

but also assume leadership roles to ensure its success.

Your personal support and enthusiasm will help positively influence thousands of employees and will result in another successful campaign.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 12.

Remarks on the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and an Exchange With Reporters in New Orleans, Louisiana

September 12, 2005

The President. I want to thank the Governor for joining us today and thank the mayor for joining us. My impression of New Orleans is this, that there is a recovery on the way. There's progress being made, but there's a lot of serious and hard work that's yet to be done.

I was briefed today about the search and rescue that continues. I was also briefed about the different projects that are taking place. There's a containment of an oil spill. The electricity is beginning to be turned back on. The mayor is anxious, of course, to get parts of the city up and running, but he's also mindful that there's a lot of work to be done for that to happen.

General Honore and Admiral Allen briefed us as well about the close coordination between the Federal Government, State government, and local government, all aimed at solving problems. And we just came through an area that had had substantial water in it, and the dewatering is an indication that the city is moving forward. But I'll repeat, we got a lot of work to do, a whole lot of work to do. And my pledge again to the Governor and the mayor is, the Federal Government will work closely in coordination with their authorities.

You know, one of the things that the people are beginning to think about is the long-term revival of New Orleans, for example, or the surrounding parishes. My attitude is this: The people of New Orleans can design the vision; the people of New Orleans can

lay out what New Orleans ought to look like in the future; and the Federal Government will help. The people of Louisiana can lay out their vision of what Louisiana will look like, and the Federal Government can help. I think the best policy is one in which the Federal Government doesn't come down and say, "Here's what your city will look like." The best policy is one where the local folks say, "Here's what we want our city to look like, and let's work together to achieve that vision."

And so I—as we're beginning to get through this recovery phase and the rescue phase and the transitional phase—recovery phase—we're beginning to think through the—how to reconstitute this really important State as well as along the Mississippi coast, as well.

At any rate, again, I want to thank you all for being here. I appreciate you taking time out.

I'll answer a couple of questions. Yes.

Allegations of Racism

Q. Sir, what do you make of some of the comments that have been made by quite a number of people that there was a racial component to some of the people that were left behind and left without help?

The President. My attitude is this: The storm didn't discriminate, and neither will the recovery effort. When those Coast Guard choppers, many of whom were first on the scene, were pulling people off roofs, they didn't check the color of a person's skin. They wanted to save lives.

I can assure people from the—and I know from the State and local level as well that this recovery is going to be comprehensive. The rescue efforts were comprehensive, and the recovery will be comprehensive.

Learning From Relief Efforts

Q. Mr. President, does the Federal Government need the authority to come in earlier or even in advance of a storm that threatening?

The President. I think that's one of the interesting issues that Congress needs to take a look at. And it's really important that as we take a step back and learn lessons, that we are in a position to adequately answer

the question, are we prepared for major catastrophes, that the system is such that we're able to work closely together and that—

Q. Do you recommend that Congress consider allowing the Federal Government to act more quickly?

The President. I think it's very important for Congress to take a good, close look at what went on, what didn't go on, and come up with a series of recommendations. And my attitude is, is that we need to learn everything we possibly can; we need to make sure that this country is knitted up as well as it can be, in order to deal with significant problems and disasters. Meantime, we've got to keep moving forward.

And I know there's been a lot of second-guessing. I can assure you, I'm not interested in that. What I'm interested in is solving problems. And there will be time to take a step back and to take a sober look at what went right and what didn't go right. There's a lot of information floating around that will be analyzed in an objective way, and that's important. And it's important for the people of this country to understand that all of us want to learn lessons. If there were to be a biological attack of some kind, we've got to make sure we understand the lessons learned, to be able to deal with catastrophe.

Iraq/Hurricane Katrina

Q. Will what is needed to get this area back on its feet have any impact on the timing of troop withdrawals in Iraq?

The President. In Iraq?

Q. Yes.

The President. We've got plenty of troops to do both. Let me just talk about that again. I've answered this question before, and you can speak to General Honore if you care to. He's the military man on the ground. It is preposterous to claim that the engagement in Iraq meant there wasn't enough troops here, just pure and simple.

