

For his resolute service to the Nation and his stalwart efforts to advance the cause of ordered liberty, I am proud to bestow the Presidential Medal of Freedom on Laurence H. Silberman.

My congratulations to each of the recipients. And now the military aide will read the citations for the Presidential Medals of Freedom.

[At this point, Lt. Cmdr. Robert A. Roncska, USN, Navy Aide to the President, read the citations, and the President presented the medals.]

The President. In honor of these distinguished men and women, Laura and I invite you to stay for a reception in the State Dining Room. Please enjoy yourselves. Congratulations. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to George M. Steinbrenner III, chairperson, New York Yankees baseball team; and former Gov. Tommy G. Thompson of Wisconsin.

Remarks in a Briefing on Flooding in the Midwest in Cedar Rapids, Iowa June 19, 2008

The President. Our job is to come down here—and I want to thank the Senator and Congressman and members of the Cabinet—just to listen to what you got on your mind. Obviously, to the extent that we can help immediately, we want to help, and then plan for recovery.

I know a lot of farmers and cattlemen are hurting right now, along with the city people. The other thing I think is just very important is that—and the Senator and Governor have made it clear—that as we worry about Cedar Rapids, we also got to worry about the little towns. A lot of folks are wondering whether or not the government hears about them too. And I can assure you that I know the Governor cares deeply about it, and so do we.

Paulison, who is the head of FEMA, tells me that there are 600 FEMA people moving around the State, and that ought to help the people in the smaller communities know that somebody is there to listen to them and care about them.

Our hearts and prayers are—from around the Nation go out to people here. It's a tough time for you.

Mayor Kathleen “Kay” Halloran of Cedar Rapids, IA. It is.

The President. The good news is, the people in Iowa are tough-minded people. I mean, you'll come back better. Sometimes it's hard to see it when you're this close to the deal.

Mayor Halloran. Well—and it's going to take time.

The President. A lot of people aren't getting much sleep these days, but—[laughter]. You're exhausted; I understand that.

But we want to—Congress passed a—about to pass a big chunk of disaster money, which will put—help put people's mind at ease, and that will—we're going to help people—going to help you recover.

Anyway, thanks for letting me come by and see you.

Governor Chet Culver of Iowa. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Yes.

Governor Culver. If I could, just very quickly, I want to thank the President on behalf of the people of Iowa—

The President. Get those cameras back in here. [Laughter]

Governor Culver. And I want to make sure they get in trouble. [Laughter]. But I also want to thank this incredible team, all of these people in this room, just an amazing team. All the people standing up here, thank you. And we will rebuild this State and this city, and it will be even better and even stronger as a result. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:01 p.m. in the Lynn County Training and Response Center at Kirkwood Community College. In his remarks, he referred to Senator Thomas R. Harkin and Representative Dave Loebsack of Iowa. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks to Reporters in Iowa City, Iowa June 19, 2008

The President. Let me thank the mayor, thank the Governor. Mr. Congressman, thanks for flying down from Washington with

us, and Senator Harkin, thanks for being here.

Senator Tom Harkin. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. You know, these are tough times for the people of Iowa City and Cedar Rapids and a lot of other communities in Iowa. Some of them are, you know, real tiny communities. And this—obviously, as you can see here, they're still going through a recovery phase. The mayor was telling me that she had the—part of the city evacuated and now some folks are able to come back in.

I brought a lot of Federal officials with me because it's really important that as the rebuilding phase begins, there's a coordinated effort between the Federal Government and the State and the local governments. And Michael Chertoff is going to be handling the coordinating effort with the Governor. And the Governor will make sure that the affected communities are represented as well.

We passed a—or the Congress is contemplating passing a supplemental, and a big chunk of that supplemental will be disaster relief money. And I want to thank the Members of Congress—hope we can get that done quickly.

Representative David Loebsack. It will get done.

The President. The—one of the things that happens in a disaster such as this is that citizens from around the country want to know how they can help. They see the picture of this kind of flooding on TV and they know that people are hurting and they want to know how they can participate in helping the rebuilding. Well, one way that the people can do is they can go on their computers and dial up volunteer.org [volunteer.gov]*.

And, you know, if you want to try to figure out how to send something, you can—there will be ways to—ways to direct your compassion. If you want to give money, there are organizations that could use your contributions; organizations such as the Red Cross. And I'm—again, I'll repeat to you: volunteer.gov—I think I might have said “org”; I meant “gov.”

* White House correction.

And I really again want to congratulate the local folks here for really showing great compassion and working hard and hugging people and giving people hope. And, Governor, you've been out front. You and your first lady are working hard, and the mayor has been very much engaged in helping people deal with the initial response. And now we all got to come together and help people deal with the rebuilding of Iowa.

Anyway, thank you for your hospitality. I'm sorry we're going through this. I tell people that oftentimes you get dealt a hand you didn't expect to have to play, and the question is not whether you're going to get dealt the hand; the question is, how do you play it? And I'm confident the people of Iowa will play it really well.

Anyway, thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Regenia Bailey of Iowa City, IA; and Gov. Chet Culver of Iowa and his wife, Mari.

Message on the Observance of Juneteenth

June 19, 2008

I send greetings to those celebrating Juneteenth.

On Juneteenth, we commemorate the arrival of Major General Gordon Granger in Galveston, Texas, and his declaration that slavery had been abolished and the blessings of liberty were finally extended to African Americans.

On this occasion, we recognize the many contributions that African Americans have made to our great Nation and honor the legacy of diversity that America has embraced. Today is an opportunity to recommit ourselves to confronting injustice wherever we find it and upholding the dignity of all people. By doing so, we protect the freedom and democratic ideals that will keep America strong for generations to come.

Laura and I send our best wishes on this memorable occasion.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.