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Remarks to the Community in Woodland, Washington

February 14, 1996

Good morning. Let me say first of all a word of thanks to Mayor Graham for giving me a good tour this morning. I'm here with your two Senators, Senator Murray and Senator Gorton and of course Governor Lowry and Congresswoman Smith. And we have also Senator Ron Wyden from Oregon with us. And James Lee Witt, the Director of FEMA, and my Chief of Staff, Mr. Panetta and I came in this morning to—and we flew over the flooded area, and we've been walking down the streets talking with some of the folks.

I was on the other side of the street where the houses were built higher, and they now have lakefront property, I see. That's what the Gleasons told me and, of course, I was with Doug and DeLois Youngnickel down there in their home, and I saw how much they've lost.

Let me say to all of you, I know there's nothing that anyone, including the President, can say that will make these losses go away. I can tell you that in my life, in my former life when I was a Governor, I have been in whole communities that were wiped out by floods. I've been in whole communities that were torn apart by tornadoes. And I have been very impressed with what the people here have done—the way you've rallied together, the way you've worked to help save as much as you could—the work the Corps of Engineers has done to try to get the water down as much as possible as quickly as possible. And I want to begin just by thanking all of you who worked hard to minimize the damage of this flood.

When I leave here, we're going to kind of a roundtable discussion, and we'll talk about what the Federal Government can do to try to help you rebuild. The only thing I can do to you is to pledge to you that I will do everything I can to see that we move

as quickly as possible to do as much as we can, everything we're allowed to do within the law, to help you rebuild and to go on with your lives.

I can see just from talking to the mayor—he told me he had lived here all of his life—that this is a wonderful community with good, strong families and good, strong values, and I loved seeing the children at the school today. We will do what we can to help you put it back together and get going in the right direction just as quickly as we can. And meanwhile, I hope you will keep your spirits up. This will pass, and it will get better, and we'll do everything we can to help.

God bless you, and thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:40 a.m. in a residential neighborhood. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor James Graham of Woodland and Gov. Mike Lowry of Washington.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on the Floods in Woodland

February 14, 1996

The President. Is everybody here? Mark, do you want to start?

[*Mark Anderson, Woodland deputy fire chief, thanked the President and other roundtable participants, summarized the efforts to control the flooding, and asked the President to comment.*]

The President. Well, first of all, I want to thank you and the fire chief and the mayor and everybody in this community who worked so hard. You deserve to be a little emotional, and I bet you haven't had much sleep in the last several days.

[*Mr. Anderson reported that although he got little sleep during the first 4 days of flooding, the last few nights were more restful.*]

The President. When the mayor and I were coming in here—we went out and toured one of the neighborhoods, and we met with some people who had lost their homes, along with Governor Lowry and Senator Gorton, Senator Murray and Congresswoman Smith and Secretary Peña, and the FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, who is to my left there. It was interesting—he intro-

duced me to one man who was standing on the side of the street. He said, "That man ran a jackhammer for 8 hours with a cracked rib." And I think that's sort of symbolic of what this community has done in the last few days.

And I just wanted to say the whole country has been touched by the pictures we've seen, moved by the losses that you've endured but also moved by the way that you have rallied in this crisis. And I thank you very much for what you have done.

I understand that you evacuated a thousand people in 40 minutes. If that's true you could probably become police chief of Washington, DC, or fire chief of New York City—[laughter]—or Denver or some big place.

Mr. Anderson. I came here from a larger fire department, and I really like the size of Woodland. [Laughter]

The President. Let me say that—what I want to do today is mostly hear from all these folks that are here with us, but I would like to just—and both your elected officials and the citizens that are here. One of the things that we have really worked hard on since I've been President is trying to help make sure the Federal Government did its part whenever there's a natural disaster.

When I appointed James Lee Witt to head FEMA, he had headed the Emergency Management Agency of our home State of Arkansas for several years before that, and we had been inundated with floods. We had the highest per capita rate of tornadoes in America. We have picked up after every known disaster. And we really tried to work hard with people.

We know that the State and local community groups and people like the Salvation Army and all the folks that have worked here are terrific. We just want to do everything we legally can as quickly as we can to be helpful. And that's what I want to hear about today: where are you now; how are you going to rebuild; what can we do.