Do you care to comment on that?

Lieutenant General Honore. Well, we have about 90,000 members of the Reserve and National Guard deployed, of a total force of approximately 400,000. So 90,000 are deployed. We've got the capability. We're here. We're demonstrating in deed every day. We're performing the mission with the great

support of the National Guard from multiple States. The response is here. The troops are getting the job done under the conditions that you see here today, and they're making America proud that we have that capability.

We have capability. We're applying it—air, land, and sea—our Federal forces in support of the Governors of Louisiana and Mississippi, under the direction of the adjutant general. The system is working. We've got the capability, and we're looking forward to get the job done and get the job completed, until the Governors tell us otherwise.

The President. The troop levels in Iraq will be decided by commanders on the ground. One, we're going to—our mission is to defeat the terrorists, is to win. Secondly, the strategy is, as Iraqis stand up, we will stand down. And so, to answer your question about the decisions made on the ground in Iraq, they will be made based upon the ability of the Iraqis to take the fight. And more and more Iraqi units are getting more and more qualified.

There's still a lot of work to be done there. Obviously, we're going to make sure we have a troop presence to help this political process go forward. There's an election—the ratification of the constitution—election will be coming up, and of course, there will be elections this—later on this year. And we will have the troop levels necessary to make sure those elections go forward.

After all, the enemy wants to stop democracy. See, that's what they want to do. They want to kill enough people so that—in the hopes that democracy won't go forward. They tried that prior to—more than 8 million Iraqis voting. They were unable to stop Iraqis from voting, because people want to be free. Deep in everybody's soul, regardless of your religion or where you live, is a desire to be free. And they can't stop it. And what we're going to do is help, and they can't stop democracy from moving. And so what we're going to do is help make sure those elections are accessible to the Iraqi people.

Federal Emergency Management Agency

Q. Mr. President, there is a belief that we've been hearing for 2 weeks now on the ground that FEMA let the people here on the ground down. And perhaps, in turn, if

you look at the evidence of what it's done to your popularity, FEMA let you down. Do you think that your management style of sort of relying on the advice that you got in this particular scenario let you down? And do you think that plays at all—

The President. Look, there will be plenty of time to play the blame game. That's what you're trying to do.

Q. No, I'm trying to—

The President. You're trying to say somebody is at fault. Look—and I want to know. I want to know exactly what went on and how it went on. And we'll continually assess inside my administration. I sent Mike Chertoff down here to make an assessment of how best to do the job. He made a decision. I accepted his decision, but we're moving on. We're going to solve these problems. And there will be ample time for people to look back and see the facts.

Now, as far as my own personal popularity goes, I don't make decisions based upon polls. I hope the American people appreciate that. You can't make difficult decisions if you have to take a poll. That's been my style ever since I've been the President. And of course, I rely upon good people. Of course, you got to as the President of the United States. You set the space; you set the strategy; you hold people to account. But yes, I'm relying upon good people. That's why Admiral Allen is here. He's good man. He can do the job. That's why General Honore is here. And so when I come into a briefing, I don't tell them what to do. They tell me the facts on the ground, and my question to them is, "Do you have what you need?"

New Orleans Levees

Q. Did they misinform you when you said that no one anticipated the breach of the levees?

The President. No, what I was referring to is this: When that storm came by, a lot of people said we dodged a bullet. When that storm came through at first, people said, "Whew." There was a sense of relaxation, and that's what I was referring to. And I, myself, thought we had dodged a bullet. You know why? Because I was listening to people, probably over the airways, say, "The bullet has

been dodged." And that was what I was referring to.

Of course, there were plans in case the levee had been breached. There was a sense of relaxation in the moment, a critical moment. And thank you for giving me a chance to clarify that.

