

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana.

Remarks to the Community in Poplarville, Mississippi

September 5, 2005

[The President's remarks are joined in progress.]

—out of this despair is going to come a vibrant coast. It's—again, I understand if you're saying to yourself, “Well, it's hard for me to realize what George W. is saying, because I've seen the rubble and I know what has happened to my neighbors.” But I'd like to come back down here in about 2 years and walk your streets and see how vital this part of the world is going to be.

I can't wait to join you in the joy of welcoming neighbors back into neighborhoods, and small businesses up and running, and cutting those ribbons that somebody is creating new jobs. That's what I think is going to happen.

I just want you to know that when I'm thinking about how we can help this part of the world, Mississippi is on my mind. Mississippi is a part of the future of this country, and part of that future is to help you get back up on your feet. And I'm confident that your United States Senator Trent Lott, if I don't say it loud enough, he will. *[Laughter]* He'll remind us. But I appreciate you taking time out of your day.

And by the way, I'm traveling with good company. My wife, Laura, is with me too.

Let me conclude by asking for God's blessings on you all and your families and friends, and let you know we're here for the long term. I understand. I understand the damage. I understand the devastation. I understand the destruction. I understand how long it's going to take. And we're with you. That's what I want you to know. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:12 p.m. at Pearl River Community College. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

September 6, 2005

The President. Thank you all for coming. My message to the Cabinet this morning is this: This administration is not going to rest until every life can be saved, until families are reconnected, until this recovery is complete. Our goals—our immediate goals are these: We want to complete the search-and-recovery; we want to restore essential services; we want to drain the water in the affected areas and begin removing debris; we want to—and are assessing public health and safety matters.

I've asked the Vice President to go down to the affected region on Thursday. He will go down to assess our recovery efforts. He will help me determine whether or not we're meeting these goals. He'll work with Secretary Chertoff and others to make sure that we remove any obstacles, bureaucratic obstacles that may be preventing us from achieving our goals. In other words, bureaucracy is not going to stand in the way of getting the job done for the people.

I was briefed on plans to immediately help our folks, plans to reconnect families, plans to make sure health care is available. And Secretary Leavitt gave me a good brief—plans on housing, both immediate and long-term housing. Most importantly, I was briefed by members of my Cabinet about how we're going to make sure that people who are owed a Social Security check, get their Social Security check. At the center in Baton Rouge I went to yesterday, I remember clearly a person saying, “When am I going to get my Social Security check?” And it's important to note, people understand we have a strategy to make sure the benefits that are due are going to get to them.

Now, we understand people are scattered out across the country, but we have an obligation to make sure that whether a veteran's benefit or an unemployment benefit or a Social Security benefit gets to these people. And so we have a strategy in place, and we're going to implement that strategy—to find people who are in those shelters or in

churches or in private homes—and get them the benefit.

A lot of people are doing good work. We've got a heck of a lot more work to do, and that's exactly what this Government is going to do.

Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts

Q. Mr. President.

The President. Yes, Bob [Bob Franken, CNN].

Q. Do you intend to replace any from your administration who are leading this recovery effort, who were part of the effort last week that has been so widely criticized?

The President. What I intend to do is lead a—to lead an investigation to find out what went right and what went wrong. And I'll tell you why. It's very important for us to understand the relationship between the Federal Government, the State government, and the local government when it comes to a major catastrophe. And the reason it's important is, is that we still live in an unsettled world. We want to make sure that we can respond properly if there's a WMD attack or another major storm. And so I'm going to find out, over time, what went right and what went wrong.

Q. Sir.

The President. Yes, Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

Q. Secretary Chertoff has talked about being disturbed at the information—or lack of information to the State from the region. Just from what you know initially, do you think that more went wrong at the local or State level or the Federal level? And do you think there should be a commission to sort it out?

The President. I think one of the things that people want us to do here is to play a blame game. We've got to solve problems. We're problem-solvers. There will be ample time for people to figure out what went right and what went wrong. What I'm interested in is helping save lives. That's what I want to do. And I want to make sure those poor folks who have been taken out of their communities and who live in a—whose world has been shattered, get the help they need. And then we want to help New Orleans rebuild, and we want to see Biloxi rise again.

