.

Additionally, Vice President Harris and I said yesterday, and we'll say it again: To anyone who seeks to take advantage of our fellow Americans' desperation, whether you're a company engaging in price gouging or a citizen trying to scam your neighbors, we will go after you, and we will hold you accountable.

Now, not only that. Our fellow Americans are putting their lives on the line to do this dangerous work and received death—some received death penalties [threats; White House correction] yesterday as a result of reckless, irresponsible, and relentless disinformation and outright lies that continue to flow. Those who engage in such lies are undermining the confidence in the rescue and recovery work that's opening and ongoing. As I speak, they're continuing.

These lies are also harmful to those who most need help. Lives are on the line. People are in desperate situations. Have the decency to tell them the truth.

So let me say this. To all the people impacted by Hurricane Helene and Hurricane Milton, despite the misinformation and lies, the truth is, we're providing the resources needed to rescue, recover, and rebuild—and rebuild.

Let me close with this. I know recovery and rebuilding projects can take a long and difficult time. But as—long after the press and the cameras move on, I promise you, you have to pick up the pieces still. I want you to know we'll do everything in our power to help you put the pieces back together and get all that you need.

May God bless you, and may God bless our troops and our first responders, who are—many—in some cases risking their lives to help.

Thank you very much. I'll be reporting again tomorrow.

Thank you.

Federal Disaster Assistance Funding/Small Business Administration

Q. Mr. President, on FEMA funding. On FEMA funding. How much time does Congress have to act before FEMA or the SBA run out of money?

The President. That's in discussion now, and I don't want to give you—mislead you. I think in terms of the SBA, it's pretty right at the edge right now.

And I think the Congress should be coming back and moving on emergency needs immediately. And they're going to have to come back after the election as well, because this is

going to be a long haul to—for total rebuilding. It's going to take several billion dollars. It's not going to be a matter of just a little bit.

But we're providing now to make sure people have the emergency relief they need with dollars just to be able to get a prescription filled, to get a baby formula done—all the things—that \$750 that they're talking about, Mr. Trump and every—all those other people know it's a lie to suggest that's all they're going to get. That's bizarre. It's bizarre. They've got to stop this. It's so—I mean, they're being so damn un-American with the way they're talking about this stuff.

But there's going to be a need for significant amounts of money. We're already underway at trying to calculate what the cost will be because you don't want to mislead anybody. We want to make sure all the costs are able to be covered.

Federal Disaster Assistance Funding

Q. Have you spoken to Speaker Johnson about coming back before the election to vote?

The President. No, I haven't.

Federal Support for Impacted Small Businesses

Q. Mr. President, are you calling on Congress to come back early?

The President. I think Congress should move as rapidly as they can, particularly on the most immediate need, which is small business.

Q. But are you——

Federal Emergency Management Agency/Small Business Administration

Q. Mr. President, the Vice President said yesterday that FEMA has what it needs. There's enough resources. They don't need—that Congress does not need to come back right away. Who's right?

The President. FEMA has what it needs.

Q. Okay.

The President. That's different than SBA.

Q. Okay. So it's SBA that—they need to come back and do SBA?

The President. Yes, but they're going to need a lot more.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel

Q. Mr. President, what did you—what did Prime Minister Netanyahu tell you about his plans relating to retaliation against Iran?

The President. He's coming over to help with the storm. [*Laughter*]

Former President Donald J. Trump

Q. Mr. President, have you spoken with former President Trump at all——

The President. Are you kidding me?

Q. ——about the disinformation?

The President. [*Laughter*] Mr. President Trump—former President Trump, get a life, man. Help these people.

Former President Donald J. Trump

Q. Will you hold him accountable? You said you were going to hold those accountable.

The President. The public will hold him accountable.

Q. The——

The President. You'd better, in the press, hold him accountable because you know the truth.

Q. Well, do you plan to speak with former President Trump?

The President. No.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Deanne Bennett Criswell; Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas; Gen. Gregory M. Guillot, USAF, commander, North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command; U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Linda L. Fagan, USCG; and former President Donald J. Trump.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Milton, Federal support to State and local officials in impacted areas; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Austin, Lloyd J., III; Criswell, Deanne Bennett; DeSantis, Ronald D.; Fagan, Linda L.; Guillot, Gregory M.; Harris, Kamala D.; Mayorkas, Alejandro N.; Netanyahu, Benjamin; Trump, Donald J.

Subjects: 2024 Presidential election; Army Corps of Engineers, U.S.; Coast Guard, U.S.; Department of Defense, disaster response capabilities; Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); First responders, service and dedication; Florida, Governor; Florida, Hurricane Milton damage and recovery efforts; Israel, Prime Minister; Natural disasters, Hurricane Helene; Natural disasters, Hurricane Milton; Secretary of Defense; Secretary of Homeland Security; Small Business Administration; U.S. servicemembers, service and dedication; Vice President.

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