

Remarks on the Tornadoes in Oklahoma

May 21, 2013

Good morning, everybody. As we all know by now, a series of storms swept across the Plains yesterday, and one of the most destructive tornadoes in history sliced through the towns of Newcastle and Moore, Oklahoma. In an instant, neighborhoods were destroyed. Dozens of people lost their lives. Many more were injured. And among the victims were young children, trying to take shelter in the safest place they knew, their school.

So our prayers are with the people of Oklahoma today.

Our gratitude is with the teachers who gave their all to shield their children, with the neighbors, first responders and emergency personnel who raced to help as soon as the tornado passed, and with all of those who, as darkness fell, searched for survivors through the night.

As a nation, our full focus right now is on the urgent work of rescue and the hard work of recovery and rebuilding that lies ahead.

Yesterday I spoke with Governor Fallin to make it clear to Oklahomans that they would have all the resources that they need at their disposal. Last night, I issued a disaster declaration to expedite those resources, to support the Governor's team in the immediate response, and to offer direct assistance to folks who have suffered loss. I also just spoke with Mayor Lewis of Moore, Oklahoma, to ensure that he's getting everything that he needs.

I've met with Secretary Napolitano this morning and my Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Adviser, Lisa Monaco, to underscore that point that Oklahoma needs to get everything that it needs right away. The FEMA Administrator, Craig Fugate, is on his way to Oklahoma as we speak. FEMA staff was first deployed to Oklahoma's Emergency Operations Center on Sunday, as the State already was facing down the first wave of deadly tornadoes. Yesterday FEMA activated urban search and rescue teams from Texas, Nebraska, and Tennessee to assist in the ongoing search and rescue efforts and a mobile response unit to boost communications and logistical support.

So the people of Moore should know that their country will remain on the ground, there for them, beside them as long as it takes. For there are homes and schools to rebuild, businesses and hospitals to reopen, there are parents to console, first responders to comfort, and of course, frightened children who will need our continued love and attention.

There are empty spaces where there used to be living rooms, and bedrooms, and classrooms, and in time, we're going to need to refill those spaces with love and laughter and community.

We don't yet know the full extent of the damage from this week's storm. We don't know both the human and economic losses that may have occurred. We know that severe rumbling of weather, bad weather, through much of the country still continues, and we're also preparing for a hurricane season that begins next week.

But if there is hope to hold on to—not just in Oklahoma, but around the country—it's the knowledge that the good people there and in Oklahoma are better prepared for this type of storm than most. And what they can be certain of is that Americans from every corner of this country will be right there with them, opening our homes, our hearts to those in need. Because

we're a nation that stands with our fellow citizens as long as it takes. We've seen that spirit in Joplin, in Tuscaloosa; we saw that spirit in Boston and Breezy Point. And that's what the people of Oklahoma are going to need from us right now.

For those of you who want to help, you can go online right now to the American Red Cross, which is already on the ground in Moore. Already we've seen the University of Oklahoma announce that it will provide housing for displaced families. We've seen local churches and companies open their doors and their wallets. And last night the people of Joplin dispatched a team to help the people of Moore.

So for all those who've been affected, we recognize that you face a long road ahead. In some cases, there will be enormous grief that has to be absorbed, but you will not travel that path alone. Your country will travel it with you, fueled by our faith in the Almighty and our faith in one another.

So our prayers are with the people of Oklahoma today. And we will back up those prayers with deeds for as long as it takes.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:08 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Oklahoma, tornadoes.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Fallin, Mary; Fugate, W. Craig; Lewis, Glenn; Monaco, Lisa O.; Napolitano, Janet A.

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