

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 1:15 p.m. at the Tyson Events Center. In his remarks, he referred to Iowa State Auditor David A. Vaudt; Speaker Christopher Rants and State Representative Ralph Klemme, Iowa State House of Representatives; former Representative John R. Thune, senatorial candidate in South Dakota; Mayor Dave Fer-

ris of Sioux City, IA; Jeff Fortenberry, candidate for Nebraska's First Congressional District; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady, who introduced the President.

Remarks on the Devastation of Hurricane Charley and an Exchange With Reporters in Punta Gorda, Florida *August 15, 2004*

The President. The job of the Federal Government and the State government is to surge resources as quickly as possible to disaster areas. And that's exactly what's happening now. We choppered over and saw the devastation of this area. A lot of people's lives are turned upside down. We've got ice and water moving in, trailers for people to live in are moving in. State is providing security so that people can have peace of mind that their neighborhoods will be safe. There's a lot of compassion moving in the area. The Red Cross is here.

What I'm telling is that there's a lot of help moving into this part of the world. It's going to take a while to rebuild it. But the Government's job is to help people help rebuild their lives, and that's what's happening.

The coordination between the Federal Government and the State government and the local government is really important. I think it's excellent now. The Governor can speak to that, if you like. But it's really important that when we say we're going to do something, that it actually happens. And that's what we're following through on now.

I'll answer some questions, if you've got some.

Community Response

Q. Can you tell us about some of the people who you spoke with and what they told you?

The President. Well, I've got—you know, these good folks here—this is this man's house here. His parents were uprooted from where they were living. They came here to spend the night. And that's what you're beginning to see. You're beginning to see neighbors helping neighbors. A lot of people who have been dislocated are staying with a friend or a neighbor. You know, out of these catastrophes the spirit of America really shines, and that spirit is neighbor helping neighbor. So that's the lesson here.

The fellow down the street came out okay; he had taken precautions necessary. Nearly everybody here that I've talked to had evacuated, as the State asked them to do, and therefore, the loss of life was minimized. Still, too many people lost their lives, but nevertheless, it was not as significant as it could have been. We're here, now, obviously, in a residential neighborhood where people's lives have been destroyed. They're beginning to worry about insurance claims, and the State is organized to handle insurance claims. The key is just to make sure that they expedite the services which are available as quickly as possible.

Federal Response

Q. There was some consternation after Andrew, that the Federal aid didn't arrive soon enough. Can you promise that there will be a more expeditious response this time?

The President. It's happening now——

Q. Sir——

The President. Hold up for a second. We're moving a lot of aid very quickly, and again, you can ask the Governor whether or not he's satisfied with how fast the aid is moving. All I can tell you is, is that FEMA was on the ground yesterday morning, and there's a lot of supplies surging this way.

Yes, ma'am.

Estimates of Damage

Q. Have you gotten an updated tally of the cost of the damage——

The President. Not yet. Jeb estimated billions. We'll see.

President's Visit

Q. Mr. President, some people are going to say that there's a political component to your rapid visit to Florida.

The President. Yes, and if I didn't come they would have said, "He should have been here more rapidly."

Q. Yes. [Laughter]

Federal Response

Q. What about what happened in '92, with Hurricane Andrew? That was obviously in August of a Presidential——

The President. This is now——this is now. And the Government is set up to respond very quickly, and we are.

Q. Was there a lesson learned back then, though?

The President. The lesson is, respond quickly. And we are responding quickly. And we're surging equipment. And the coordination between the Federal Government and the State government is excellent. And the Homeland Security Department is doing its job. FEMA Director Brown is doing an excellent job. You can talk to the Governor. He can give you a sense for——from the State perspective. But from the Federal perspective, I was notified that they're going to move as quickly as possible, and they are. A lot of stuff is coming. And thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:46 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida.

Remarks to the Veterans of Foreign Wars Convention in Cincinnati, Ohio
August 16, 2004

Thank you all very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. And thanks for inviting me for your 105th national convention. I'm proud to be here.

One of the great honors of being Commander in Chief is meeting the courageous men and women who stand watch for freedom. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to look them in the eye and say on behalf of our country, "Thank you for your service." The same is true of each of you

here today. When the enemies of freedom were on the march and our country and the world needed brave Americans to take up arms and stop their advance, you stepped forward to serve. And today I'm proud to stand before you as Commander in Chief, look you in the eye, and say, America thanks you for your service.

I want to thank Ed Banas for his service in being an effective commander of the VFW. I appreciate the job he's done, and