AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Q. Happy Valentine's Day, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, sir.

[*A participant described how after days of working, the crew working on the dikes began needing rest and that they had asked for help on radio and television and the community response was to have 100 new workers within the hour.*]

The President. Thank you. Now, there are two over there. Two people over here. There are two over there. You can stay now. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you for coming to Woodland, Mr. President. I'm one of your supporters that writes you letters from Woodland, although you probably never see them.

The President. Keep them coming.

Q. One of my concerns is the possibility that Congress could close down the Government in March—will that interfere with the help needed for this area?

The President. Well, first of all, I don't think that's going to happen. And I believe that the leaders have made it pretty clear that we don't think that's going to happen. And I believe that we will pass the legislation necessary to—the Congress can't act on it until we draw it up. We have to get up the supplemental appropriation necessary to provide the funds here. But as soon as we know it, what they are, we have—you know, it's going to take us a while because we can't keep—we want to do it all at once. But I believe that as soon as we know the Congress will act appropriately. I wouldn't worry about that. I think they'll take care of it.

I thought there was somebody else. Nobody else? Okay.

Do you have a question, young lady? You want to ask a question? She had her hand up. Do you want to ask a question? Do you want to say something? I don't blame you, that's the right thing to do.

Q. Mr. President, she wants to wish you a Happy Valentine's Day.

The President. See, I had to have valentines with my little girl last night. So I need a valentine today.

Thank you very much.

[*Mr. Anderson said they had run out of time, and thanked all the participants for coming.*]

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The roundtable began at 11:20 a.m. in the bay of the Woodland city hall/fire station.

Remarks to Workers and Volunteers at the Flood Wall in Portland, Oregon

February 14, 1996

Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Jim McKune, for your fine words and, even more, for your fine work.

I want to say on behalf of all Americans, having had the opportunity now to fly over the areas of Oregon and Washington which were damaged by the flood and many of which are still under water, our country has been watching you and pulling for you and praying for you. We have a lot of admiration for the incredible work that has been done, and we're proud of the contributions made by all the groups and all the individuals who have worked so hard.

I want to thank especially, on behalf of the Federal Government, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and its Director, James Lee Witt, who is here with me today; the Corps of Engineers, who used their night scopes to make sure the dikes along the Columbia were holding strong; the Secretary of Transportation Federico Peña, who is also here today. I want to thank the National Guard which has done about everything it could to help. And I understand they even air-dropped hay to cattle cut off by water on Sauvie Island.

I want to congratulate and thank Bill Long and Steve Barrett for the tour I just got of the wall and the work they did to build it and all those who did it so well. And let me say a special word of appreciation also to Governor Kitzhaber and my good friend, Mayor Katz; Senator Hatfield and Senator Wyden, and Congressman DeFazio and Congressman Bunn. We're going to need them all in the next few weeks because we don't have enough money right now in the Treasury to meet all the demands for the problems that Oregon and Washington and your neighbors in Idaho have gone through, and we're going to have to go back to Congress and

ask for a little help. But I'm sure it will be there. And I thank them for their support.

I want to say a special word of thanks, too, to the United States Marine Corps members who worked on this wall. I understand some of them worked all night long.

I won't keep you here long. I just wanted to come here and listen, and in a few moments we'll be going to kind of a roundtable where I'll be hearing about where you are now in the flood recovery efforts, and getting some suggestions about what else needs to be done. But I do want to point out something. If you look at this wall behind us, it seems to me that it is a symbol of what our country does when everybody pulls together and works together and forgets about their differences and focuses their attention and their hearts and their minds.

I understand it was exactly a week ago when Mayor Katz learned that the seawalls might be no match for the river, and that you would have to get an emergency wall up before the river was expected to crest on Thursday night. Crews worked overnight, but there were too few of them for such a big job, and without outside help, clearly the wall couldn't have been ready. So the mayor called on the people of Portland. I've had enough experience with the mayor to know that she's hard to turn down, but with the aid of the river coming down, I suppose that focused the attention of the citizens.

