

Week Ending Friday, August 20, 1993

**Remarks on Signing Flood Relief  
Legislation at a Tribute to Flood  
Heroes in St. Louis, Missouri**

*August 12, 1993*

Thank you very much. Please be seated, and good morning, to our distinguished host, Governor Carnahan; and majority leader of the United States House, Dick Gephardt; Secretary Espy; Secretary Shalala; James Lee Witt; the distinguished other Members of Congress who are here, Congressmen Jim Talent, Alan Wheat, Jerry Costello, Ike Skelton, and Bill Emerson. To the distinguished Governor of Kansas, Joan Finney, my good friend, welcome, and to all of you from all the States who were affected by this terrible flood.

We're going to begin today by awarding 19 outstanding Americans Presidential Certificates of Commendation. These recipients are everyday people, but what they did was most extraordinary. Hillary and Chelsea and I just had the opportunity to meet them all and to talk with them a little bit about their experiences during the flood. Because of their efforts, lives were saved and larger disasters were averted. In some cases, they provided the support that kept all the other volunteers going, and that's what made the difference.

In their communities, they are mothers and fathers, business owners, police officers, and neighbors. But in this time of crisis, they risked their lives to save children and parents, to pull people from troubled waters or trapped vehicles, to feed the hungry, to provide water to people who literally could not have had safe living conditions otherwise. And most importantly, a lot of them are committed to staying involved in this for the long haul. It is so easy to forget that much of the work is still to be done.

Today we salute them and others like them. And to be sure, there are hundreds, indeed thousands of others that we might

have just as well recognized today who took on the raging rivers to stick up for their friends and neighbors and total strangers.

Now I'd like to ask the FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, to come here and present the commendations to the individuals as they are introduced and to thank him and all the State FEMA directors and all the local emergency management people for the wonderful work that they have done also in dealing with this flood.

Mr. Witt.

*[At this point, Director Witt presented the Presidential Certificates of Commendation. Gov. Mel Carnahan and Representative Richard Gephardt then made brief remarks.]*

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. Please be seated. I want to thank my friend Congressman Gephardt for that generous introduction and Governor Carnahan for his fine remarks. I acknowledged Governor Finney here. I thank all the others from the other States who are here. We have the Lieutenant Governor of Nebraska, the heads of various States' National Guards and emergency management programs, representing all those who worked.

I have been now to the Midwest four times since this flood began. The Secretary of Agriculture, who was up here with me, Mike Espy, has been here probably twice that many times, if not more. And I have charged him with being responsible for the long-term cleanup efforts, so I wanted him standing up here. So when you get frustrated with the Federal Government 30 days from now, call him—*[laughter]*—and harass him. He'll be good at it.

I thank also the Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, who has come here with me today. Many members of my Cabinet have been here to the Midwest, and many of them have a role to play.

We are here for two reasons. The first was to honor these fine people who have received their just recognition. The second is to sign the relief package which will permit the rebuilding to begin with a significant dose of support from the Federal Government.

Throughout human history it has been the way of nature to visit us on occasion with disaster, without apparent cause, without explanation, often without mercy, always reminding us that we need to live our lives with a little more humility and always understanding that we are not in full control. How we face these misfortunes tells us a lot about ourselves and our friends. We know we cannot contain the fury of a river. But we can and we must allow our humanity to overflow as well, to help to reclaim the lives that are shattered. That is what I have seen happen here in the Midwest, from official responses and from individual responses.

The other day I had a young girl from Wisconsin in the Oval Office. You may have seen her story written up. She's 13 years old, but she's only 4 feet tall. She weighs about 60 pounds. She was born with a rare bone disease which resulted in over two dozen bone-breakings in her body before she was born. Years ago she would never have been able to live any kind of life, but because of the medical miracles of the National Institutes of Health, which she has visited once every 3 months since she was an infant, she is able to function as a student. She is able to have a semblance of a normal life. She is a delightful young person. But she still can easily break major bones in her body. And yet, she implored her parents to let her leave Wisconsin—she lives in Milwaukee—and come to Iowa to help to fight the floods, knowing that she had an imminent risk just by carrying a can of water around.

That is the sort of thing that I have seen happen. When people say to me, "Well, FEMA really did a great job this time. The Federal Government was here all the way," I say, what else could we have done in the face of that kind of contribution by ordinary Americans?

