

Remarks on Arrival in San Antonio, Texas September 24, 2005

The President. Mr. Mayor, thanks—[*inaudible*—and the Judge. It's good to see you all, thanks. It's good to be back in San Antonio.

The country and the world has seen the great compassion of the Texas people after Hurricane Katrina. Over 300,000 people moved east to west, and they found home here in Texas. And the city of San Antonio, Mr. Mayor, and Judge, was—really rose up with great compassion. And I cannot thank you enough and the people of this city enough, for providing safe haven for people whose lives were turned upside down by this horrific storm. And it made me so proud to be from the State of Texas, to see the Texans rise to the occasion.

Again, I want to thank you, Mayor, and thank all the—

Mayor Phil Hardberger. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. —houses of worship and community groups and individuals who love their neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves.

We're now dealing with another storm, and the State of Texas is prepared for and

is now responding to the storm that's affecting east Texas. I briefed today up in Colorado about the Federal Government's response to the storm and then went to Austin to be briefed by the State officials, to make sure that we're working in concert with the State. And then tomorrow morning General Clark is going to come over and brief me once again about how the Federal Government is helping the State of Texas and Louisiana recover.

But at any rate, it's good to be back here. I'm proud of my fellow Texans, and I'm proud of the people of the San Antonio.

Mayor Hardberger. Well, we're mighty glad to have you here, Mr. President. Thank you for being with us.

The President. Thank you, Mr. Mayor. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:26 p.m. at Randolph Air Force Base. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Phil Hardberger of San Antonio, TX; Bexar County Judge Nelson W. Wolff; and Lt. Gen. Robert T. Clark, USA, commander, Joint Task Force—Rita.

Remarks During a Briefing on Hurricane Rita in San Antonio September 25, 2005

[*The briefing is joined in progress.*]

The President. Yes, having said that about Katrina, there were still some amazingly heroic efforts in pulling people off roofs. I don't know how many sorties were flown in Katrina, but there must have been thousands of sorties.

Maj. Gen. White. Well, as I left last Wednesday, it was close to 18,000 sorties flown. Now, sir, that includes every agency, and it's a lot of the airlift in there too.

The President. Your point is, on a Katrina, had there been a better coordinated effort between Guard choppers—Coast Guard choppers, regular Army choppers, it would have been less dangerous?

Maj. Gen. White. It would have been a better orchestrated plan. You wouldn't have seen a lot of—for instance, one of the things that we've learned out of that—we had someone that needed to be rescued, and that comes up on the net. Five

helicopters show up at the same place to get one person. That's the sort of simplistic thing we'd like to avoid, and we're not maximizing the use of our forces to best efficiency.

Certainly, that was a train wreck that we saw in New Orleans, and I know everybody is jumping in, trying to help at one time, and that's the right thing to do. But if we can have a national plan that would address the search and rescue at this magnitude, is what we're out to try to do.

The President. Good.

Maj. Gen. Mayes. Sir, if I might add, I would say that it wouldn't necessarily make it less dangerous. I would tell you that the professionalism and the plan came together. I believe that all participants would agree that with the fog that we had and the weather that we were battling, nighttime, all the things that went into that environment, that I'm not sure we can make it less dangerous. There may be a factor there, but the main point would be, with a national plan, we'll have a quicker jump-start and an opportunity to save more people. That would be my input there.

Lt. Gen. Clark. A national plan, good training against the plan, gets you to this state faster in extremis. And that's the goal.

The President. Part of the reason I've come down here and part of the reason

I went to NORTHCOM, was to better understand how the Federal Government can plan and surge equipment, to mitigate natural disasters. And I appreciate very much, General, your briefing, because it's precisely the kind of information that I'll take back to Washington to help all of us understand how we can do a better job in coordinating Federal, State, and local response.

The other question, of course, I asked was, is there a circumstance in which the Department of Defense becomes the lead agency? Clearly, in the case of a terrorist attack, that would be the case, but is there a natural disaster which—of a certain size that would then enable the Defense Department to become the lead agency in coordinating and leading the response effort. That's going to be a very important consideration for Congress to think about.

Okay.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:30 a.m. in the headquarters of the Air Education and Training Command at Randolph Air Force Base. Participating in the briefing were Maj. Gen. John White, USAF, member, Maj. Gen. M. Scott Mayes, USAF, member, and Lt. Gen. Robert T. Clark, USA, commander, Joint Task Force—Rita. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks at the Federal Emergency Management Agency Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge, Louisiana September 25, 2005

The President. Thank you all. The Governor and I just got briefed by Admiral Allen on the progress here in Louisiana. There's still assessment on the damage of Hurricane Rita. One of the things that is important for the citizens of this State to do is to listen to the Governor about when it is okay to return back to your homes. I know a lot of people want to get back

home. It's important that there be an orderly process. It's important there be an assessment done of infrastructure, and it's important for the people of the affected areas of Louisiana to listen carefully to the Governor and local authorities about the proper timing of return home.

We also got briefed on the levees in New Orleans. There is flooding, obviously, in the