Today we can announce that we will be able to provide over \$26 million to the communities to help rebuild the community facilities, \$10 million in emergency relief funds for Federal highway damage, and \$2 million to meet other emergency needs. But there will be more that has to be done, a lot more.

We believe that—Mr. Panetta, my Chief and Staff, and I were coming out here, and we were just trying to assess what we know is the damage in Washington and Oregon and over in Idaho. We think we'll have to do a lot more, and we're prepared to do it. And I basically want to spend the rest of this time that we have here listening to the citizens and the elected officials that are here, so that when we leave here we've got a very good idea of where we are and what we need to do.

[Mr. Anderson introduced a Woodland resident who had worked for 4 days on a jackhammer without going home. He then invited roundtable participants to join in.]

The President. Do you want to start?

Q. I'm a terrible public speaker, as you soon will learn. [Laughter]

Mr. Anderson. Go ahead, Mr. Johnston.

The President. Just pretend you're not talking to the public; just pretend you're talking to us.

Mr. Johnston. No, we'll survive—you're talking about—go back sometime this summer—

The President. Did you lose everything in your house?

[Mr. Johnston said that he had lost 75 percent of his household effects, including photographs, and had taken furniture and bedding to the trash dump.]

The President. Mayor?

[Woodland Mayor Jim Graham praised the community's response to the disaster. A participant then asked FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, how long it would take to assess damage to homes and provide financial assistance. Mr. Witt asked the participant if they had called the 800 number and indicated that checks were being issued that day. He said that residents could get temporary housing assistance or emergency home repair assistance or an individual family grant and that they should hear in just a few days. Governor Mike Lowry then thanked the President for his presence and for the speed with which Federal funding was provided during the disaster and during previous flooding.]

The President. That's a poor way to get Federal money, having these floods. [Laughter]

[Governor Lowry said the flood will be the most expensive natural disaster in the history of the State of Washington, estimates running to \$300 million with 2,600 residences and over 50 bridges lost.]

The President. Thank you. Anyone else like to talk?

[A participant thanked the President for visiting and for caring and said that the community was one that worked together and that the Federal Government had stepped in to fill its role. She indicated that she had traveled around the State and that 1,000 families couldn't get from their homes to the cities because of damaged bridges and that the Tri Cities were running out of heating oil.]

The President. Thank you. Let me say, first of all, on things like the heating oil issue—these big, specific issues come up, it's very important that we know about them if there's something we can do to help, and there may be.

Governor Lowry talked about the dimensions of the losses, and I think that that's probably a conservative estimate, depending on—you know, just based on what we've seen. We may have to come back to you, to Senator Gorton and Congresswoman Smith and to the Congress for some sort of supplemental appropriation on this, and if so, we want to do it as quickly as possible, because I don't want all of these folks out here hanging by their fingernails, full of anxiety about whether we are or are not going to be there when they need us.

Ms. Howell, do you want to say anything? They tell me you're great. I expected you to be able to talk all over us. [Laughter] The guys with the best seat in the house up there were clapping for you. [Laughter]

[Ms. Howell thanked the President for coming to such a small place as Woodland and said the people of the community had reached out to one another and the community would maintain its hope.]

Mr. Anderson. With that kind of support, the community of Woodland can accomplish anything.

The President. Don't forget, folks, this country is made up of Woodlands. And most of us who live in bigger towns now once came from places like Woodland. So you should never—don't feel insignificant just because you're small. In some ways—I was just telling the mayor, I said, "It must be immensely rewarding to be the mayor of a place where you can know people, you see them. When they commit these acts of heroism and generosity you know who they are."

There are a lot of places that are so big now, it would be impossible to know whether the guy that worked a jackhammer for 8 hours had a cracked rib, or not. In a place like this you know that. And that really counts for something.

Senator Gorton?

Senator Slade Gorton. Mr. President, it is said that a picture is worth a thousand words, and lord knows the people who follow you around certainly live by that.

The President. A thousand pictures is worth one word. [Laughter]

[Senator Gorton said that for the people of Woodland and Washington having the President come and see firsthand what these people have gone through, to bless the efforts that they have made, and to pledge his aid is very important. He thanked the President for coming and for the assistance he brought with him.]

The President. Thank you.