One of the reasons, frankly, that FEMA did such a good job, I think, is that the Director of FEMA has actually spent several years helping ordinary people fight disasters. He

is a friend of mine. He was a county judge in a county where all the Clintons came from. But he was not a political appointment to FEMA, he was somebody who knew what it was like to see people there risking their lives, their businesses, their livelihoods, putting sandbags against a swollen river. We need more people like that in our National Government, people who are related at the grassroots level to the real concerns of people. And we're going to try to give you that.

In this disaster, more than 45 lives were lost; 70,000 people had to be evacuated. But you all know it could have been a lot worse if it hadn't been for folks like you and the many tens of thousands who fought to make it as good as possible.

In just a minute I will sign this disaster relief bill, \$6.3 billion in Federal assistance to the victims of the flood here in the Midwest and other disasters. This is an extraordinary measure taken under extraordinary circumstances with real speed, moving through Congress with the help of suffering citizens from the Midwest and eloquent advocates for the Midwest. I would be remiss if I did not commend the legislators of both parties who put aside partisan differences and put the people of this area first in passing this bill: people who are not here, like Senator Tom Harkin from Iowa and Senator Paul Wellstone of Minnesota; people who never seek the headlines, like Senator Jim Exon of Nebraska; people who are here represented, who quietly work for you day in and day out, again, without regard to party. We finally even found something that Senator Dole and I could agree on, in this bill. [*Laughter*]

These funds will be used across a wide spectrum and delivered quickly. They'll help farmers who lost their crops. Secretary Espy will see to it that payments are made at the rate of 100 percent of approved 1993 crop losses as defined by the 1990 farm bill. The funds will also be used to repair public facilities, bridges, highways, levees, and flood control networks; to provide for the health and social service needs of flood victims, and they will be significant. I hope we will have heroes who will be attending to those who will inevitably suffer from depression, from an undefinable and almost uncontainable sense of loss as they go back and see their life savings

gone, the work of their lifetime washed away, even their family albums no longer available to them in times of sorrow. They'll be used to provide housing for the displaced; to help homeowners and businesses to clean up and rebuild; to help our dislocated workers to find new work, hopefully with even better skills.

Two billion dollars will go to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, for relief of the floods and other disasters and to provide for emergency cash relief for those who qualify for that. I'm proud to say that FEMA has enjoyed a new respect as a result of their efforts in this flood. I was especially heartened by the praise given FEMA by the Mayor of Quincy, Illinois, Chuck Scholz. His city's brave stand against the rising waters made all Americans proud. And they didn't win all their battles.

All of the help in this relief package will come free of the bonds of redtape. Disasters provide enough grief without more coming from Washington, so we've worked as hard as we could to streamline the paperwork, to cut out unnecessary delays, to work on flexibility and fairness, to help in every way that we can.

A good example of this flexibility and willingness to cut redtape is contained in another bill that I will also sign this morning, called Depository Institutions Relief Act. It doesn't mean a thing, does it? Washington language. But what the act will do is important. It will allow Federal regulators to waive certain legal requirements for financial institutions serving areas hard hit by flooding, by relaxing a few regulations in response to this emergency. We'll allow local banks to make local decisions on how best to speed up aid and credit to those who really need it.

Just this week I signed into law the largest deficit reduction package in the history of America, almost \$500 billion. There were a lot of things in that bill, which will become apparent over time, which really help ordinary Americans, including tax relief for people who work 40 hours a week and have children in their homes and still are living below the poverty line. One part of that bill is especially important today. Under it, flood victims will have more time and flexibility in replacing their homes and personal property. At

the same time, the IRS will ease tax collection requirements on those who now have to live on their insurance proceeds.

You can be sure that we will continue to review the help needed by people in this region. We are in it for the long run. As I said, Secretary Espy is our designated leader on long-term Federal involvement in the rebuilding. And if there are further problems, we'll depend upon you, directly or through your elected representatives, to let us know.

Will Rogers once said, "We can't all be heroes because somebody has to sit on the curb and clap as everybody else goes by." [Laughter] Well, that may be true. And today we have applauded 19 heroes. But we have acknowledged also that they simply represent the best of what thousands of people demonstrated. I think that we can all be heroes if we learn something from this that we carry over into the rest of our lives.