Anticipation of Katrina/Emergency Declarations

Q. Mr. President, where were you when you realized the severity of the storm?

The President. I was—I knew that a big storm was coming on Monday, so I spoke to the country on Monday [Sunday]* morning about it. I said, "There's a big storm coming." I had presigned emergency declarations in anticipation of a big storm coming—

Q. Mr. President—

The President. —which is, by the way, extraordinary. Most emergencies the President signs after the storm has hit. It's a rare occasion for the President to anticipate the severity of a storm and sign the documentation prior to the storm hitting. So, in other words, we anticipated a serious storm coming. But as the man's question said, basically implied, wasn't there a moment where everybody said, "Well, gosh, we dodged the bullet," and yet the bullet hadn't been dodged.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Last question.

Retrospective Analysis/Reconstruction

Q. This is 2 weeks in. You must have developed a clear image at this point of one critical thing that failed, one thing that went wrong in the first 5 days.

The President. Oh, I think there will be plenty of time to analyze, particularly the structure of the relationship between government levels. But again, there's—what I think Congress needs to do—I know Congress needs to do—and we're doing this internally as well—is to take a sober look at the decisionmaking that went on.

And what I want the people of this State and the State of Mississippi to understand is that we're moving forward with relief plans. And we're going to move forward with reconstruction plans, and we're going to do

* White House correction.

so in a coordinated way. And it's very important for the folks of New Orleans to understand that, at least as far as I'm concerned, this great city has got ample talent and ample genius to set the strategy and set the vision. And our role at the Federal Government is—obviously, within the law—is to help them realize that vision. And that's what I wanted to assure the mayor.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:29 a.m. at the intersection of North Claiborne and Cleveland Streets. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA; Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honore, USA, commanding general, First United States Army; and Vice Adm. Thad W. Allen, USCG, U.S. Coast Guard Chief of Staff. Lt. Gen. Honore referred to Maj. Gen. Bennett C. Landreneau, Adjutant General of Louisiana. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and an Exchange With Reporters in Gulfport, Mississippi

September 12, 2005

The President. First of all, I want to thank the school principal for her hospitality. It's interesting, you know, she said she lost her school and lost her house, but I told her, she hadn't lost her smile or her will to succeed.

Behind us we've got U.S. troops and Mexican troops working together to help get this school up and running. The superintendent of schools here in the region tells me that they're trying to have everybody back in school by the end of October. And that's part of what you're beginning to see here in Mississippi. This country is beginning to rebuild and lives are starting over.

I thank the Governor and the Congressman for their hospitality here. And Mayor, thank you, sir. You've been in office for how long? Four months?

Mayor Brett Warr. Two months.

The President. Two months.

Governor Haley Barbour. It seems like
4. [Laughter]

The President. But there's a remarkable spirit all across this—all across this affected zone. You're hearing the Mississippi spirit here, where there's a can-do attitude. People are coming together, slowly but surely putting their life back together. The Governor was telling me about the electricity, and the mayor has got a positive attitude.

I remember when I was down here last time, they were talking about gasoline. I saw a gasoline station up and running. And so progress is being made, and yet there's a lot of work to do, a lot of issues to be resolved, a lot of lives to be lifted up, a lot of hope to be restored.

I look forward to working with the congressional delegation, seeing people in Mississippi and the two Senators, of course, and the Governor, to address problems. I mean, we are problemsolvers, and we look forward to working with the folks here.

I said something in Louisiana I want to repeat here in Mississippi, and that is, as these communities are rebuilt, they're going to be rebuilt by people from Mississippi. And as the coast is replanned and the vision of the coast emerges, it's going to be planned by the people of Mississippi. The role of the people in Washington is to support the Governors and support the Congressmen, support the mayors, as a vision for what this part of the world will look like. And it's important for people to understand that, and that's a pledge we will keep.

Now, the school is going to open before the end of October.

Phyllis A. Bourn. We're hoping for the end of October.

The President. End of October—isn't that fantastic?

Ms. Bourn. Well, I'm sorry—the beginning of October.

The President. The beginning of October.

Ms. Bourn. The beginning of October for this school, for this school.

The President. Well, that's great. Well, thank you all very much. Thanks for having me.

Are we doing another round of questions today, or is one enough, do you think?