

In his remarks, he referred to Georgia Senatorial candidate Michael J. Coles; Mayor Bill Campbell and former mayors Maynard Jackson and Andrew Young of Atlanta; and Gov. Zell Miller of Georgia.

Remarks to Firefighters and Relief Workers in Daytona Beach, Florida July 9, 1998

Thank you so much. Well, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I'd like to thank Karen Terry and Randy Holmes for their remarks and the introduction and for giving me and all of you and all of America, thanks to the media folks who are here, one vivid picture of what these last couple of weeks have been all about.

I want to thank my good friend Governor Chiles for the work that he has done. I thank Lieutenant Governor MacKay and all the other State officials who are here. I thank Mayor Asher and Mr. Rosevear, the chair of the county council. The mayor asked me to say in front of national television what Lawton has already said, that Daytona Beach is open for tourists. People all over America are calling the White House on the comment line. They want to know, what can we do to help the people of Florida? Well, one thing you can do is, if you haven't taken your vacation yet and you were trying to decide whether to come, give these people an economic boost down here. They've got the fires under control, and they need some help and support. It would be a good thing to do.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who are here—Corrine Brown, Peter Deutsch, and Allen Boyd—for representing you well and for supporting strongly the emergency appropriations that make it possible for FEMA and the other agencies to do its work. I thank our Agriculture Secretary, Dan Glickman, and our wonderful FEMA Director, James Lee Witt, for the work they have done.

I want to thank all the firefighters who are here. I know we have people from Palm Coast Fire Department, from the National Guard, from the U.S. Forest Service, from the Division of Florida Forestry, the Florida Emergency Management Division, and a lot of State and local emergency workers; Mr. Myers, your emergency management director here; and I'm glad to see Mr. Barbera from the International Association of Fire Fighters here.

There's so many people I want to thank, but I'd like to say a special word of thanks, too, to Bill Franz for making Daytona available as a headquarters for the firefighters and for the effort here. I really appreciate that.

They had to postpone the race this year because there was a more important race going on, and you just heard them talk about it, a race that was fought house by house and family by family. There are 150,000 fans that normally show up here, and even though the race was delayed, I hope they'll show up later to show their loyalty and support not only to Daytona but to all of you for what you did here.

I'm here because I think it's important that every American knows that this summer, notwithstanding the great movies, the real American heroes are not up in space fighting asteroids, they're in Florida fighting fires. And I thank you for it.

You might be interested to know, those of you who are firefighters, that on the several occasions when I would call—and I want to thank our great Vice President, Al Gore, for coming down here on my behalf, because I was in China when much of this occurred, and I would call back and get my daily reports, and every day, people said, "You would not believe what the firefighters are doing. The only real worry we have is, none of them will sleep; none of them will rest."

As you know, there are almost 100 injuries and no telling how much exhaustion here. And I guess I'm cutting into your rest time now, so I've now become part of the problem. [Laughter] But I think it's important that Americans know that, too. Every single report I got on the progress of these fires, someone said, our real concern is the people who are fighting the fires will not sleep; they will not rest; they are obsessed with saving every home. And I thank you for that.

I'd also like to thank the people who came from all corners of our country and from Canada

and even some came from as far away as Russia to help, showing that this was a human challenge that touched the hearts of people the world over. When I was in China, and we were in the midst of tough discussions and arguing over things that are profoundly important over the long run, my Chinese host asked me how the people of Florida were doing with the fires. You really reached the hearts of people throughout the world.

I also want to thank the people with the public works departments across the State for the work they did in cutting fire lines and clearing the fields. And I want to thank again—no telling how many of you did things that I don't know about, but I want to echo something Governor Chiles said. Maybe it shouldn't require a disaster like this, but you did show our country at its best. You showed people at its best. You showed people what the meaning of community is and why we all really do depend on each other. And as we go back to our daily lives and, I hope, a much more ordinary routine, I hope it's something we never forget, that we are all in this together; we need each other; and we're all at our best when we're giving not only to our families but to our neighbors. It's something I will never forget, and I hope all of you can help the rest of the people of Florida and the United States remember it in good times and rainy times.

There were children who gave up their Fourth of July picnics and trips to Disney World—I met a couple of them earlier, Katie and Megan Hendren—to help out and donate food and money; hotel managers giving free rooms; churches helping people cook food for all the empty pots; laundromat owners cleaning soot and ash from uniforms. I even heard about the truckload of bananas that were mistakenly donated to Volusia County when you put out the word that bandannas were needed for the firefighters. [*Laughter*] Well, the older I get and the more muscle cramps I get doing my exercises, the more I appreciate bananas. So the firefighters may need the bananas as well as the bandannas. And I thank all the people who made them available.

