

Remarks Following a Briefing on Hurricane Matthew Preparedness and Response Efforts and an Exchange With Reporters

October 7, 2016

The President. Obviously, everybody has been tracking the course of Hurricane Matthew, and I just received an update from our FEMA director, Craig Fugate, as well as the rest of our national security team. And I just wanted to make a couple of key points.

First, what we're seeing now is Matthew having moved above South Florida and some of the largest population centers, working its way north. And the big concern that people are having right now is the effects that it could have in areas like Jacksonville on through Georgia. And although we've seen some significant damage in portions of South Florida, I think the bigger concern at this point is not just hurricane-force winds, but storm surge.

Many of you will remember Hurricane Sandy, where initially people thought this doesn't look as bad as we thought, and then suddenly you get massive storm surge and a lot of people were severely affected. And so I just want to emphasize to everybody that this is still a really dangerous hurricane; that the potential for storm surge, flooding, loss of life, and severe property damage continues to exist. And people continue to need to follow the instructions of their local officials over the course of the next 24, 48, 72 hours.

Those of you who live in Georgia, I think, should be paying attention because there's been a lot of emphasis on Florida, but this thing is going to keep on moving north, through Florida, into South Carolina. There are large population centers there that could be vulnerable, so pay attention to what your local officials are telling you. If they tell you to evacuate, you need to get out of there and move to higher ground, because storm surge can move very quickly, and people can think that they're out of the woods and then suddenly get hit and not be in a position in which they and their families are safe. So pay attention to local officials.

In the meantime, I've been in contact with the Governors of all four of the potentially affected States. I want to thank them all for their leadership. There's been strong cooperation between Federal and State and local officials. FEMA has worked diligently to pre-position resources, assets, water, food, commodities. And as the hurricane moves north, what Craig and his team will be doing is moving those resources and assets further north so that any place that happens to get hit badly, we'll be in a position to immediately come in and help.

But I really want to emphasize the Governors have been on top of this. State and local officials have been on top of this. They are the ones who are tracking most closely what is happening in your particular community, your particular area. You need to pay attention to them. Do what they say. Do not be a holdout here because we can always replace property, but we can't replace lives.

I want to thank Craig and his whole team as well as Department of Homeland Security, my own national security team for really staying on top of this. We're going to monitor this throughout the weekend. Our thoughts and prayers are with folks who have been affected. It's—even if the damage in South Florida wasn't as bad as it could be, there are people who've been affected, and for them, they're going to need help.

Last point I'd like to make is, we're still tracking what happened in areas like Haiti that were hit more directly. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. It has consistently

been hit and battered by a lot of natural disasters to compound what is already great poverty there. We know that hundreds of people have lost their lives and that there's been severe property damage and they're going to need help rebuilding. So I would ask all Americans to go to the American Red Cross and other philanthropic agencies to make sure that we're doing what we need to do to help people in need. And we'll continue to provide information. If you're interested in how you can help the people of Haiti and others, you can go to whitehouse.gov and we'll provide you some direction in terms of where. Even the smallest contribution can really make a big difference.

All right? Thank you very much, everybody.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Funding

Q. Sir, does FEMA—does FEMA have enough funding?

The President. FEMA is in a good position right now. We had some concerns last year when we were in the midst of budget negotiations. I think that we did a good job of making sure that FEMA was properly funded and, not to make him blush, but we happen to have one of the best public servants in America in Craig Fugate and his team, and they know how to manage their money and use it effectively.

So that's not going to be an issue. Of course, we always want to be cautious about making assessments with respect to damage. We're still on the front end of this hurricane. We're not on the back end. So we don't know how bad the damage could end up. We don't know how severe the storm surge could end up being. And we're not going to know for 3, 4, 5 days what the ultimate effects of this are.

If we end up having really significant problems and really severe property damage, then the Stafford Act comes into play, our ability to provide through emergency declarations and other mechanisms—more help to local governments—that's always going to be a question. We have, as you know, we still have flooding in Louisiana that has left a lot of people homeless. Over 100,000 people lost their homes there and we still have to rebuild. There are—is a backlog of need from natural disasters around the country that we'd like, hopefully during the lame duck session, to figure out how to fund effectively.

So the issue is not so much FEMA's funding for immediate emergency response; the issue is going to be making sure that after the, in this case the hurricane, but in other cases flooding or wildfires or other natural disasters—after they've happened, are we in a position to properly help people rebuild? And we'll obviously make those assessments after the fact and then we'll talk to Congress about how we can help out.

All right? Thank you, everybody.

2016 Presidential and Congressional Elections

Q. Are you going to vote while you're in Chicago?

The President. I'm not going to the precinct. I'll probably do early vote. I'll fill out my form. Don't worry, I'll be voting.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:22 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Nathan J. Deal of Georgia; Gov. Nikki Randhawa Haley of South Carolina; Gov. Patrick L. McCrory of North Carolina; and Gov. Richard L. Scott of Florida.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Hurricane Matthew, preparedness efforts; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House.

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