And, you know, I was with the mayor of Waveland the other day, from Mississippi. His town was completely destroyed. What I'm interested in is helping that man and that community get back on their feet. That's where my focus is. There will be ample time to assess—and we need to assess. And this administration will be part of the assessment as to what went wrong, because, I repeat, we've got to have as good a relationship as possible with all levels of government to be able to respond to major problems. And if things went wrong, we'll correct them. And when things went right, we'll duplicate them.

Patsy [Patricia Wilson, Reuters].

Upcoming Supreme Court Nomination

Q. Mr. President, on the Supreme Court, do you have a candidate in mind? And now that you have a second opportunity, are you more inclined to follow the First Lady's advice and choose a woman?

The President. First of all, I'm proud of my nominee to be the Chief. And the goal is to get this good person confirmed by the time the Court convenes this fall. See, they're going to need their Chief. And, therefore, the Senate needs to have a—obviously, a thorough debate about Judge Roberts and get him confirmed quickly so that when the Court convenes, there is a Chief Justice. And I was deliberate in my process last time. I'll be deliberative this time. I obviously interviewed a lot of good candidates last time. I still will continue to reach out and make sure every good candidate is considered.

Q. Are the same ones on the list, sir? Some of the same ones that you interviewed last time, are they—

The President. The list is wide open, which should create some good speculation here in Washington. [Laughter] And make sure you notice, when I said that, I looked right at Al Gonzales, who can really create speculation. [Laughter]

Assistant Press Secretary Josh Deckart. Thank you all.

The President. I'm not through yet. But this is important for people to understand: I want the Senate to focus not on who the next nominee is going to be, but the nominee I've got up there now. And it's important for the country that they complete the work. And

in the meantime, the country can be assured that I'll take a good, long look at who should replace Justice O'Connor. I called her from Air Force One yesterday and told her of my decision to name John Roberts to be the Chief. And her first reaction was that she better get back to doing her homework, and she said so somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but she's right, she'll be there when the Court is seated with a new Chief Justice. And then we'll move deliberately to replace Justice O'Connor.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:08 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chief Justice-Designate John G. Roberts, Jr.; and Mayor Tommy Longo of Waveland, MS. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With National Voluntary Organizations Representatives

September 6, 2005

Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts

Listen, I want to thank leaders of the—in the faith—faith-based and community-based community for being here. We've got people who represent thousands of volunteers who are in the midst of helping save lives.

You know, there's a debate here about refugees. Let me tell you my attitude and the attitude of people around this table. The people we're talking about are not refugees; they are Americans. And they need the help and love and compassion of our fellow citizens. And the people at this table are providing that help and compassion and love.

If you want to help, support the Red Cross or the Salvation Army or your church or the United Way. Houston, for example, is going to kick off a United Way campaign, and that money is going to help with the costs of the displaced persons inside of Houston. So please give cash money to organizations that are directly involved in helping save lives—save the lives that have been affected by Hurricane Katrina.

We have spent time talking about how we can make sure we continue progress, make sure people get—not only continue to get the affection and love of people in the private sector, but also to make sure that the Government gets people their Social Security checks or their veterans benefits checks, the checks that—unemployment checks. And we'll do that. We'll do that.

Out of the darkness will come some light, and the light I saw yesterday at the program in Baton Rouge with T.D. Jakes was so apparent to me. And it's based upon the fact that we've got citizens who are willing to take time to love somebody like they would like to be loved themselves, welcome a stranger in their midst. And for those of you who have done that, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You're a part of the strength of this country. You're what makes America a great place.

In the meantime, we'll continue to work together to do our duty and to help our citizens who hurt and help this great part of the country rebuild.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:02 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Bishop Thomas D. Jakes, chief executive officer, The Potter's House of Dallas, Inc., Dallas, TX.

Remarks on Efforts To Assist Students and School Districts Displaced by Hurricane Katrina

September 6, 2005

The President. Laura and I just had a good visit with Secretary of Education Spellings and her team about the—about the school children who have been displaced because of Hurricane Katrina. You know, this is a time when a lot of families are looking forward to sending their child back to school, and their children are excited about school. But a lot of those dreams and a lot of that excitement has been upset for a lot of students because of the storm.

Yesterday we went to a shelter in Baton Rouge and met a lot of little kids, many of whom are starting school in Baton Rouge. And it's indicative of what's taking place