

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at a Meeting of the State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience

July 16, 2014

Well, I want to thank everybody who has been participating in this very important Task Force. We've got Governors, we've got mayors, local and tribal leaders. We've got Democrats and Republicans and Independents from all the across the Nation. And we are here because we know that climate change is an undeniable scientific fact.

And these leaders are here because States and communities that they represent are already dealing with the effects of climate change. They're seeing rising sea levels, more powerful hurricanes, more intense heat waves, severe droughts, and wildfires out West. So this is already happening, and these leaders understand that climate change is a threat to public safety, it's a threat to public health and to something that we want to emphasize today: the infrastructure upon which our economy depends. More severe storms and increased flooding threaten roads and bridges and businesses. Rising sea levels threaten coastal communities and ports.

So climate change poses a direct threat to the infrastructure of America that we need to stay competitive in this 21st-century economy. That means that we should see this as an opportunity to do what we should be doing anyway, and that's modernizing our infrastructure, modernizing our roads, modernizing our bridges, power grids, our transit systems, and making sure that they're more resilient. That's going to be good for commerce, and it's obviously going to be good for communities.

As a result of this need, I've put forward a plan to build our transportation infrastructure, and it's a key part of our climate action plan, making sure that we've got a smarter, more resilient infrastructure that can withstand the effects of climate change.

And today I'm announcing a series of new steps. We're going to do more, including new data and 3-D maps, to help State, local officials and communities understand which areas and which infrastructure are at risk as a consequence of climate change. We're going to help communities improve their electric grids, build stronger seawalls and natural barriers, and protect their water supplies. We're also going to invest in stronger and more resilient infrastructure.

Last month, I announced a new competitive fund—\$1 billion—to help communities do this. Today we're taking steps to make sure that this competition will work. We're going to announce the specifics about who can compete, how we can learn from communities that are rebuilding stronger from disasters like Hurricane Sandy and flooding in Colorado. We want the best ideas to become models for the whole country. And the idea of this competition is not just the communities that win a grant are able to improve their infrastructure, but what we're also going to be doing is, hopefully, lifting everybody's game and making sure that people in their planning are thinking about these issues as they move forward.

So the bottom line is, investing in our infrastructure, protecting our communities, ensuring the health and safety of our citizens—none of this should be a partisan issue. This is something that Democrats, Republicans, Independents all care about, and the leaders who are sitting around this table prove that today and prove it every day.

And I want you to know that you have a partner in me, you have a partner in this administration, and I'm confident that, working together, we can take some commonsense steps to make sure that America's infrastructure is safer, stronger, and more resilient for future generations, at the same time as we are also tackling the broader problem of climate change and trying to slow the impact of that not just here, but around the world.

So I very much appreciate the wonderful participation. I know that some great ideas have already come out of this. And I'm looking forward to continuing to work with this group in the future. So thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:24 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.

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