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# Week Ending Friday, January 28, 1994

## Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on the Los Angeles Earthquake in Burbank, California

*January 19, 1994*

***The President.*** Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mayor.

Ladies and gentlemen, first let me say that I always learn something when I come to southern California. Very often in the last 2 years I have come here when things were difficult for people, and I always walk away utterly astonished.

I would like to say two things by way of introduction. First, on behalf of all the people on our Federal team, we want to thank the Mayor and the members of the City Council and city government, the Governor and the State legislators, Senator Boxer, Senator Feinstein, the Members of the United States Congress, the members of the county government, people I have already met with here today. The sense of teamwork here has been truly extraordinary. And I appreciate all of you doing that so much.

When I became President, one of the things I most wanted to do was to give the American people a high level of confidence that their Government at least would work in basic ways and that they could trust us at least to do the basic human things right without regard to party, philosophy, whatever fights we were having over economic policy or anything else in the world, that when the chips were down, the basic things that people were entitled to have that done by their National Government, they would feel that. And I suppose there's no more important area than in an emergency for people to have that kind of feeling.

The second thing I want to say is, I never cease to be amazed by the energy and the optimism, the courage and the constant good humor of so many millions of people in this State against all odds. And I walked the crowds today—through these crowds. I saw public workers that haven't slept more than 2 or 3 hours in 3 days working on the roads, the water lines, the gas lines. We saw countless numbers of people who had lost their homes, who didn't know when they were going to be able to go back to work. We saw children asking us to help get their schools fixed so they could go back to school. I met a man who had saved three homes in his neighborhood, along with a team of firemen. I met a woman who had lost her home—this is unbelievable—lost her home, who said to me, ''You know, I lost my home, and I'm really grateful you folks are coming here to help, but when you go to that meeting this afternoon, I hope you'll just ask everybody to do the right thing.'' She said, ''Ask people not to overcharge us for water. But ask all the people who are hurt not to take advantage of FEMA.'' She said, ''You know, somebody in the rest of this country might get in trouble later this year. And I lost my home, but we're going to do some of this ourselves. And I heard some people who were asking for reimbursement for things that were already broken in their homes.'' And she said, ''We just all ought to do the right thing, and we'll come out okay.'' And so I say to all of you who are elected, you've got a lot to be proud of just in the people that you represent.

The Mayor has already mentioned all the people in the Federal team who came out here, but I would like to thank them. FEMA Director James Lee Witt and Secretary Cisneros, Secretary Peña, the Federal Highway Administrator Rodney Slater, the Deputy Secretary of Commerce David Barram, John Emerson, from my staff, came out here early. All told, we've had about 1,500 Federal personnel in California, Washington, and at the teleregistration center in Denton, Texas, working on this. And as I said, it's really been a joy to work with the local and the State officials. I think we're all about to get the hang of working with each other, but we

hope we don't have another chance to do it very soon.

As you know, I was asked to declare a disaster declaration on the day that the earthquake occurred, and I did that. And we'll be talking later in this meeting about the whole range of Federal services that are available and about the disaster assistance centers that FEMA will set up and how people can access them. I ask all of you who are Federal officials and State officials and county officials and local officials to help us with this.

I looked at those people today, and a lot of those folks are not used to fooling with the Government for anything. They're not used to asking for help, they're not—they can't be charged with the knowledge of what is in a FEMA program, or in an SBA program or some other agency program. We're going to do our very best to make it easy and accessible for them. And they'll talk more about that in a minute. But you can help us a lot, Mayor, all of you can help us a lot by simply telling us if it's reaching people. And when this is all over, Leon Panetta and I have to go back to Washington and figure out how to pay for it—[*laughter*]—and that's our job. But it won't work unless it actually works.

When I was walking up and down those lines today looking at those folks, I thought most of these people are just good hard-working people trying to do the right thing. And it never occurred to them that they would ever have to figure out how to work their way through a maze of any sort of Federal program, whatever. So one of the things that all of you can do to help us is to be good intermediaries, and if it's not working to let us know. If we need to be some place we're not, let us know. And that's, I think, very, very important.

The other point I want to make is that we'll be talking a lot about emergency aid today, but we recognize that it's going to take a good while to finish this work. When I was out at the place where the highway broke down, one of many, I asked how long it would take to fix it. And the highway engineer said, ''Oh, probably about a year.'' And I said, ''Well, what do you have to do to fix it in less time?'' It's not just a question of money, it's also a question of organization. We'll talk more about that today.

I want to make three specific announcements today, but to make this point: This is a national problem, and we have a national responsibility and we will be in it for the long run. This is not something where all of us from the Federal Government just showed up while this is an issue in the headlines, gripping the hearts and emotions of all your countrymen and women who feel for you all the way to the tip of northern Maine and the tip of southern Florida. This is something we intend to stay with until the job is over.

And in that connection, I have been authorized to say that today the Small Business Administration will be releasing enough money to support about $240 million in new low-interest loans to people who qualify for them. We will release $45 million in new funds from the Department of Transportation to support the beginning of all the cleanup and the beginning of the repair movement. You know, there's a lot of, unfortunately, a lot of destruction now that has to be done on those roads before the construction can start. So that will accelerate that process.