Within minutes, 1,000 men and women from all over the area cast aside what they were doing to come to build the wall, to hammer the boards, to wrap them with plastic, to pile the rock, to pass sandbags hand to hand. Restaurants donated food, carpenters lent equipment, AmeriCorps volunteers—young people learning construction skills—put their education to work, and, as I said, there were even 60 marines who pitched in and finished the wall on time. When the river finally crested, it was about where you built the wall.

I have seen similar stories of courage and teamwork all around this State. We know that a lot of the places hit by this flood were in very small towns and rural areas, places that often get overlooked but places that are really the backbone of our Nation, places from Tillamook County, where dairy farmers sought to save their cows, to Sherman County, where wheat farmers saved the battle of their fields, to Marion County, where kids volunteered around the clock to help in shelters. There are individual heroes everywhere: A tugboat crew rescuing a man stranded on top of his house; a police officer jumping into a debris-filled river to save a life; rescue workers evacuating people from their flooded homes; neighbors helping neighbors move cattle to higher ground.

But I also think we know that all of these individuals together really is what made this such an extraordinary, remarkable experience. This wall will never obscure the triumph that the people who lost their homes and their lives in the Pacific Northwest—there were four lives lost, dozens of people injured, thousands more evacuated, a lot of farmland was ruined, a lot of livestock was destroyed. That is a tragedy. It can never be obscured. The roads, the homes, the businesses, the powerlines that were swept away in the mudslides, the avalanches and the wash-outs, they are many.

And let me say to all of you, the people who experienced these losses, a lot of you have rallied to their side in the last couple of days, and I applaud you for that. But I can tell you, from years of experience long before I became President, as a Governor with whole communities flooded out and whole towns leveled by tornadoes, the going will get tough again for these people in a week or 2 weeks or 3 weeks. Many of them are almost in shock now. But they will have to come to grips with the dimensions of their losses.

And so I ask you all, everybody who put a shoulder to build this wall and everybody who has done anything else in the last few days, be on the lookout for your friends and neighbors for the next few weeks, because a lot of them will have to come to grips with enormous personal loss and anxiety and pain, and they will need you then as well.

I want to thank you for doing your part, for pulling together. You will have our help, I assure you of that, in the job of cleaning up and rebuilding. And we will help you until it is finished. Today, I'm going to survey the damage, as I said, talk with Members of your congressional delegation, with your State and

local officials, with the citizens who are dealing with this. We want to know what more we at the national level can do to help.

I want you to understand that I know that this is not just an emergency for a few days or a week. We have been committed—we are still working on the hurricanes that hit Florida years ago. We have continued to work on the terrible floods that hit the Middle West a couple of years ago. We are trying to finish the work of dealing with the aftermath of the earthquake and the fires that hit California. We know that we have to be your partners until the complete work of rebuilding the lives, the economy, and the communities that were damaged by this flood is over. And I look forward to that.

When I became President, one of the things I promised myself I would do is to at least see that the Federal Government did a good job when disaster struck. I had lived in a State which had the highest per capita incidents of tornadoes in America, and I know what it's like when you need help and it's not there.

I am proud of the fact that, where it used to take a month or more for families who were hurt in disasters to get checks, now you can call an 800 number and get it within days. Already more than 3,500 Oregonians have registered for help, and the first checks were mailed to them today.

The Small Business Administration will do everything in its power to get Oregon's small business communities up and running again. And I am pleased to announce today emergency grants from other Government agencies. The Department of Transportation is today committing $10 million to help repair highways damaged by the flood. The Department of Housing and Urban Development is speeding $10.3 million for community development and housing assistance. The Department of Labor is providing $2 million in emergency funds for dislocated workers.

And today, we are opening two disaster recovery centers in Tillamook and Clackamas Counties. Residents can go to the center and meet with representatives of all the Federal and State agencies that are taking part in the recovery. So those who can't get everything they want or need over the 800 number will be able to go in and deal with someone face to face. I know that it takes time to get this done. But let me say again, we can do it.

I hope you will never forget this wall behind me, and goodness knows, I hope you never need it again. But I hope you will always remember for as long as you live what the people of Portland did in one remarkable day. And I hope that all of us will find in our minds and hearts the wisdom and strength to be a little more like the people of Portland were on that one day every day of the year. If we had that kind of cohesion, that kind of common commitment, we'd really be in pretty good shape.

