

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.

Thank you, Governor, for that powerful message, but more importantly, for being here with and for your people every step of the way.

We are grateful to you, to Reverend Gariss. Father Monaghan, I'm so glad you got in that tub. *[Laughter]* To Reverend Brown for that incredibly powerful message.

To Senator Claire McCaskill, who's been here, and Congressman Billy Long; Mayor Woolston; to Craig Fugate—it doesn't get a lot of attention, but he heads up FEMA, our emergency response at the Federal level. He's been going from Tuscaloosa to Joplin and everywhere in between tirelessly doing outstanding work. We're grateful for him. Gail McGovern, the president of the national Red Cross, which has contributed mightily to the rebuilding efforts here.

Most of all, to the family and friends of all those who've been lost and all those who've been affected.

Today we gather to celebrate the lives of those we've lost to the storms here in Joplin and across the Midwest, to keep in our prayers those still missing, to mourn with their families, to stand together during this time of pain and trial.

And as Reverend Brown alluded to, the question that weighs on us at a time like this is, why? Why our town? Why our home? Why my son or husband or wife or sister or friend? Why?

We do not have the capacity to answer. We can't know when a terrible storm will strike or where or the severity of the devastation that it may cause. We can't know why we're tested with the loss of a loved one or the loss of a home where we've lived a lifetime.

These things are beyond our power to control. But that does not mean we are powerless in the face of adversity. How we respond when the storm strikes is up to us. How we live in the aftermath of tragedy and heartache, that's within our control. And it's in these moments, through our actions, that we often see the glimpse of what makes life worth living in the first place.

In the last week, that's what Joplin has not just taught Missouri, not just taught America,

but has taught the world. I was overseas in the aftermath of the storm and had world leaders coming up to me saying, let the people of Joplin know we are with them, we're thinking about them, we love them.

Because the world saw how Joplin responded. A university turned itself into a makeshift hospital. Some of you used your pickup trucks as ambulances, carrying the injured on doors that served as stretchers. Your restaurants have rushed food to people in need. Businesses have filled trucks with donations. You've waited in line for hours to donate blood to people you know, but also to people you've never met. And in all this, you have lived the words of Scripture:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed;  
we are perplexed, but not in despair;  
Persecuted, but not forsaken;  
cast down, but not destroyed;

As the Governor said, you have shown the world what it means to love thy neighbor. You've banded together. You've come to each other's aid. You've demonstrated a simple truth: that amid heartbreak and tragedy, no one is a stranger. Everybody is a brother. Everybody is a sister. We can all love one another.

As you move forward in the days ahead, I know that rebuilding what you've lost won't be easy. I just walked through some of the neighborhoods that have been affected, and you look out at the landscape, and there have to be moments where you just say, where to begin? How to start? There are going to be moments where, after the shock has worn off, you feel alone. But there's no doubt in my mind what the people of this community can do. There's no doubt in my mind that Joplin will rebuild. And as President, I can promise you, your country will be there with you every single step of the way. *[Applause]* We will be with you every step of the way. We're not going anywhere. The cameras may leave, the spotlight may shift, but we will be with you every step of the way until Joplin is restored and this community is back on its feet. We're not going anywhere.

That is not just my promise, that's America's promise. It's a promise I make here in Joplin; it's a promise I made down in Tuscaloosa or in any of the communities that have been hit by these devastating storms over the last few weeks.

Now, there have been countless acts of kindness and selflessness in recent days. We've already heard the record of some of that. But perhaps none are as inspiring as what took place when the storm was bearing down on Joplin, threatening an entire community with utter destruction. And in the face of winds that showed no mercy, no regard for human life, that did not discriminate by race or faith or background, it was ordinary people, swiftly tested, who said, "I'm willing to die right now so that someone else might live."

It was the husband who threw himself over his wife as their house came apart around them. It was the mother who shielded her young son.

It was Dean Wells, a husband and father who loved to sing and whistle in his church choir. Dean was working a shift at the Home Depot, managing the electrical department, when the siren rang out. He sprang into action, moving people to safety. Over and over again, he went back for others, until a wall came down on top of him. In the end, most of the building was destroyed, but not where Dean had directed his coworkers and his customers.

There was a young man named Christopher Lucas who was 26 years old, father of two daughters, third daughter on the way. Just like any other night, Christopher was doing his job as manager on duty at Pizza Hut. And then he heard the storm coming.

It was then when this former sailor quickly ushered everybody into the walk-in freezer. The only problem was, the freezer door wouldn't stay closed from the inside. So as the tornado bore down on this small storefront on Range Line Road, Christopher left the freezer to find a rope or a cord or anything to hold the door shut. He made it back just in time, tying a piece of bungee cord to the handle outside, wrapping the other end around his arm, holding the door closed with all his might. And

Christopher held it as long as he could, until he was pulled away by the incredible force of the storm. He died saving more than a dozen people in that freezer.

