

leaders. And then we'll fly over to Louisiana, touch base there, and be back here tomorrow evening.

Note: The President spoke at 4:25 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters on Disaster Relief Efforts in Homestead, Florida

September 1, 1992

The President. Let me, at the outset of these remarks, say how much I appreciate the cooperative spirit here, the Governor of Florida, the Mayor and the city manager of Homestead, and the other cities here that are represented. And all are pitching in. I am so proud of what our military is doing. And God bless the volunteers, those who are giving of themselves to help others. It is a moving and a wonderful message that's going forth to the whole country, whether it's from the military, from State officials, from local officials, or from the volunteers, the propensity of one American to help another. That's the message that I get loud and clear.

Last week I was here in south Florida, and then I returned to Washington and issued the orders to help people get back on their feet. We're in this for the long haul. We won't leave until the job is done. That's why I'm here this morning with Secretary Cheney, the Secretary of Defense. And I'm proud to be at the side of our two Senators from Florida who have been working day and night along with the Governor trying to help the people of this State.

Today I'm announcing that we are committed to rebuilding Homestead Air Force Base to show our commitment to south Florida. Homestead is very important to our military. It helps combat the cocaine trade. It provides air defense. And it will be rebuilt.

Now, I don't underestimate our task in south Florida, particularly after being back here today. And to ease the financial burden, today I am authorizing under the Stafford Act full Federal reimbursement for 100 percent of all eligible public assistance, including projects such as debris removal, to eliminate immediate threats to public

health and safety, and repair and reconstruction of nonprofit facilities. After the State has committed an amount equal to, what was it, \$10 per capita—but this authorization is the maximum that we can do, and I am very proud that we're doing this. Temporary housing and mortgage assistance crisis counseling, disaster unemployment assistance will continue to be 100 percent federally funded where permitted under the law. And although some cost sharing is involved, the Federal assistance that I have authorized today represents an extraordinary and very appropriate response to this human tragedy.

However, the real heroes of Hurricane Andrew have been and will continue to be the people, the people of south Florida. They offer great hope for tomorrow. And to help coordinate the private sector response to Hurricane Andrew, I've asked Alvah Chapman, a very respected Florida leader and businessman, to serve as the private sector liaison to work with Secretary Card, to work with the Governor, to work with the Federal task force to ensure the most effective recovery effort possible.

Also, as I said yesterday, I want to commend and thank in the strongest terms possible the great effort of these private volunteer agencies who have responded so quickly and so well to the crisis. God bless the volunteers. I know, and I say this confidently, that these volunteers can count on the continued support of the American people in their ongoing work in meeting the critical needs of the people of south Florida. We are going to succeed. We will succeed because the people of south Florida, because of their spirit.

I've seen many examples of this just since I've been here, but let me just mention Isa

Haydem who owns a Days Inn in Homestead. Isa fired up his commercial-sized outdoor grill, cooked steaks, shrimp, and scallops, food donated by the local restaurants. And last Wednesday they fed 2,500 people during the day. And at night they fed almost 300, most of whom are police out there working their hearts out to keep order.

Well, it's heroes like this, and there are many other such examples, which make Alex Muxo, the Homestead city manager, say, "It's never gone. There's always tomorrow." Well, I agree. And we, working cooperatively with everybody, will rebuild south Florida. The spirit's still here. The spirit is still intact.

And may God bless the people that have been hurt. We're here to help. Thank you all very, very much. A great crowd. I did not mention the Congressmen here, Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and, of course, my old friend Dante Fascell, who represents this area. He's been the conscience here, getting in touch with us on things that we could do, including this matching of funds situation. So I salute him and Ileana.

Q. Mr. President, how long is the long haul in your estimation, sir?

The President. Whatever it takes. Whatever it takes.

Q. Years, perhaps?

The President. I'd have to defer to the experts on that. But amazing progress has been made. Out of the rubble you can see tent cities springing up. You can see medical units staffed by volunteers, former military guys and other—down here pitching, right in this very facility. So it's happening all over the place. And, again, I don't think you can know the answer to the question to how long until we actually can measure not only the Federal response and the State and local response but the response of the volunteer sector, which I'm convinced will be overwhelming. It already has started. Look what the Red Cross and these ministries are doing. It is unbelievable. And that spirit is going to move it along very, very fast.

