

very important for the folks in New Orleans to understand that, at least as far as I'm concerned, this great city has got ample talent and ample genius to set the strategy and set the vision. And our role at the Federal Government is, obviously, within the law to help them realize that vision. And that's what I wanted to assure the mayor.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:29 a.m. at the intersection of North Claiborne and

Cleveland Streets. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA; Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honore, USA, commanding general, First United States Army; and Vice Adm. Thad W. Allen, USCG, U.S. Coast Guard Chief of Staff. Lt. Gen. Honore referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; and Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, Adjutant General, Louisiana National Guard. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks on the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and an Exchange With Reporters in Gulfport, Mississippi *September 12, 2005*

The President. First of all, I want to thank the school principal for her hospitality. It's interesting, you know, she said she lost her school and lost her house, but I told her, she hadn't lost her smile or her will to succeed.

Behind us we've got U.S. troops and Mexican troops working together to help get this school up and running. The superintendent of schools here in the region tells me that they're trying to have everybody back in school by the end of October. And that's part of what you're beginning to see here in Mississippi. This country is beginning to rebuild, and lives are starting over.

I thank the Governor and the Congressman for their hospitality here. And, Mayor, thank you, sir. You've been in office for how long? Four months?

Mayor Gregory Brent Warr. Two months.

The President. Two months.

Governor Haley Barbour. It seems like 4. [Laughter]

The President. But there's a remarkable spirit all across this affected zone. It's a peculiar Mississippi spirit here, where there's a can-do attitude. People are com-

ing together and slowly but surely putting their life back together. The Governor was telling me about the electricity, and the mayor has got a positive attitude.

I remember when I was down here last time, they were talking about gasoline. I saw a gasoline station up and running. And so progress is being made, and yet there's a lot of work to do, a lot of issues to be resolved, a lot of lives to be lifted up, a lot of hope to be restored.

I look forward to working with the congressional delegation, seeing people in Mississippi and the two Senators, of course, and the Governor, to address the problems. I mean, we are problem-solvers, and we look forward to working with the folks here.

I said something in Louisiana I want to repeat here in Mississippi, and that is, as these communities are rebuilt, they're going to be rebuilt by people from Mississippi. And as the coast is replanned and the vision of the coast emerges, it's going to be planned by the people of Mississippi. The role of the people in Washington is to support the Governors and support the Congressmen, support the mayors, as a vision for what this part of the world will look

like. And it's important for people to understand that, and that's a pledge we will keep.

Now, your school is going to open before the end of October?

Phyllis A. Bourn. We're hoping for the end of October.

The President. End of October—isn't that fantastic?

Ms. Bourn. Well, I'm sorry—the beginning of October.

The President. The beginning of October.

Ms. Bourn. The beginning of October for this school, for this school.

The President. Well, that's great. Well, thank you all very much. Thanks for having me.

Are we doing another round of questions today, or is one enough, do you think?

Resignation of FEMA Director Michael D. Brown

Q. Can you tell us—

Q. Have you accepted the resignation of Michael Brown, or have you heard about it?

The President. I haven't. No, I have not talked to Michael Brown or Mike Chertoff. That's who I'd talk to. As you know, I've been working. And when I get on Air Force One, I will call back to Washington. But I've been on the move.

Q. Our understanding is that he has resigned; he's put out a statement. Would that be appropriate—

The President. I haven't talked to Mike Chertoff yet, and that's what I intend to do when I get on the plane. You know, I—you probably—maybe you know something I don't know, but as you know, we've been working, and I haven't had a chance to get on the phone.

I just came from an extraordinary event. When I say I've been working, what I've been doing is thanking people. We just came from a church that's feeding people in need, that need help, and there were people from all over the country there. It

was unbelievable. And so I was spending time thanking them and lifting their spirits.

So I can't comment on something that you may know more about than I do. So don't ask me again about a subject that—

Q. Can you say—have you been disappointed in the job that he did? Were you disappointed in the job he did?

The President. We went through this this morning, as you know, and I've said this—so I haven't changed my mind since you asked that question—or somebody asked the question about it—

Q. It was a little bit different. It wasn't specifically about him, sir.

The President. It's the same spirit, and that is, is that there will be plenty of time to figure out what went right and what went wrong. And the reason why it's important for us to figure that out at a national level is that, if a major event were to come—another major event—we want to make sure that there's appropriate relationship between the State and the local government. And so it's appropriate that we step back and take a look.

Here in Mississippi and in Louisiana, people want to move forward. They understand there's time to try to blame somebody. But they want to get their lives back together. And that's the spirit I see, and that's what—

Reconstruction After Hurricane Katrina

Q. On rebuilding, when you say it's up to—the vision of it is up to those on the ground, the local decisions, does that mean the Federal Government doesn't want to help rebuild things exactly as vulnerable as they were?

The President. Well, you see, I think that nobody wants to build a fragile society. Everybody wants to, when you rebuild, rebuild better. And we want to work with the local folks to achieve that.

The Congressman brought up an interesting issue. He said that he's waiting to find out what height—in order for Federal money to come, the houses have to be built

to a certain height. He's not trying to figure out the height; he just wants an answer.

Representative Gene Taylor. And the same thing with the highways, for example. We can't—a highway commission can't put out contracts for bridges until the Coast Guard tells us how the vertical clearance has got to be.

The President. So, obviously, there's a collaborative effort. And what the Congressman's basic point was and the Governor's point is, how about getting us the answers—for one reason: They want to get going, which is exciting news. And it's—so that's the kind of relationship I'm talking about.

Insurance Issues

Q. Mr. President, a lot of local people asking about insurance——

The President. Yes——

Q. ——the flood versus wind. What can you——

The President. I can't give an answer to that right now. But I am taking back the message, again, of the Congressman and the Governor, and particularly a lady I met at the church. She said she'd lived here for a long period of time, and she said, "I want to ask you something, President." She said, "How would you like it if your insurance company said, 'Ma'am, this is a flood event, and therefore, I'm not going to cover it, cover your house?'" I said, "I wouldn't like it a bit." She said, "Well, that's just what happened to me today." She had come back from where she had evacuated to, to hear that message. And

she asked my opinion, and I said, "I'll find out the process that determines whether or not it's a wind or water event."

President's Focus on Domestic and Foreign Policy

Q. One more question. With all your focus on foreign policy over the next couple of days, what structures have you put in place to keep your attention also focused on the hurricane?

The President. I can do more than one thing at one time. That's what—I hope you—by the time I'm finished President, I hope you'll realize that the Government can do more than one thing at one time, and individuals in the Government can. And so I'll be in constant touch with—I have a hurricane recovery briefing every morning, for example. And I'll be in touch with Mike Chertoff. Andy Card, on my staff, will be in touch with the appropriate people. And so whether—if I'm focusing on the hurricane, I've got the capacity to focus on foreign policy, and vice versa. But I thank you for asking that question.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:06 p.m. at Twenty-Eighth Street Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Glen East, superintendent, Gulfport School District. Participating in the exchange were Phyllis A. Bourn, principal, Twenty-Eighth Street Elementary School; Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Representative Gene Taylor of Mississippi; and Mayor Gregory Brent Warr of Gulfport, MS.

Statement on the Electoral Victory of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Japan's General Elections

September 12, 2005

I extend my congratulations to Prime Minister Koizumi for his decisive victory in yesterday's elections and to the Japanese

people for continuing Japan's robust democratic tradition. Prime Minister Koizumi is a bold leader and a good friend, and I