

and Mary Spence, dinner hosts; Texas State Senators Carlos Truan and Gonzalo Barrientos; Garry Mauro, former Texas land commissioner; Judy Trabulsi, Nancy Williams, and Tom Henderson,

who worked with the President on the 1972 McGovern campaign in Texas; former Gov. Ann Richards of Texas; and Joseph J. Andrew, national chair, Democratic National Committee.

## The President's Radio Address

*May 8, 1999*

Good morning. I want to talk to you today about our efforts to help the people and communities devastated by the terrible tornadoes that hit Oklahoma, Kansas, Texas, and Tennessee this week. These tornadoes killed over 50 people, injured hundreds more, and damaged or destroyed thousands of homes and businesses. I know I speak for all Americans when I say to the families who lost so much, our thoughts and prayers are with you.

Today I'll be flying to Oklahoma City to get a firsthand view of the destruction. This is a duty I've performed many times in the aftermath of many natural disasters. One thing I've learned is that the images we see on television can never fully convey the level of sheer destruction or the depth of human grief caused by these disasters. Yet, I've also learned that the worst of nature can bring out the best in people.

At times like these, families rally together; neighbors help neighbors; strangers reach out to strangers; while police, doctors, firefighters put in 24-hour days in often hazardous conditions without complaint. Natural disasters create many victims but bring forth many heroes. There are some challenges that no individual, indeed, no community can handle alone. And on these occasions the National Government must act quickly, effectively, compassionately.

When I became President, I vowed that the Federal Government would do a better job of helping communities respond to the ravages of nature, and it has. As part of Vice President Gore's reinventing Government effort, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, under the direction of James Lee Witt, has gone from being much criticized to becoming a model of disaster relief, now recognized all around the world for its speed, skill, and dedication.

Officials from FEMA and other Federal agencies are already on the ground in communities

hit by this week's tornadoes, healing wounds, searching for missing persons, providing shelter, clearing debris, restoring power and water, issuing emergency expense checks. But more must be done.

Today I'm glad to announce the Department of Labor will spend over \$12 million to provide temporary jobs for some 3,500 Oklahomans. Men and women who lost their jobs and businesses destroyed by the tornadoes will be paid to serve at relief centers, to distribute food and water, to help on construction crews. They'll be able to feed their families by rebuilding their communities.

I'm also announcing today that I'll ask Congress for an additional \$372 million for FEMA's disaster relief fund. These resources are crucial for our disaster relief efforts, and I urge Congress to act quickly on my request.

Finally, in the balanced budget that I sent to Congress there is \$10 million to further improve the National Weather Service's next generation Doppler radar network. This system makes it possible to issue warnings in advance of coming tornadoes so that local residents can seek shelter. Over the last decade, average warning times have doubled from 6 minutes to 12 minutes. Residents of hard-hit Cleveland County, Oklahoma, received warnings a full 35 minutes before the tornado touched down there this week, and that warning saved lives. That's also why I support the creation of a national weather center for state-of-the-art tornado and severe storm forecasting at the University of Oklahoma.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to provide individuals with the tools they need to improve their own lives. That's what we're doing in Oklahoma this week. Natural disasters test our faith, but they also show us that the old-fashioned American values of neighborly care and concern are still very much alive. And

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they remind us of the enduring power of the American people to emerge from calamities even stronger.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 6:03 p.m. on May 7 in La Colombe d'Or restaurant in Houston, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on May 8. The transcript was embargoed for release until the broadcast.

## Remarks Following a Walking Tour of Tornado Damage in Del City, Oklahoma

*May 8, 1999*

Thank you very much. Governor Keating and Mrs. Keating; Congressmen Istook and Lucas; I don't know if Senator Nickles and—there he is, over there. Thank you very much.

We have, obviously, James Lee Witt, our FEMA Director, here with me, and Buddy Young, his Regional Director, and many others here: our SBA Administrator, Aida Alvarez; the Deputy Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, Saul Ramirez; Mayor Lewis; Mayor Nelson; Mayor Reed; and a lot of other Oklahoma State officials who are here.

Let me say to all of you, I was talking last night to my wife, and we were remembering all the tornadoes that we dealt with when I was Governor of Arkansas. You may know that our two States have the highest incidence of tornadoes in the entire country. I have been going to these sites for 20 years, most of them with James Lee Witt, and this is the most devastating tornado I have ever seen. I have never seen so much complete destruction of homes over so wide an area. And of course, you know that at least for a couple of communities, the measurement of the tornado was virtually off the charts.

And I just want you to know—and I came into this neighborhood today, and I saw all these American flags sticking up, all the people rooting around in the rubble of their houses, looking for those family photos and the marriage licenses and the other records of family life, but with a strong spirit. It was profoundly moving to me.

And I want to say that our hearts go out to those who have lost so much and, obviously, especially to the families of those people who lost their lives. But we also thank you for setting an example of what is very best in this country, the way you have reacted to this.

I want to say a special word of thanks to the police and fire personnel, the National Guard, the Red Cross, all the people who volunteer, the young AmeriCorps volunteers over there, everybody who's been a part of this. I am very grateful. And I'd like to thank the citizens of Oklahoma. When the Governor said there had not been a single incident of looting, even though there had been no curfew, I think that says it all. And again, let me say to all of you, I am profoundly grateful.

There are a couple of things that I'd like to say that we're trying to do in addition to what you know already. FEMA has got a 1-800 number. We're trying to get in touch with all the businesses, as well as the homeowners and the people who have lost their cars and other things. But we also are today going to make available about \$12 million from the Department of Labor, which will provide 3,500 temporary jobs that will be directed to people who lost their jobs because their businesses were taken out by the tornado.

And these jobs—though obviously they pay better, a lot better than unemployment compensation—so we can put several thousand people to work in the reconstruction process, everything from delivering water and food supplies to doing cleanup to actually helping on some of the construction crews. We'll be able to do that. We talked with your congressional delegation today, and we're going to look and see if we can do more.

But there will be several people here who will be out of their own jobs for months while the rebuilding occurs. And we're going to go back to Washington, try to figure out exactly how many people are going to be out of work, for how long, and try to make sure we can provide funding for work that actually needs