Congresswoman Smith?

Congresswoman Linda Smith. Thank you. We're honored you are here. I saw kids do what I did when I remember seeing President Kennedy—now you know how old I am, about the same age as you are. [Laughter]

The President. Looks better on you. [Laughter]

[Representative Smith said that the President's visit gave the people reassurance that there will be a coordination, that it will be real, and that they would turn all the people power into cleaning up. She also asked for a direct assistance site, saying the people were stunned by the destruction and would

appreciate having someone to talk to directly for assistance.]

The President. James Lee?

[Mr. Witt introduced Linda Ramsey, Washington State Emergency Management Agency, and said her agency was willing to put a disaster coverage center in Woodland which would put all the Federal agencies and the State agencies and everyone in the same building. He added that State and FEMA outreach teams had been going door-to-door in the community, working with people as well. Representative Smith commended the FEMA Director and the FEMA professionals working in her District.]

The President. May I say—she made a point here, the Congresswoman made a point that I think is, in some ways, for all of you, not just for us, one of the most important things that's been said here today. A lot of the people who have been hurt by this flood are, frankly, still in shock. They have not really come—they're still trying to come to grips with what's happened to them and grieving over the loss of family pictures, and things that seem small until you lose them and then they become big.

And I know that it's true; whenever we go into a rural area or a set of small towns, people do feel awkward even asking for things from the Government; they don't quite know how to do it. And I appreciate the response James Lee gave to you.

But I just want to remind you that I met a couple on the street that told me they'd been married 64 years this year, and I could tell they were just trying to come to grips with this.

I just ask you all to be sensitive to this. Sometimes when the flood waters go down and there's nothing for a neighbor to do that's real visible like stack the sandbags up, we forget that there's going to be a lot of scars inside. A lot of these folks are going to be hurt for a very long time, and they're going to have to try to come to grips with it. And all of us, from the Federal Government on down, need to be very sensitive to this. It's going to be—there's a lot of tough things that people are going to have to deal with. The churches will have to help; everybody will.

But I really appreciate you saying that, because sometimes I think we forget that in the moment. A lot of times it comes up a week or so later, sometimes 2 weeks later when it's really difficult.

I want to hear from our last panelists, but before I do I want to say again—I want to thank Secretary Peña for coming with us. And I want to recognize in the audience, as we're going back to Oregon as soon as we leave here, the presence of Senator Hatfield, Mark Hatfield, and Senator Ron Wyden, the new Senator from Oregon. Thank you both for being here with us.

[A participant, speaking for all the local emergency managers, thanked the President, the Governor, and the FEMA Director for their response to the series of disasters in the area. Another participant added that it couldn't have been done without FEMA and the Washington, State Emergency Management Officer and Trudy Winterfeld, emergency management supervisor for Cowlitz County.]

The President. Thank you, Trudy.

Let me just say, you made a point which provoked another thought in my mind. We went down Gun Club Road today, and we saw the houses on the right side of the road that were wiped out, and the houses on the left side of the road had been built recently, consistent with the Federal flood standards. And as they all said, they all developed lake-front property overnight because behind all their houses is a big lake. But all those houses survived.

And I think it's worth pointing out that we've had several places in America that within the last 5 or 6 years have had two floods that went into their 100-year flood plain. And no one quite knows—there's a lot of speculation—one of the major news magazines had a cover story on the extreme winter weather, speculating that it was related to the phenomenon of global warming. No one really knows. But we do know that both in the winter and the summer now, we're having our weather in more extreme bursts, so that more of our precipitation is coming in more extreme bursts. And we're having also a really long, hot spells that are quite extreme. Last year was the hottest year ever recorded.

So these are things that we have to be sensitive to, and I think that it's just worth remembering as we all start the rebuilding effort that there's something to be said for honoring the building standards in the flood plain; that it may be that these aren't 100-year flood plains anymore, they may be 10-year flood plains for all we know. There may be something rather fundamental going on, and there's nothing to be harmed by at least playing it safe.

Mark, anybody else want to speak?

Q. Yes, sir. This will be the best, famous—whatever adjective you can think of, sir, for a Valentine's Day that we'll never forget. [Laughter]

The President. I received a note from a young lady from this community whose middle name is Valentine because she was born on Valentine's Day, and she asked me to come by and have a piece of cake at her house. [Laughter] The mayor said we were too busy; I'm going to blame it on him. [Laughter]

Mayor Graham. Thanks.

