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The President's Radio Address

August 26, 2006

Good morning. Earlier this week, I had coffee with Rocky Vaccarella in the White House. Rocky is from St. Bernard Parish in Louisiana, and he and his family lost everything they owned to Hurricane Katrina. Rocky drove to Washington to thank the Federal Government for its efforts to help people like him, and he brought a trailer along to help remind us that many good people along our gulf coast are still living in difficult conditions and that the hard work of rebuilding has only just begun.

This Tuesday marks the first anniversary of Katrina—one of the deadliest and most costly natural disasters in American history. In Mississippi, the storm wiped out virtually everything along an 80-mile stretch of the coast, flattening homes and destroying entire communities. In Louisiana, flooding left 80 percent of the city of New Orleans underwater. The human costs were even more terrible. More than a thousand people died, countless families lost their homes and livelihoods, and tens of thousands of men, women, and children were forced to flee the region and leave behind everything they knew.

During the storm and in the days that followed, Americans responded with heroism and compassion. Coast Guard and other personnel rescued people stranded in flooded neighborhoods and brought them to high ground. Doctors and nurses stayed behind to care for their patients, and some even went without food so their patients could eat. Many of the first-responders risking their lives to help others were victims themselves—wounded healers, with a sense of duty greater than their own suffering. And across our great land, the armies of compassion rallied to bring food and water and hope to fellow citizens who had lost everything.

In these and countless other selfless acts, we saw the spirit of America at its best.

Unfortunately, Katrina also revealed that Federal, State, and local governments were unprepared to respond to such an extraordinary disaster. And the floodwaters exposed a deep-seated poverty that has cut people off from the opportunities of our country. So last year, I made a simple pledge: The Federal Government would learn the lessons of Katrina; we would do what it takes, and we would stay as long as it takes, to help our brothers and sisters build a new gulf coast, where every citizen feels part of the great promise of America.

That was the same pledge I repeated to Rocky during his visit to the White House. This pledge meant stronger levees and rebuilt homes and new infrastructure. It also means safe streets and neighborhoods filled with locally-owned businesses and more opportunities for everyone.

Next week, Laura and I will return to Mississippi and New Orleans to meet with local citizens and officials, and review the progress we have made. The Federal Government has conducted a thorough review of its response to natural disasters, and we're making reforms that will improve our response to future emergencies. With help from Congress, we have committed \$110 billion to the recovery effort, and we are playing a vital role in helping people clear debris, repair and rebuild their homes, reopen their businesses and schools, and put their lives back together.

The Federal Government will continue to do its part. Yet a reborn gulf coast must reflect the needs, the vision, and the aspirations of the people of Mississippi and Louisiana. And their State and local officials have a responsibility to help set priorities and make tough decisions, so people can plan their futures with confidence.

One year after the storms, the gulf coast continues down the long road to recovery. In Mississippi and Louisiana, we can see many encouraging signs of recovery and renewal, and many reminders that hard work still lies ahead. This work will require the sustained commitment of our Government,

the generosity and compassion of the American people, and the talent and vision of people determined to restore their homes, neighborhoods, and cities. We will stay until the job is done, and by working together, we will help our fellow citizens along the gulf coast write a new future of hope, justice, and opportunity for all.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:25 a.m. on August 24 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 26. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 25 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks Following a Lunch Meeting With Community Leaders in Biloxi, Mississippi

August 28, 2006

Laura and I are pleased to be down here again, and we want to thank the community leaders from the gulf coast region of Mississippi for sharing their thoughts and their concerns and their hopes and their aspirations.

I was just commenting on how clean the beaches look, and that wasn't a given a year ago. The beaches were cluttered with debris and garbage—the beautiful beaches here had been destroyed. And now they speak to the hope of this part of the world.

There's still a lot of problems left, but the people down here need to know the Federal Government is committed to working with you and the local people, and that, even though we've been through about one year together, one year doesn't mean that we'll forget. As a matter of fact, now is the time to renew our commitment to let the people down here know that we will stay involved and help the people of Mississippi rebuild their lives.

The truth of the matter is, the ultimate future for this region down here depends on the people of Mississippi. It requires the spirit and the courage of the people of this part of the world to rebuild and I'm confident that's going to be the case.

We saw that spirit right after the storm hit, and we still see that spirit. And so I want to thank the good folks for letting us come by and say hello. We value our friends down here, and we really appreciate the good people of the gulf coast of Mississippi for what you stand for.

Governor, thank you; appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:39 p.m. in the Biloxi Schooner Restaurant. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Hurricane Katrina Recovery Efforts in Biloxi

August 28, 2006

The President. Listen, thank you all for coming. I'm glad to be back here in Biloxi, and I'm glad Laura came with me. I've been in this neighborhood before. As a matter of fact, I was here a couple of days after Katrina hit. It's amazing, isn't it? It's amazing what the world looked like then and what it looks like now.

I remember meeting Patrick Wright. Remember, Patrick? I don't know if you all remember the picture of me seeing this fellow sitting in what used to be his home, a pile of rubble. Patrick, it's good to see you.

I also met Sandy and Lynn Patterson when I was walking down the street, your neighbor. They—well, just about everybody here, they'd lost everything they owned. People can't imagine what the world looked like then. I went by their home—just came out of their home. It's got air-conditioning—[laughter]—and electricity. You can see the reconstruction effort beginning here in this part of the world.

It's a sense of renewal here. It may be hard for those of you who have endured the last year to really have that sense of change, but for a fellow who was here and now a year later comes back, things are changing. And I congratulate you for your courage and your perseverance.

And there's still challenges. There's still more to be done. You can see it with the temporary trailers. I feel the quiet sense of