

Remarks at Federal Emergency Management Agency Headquarters

November 3, 2012

Well, listen, I just completed not only a meeting with our team here at FEMA and all of our Cabinet officers who are involved in the recovery process along the East Coast, but we also had a conference call with the Governors of Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, as well as many of the municipalities who have been directly affected by this crisis and this tragedy.

We still have a long way to go to make sure that the people of New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, and some of the surrounding areas get their basic needs taken care of and that we start moving back to normalcy.

A couple of things that we've emphasized: Number one, that it is critical for us to get power back on as quickly as possible. And just to give people an example of the kind of work we're doing, the military, DOD, thanks to the work of Leon and others, have been able to get military transport facilities to move cherry pickers and personnel from as far away as California to get that equipment into the area so that we can start getting some of the power back on as quickly as possible. It is a painstaking process, but we're making progress.

Number two, we're getting assets in to pump as much water out as possible. Lower Manhattan obviously is a particularly acute example, but there are problems with flooding that are affecting substations throughout the region. That's going to continue to be a top priority.

Number three, making sure that people's basic needs are taken care of. As we start seeing the weather get a little bit colder, people can't be without power for long periods of time, without heat for long periods of time. And so what we're doing is starting to shift to identify where we can have temporary housing outside of shelters so people can get some sense of normalcy. They can have a hot meal; they can have the capacity to take care of their families as their homes are being dealt with.

Number four, debris removal, still important. Number five, making sure that the National Guard and other Federal assets are in place to help with getting the transportation systems back up and running, that's going to be critical.

What I told the Governors and the mayors is what I've been saying to my team from the start of this event, and that is, we don't have any patience for bureaucracy, we don't have any patience for redtape, and we want to make sure that we are figuring out a way to get to yes, as opposed to no, when it comes to these problems.

The other thing I emphasize, though, is that it is much easier for us to respond if we know what these problems are out in these areas, so if everybody can help publicize the number 800-621-FEMA—800-621-FEMA—then individuals can register with FEMA and immediately get the assistance that they need.

And so the more that folks in New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut understand that there are a lot of resources available for them, not just with respect to housing, but also with respect to childcare, medicine, a whole range of support, then we want to make sure that they contact us as soon as possible if they're in distress, because help is available.

Let me just close by saying this: Obviously, we've now seen that after the initial search and rescue, the recovery process is difficult, and it's painful. But the Governors at the local level—

Governors Christie, Cuomo, and Malloy—they are working around the clock; their teams are working around the clock. We are incredibly grateful to the heroism and hard work of our first-responders, many of whom themselves have had their homes flooded out. Our hearts continue to go out to those families who have been affected and who have actually lost loved ones; that's obviously heartbreaking.

But I'm confident that we can continue to make progress, as long as State, local, and Federal officials stay focused. And I can assure you everybody on this team, everybody sitting around the table, has made this a number-one priority and this continues to be my number-one priority.

There's nothing more important than us getting this right. And we're going to spend as much time, effort, and energy as is necessary to make sure that all the people in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut know that the entire country is behind them in this difficult recovery effort. We are going to put not just 100 percent, but 120 percent behind making sure that they get the resources they need to rebuild and recover.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 8:55 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Dannel P. Malloy of Connecticut; Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York; Gov. Christopher J. Christie of New Jersey; and Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta.

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