The President. I appreciate that.

Mayor Graham. Actually, we couldn't get the driver to turn the steering wheel in the right direction. [Laughter]

The President. Thank you.

Mayor Graham. Did we have some time for questions from the audience, Mr. President?

The President. Does anybody have any questions about the whole operation here? Yes, sir.

[A participant asked about a project to deepen the Columbia River which would increase international trade and asked if it would go forward given Government cutbacks.]

The President. I don't know that I'm familiar enough with the project to answer. Does anyone want to comment on it? Slade or Patty or anybody?

[A participant said that both Senator Hatfield and Senator Wyden, and the two Senators from Washington were working on the issue and making progress but that it was a long-term project. Another participant told the story of an encounter with an elderly gentleman who said that there is so much negative talk about the Government, but when

something like this happens, we remember why we have neighbors in Government.]

The President. Thank you. But I think it's important to remember he said it right, too; it's neighbors and Government—if you had one without the other, it wouldn't work.

[A participant said the chamber of commerce was concerned about the integrity of the dikes. FEMA Director Witt said that the President had signed mitigation legislation in 1993, adding 15 percent more money that can go to mitigation projects, projects which States do to prevent disasters reoccurring.]

The President. Yes, I might say in the Middle West, there has already been another flood in one of those areas where hundreds of people were saved from losing their homes a second time, but there are other ways to mitigate; you don't have to—it's just that—that was the Mississippi and the other big rivers there, and they were way down in the flood plain, and there was no practical way for them to do something like the people did on the lefthand side of Gun Club Road when I was walking down there.

So they decided that they wanted to do that, and they saved it. There are other less drastic mitigation strategies that you can follow here, and you need to just decide whether—how you want to do with the dike or your flood wall or whatever you want to do here, and come up with a plan through the State, and you will be eligible for funds to try to implement it.

There was a question back there?

[A participant asked if the Corps of Engineers could take some action with regard to two or three miles of identifiable problem dikes.]

The President. Can they use any of their public infrastructure money to fix that?

Q. The Corps of Engineers has—

The President. Oh, they're Corps dikes?

[Mr. Witt indicated that the Corps of Engineers would make many such repairs. A participant pointed out the need for an early warning system on the river in addition to repairing the dikes.]

The President. Sir, let me follow up on what you said. It is true that the Corps of

Engineers can do that. It's also true they're probably out of money because we've had a lot of floods this year, including back in—you probably saw the floods we had in Pennsylvania and West Virginia and Maryland back on the East Coast, so we will probably have to include some more money for the Corps of Engineers in whatever supplemental budget we do. But if we do it, they can immediately, if they have the personnel, go back and fix the dikes.

Yes, sir?

Q. I live on Gun Club Road that you drove down. We can replace our stuff; you know, you can't replace lives. As long as nobody got hurt, that's what matters.

The President. Thank you.

Q. We had no loss of life, and we had no injuries.

The President. Thank you for saying that.

Mr. Anderson. Do we have a question over here?

The President. These are, I think, the legislators from the local area. We thank them for coming out as well.

[A State representative said that it was vitally important that the people register with the 800 number as soon as possible. He asked FEMA to do more active marketing on the 800 number information. Mr. Witt said that they were trying via the Recovery TV channel and the Recovery Times to get information out to the public.]

The President. Senator, you—well, let's do this gentleman and then we'll come back to you.

[A State senator said that the rivers were getting so shallow that they could not sustain the flow and the Corps of Engineers had over the year built revetments to reenforce the banks of the rivers but in doing so had never taken into account the fact that the rivers had gotten more shallow. He asked for a re-appraisal of the revetments and also asked for work on an early warning system for area rivers.]

The President. Do you want to say anything about that, James Lee?

[Mr. Witt said that local emergency management officials could make warning systems a priority. He added that they were consider-

ing using 5 percent of mitigation funds toward early warning systems.]

