

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Remarks by the President after Touring Tornado Damage in Joplin, Missouri

Joplin, Missouri

1:16 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: Obviously the scene speaks for itself. When we were in Tuscaloosa a few weeks ago, I talked about how I had not seen devastation like that in my lifetime. You come here to Joplin and it is just as heartbreaking and in some ways even more devastating.

I want to thank the outstanding work that Governor Nixon, the Mayor, all the congressional delegation, as well as the First Lady have done -- and the Red Cross -- in helping people to respond. But obviously it is going to take years to build back. And we mourn the loss of life. We're going to be going to a memorial service and try to help comfort the families and let them know that we're praying for them and thinking about them.

We had a chance to meet some of the folks who lived in this community, and just harrowing stories but also miraculous stories. I met an 85-year-old gentleman who has a -- still has a lawn service. He explained how he had just gotten his chicken pot-pie out and the storm started coming and he went into the closet, and came out without a scratch. And so there are good stories to tell and happy stories to tell here, but obviously there's been a lot of hardship as well.

The main thing I just want to communicate to the people of Joplin is this is just not your tragedy. This is a national tragedy and that means there will be a national response. Craig Fugate, who has probably been the busiest man in the federal government over this last bit of months, has been on the ground since just the day after this happened, and he's helping to coordinate with an outstanding team of state and local officials. We're going to do everything we can to continue whatever search and rescue remains. We are doing everything we can to make sure that folks get the shelter that they need, the support that they need.

We're working with the Governor to make sure that we cut through any red tape that's necessary with respect to rebuilding here. And then we're just going to have a tough, long slog. But what I've been telling every family that I've met here is we're going to be here long after the cameras leave. We are not going to stop until Joplin is fully back on its feet.

So to all the volunteers who are helping out -- one of the things that's been incredible is to see how many people from out of state have driven from as far a way as Texas, nearby Illinois, people just coming here to volunteer -- firefighters, ordinary citizens. It's an example of what the American spirit is all about. And that gives us a lot of encouragement at a time when obviously people are going through a lot of hardship.

So, thank you again, Governor.

GOVERNOR NIXON: Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Would you like to say a few words?

GOVERNOR NIXON: Just that we've been out -- I've been here every day, trying to work early to late, trying to back up the local officials, what they needed, trying to coordinate the federal response, trying to make sure we green-light the necessity to move forward.

Today is a day of remembrance, as we move here to the memorial service. The loss not only of life, not only of injuries, property are significant. It's going to take a higher power to keep the strength of this community resolved to get this done. And we're confident that it will happen.

We're especially appreciative, Mr. President, you focusing your attention right here, the entire world's attention right here, to help us in ways that will make a lasting difference to this community. God bless you, my friend.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

And one last point I want to make, obviously in the rebuilding process there are a lot of families who are thankful that they're okay. But they've been displaced. It's not just their homes; many of them lost their means of transportation. The school has been destroyed. And so for all Americans, to take a little bit of time out and make a contribution to the American Red Cross or other charitable organizations that are active here in Joplin, that can make an enormous difference. Even if it's just \$5, \$10, whatever you've got to spare -- because one of the things that's striking about this -- and I felt the same way when I was down in Alabama -- this can happen to anybody. The difference between you being in the path of this twister and a few blocks away, you being okay, is a very slim, slim margin. And so we've all got to put together because here but for the grace of God go I.

Thank you very much, everybody.

End

1:21 P.M. CDT