

Remarks During a Tour of Areas Damaged by Wildfires and an Exchange With Reporters in Colorado Springs, Colorado

June 29, 2012

The President. First of all, I want to say to Mayor Bach, Governor Hickenlooper, and the congressional delegation, but most importantly, all the guys on the ground who have been fighting this fire: We are so grateful to see the extraordinary coordination that's taking place between the State, Federal, municipal—all the agencies—everybody tried to put everything they got into this thing.

This has been a devastating early fire season for Colorado. This community, obviously, is heartbroken by the loss of homes. We're lucky because of the quick action that's been taken, that we haven't seen a lot of loss of life. But for those families who have lost everything—their possessions, who have been displaced—our thoughts and prayers are with them.

What I've said is, is that the Federal Government is going to do everything we can to coordinate assistance, not just short term, but long term. In fact, one of the good things that we've been seeing is some innovative ways in which some military assets have been deployed alongside the traditional assets that are used in these fire fights.

So we're going to have a long way to go before all these fires are put out. We need a little bit of help from Mother Nature. But I hope that people all across the country recognize that when challenges like this happen, all of us come together as one American family. And we're seeing similar disasters, some of the flooding in Florida. Obviously, we've been seeing tornadoes and other natural threats. But what always is inspiring to me is whenever I come to these communities, the strength, the resilience, the degree to which people are willing to work together, it's a reminder of what is the most important aspect of this country, and that is its people and the way that we are willing to get each other's backs.

And so I just want say again, Mr. Mayor, you did an outstanding job. Governor, as always, you're on top of things. And I think I speak for the congressional delegation in saying the Federal Government will continue to do everything we can to help coordinate relief. But we've still got a ways to go before these fires are out.

Q. What do you think when you see just this stuff right here?

The President. Well, what's remarkable is obviously how devastating these fires are. Once they hit a house and they take root, it is very difficult for anybody to imagine the kind of devastation and how quickly it happens.

And obviously, what's also tragic is, is that the nature of these fires, you can have a house that is perfectly fine on one side and then another house that's completely destroyed on the other. But because of those outstanding firefighters that we just saw, three of those homes were saved. And for those three families, those folks are heroes.

And when you think about 18-hour days and the kind of effort that these guys are putting in, and the danger that they're putting themselves under, it's a testament to our Forest Service and our firefighters; and we just got to make sure that we are giving them the best equipment, all the resources that they need. But what we can't give them is their courage. They bring that to the table from the start.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:03 p.m. at the Mountain Shadows residential neighborhood.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Wildfires in Colorado Springs, CO, tour of damage;
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