The President. Mr. Panetta says, drawing on his experience as former chairman of the House Budget Committee, so he knows this stuff—*[laughter]*—he says if we get the money to the Corps, he believes they have some flexibility to build on the revetments as a part of the mitigation plan. So we need the—I would think that you all should work with the Governor and try to make that a part of the mitigation plan, because obviously that's what we're trying to do, to go back to his question. We're trying to minimize the chance of this occurring again. So I would urge you to make sure that you make that a priority, and then we'll try to make sure whatever we can do whatever is necessary to give the Corps the legal authority to do it.

Yes, sir. There's a gentleman in the back there. We're bringing you a microphone.

[A participant said he thought the town of Woodland owed a thank you to the inmates of the Larch Mountain Corrections Facility and all the Hispanics in the farm communities who helped avoid an even worse disaster.]

The President. There's another question back there.

[A participant said the work done by high school students was impressive and it was amazing to see all the youth in the community coming together. He added that he had a tape for the President of the high school jazz band.]

The President. Send it up here.

The gentleman here in the blue jacket there.

[A participant said the restaurants in town deserved thanks for feeding the flood workers, which they did around the clock.]

The President. Is there a question back here? There's someone with a hand up over here to the right. And then there's a lady over here. I'm running you guys crazy. *[Laughter]* This guys a—he's with us, and he needs the exercise. *[Laughter]* This is part of my, you know, get-my-staff-fit campaign. *[Laughter]*

Q. Happy Valentine's Day, Mr. President.
The President. Thank you, sir.

[A participant described how after days of working, the crew working on the dikes began needing rest and that they had asked for help on radio and television and the community response was to have 100 new workers within the hour.]

The President. Thank you. Now, there are two over there. Two people over here. There are two over there. You can stay now. [Laughter]

Q. Thank you for coming to Woodland, Mr. President. I'm one of your supporters that writes you letters from Woodland, although you probably never see them.

The President. Keep them coming.

Q. One of my concerns is the possibility that Congress could close down the Government in March—will that interfere with the help needed for this area?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't think that's going to happen. And I believe that the leaders have made it pretty clear that we don't think that's going to happen. And I believe that we will pass the legislation necessary to—the Congress can't act on it until we draw it up. We have to get up the supplemental appropriation necessary to provide the funds here. But as soon as we know it, what they are, we have—you know, it's going to take us a while because we can't keep—we want to do it all at once. But I believe that as soon as we know the Congress will act appropriately. I wouldn't worry about that. I think they'll take care of it.

I thought there was somebody else. Nobody else? Okay.

Do you have a question, young lady? You want to ask a question? She had her hand up. Do you want to ask a question? Do you want to say something? I don't blame you, that's the right thing to do.

Q. Mr. President, she wants to wish you a Happy Valentine's Day.

The President. See, I had to have valentines with my little girl last night. So I need a valentine today.

Thank you very much.

[Mr. Anderson said they had run out of time, and thanked all the participants for coming.]

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The roundtable began at 11:20 a.m. in the bay of the Woodland city hall/fire station.

Remarks to Workers and Volunteers at the Flood Wall in Portland, Oregon

February 14, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Jim McKune, for your fine words and, even more, for your fine work.

I want to say on behalf of all Americans, having had the opportunity now to fly over the areas of Oregon and Washington which were damaged by the flood and many of which are still under water, our country has been watching you and pulling for you and praying for you. We have a lot of admiration for the incredible work that has been done, and we're proud of the contributions made by all the groups and all the individuals who have worked so hard.

I want to thank especially, on behalf of the Federal Government, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its Director, James Lee Witt, who is here with me today; the Corps of Engineers, who used their night scopes to make sure the dikes along the Columbia were holding strong; the Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña, who is also here today. I want to thank the National Guard which has done about everything it could to help. And I understand they even air-dropped hay to cattle cut off by water on Sauvie Island.

I want to congratulate and thank Bill Long and Steve Barrett for the tour I just got of the wall and the work they did to build it and all those who did it so well. And let me say a special word of appreciation also to Governor Kitzhaber and my good friend, Mayor Katz; Senator Hatfield and Senator Wyden, and Congressman DeFazio and Congressman Bunn. We're going to need them all in the next few weeks because we don't have enough money right now in the Treasury to meet all the demands for the problems that Oregon and Washington and your neighbors in Idaho have gone through, and we're going to have to go back to Congress and