And the third thing I want to say is that as soon as we get good cost estimates, and the Governor and the Mayor have given us some today, but as soon as we get good cost estimates on what the losses are and what kinds of things fall within the responsibility of the Federal Government, we will then see how much money we now have already appropriated for disasters. And then, along with your congressional delegation, I expect to ask the Congress for an emergency supplemental appropriation for California as soon as the Congress returns on January the 25th. And I believe the Congress will do the right thing. And I want to tell you that this is something I think the California delegation will be absolutely united on. And we've already had the conversations with them. I'm grateful that so many members of the delegation are here today.

Let me just say one final thing. I have been asked also by several people, by the Mayor, the Governor, the Senators among others today, about the matching requirement. Generally, in any emergency, there's a 25-percent match requirement which the Federal Government can waive—can be waived

so that the match requirement goes down to 10 percent for State and local contribution to disaster assistance. I wish I could just come here today and tell you that I could waive that. We waived it in the Midwest flood, when we had the floods earlier this year. We had a 500-year flood, the worst flood that we hope it only comes along every 500 years. I think you have a very strong case for waiver, but before we can approve it, under the law we have to have a realistic assessment of what the costs are, because the criteria established by Congress for waiver is that the burdens on the State and local resources will be too great to reasonably bear, given the other problems. Now, if you look at the economic problems that California and southern California have had alone in the last 4 years, I don't think it will be too difficult for you to make that case. But it is not legally possible for me to say until I see the numbers and the arguments. So you have to make the case, we will work with you to help you make that case. But that's a commitment I can't make today until we see the evidence under the law.

We will proceed with the emergency supplemental. And I'd like to spend the rest of the meeting just sort of listening to what's going on, what the problems are, because when I leave here today, I want to have a clear sense that we have our act together and that when we go back to Washington we'll be able to do our part there while you're doing your part here.

And the last point I want to make, again, is that we have no intention, none, of letting this be a short-term thing. We will stay with you until this job is finished. Thank you very much.

[*At this point, Gov. Pete Wilson, Senator Dianne Feinstein, and Senator Barbara Boxer thanked the administration for their response and discussed efforts being made to assist victims and repair damage. Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan outlined areas of concern, and Dick Andrews, director of the office of State emergency services, discussed the response efforts of Federal, State, and local governments. James Lee Witt, Director of FEMA, explained how disaster assistance centers provide temporary housing and financial assistance to victims. Mayor Riordan then invited the President to comment.*]

***The President.*** Well, I would like to ask just—I think the audience would like to know, and I know Dick's going to announce later where they are, because the local folks have decided where the disaster assistance centers should be sited, but how many will there be? And we talked earlier about whether there will be a mobile center, too, to go to the people who may have lost their cars, for example, in the earthquake. And how long will it take people to get checks for their personal needs, those that lost all sources of income and have to have some money just to live, how long will it take before those checks will actually be in their hands after they apply?

[*Mr. Andrews explained that additional disaster assistance centers will be opened to help with the large volume of applicants, as well as mobile centers that will travel around the area to assist in the application process. Director Witt explained that because of improvements in the process, applicants are receiving assistance checks faster than in previous years.*]

***The President.*** Maybe I should wait on this, but I don't know when the appropriate time is. When I was working the crowds today, a lot of children asked me about the schools. Apparently there are a whole lot of schools that are affected, and the kids are out of school. How long will it take to get any assistance to them, and how does that work?

[*At this point, Sidney Thompson, superintendent of schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, discussed the condition of the southern California school system and the efforts being made to reopen. Shirley Mattingly, head of emergency services for Los Angeles, stated that Federal, State, and local governments will continue to work together. Dan Waters, head of the department of water and power, spoke about the efforts to restore water and power. Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich detailed the damage in the Santa Clara Valley, and Congressman Elton Gallegly addressed the damage in Ventura County and requested that the area be*

*declared a disaster. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros discussed solutions for providing temporary and permanent housing to victims. Congressman Esteban Edward Torres asked the President if fact sheets could be written in other languages. Mayor Judy Abdul of Santa Monica expressed concern that her heavily damaged city will not receive adequate funding, and Secretary Cisneros assured her that the money will be distributed based on the extent of damage.*]

***The President.*** I just want to echo that, if I might. I just asked Mr. Panetta to come down here to talk about it. Right now, all we can do is put out this emergency relief and programs that already exist; that is, until Congress acts, that's all we can do. So you'll get something now, and if it turns out to be inadequate, then when we put the supplemental appropriation together, it will be based on a showing of need by community. It will be irrespective of size or allocation or anything else. So when that program goes through, all you have to do is make sure that we got the right evidence, and then we'll be able to proceed on that basis.