Q. Mr. President, Governor Clinton says that once the dust settles that there should be an investigation—

The President. Well, look, let me say this,

Jim: I'm not even going to take any political questions. I have tried, and I know the Governor has, these Senators have, Congressmen standing with me have, try to keep it out of the political arena. And I have no comment whatsoever, simply to say we're here to help, and I really mean that. This is nothing to do with partisanship. It has everything to do with helping the families, some of whom are standing right here today. And we're going to try to keep it that way.

Q. Well, in a nonpartisan spirit, then, is there going to be an investigation into the Federal response, sir?

The President. I am very proud of the Federal response. And I think the Governor has been very gracious in his comments, certainly the others have. And let me express my total confidence in the Federal response and in the response particularly of the military, be it the Guard under the State, be it the military that comes under Secretary Cheney and General Powell's command. They've moved fast; they're here in large numbers. But they're here with hearts that are reaching out to the people, and that's what matters.

Q. Mr. President, does your 100-percent reimbursement mean that there will be billions of dollars in Federal aid?

The President. Yes, it does mean that. Well, I don't know, we have to wait and see what the estimates are.

Q. Andy Card—

The President. Well, he's an expert, and he has my full confidence. And I salute Andy Card, Secretary of Transportation. He's pulled off of his duties and responsibilities there, and he's taken on a massive job of coordination. He deserves great support and certainly the thanks of the President. I know we all feel that way about what he's doing.

Q. If you had a message specifically for young people of the community, what would it be?

The President. It would be, have hope. We're going to get these schools open again, working with the State and local officials. I talked to the State superintendent, to the Miami superintendent of schools today. He demonstrates a determination

and a spirit that just really moved me. I called him from the plane coming down here. And I'll tell you, with that kind of spirit and then the cooperation from these officials, local, State, and Federal, why, we're going to get the job done.

But my message to these kids would be, look, you've had a tough time, and you lost a lot of stuff, a lot of toys, a lot of—you've seen your mothers and dads hurt, but you're going to bounce back. You're living in America. And the American spirit is going to lift you up. And that's the answer.

Last one.

Q. Mr. President, a lot of people, they're afraid to use the tents because they're concerned about security of their homes. And do you have anything you can say to encourage them?

The President. Yes, I would encourage them to use these tent cities. If they don't want to stay there all night long, they ought to go there, get medical attention, get showers, use the sanitary facilities there, get the food that's there. But I've talked to Governor Chiles about this. He has expressed his confidence not only in the National Guard, who has the security function and will be patrolling, but all of us have expressed our support for the local law enforcement people. I think it's a tribute to the spirit of Florida and the people of Florida that the acts of violence have been far less than predicted. We would, of course, condemn any violence, any taking advantage of one's neighbor. But nevertheless, I think that my message to them would be, use the facilities that exist.

I met a family right across the way here, literally less than a block from here. They needed medical attention for a child. And

they were asking, "We need medical attention. Where can we get help?" Here are these fantastic volunteers, right here, less than a block away, who stand ready to help in whatever the ailment, whatever the illness.

And so I think the city officials, the Mayor, the city manager are doing what they can now to get the message out. The Army has distributed, I think it's 10,000 radios. Those will be in the communities. And over those radios will be broadcast: What's available? How do you get your insurance? How do you get your Social Security check? Where do you go for medical attention? And once that communication networks gets going, say nothing of word of mouth, then I think these people will be beautifully served.

Some are scared to leave their homes. And I would simply say to them, trust in the security that's being provided in the neighborhoods. You don't have to be gone for all the time. If you feel more comfortable in your home or what's left of it, go, take the kid and go and leave somebody else in the house, and then come back. But soon that confidence will build, because these military people that have set up the camps, these private sector people, the Red Cross and others that have set up these facilities really have the spirit that will give the people the reassurance they need.

And it'll take care of itself, but we need to get the message out. And we're going to continue to try to do that.

Thank you all very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 10 a.m. to community members at Homestead Middle School.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Naming Alvah Chapman as Florida Disaster Relief Adviser

September 1, 1992

President Bush today asked Alvah Chapman, of Miami, FL, to work with Secretary of Transportation Andrew Card and the Federal Task Force on Hurricane Andrew

as an adviser on private sector resources and relief efforts in south Florida. Mr. Chapman is director and chairman of the executive committee of Knight-Ridder, Inc.,