

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

ninth ward. The Corps of Engineers gave us a briefing about the building—repairing levees and then, once again, pumping the water out of that part of New Orleans. It's—I would say it's an optimistic appraisal, in the sense that work has started now, and they can start to—draining that part of the city again.

But I'm here to really thank the people in the Operations Center for their hard work and their dedication to helping the people of Louisiana recover from a second major storm in a very quick period of time.

Governor, thank you for your hospitality, again. I know you've been through a lot, and I know the people of this State have been through a lot. We ask for God's blessings on them and their families.

Thank you.

Governor Blanco. Well, we want to welcome you back. I'm sorry that we brought you back under another stressful event. But

we do appreciate your support. And I do want to tell you how much we appreciated watching all of the integrated forces at work as one. And as we talked, I know that it was possible to do it quickly, and to move in as one, with Federal, State, and local folks working all together.

We talked about what happens next here and how quickly we could marshal the right kind of forces again. And I think that, together, we're going to work out some very important plans that citizens of the United States can feel will work very effectively and efficiently.

Thank you.

The President. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:08 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; and Vice Adm. Thad W. Allen, USCG, U.S. Coast Guard Chief of Staff.

Remarks at the Department of Energy and an Exchange With Reporters September 26, 2005

Energy Supply

The President. I want to thank Secretary Bodman for welcoming us here at the Energy Department; Secretary Norton. We've just had a full briefing on what we know thus far about the effects of Hurricane Rita on the energy situation in the Gulf of Mexico.

A lot of our production comes from the gulf, and when you have a Hurricane Katrina followed by a Hurricane Rita, it's natural, unfortunately, that it's going to affect supply. There's about 1.56 million barrels of oil that is shut in. And before Rita, just to put that in perspective, that was approximately 880,000 barrels a day that was shut in due to Katrina, so that when you really look on a map you have, if you follow the path of Katrina and the path

of Rita, it pretty much covers a lot of the production in the Gulf of Mexico.

Right now the producing companies are assessing damage to the platforms and rigs. It's important for our people to know that we understand the situation and that we're willing to use the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to mitigate any shortfalls in crude oil that could affect our consumers. And I've instructed the Secretary of Energy to be mindful once again about the effects of the SPRo and how it can help settle price. He did a fine job after Katrina, and we're paying close attention to the markets as we speak.

Secondly, gasoline prices, obviously, are on our mind, and so we've watched very carefully the assessments done on the refining—the refineries there on the gulf coast.