When I was up in Washington a couple of hours ago, I went to the home of man, 70 years old, hard of hearing, lost everything he had in his home including his hearing aid. And all he did the whole time I saw him—he and his wife were there and their two daughters had come in, their granddaughter trying to help them deal with the aftermath of losing everything in a home they had lived in for decades—and all he did was crack jokes the whole time I was there—[*laughter*]—trying to keep everybody else in a good humor.

And he said, ''You know, it's amazing how all these total strangers showed up to help me.'' He said, ''People were going down into my basement, which I turned into an indoor swimming pool—[*laughter*]—and really risking getting hurt pretty seriously trying to help me save the few little things I've accumulated in my life.'' And he said, ''I'm real grateful, but I just wish we could all be that way every day.'' And that's a pretty good pearl of wisdom from a man who, at the age of 70, is looking at a future without anything that he had just a couple of days ago.

Let me close by asking you to remember that today is your State's birthday. On February 14, 1857, the people of the Oregon Territory decided their bond to each other was strong enough to sustain a State. The spirit that brought statehood was alive and well again here last week. May that spirit heal the wounds of recent days, and may it continue to grow and flourish for another 139 years and beyond.

Thank you, happy birthday, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m. in Waterfront Park. In his remarks, he referred to Jim McKune, volunteer carpenter; Bill Long, supervisor, bureau of maintenance; Steve Barrett, structural engineer; Gov. John A. Kitzhaber of Oregon; and Mayor Vera Katz of Portland.

Statement on the Interim Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses

February 14, 1996

I am pleased to accept the interim report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses. Dr. Joyce Lashof and the Committee members have made an impressive start on helping to ensure that we are doing all we can both to determine the causes of the illnesses Gulf war veterans are suffering from, and to provide effective medical care to those in need.

I am pleased that the Committee's interim report recognizes the serious efforts underway in the administration to restore these men and women to good health. I know that the Departments of Defense, Health and Human Services, and Veterans Affairs will review the recommendations contained in this report and will continue the research, outreach, and medical programs needed to improve the lives of Gulf war veterans and their families.

I have asked Secretary William Perry, Secretary Donna Shalala, and Secretary Jesse Brown to develop an action plan for implementing the recommendations in the interim report. I am also asking the Departments to continue their record of full cooperation with the Advisory Committee as it prepares its final report over the next 10 months.

As I said last March when announcing my intention to establish the Advisory Committee, 5 years ago we relied on these Gulf war veterans to fight for our country; they must now be able to rely on us to try to determine why they are ill and to help restore them to full health. We are all indebted to the Presidential Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses for its contribution to this critical task. I look forward to reviewing their final recommendations later this year.

Remarks on Departure from Boise, Idaho

February 14, 1996

[*The President's remarks are joined in progress.*]

On the ground, we are doing what needs to be done not only now, in the next few days, but for as long as it takes, until the people there are back on their feet and back to normal.

Let me also say that, as I'm sure all of you know, this has been a long day for me, but it's been a very rewarding one, even though I've seen a lot of sad and heartbreaking things. And not only in my conversations here but in my trip to Oregon and to Washington, I've seen a lot of loss, but I've also seen what happens when the American people work together in a spirit of genuine community and when people exhibit individual acts of courage and kindness that seem to overwhelm the dimensions of even the worst tragedy. And I have seen that as well.

I think the lesson that I have learned more than any other in 3 years and a few days as President is that when this country works together, we never lose. And when we permit ourselves to be divided, we often wind up being less than we ought to be.

I thank again everybody here in the northwestern part of our country for what I have seen today, for the work that they have done. And I want to say again specifically to the people of Idaho, I will follow up on the suggestions that we have gotten. I look forward to working with you. And I hope, as the members of your congressional delegation suggested to me in there, Senator Kempthorne in particular, that maybe the model of cooperation that we've seen in dealing with this flood can become a model for other kinds of cooperation in the future, so that Americans everywhere feel that their Government is a partner in a common endeavor to help individuals and families and communities make the most of their God-given capacities.

Thank you. Good luck, and we'll be at work on this immediately. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 7:50 p.m. at the Idaho National Guard Ramp at Boise