[*At this point, Councilwoman Jackie Goldberg of Hollywood discussed the lack of storage facilities and housing in her district. Jackie Tatum, president, recreation and parks commission of L.A., and Gary Squires, general manager, L.A. housing department, offered their cooperation in providing temporary and permanent housing to victims. Yvonne Burke, head of the county board of supervisors, commented on mutual aid and the coordinated efforts of various government agencies. Vicki Howard, chair of the Ventura County board of supervisors, requested two disaster assistance centers in her county. OMB Director Leon Panetta assured participants that the Government has sufficient funds to provide immediate assistance. Chief of Police Willie Williams and Sheriff Sherman Block addressed public safety. Kathleen Brown, California State treasurer, discussed the damage to public buildings and offered her cooperation in financing the repair of buildings and bridges. Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña commented on the efforts to repair the transportation system, and Senator Watson requested that helicopters be supplied to transport patients to less crowded hospitals. Small Business Administrator Erskine Bowles discussed programs to provide loans to victims, and California insurance commissioner John Garamendi requested the Federal Government's help in rebuilding homes and businesses and suggested a national disaster insurance program. Mayor Riordan then invited the President to respond.*]

***The President.*** Well first, Mayor, let me thank you for hosting the meeting and for inviting me out. I was sitting—I actually got quite a number of good ideas today. I'm not sure the best idea didn't come from Art Torres when he said we needed to give every elected official a fact sheet on all these programs in all the appropriate languages, because then all of you can go out and strengthen your own position by making sure that it works. And I think that's important; that's a great idea.

The second thing I'd like to do is just thank you for the kind words you said about all the people that are here that came from the Federal Government. As I was looking there, from my Federal Highway Administrator Mr. Slater to my Budget Director Mr. Panetta to James Lee Witt to Secretary Peña, Secretary Cisneros, Mr. Bowles, and down to David on the end, starting with David Barran and looking around the other table, these people have something very unusual in Federal officials, they actually had years of experience in the fields in which they're working before I appointed them to the jobs that they hold. It makes a huge difference, and I hope it turns out to be a precedent in the future.

Let me just say one other thing. Every month when the economic reports come in at the White House and I see that interest rates are down, investments up, home mortgage delinquencies were at a 19-year low the month before last, and all these jobs have been created in the country, I ask everybody the same question: When is this going to start affecting California? And the thing that worried me most about the earthquake, beyond the terrible human tragedies involved, was the prospect that this might delay what we were beginning to see, which is the economic recovery beginning to take hold in California.

Now, one of three things can happen now: This earthquake can make your situation worse, it can have no impact, or it can actually make it better. And you're going to have to decide. We have a couple of responsibilities in that regard at the national level. The first thing we've got to do is to get this money out in a hurry.

We'll work with you on that, both the emergency money and that which comes in the supplemental. That will have a positive economic impact which at least will partially offset the negative things which have occurred in the short run.

The second thing we have to do is to make sure that structurally nothing happens. For example, I thought what Senator Watson said about looking at the different road routes was an interesting thing. You have got to figure out how to make sure you don't lose a single job on this. And as Rodney Slater pointed out to me earlier, you also ship a lot of produce and other products out of California on the highways. And we can't help that. And you can't do that by mass transit. They're still going to have to get on a truck and go. So you have to figure that out. And whatever we're supposed to do to help you do that, we've got to do.

The third thing I want to say is, we will do whatever we can that is legally possible working with Chairman Panetta here to accelerate the funds and to reduce the bureaucratic burdens of moving on this highway construction. But I would urge you, as we talked at the site today, to consider things like 7-day work weeks, 24-hour-a-day construction where the neighbors will permit it. Things that will actually put more people from southern California to work.

If you build these roads quicker than you normally would, you will by definition, have to hire more people than you normally would in a short period of time which could actually give you a little bit of economic boost when you desperately need it. So we will try to help you, but I want you to come up with a plan to tell us how you want to do it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. at the Hollywood-Burbank Airport. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

## The President's Radio Address

*January 22, 1994*

Good morning. This week we saw how events beyond our control can test the courage and fortitude of our people.

For many in the eastern half of our Nation, life is beginning to return to normal after the harshest stretch of winter in memory. And in southern California, there was another kind of disaster. I went to Los Angeles and saw the devastation that can occur in just a matter of moments in an earthquake. Freeways were crumbled, homes were destroyed, lives were shattered.

But even in this kind of adversity, or maybe even because of it, our people have become more determined. We've seen neighbor helping neighbor and total strangers performing acts of quiet heroism. In addition to Federal funds we've pledged, our recovery efforts are being coordinated on the site by the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency James Lee Witt and HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros, who are looking for more ways to help the quake's victims.

Los Angeles will come back. Together, with the people of Los Angeles, we'll help to make that happen. That's the American way. At every crucial moment in our history, our people have somehow found the courage, the will, and the way to come together in the face of a challenge and to meet it head on. For the last year, we've been doing just that here in Washington.

It was one year ago this week that I took office as your President. The challenges before us were many. We faced a debt that has been mortgaging our future; we were burdened by the cynicism created when Government does wrong by people who do right.

For two decades, the middle class had been working longer and harder just to hold its ground with stagnant wages. Seemingly secure jobs were lost and, along with declining wages, people lost the security of stable and reliable health insurance.

Well, after one year, the challenges aren't gone, but together we are surmounting many of them. We've moved to offer opportunity, challenge our people to assume more respon-