You see, there are heroes all around us, all the time. They walk by us on the sidewalk, and they sit next to us in class. They pass us in the aisle wearing an orange apron. They come to our table at a restaurant and ask us what we'd like to order.

Just as we can't know why tragedy strikes in the first place, we may never fully understand where these men and women find the courage and strength to do what they did. What we do know is that in a split-second moment, where there's little time for internal reflection or debate, the actions of these individuals were driven by love: love for a family member, love for a friend, or just love for a fellow human being.

That's good to know. In a world that can be cruel and selfish, it's this knowledge—the knowledge that we are inclined to love one another, that we're inclined to do good, to be good—that causes us to take heart. We see with fresh eyes what's precious and so fragile and so important to us. We put aside our petty grievances and our minor disagreements. We see ourselves in the hopes and hardships of others. And in the stories of people like Dean and people like Christopher, we remember that each of us contains reserves of resolve and compassion. There are heroes all around us, all the time.

And so, in the wake of this tragedy, let us live up to their example, to make each day count, to live with the sense of mutual regard, to live with that same compassion that they demonstrated in their final hours. We are called by them to do everything we can to be worthy of the chance that we've been given to carry on.

I understand that at a memorial yesterday for Dean, his wife decided to play a recording of Dean whistling a song he loved, "Amazing Grace." The lyrics are a fitting tribute to what Joplin has been through:

Through many dangers, toils, and snares  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far

*May 29 / Administration of Barack Obama, 2011*

And grace will lead me home . . .  
Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease,  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

May those we've lost know peace, and may grace guide the people of Joplin home. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:40 p.m. at Missouri Southern State University. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeremiah W. "Jay" Nixon of Missouri; Rev. Randy Gariss, minister, College Heights Christian Church; Rev. Justin D. Monaghan, pastor, St. Mary's Church; Rev. Aaron Brown, pastor, Saint Paul's United Methodist Church; Mayor Michael Woolston of Joplin, MO; and Sue Wells, wife of tornado victim M. Dean Wells.

## Remarks Announcing Department of Defense Personnel Changes *May 30, 2011*

All right. Good morning. In a few moments, I'll be joining members of our Armed Forces and their families and veterans for the Memorial Day observance at Arlington. There and across our Nation, we'll pause to honor all those who've given their last full measure of devotion in defense of our country. Theirs was the ultimate sacrifice, but it is one that every man and woman who wears America's uniform is prepared to make so that we can live free.

The men and women of our Armed Forces are the best our Nation has to offer, and they deserve nothing but the absolute best in return. And that includes leaders who will guide them and support their families with wisdom and strength and compassion. And that's what I expect as Commander in Chief as we work to keep our Nation secure and our military the finest in the world.

I found those qualities in Leon Panetta, who I announced last month as my choice to succeed our outstanding Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates, who I thank for joining us today. And I found these qualities in the leaders who will complete our team at the Pentagon and whom I'm proud to announce today: General Martin Dempsey as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Admiral James Winnefeld as the Vice Chairman; and to succeed General Dempsey as Chief of Staff of the Army, General Ray Odierno.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the principal military adviser to me and my national security team, including the Secretary of Defense. Since taking office, I've been very

grateful for the leadership of the current Chairman, Admiral Mike Mullen, and the Vice Chairman, General Jim "Hoss" Cartwright. These two men have served our Nation with distinction for decades, and I look forward to paying tribute to their lives of service in the months ahead.

Today I'll simply say that, like President Bush before me, I've deeply valued Mike's professional steadiness and his personal integrity. On his watch, our military forces have excelled across the whole spectrum of missions, from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan to relief efforts after the Haiti earthquake. He's helped revitalize NATO, reset our relations with Russia, and steer our relationship with Pakistan and China. And I believe that history will also record Mike Mullen as the Chairman who said what he believed was right and declared that no one in uniform should ever have to sacrifice their integrity to serve their country.

I've also benefited enormously from the advice and counsel of Hoss Cartwright. Hoss is that rare combination of technical expert, from cyber to missile defense, and strategic thinker, whether it was updating our nuclear posture or preparing our military for 21st-century missions. I'll always be personally grateful to Hoss for his friendship and partnership. And as he concludes four decades of service in the Marine Corps that he loves, he can do so knowing that our Nation is more secure and our military is stronger because of his remarkable career.

And I know that Michelle joins me in saluting Deborah Mullen and Sandee Cartwright