

American participation, American facilitation of dialogue, our investment in civil society, our willingness to do business, our openness to ultimate membership in international institutions like NATO, all those things made a difference. It solidifies, it fortifies people's impulse that change is possible.

And so to the American people, even at a time when we have fiscal constraints, even at a time where I spend most of my day thinking about our economy and how to put folks back to work and how to make sure that we're reducing gas prices and how we stabilize the housing market and how we innovate and adapt and change so that we are fully competitive in the 21st century and maintain our economic leadership, I want the American people to understand we've got to leave room for us to continue our tradition of providing leadership when it comes to freedom, democracy, human rights.

And in the dinner last night, I thought something very interesting was said. These are Central European leaders and Presidents from all across the region. One of them said: "There were those who said we could not handle democracy, that our cultures were too different. But America had faith in us. And so now we want to join with America and have faith in those in the Middle East and in North Africa. Even if some don't think that they can handle

democracy or that their cultures are too different, our experience tells us something different."

And I think that's a good lesson for all of us to remember. And I think that Poland can play an extraordinary role precisely because they have traveled so far, so rapidly, over the last 25 years.

We're looking forward to being a strong partner with them because when we work together, that's a force multiplier. The more we have strong leaders like Poland working alongside us, the more successful we can be in dealing with North Africa and the Middle East and encouraging the best impulses in that region. And that's going to be good for all of our security.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2:30 p.m. at the Chancellery Building. In his remarks, the President referred to President Aleksandr Lukashenko and opposition Presidential candidates Vladimir Neklyayev, Andrei Sannikov, Vital Rymasheuski, Nikolai Statkevich, and Dmitry Uss of Belarus; and President Bronislaw Komorowski and Speaker of the Senate Bogdan Borusewicz of Poland. Prime Minister Tusk, a moderator, and a reporter spoke in Polish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Following a Tour of Tornado Damage in Joplin, Missouri May 29, 2011

The President. Obviously, the scene speaks for itself. When we were in Tuscaloosa a few weeks ago, I talked about how I had not seen devastation like that in my lifetime. You come here to Joplin, and it is just as heartbreaking and in some ways even more devastating.

I want to thank the outstanding work that Governor Nixon, the mayor, all the congressional delegation, as well as the first lady have done—and the Red Cross—in helping people to respond. But obviously, it is going to take years to build back. And we mourn the loss of life. We're going to be going to a memorial service and try to help comfort the families and let

them know that we're praying for them and thinking about them.

We had a chance to meet some of the folks who lived in this community, and just harrowing stories, but also miraculous stories. Met an 85-year-old gentleman who has a—still has a lawn service, who explained how he had just gotten his chicken potpie out, and the storm started coming, and he went into the closet and came out without a scratch. And so there are good stories to tell and happy stories to tell here, but obviously, there's been a lot of hardship as well.

The main thing I just want to communicate to the people of Joplin is, this is just not your

tragedy. This is a national tragedy, and that means there will be a national response. Craig Fugate, who's probably been the busiest man in the Federal Government over this last few months, has been on the ground since just the day after this happened. And he's helping to coordinate with an outstanding team of State and local officials. We're going to do everything we can to continue whatever search and rescue remains. We are doing everything we can to make sure that folks get the shelter that they need, the support that they need.

We're working with the Governor to make sure that we cut through any redtape that's necessary with respect to rebuilding here. And then we're just going to have a tough, long slog. But what I've been telling every family that I've met here is, we're going to be here long after the cameras leave; we are not going to stop until Joplin's fully back on its feet.

So to all the volunteers who are helping out—one of the things that's been incredible is to see how many people from out of State have driven from as far away as Texas, nearby Illinois, people just coming here to volunteer, firefighters, ordinary citizens. It's an example of what the American spirit's all about. And that gives us a lot of encouragement at a time when obviously people are going through a lot of hardship.

So thank you again, Governor——

Governor Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon of Missouri. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. ——for the great work. Would you like to say a few words?

Gov. Nixon. Just that we've been out—I've been here every day, trying to work early to late, trying to back up the local officials—what they needed—try to coordinate the Federal response, try to make sure we green-light the necessity to move forward.

Today is a day of remembrance, as we move here to the memorial service. The loss not only of life, not only of injuries, property, are significant. It's going to take a higher power to keep the strength of this community resolved to get this done. And we're confident that it will happen.

We're especially appreciative, Mr. President, you focusing your attention right here, the entire world's attention right here, to help us in ways that will make a lasting difference to this community. God bless you, my friend.

The President. Thank you.

And one last point I want to make. Obviously, in the rebuilding process, there are a lot of families who are thankful that they're okay, but they've been displaced. It's not just their homes: Many of them lost any means of transportation; the school's been destroyed. And so for all Americans to take a little bit of time out and make a contribution to the American Red Cross or other charitable organizations that are active here in Joplin, that can make an enormous difference. Even if it's just \$5, \$10, whatever you've got to spare. Because one of the things that's striking about this, and I felt the same way when I was down in Alabama: This can happen to anybody. The difference between you being in the path of this twister, and a few blocks away, you being okay, is a very slim, slim margin. And so we've all got to put together because here but for the grace of God go I.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:16 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Michael Woolston of Joplin, MO; Georganne W. Nixon, wife of Gov. Nixon; Joplin resident Hugh Hills; and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Craig Fugate.

Remarks at a Memorial Service for the Victims of the Tornado in Joplin May 29, 2011

The President. Thank you so much. Please, please be seated.

Audience member. I love you, Obama!

The President. Oh, I love Joplin!

Audience member. We love you more!

The President. I love Joplin.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. We love Joplin.