Our Government has tried to be a good partner. I just met with several people who have been victimized by this fire, and I want to thank the families that took the time to talk to me. A lot of them are still hurting. Some of them don't have their children living with the parents

yet; they're all spread out all over. And a lot of them are still uncertain about what their future living conditions are going to be. And a couple of them gave me some very specific suggestions about what we still might do to serve people here better. And I thank them for that.

Today I want to say that there are some new things we're going to do, and I'd like to mention them just briefly. First of all, I've directed our Agriculture Secretary, who is here with me, Dan Glickman, to declare all of our Florida counties eligible for farmers emergency loans if they've been affected by the drought, which is directly connected to this fire. Second, the Labor Department will pay for hundreds of jobs to expedite the recovery process, which is important. Third, FEMA will develop a long-term recovery plan with the State and work with our economic development administration to analyze the economic impact of the fires and see what else we can do to help. And finally, FEMA will be giving individual assistance to 29 more counties, providing temporary housing, crisis counseling, repairing homes, replacing essential items. We're going to do everything we can until the full recovery is completed.

Let me just say one other thing. You all probably know this, but this fire was made worse because you had, first, the wettest few months you'd ever had, followed by the driest few months you'd ever had, and then June was the hottest month ever recorded, even hotter than any July or August ever recorded in Florida.

No one entirely understands what is bringing about this extreme weather. But I can tell you this—and I've got it on my mind since I just got back from China, and they've been keeping weather records there for 500 years and more. Since the 1400's, the 5 hottest years ever recorded all occurred in the 1990's; 1997 was the hottest year ever recorded. If present temperature trends continue, 1998 will be warmer than 1997 was.

Now, you'll hear a lot of political debate, and the Vice President and I believe that the climate is warming and that we ought to take steps to cool it off and that we can do it without hurting economic growth. Others may disagree. The point I want to make today is I'm going to go back to Washington determined to try to do whatever I can to make sure that you and people like you all over America can be even better prepared, because if we are going to have hotter and hotter and drier and drier

years—and even if we move aggressively to try to combat this climate change, we'll have that for a while—then, when you or other people like you have to face this again, we need to learn from what you've gone through; we need your best advice.

So that's the last thing I want to ask you. I want to ask you for one last shred of citizen service. When this is all over, you need to get together with the groups of people that fought this fire; you need to put your heads together; you need to ask yourself, what specific things could have been done to provide even better preparedness? What do you do when you're fighting three fires in three places at once? What do you do when you have to make choices about what you're going to do? Is there any way to avoid making those kind of choices? What else can we do?

Because we have to believe, based on the evidence of the last decade, that if we get hotter and hotter, and we have periods of more extreme wet followed by periods of more extreme drought, we're going to have more things like this happen. You can help America to deal with this.

And so, when you get some sleep, when you get some rest, when you're absolutely confident this crisis is past, if you've got some ideas, get them to the State, or get them to our FEMA people, because we want to build on what you've done. This has been heroic, but if we

can do anything to prevent these things or to be better prepared the next time because of your experience and your knowledge, I implore you to share it with us, because we have to believe we're facing things like this in the near future.

Finally, let me say, I found, with the help of some of our people who know I'm interested in Scripture, a verse from Isaiah that I think captures what you've all been through. And I'd like to read it to you in closing. Isaiah 57:10: "You were wearied with the length of your way, but you did not say it is hopeless. You find new life for your strength."

And because you did, our country is stronger. Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:15 p.m. at Daytona International Speedway. In his remarks, he referred to Karen Terry, a Palm Coast, FL, resident whose house was saved by firefighters of the Palm Coast Fire Department, one of whom was Randy Holmes, who introduced the President; Gov. Lawton Chiles and Lt. Gov. Buddy MacKay of Florida; Mayor Baron H. Asher of Daytona Beach; R. Stanley Rosevear, chairman, Volusia County Council; Joseph F. Myers, director, Florida Division of Emergency Management; Dominick F. Barbera, vice president, 12th District, International Association of Fire Fighters; Bill Franz, owner, Daytona International Speedway; and President Jiang Zemin of China.

Statement on Senate Action on Internal Revenue Service Reform Legislation

July 9, 1998

I am pleased that the Senate has finally passed bipartisan legislation to reform the IRS and strengthen taxpayer rights. This reform will help my effort to create an IRS that respects

American taxpayers and respects their values. I look forward to signing it into law.