

I am proud of the fact that, where it used to take a month or more for families who were hurt in disasters to get checks, now you can call an 800 number and get it within days. Already more than 3,500 Oregonians have registered for help, and the first checks were mailed to them today.

The Small Business Administration will do everything in its power to get Oregon's small business communities up and running again. And I am pleased to announce today emergency grants from other Government agencies. The Department of Transportation is today committing \$10 million to help repair highways damaged by the flood. The Department of Housing and Urban Development is speeding \$10.3 million for community development and housing assistance. The Department of Labor is providing \$2 million in emergency funds for displaced workers.

And today we are opening two disaster recovery centers in Tillamook and Clackamas Counties. Residents can go to the center and meet with representatives of all the Federal and State agencies that are taking part in the recovery. So those who can't get everything they want or need over the 800 number will be able to go in and deal with someone face to face. I know that it takes time to get this done. But let me say again, we can do it.

I hope you will never forget this wall behind me, and goodness knows, I hope you never need it again. But I hope you will always remember for as long as you live what the people of Portland did in one remarkable day. And I hope that all of us will find in our minds and hearts the wisdom and strength to be a little more like the people of Portland were on that one day every day of the year. If we had that kind of cohesion, that kind of common commitment, we'd really be in pretty good shape.

When I was up in Washington a couple of hours ago, I went to the home of a man, 70 years old, hard of hearing, lost everything he had in his home including his hearing aid. And all he did the whole time I saw him—he and his wife were there, and their two daughters had come in, their granddaughter trying to help them deal with the aftermath of losing everything in a home they had lived in for decades—and all he did was crack jokes the whole time I was there—[laughter]—trying to keep everybody else in a good humor.

And he said, "You know, it's amazing how all these total strangers showed up to help me." He said, "People were going down into my basement, which I turned into an indoor swimming pool—[laughter]—and really risking getting hurt pretty seriously trying to help me save the few little things I've accumulated in my life." And he said, "I'm real grateful, but I just wish we could all be that way every day." And that's a pretty good pearl of wisdom from a man who, at the age of 70, is looking at a future without anything that he had just a couple of days ago.

Let me close by asking you to remember that today is your State's birthday. On February 14, 1857, the people of the Oregon Territory decided their bond to each other was strong enough to sustain a State. The spirit that brought statehood was alive and well again here last week. May that spirit heal the wounds of recent days, and may it continue to grow and flourish for another 139 years and beyond.

Thank you, happy birthday, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. in Waterfront Park. In his remarks, he referred to Jim McKune, volunteer carpenter; Bill Long, supervisor, bureau of maintenance; Steve Barrett, structural engineer; Gov. John A. Kitzhaber of Oregon; and Mayor Vera Katz of Portland.

Statement on the Interim Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

February 14, 1996

I am pleased to accept the interim report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. Dr. Joyce Lashof and

the Committee members have made an impressive start on helping to ensure that we are doing all we can both to determine the causes of the

illnesses Gulf war veterans are suffering from, and to provide effective medical care to those in need.

I am pleased that the Committee's interim report recognizes the serious efforts underway in the administration to restore these men and women to good health. I know that the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs will review the recommendations contained in this report and will continue the research, outreach, and medical programs needed to improve the lives of Gulf war veterans and their families.

I have asked Secretary William Perry, Secretary Donna Shalala, and Secretary Jesse Brown to develop an action plan for implementing the

recommendations in the interim report. I am also asking the Departments to continue their record of full cooperation with the Advisory Committee as it prepares its final report over the next 10 months.

As I said last March when announcing my intention to establish the Advisory Committee, 5 years ago we relied on these Gulf war veterans to fight for our country; they must now be able to rely on us to try to determine why they are ill and to help restore them to full health. We are all indebted to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses for its contribution to this critical task. I look forward to reviewing their final recommendations later this year.

Remarks on Departure from Boise, Idaho *February 14, 1996*

[The President's remarks are joined in progress.]

On the ground, we are doing what needs to be done not only now, in the next few days, but for as long as it takes, until the people there are back on their feet and back to normal.

Let me also say that, as I'm sure all of you know, this has been a long day for me but it's been a very rewarding one, even though I've seen a lot of sad and heartbreaking things. And not only in my conversations here but in my trip to Oregon and to Washington, I've seen a lot of loss, but I've also seen what happens when the American people work together in a spirit of genuine community and when people exhibit individual acts of courage and kindness that seem to overwhelm the dimensions of even the worst tragedy. And I have seen that as well.

I think the lesson that I have learned more than any other in 3 years and a few days as President is that when this country works together, we never lose. And when we permit ourselves to be divided, we often wind up being less than we ought to be.

I thank again everybody here in the northwestern part of our country for what I have

seen today, for the work that they have done. And I want to say again specifically to the people of Idaho, I will follow up on the suggestions that we have gotten. I look forward to working with you. And I hope, as the members of your congressional delegation suggested to me in there, Senator Kempthorne in particular, that maybe the model of cooperation that we've seen in dealing with this flood can become a model for other kinds of cooperation in the future, so that Americans everywhere feel that their Government is a partner in a common endeavor to help individuals and families and communities make the most of their God-given capacities.

Thank you. Good luck, and we'll be at work on this immediately. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 7:50 p.m. at the Idaho National Guard Ramp at Boise International Airport. These remarks were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 15. The press release did not include the President's complete opening remarks.