

Thank you all for coming. Please enjoy yourselves. May God bless you and your families. And may God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:43 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting on Earthquake Relief Efforts in China *June 6, 2008*

Thank you very much, Bonnie, for inviting me here. I'm proud to be here with Secretary of State Rice, Secretary of Treasury Paulson. Ambassador, thank you for being here.

I've just been briefed about how the United States private sector, faith-based community, NGO community's responding to what is a horrible human disaster in China—estimated 70,000 people have died, 18,000 people missing, 15 million people homeless, and the tally is still being counted. There's no question, this is a major human disaster that requires a strong response from the Chinese Government, which is what they're providing, but it also responds—a compassionate response from nations to whom—for—that have got the blessings—good blessings of life, and that's us.

I told the folks assembled here that I'm not surprised that the American people have responded to this challenge. And the reason I'm not surprised is, we're a compassionate, decent nation that cares deeply about a stranger who hurts. And so the

response of the—so far of our American citizens have been impressive—unprecedented and unparalleled in its compassion.

There'll be more work that needs to be done. My message to the Chinese Government is, thank you for welcoming our aid, thank you for taking a firm response to this disaster, and just know the American people care about the people of China. When a brother and sister hurts, we care about it.

And so that's why our response has been so robust and so compassionate to date. I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for showing the great compassion of America.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:43 a.m. at the American Red Cross National Headquarters. In his remarks, he referred to Bonnie McElveen-Hunter, chairman of the board of governors, American Red Cross; and China's Ambassador to the U.S. Zhou Wenzhong.

Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Steven C. Preston as the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development *June 6, 2008*

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you. Welcome. Thank you. It's a—so glad to be here at the Department of Housing

and Urban Development. And I've come to introduce you to your new boss, Secretary Steve Preston. I want to thank

Steve's wife Molly, five children, and his mom and dad, Lee and Ursula.

Mr. Secretary, thanks for coming—Secretary Kempthorne; and Director John Walters. It's good to see two of your predecessors here, Steve—Alphonso Jackson and Jack Kemp. Thank you all for coming.

This is a time of turbulence in the housing market and slow growth for our overall economy. This morning the Labor Department reported that our economy lost 49,000 jobs in May and the unemployment rate rose to 5.5 percent. This rise was caused, in part, by a surge of new, young entrants into the job market, but it's clearly a sign that is consistent with slow economic growth.

To help keep this economy growing, we did pass an economic stimulus package that provides tax rebates for American families and incentives for businesses to invest in new equipment. We're beginning to see the signs that the stimulus may be working. And now the Congress needs to take the next steps. At a time when Americans are concerned about higher gas prices, Congress needs to pass legislation that expands—it will allow for the expansion of American energy production.

In this period of economic uncertainty, the last thing the Americans need is a massive tax increase. So Congress needs to send a clear message that the tax relief that we passed will be made permanent.

Unfortunately, these policies are being blocked by the Democratic Congress. So I call on congressional leaders to put partisanship aside and work with me to enact these important initiatives for the American people.

This Department is also critical to meeting the challenges we face in our economy. We need strong leadership in the Secretary's office. Steve Preston is the right man for the job. He's a financial expert who understands how the housing market impacts our broader economy. He's a skilled manager. He's a person of character and integrity.

Secretary Preston will work to strengthen homeownership with the same dedication he brought to his previous job of strengthening the American small-business community. As the head of the SBA, Steve presided over loan guarantee programs that are similar in structure to those run by the Federal Housing Administration. And just as entrepreneur across our Nation found a trusted friend in Steve Preston, so will America's homeowners.

Before coming to the SBA, Steve gained valuable financial and leadership experience in the private sector. His impressive career has taken him from investment banking to senior financial posts at major corporations. Wherever he's gone, Steve has earned the admiration of his colleagues. He takes on this new challenge with my full confidence and my trust.

Steve takes over for a good man, my longtime buddy, Secretary Alphonso Jackson. I thank you for your compassion and your hard work. You helped change a lot of lives. And I wish you and Marcia all the very best. See you back in Texas. *[Laughter]*

I also want to thank Deputy Secretary Roy Bernardi for his service. He filled in as the Acting Secretary during this transition. He spent nearly 7 years of his life here at this Department. And I appreciate your hard work on behalf of all Americans.

As Steve takes office, his first priority will [be]^{*} to help lead my administration's response to the challenges in the housing market. We've taken aggressive action to help responsible homeowners to keep their homes by giving the FHA greater flexibility to offer refinancing options. We're also helping to bring together what's now called the HOPE NOW Alliance. By working together, participants in the mortgage industry have helped more than 1 million—1½ million families stay in their homes. HOPE

^{*} White House correction.

NOW is working, but we've got more to do.

Yesterday we learned that the foreclosure rates continued to rise in the first quarter. So Steve will work with Democrats and Republicans in Congress to address this challenge. We need to pass legislation to reform Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. We need to pass legislation to modernize the Federal Housing Administration and allow State housing agencies to issue tax-free bonds to help homeowners refinance their mortgages. By taking these steps, we'll help more responsible homeowners weather this rough patch and, at the same time, strengthen the dream of homeownership for generations to come.

I've got confidence that we're going to meet these challenges, and I got confidence in the people who work in this Department. I appreciate what you do every day to expand the dream of homeownership. I thank you for your efforts to provide low-income Americans with access to affordable housing. You work hard to make sure our

communities are more vibrant and hopeful. The United States is fortunate to have such devoted public servants in this Department, and I'm grateful for your service.

You're going to have a worthy leader in Steve Preston. I thank the Senate for confirming Steve as your new Secretary. I now ask the Senate to confirm the three remaining HUD nominees to help him lead this Department.

Steve, I appreciate your stepping forward to serve your country once again. I congratulate you. And now I ask my Chief of Staff, Josh Bolten, to administer the oath of office.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In his remarks, he referred to Marcia Jackson, wife of former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Alphonso R. Jackson. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Preston.

Message to the Congress on Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to the Actions and Policies of Certain Members of the Government of Belarus and Other Persons Undermining Democratic Processes or Institutions in Belarus

June 6, 2008

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the *Federal Register* for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency and related measures blocking the property of

certain persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Belarus are to continue in effect beyond June 16, 2008.

The actions and policies of certain members of the Government of Belarus and other persons pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. These actions include undermining democratic processes or institutions; committing human rights abuses related to political repression, including detentions and disappearances; and engaging in public corruption, including by diverting or misusing