Think about Reverend Donna Harris and the people of Niota, Illinois—the spiritual nourishment and the groceries, meals, and fresh water that she provided in the tiny town of 200 for flood victims. Or Al Vogt in Glen Haven, Wisconsin, who risked his life to save a teenager, a boy being dragged by flood waters through the street, when Al saw him and pulled him to safety. The town I grew up in had a flash flood once where waters 10 feet high rushed at 30 miles an hour down the main street of town. I saw people pull babies flying in that kind of water. It is a terrifying experience. He braved it. He could have been drowned; he could have been pulled away. Sheriff Ken White helped to rescue two people, in two separate operations, from drowning. Once he had to tie himself to a truck so he could save a woman hanging on to a telephone pole.

Hearing these people, I'm reminded of what President Kennedy said of his own heroism in World War II. He said, "It was involuntary; they sank my boat." [Laughter] To be sure, for all these people heroism was involuntary. Maybe that's why the courage of daily life, in a way, is all the more to be admired, when there is no life-threatening danger, when we just are required to get up every day and to go about our business and to try to face our challenges and seize our

opportunities. That, in a way, is the enduring heroism of the American people.

It's the heroism that I believe will be embodied when the Congress comes back to town next month and passes the national service corps bill to give young people a chance to serve their communities and earn some credit toward a college education, the heroism embodied in people like the local VISTA volunteers here in St. Louis. I want to single out Delores Despiwa. She's here somewhere. Please stand, Delores. Stand up there. Her home's under water, and she's still working for other people. I want to recognize the Iowa Conservation Corps. There are some members here from the Iowa Conservation Corps. Would they stand? I think they're here. Yes. Thank you.

That is the sort of sustained service that all of us need to think about providing to our country, and the attitude of cooperation, the determination to bridge the gaps that divide us, gaps of party and religion and philosophy, to struggle for common values. In the face of a 500-year flood, that's what millions of you did here in the Middle West. And you gave us an enduring vision of your courage.

The best way for the United States to reward that courage is not only for me to sign this flood relief bill and to work with you for the long haul but for all of us to try to learn something that we can take into our daily lives from the example you set in this emergency.

A couple of nights ago, Hillary and I had the incredible honor of hosting at the White House all the commanders in chief of all of our military commands all over the world, all the four-star generals and admirals that—someone said it was a 76-star dinner, but I don't think it was because I'm not sure you can divide 76 by 4 and get an even number. *[Laughter]*

But at the dinner, the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral David Jeremiah, who's become quite a good friend of mine, came up to me and said, "You know, you can't roll up your sleeves if you're wringing your hands." An interesting statement, isn't it? When the floods were coming no one had time to wring their hands, so they just automatically rolled up their sleeves. When

the floods go away, we have time to wring our hands, so a lot of us don't roll up our sleeves. Let us honor the heroes here today by firm resolve to go back about the business of our daily lives as Americans, rolling up our sleeves and not wringing our hands.

Thank you very much.

I would like now to ask the Members of the United States Congress who are here to come up on the stage and join me as I sign this bill.

*[At this point, the President signed the bill.]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. at the Henry VIII Hotel. H.R. 2667, approved August 12, was assigned Public Law No. 103-75. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

### **Remarks to the Community in Alameda, California**

*August 13, 1993*

Thank you very much, Secretary Perry, Admiral Ruck, Admiral Briggs, Secretary of the Navy Dalton, Acting Secretary of the Army Shannon. The other people on this platform with me are essential to the partnership that I seek to establish and continue here today: Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown, who has been instructed by me to head the administration's efforts to develop a specific strategy to revitalize the California economy; the United States Senators from California, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer; and your Congressman and the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Ron Dellums. I am glad to be here with all of them.

To the distinguished military officers to my right and most of all to those of you who are here from the United States Navy, from the Marine Corps, the United States Army, and from the Coast Guard, it is an honor to be here with you in the shadow of this magnificent aircraft carrier, the U.S.S. *Carl Vinson*, and just off to my left here, a ship that I helped to launch, the U.S.S. *Arkansas*, back in a former life of mine. It's wonderful to see the ship again and to see the flag of