AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

The President. Yes. Yes.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:40 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Larry Gene Ashbrook, gunman who attacked a prayer group at Wedgewood Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX, on September 15.

Teleconference Remarks With Governors From States Struck by Hurricane Floyd and Remarks to Disaster Relief Workers and an Exchange With Reporters

September 16, 1999

The President. Thank you, Governor. Let me just say, there may be some people who question, when this is over, whether we did the right thing to recommend all the evacuations. But now that we have this technology at the National Weather Center, we have to act on it. And we can all be grateful to God that this stormed turned away and didn't hurt us as bad as we feared. But I think that this is a terrific test, even though it was extremely burdensome, because some day our ability to do this evacuation will save hundreds of people's lives.

And I just want to thank you, Governor. I'm glad that all those people, in the end, didn't have to go. But I'm glad we did it because we've got the technology now, we knew what was likely to happen, and I just wanted to thank you. And I hope that all your people also believe that some day our ability to do this will save hundreds of lives. And I thank you very much.

[*A this point, Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina discussed three topics: the extent of hurricane damage in his State, especially flooding; the need for the President to declare a major disaster for North Carolina; and Federal aid in improving and coordinating evacuation routes.*]

The President. Thank you, Governor. Let me say that on the third point you made, we'll do everything we can to help you. On the second point, we'll give you the declaration you seek today. And it's unusual, but it's fairly unusual for your wife to be waste-deep in water in somebody's home, too. [*Laughter*] So we'll try to help as much as we can. And I regret that your have had to go through this after what you went through with Fran. And we'll do everything we can to help you.

[*A this point, Gov. James Gilmore of Virginia described problems with flooding, especially concerning water treatment facilities. He also described evacuation efforts, high winds affecting electric power service, and ask the President to declare a major disaster for Virginia.*]

The President. Thank you, Governor. We will do that, and in particular, we want to help you with these emergency protective services that you will need. I'm very concerned about the water filtration plants and the other problems you have. We'll do everything we can to help.

[*A this point, Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt thanked the President and the Federal agencies for their response to Hurricane Floyd.*]

The President. You know, everywhere I go in the country that's the one thing nobody criticizes the Federal Government about. [*Laughter*] And I thank you very much, all of you. I'm very, very—I'm proud of what we've been able to do over these last few years to try to make sure that when something like this happens, we're always ready, and we do the best we can. And we help people. And I'm very proud of you.

This is something that adds a lot to the confidence of people, when they go through what we've just heard about here. Thank you. Thank you, Governor Gilmore, Governor Hodges, Governor Hunt, thank you all very much. And thank you in the Hurricane Center.

[*Following the teleconference, the President made the following remarks to disaster relief workers.*]

The President. Thank you very much. You can all hear that I can't speak very well today. I just came back from New Zealand. It's about a 20-hour trip, and I lost my voice on the airplane, and I apologize.

But let me begin by thanking all of you and Secretary Daley, Secretary Slater, my long-time friend, James Lee Witt. You have

no idea—perhaps you do—but you probably can't imagine how many times over the last 6½ years an American citizen has come up to me all over this country and thanked me for the emergency work that we do. And I always try to tell them that it's not me; it's you.

But when I became President, because I had been a Governor and because we had dealt with a lot of emergencies, I promised myself, as well as the American people, I would do everything I could to organize a team and give them the resources necessary to do what has to be done. And you have all performed superbly. So the first thing I just wanted to do is come by here and thank you very much.

Now, as all of you know, even though this hurricane was not as bad as we had feared, we've got a few problems out there. And I've just been briefed by the team here, members of the Cabinet, and I talked to Governor Hodges, Governor Hunt and Governor Gilmore. For several communities in the Carolinas and Virginia, the storm has brought very severe flooding, there are hundreds of thousands of people without power. There's been a lot of property destruction, and in the case of Virginia, the flooding of at least one, perhaps two, water filtration systems.

Governor Hunt said today that the North Carolina flooding is perhaps the worst in history. So, today, I'm releasing another $528 million to FEMA to address the immediate needs of the victims of Hurricane Floyd and other disasters; issuing an emergency declaration for Virginia to cover debris removal and provide funding for emergency protective measures, including fire, rescue, and law enforcement officials; and a major disaster declaration for North Carolina to provide individual assistance to those directly affected.

In addition, we're working with officials from South Carolina to assess what else we can do there. And we're keeping in close contact with State and local officials in Maryland and the other coastal States, now that the storm has moved on.

Again, I'd like to say that I want to commend the citizens from all the States who heeded the warnings to move safely away, under difficult circumstances. I'm sure there will be those that second-guess us now, because Florida was not hit, and we moved a lot of people out, and there were plenty of people that moved out of other places. The storm wasn't as bad as we thought.

But we now have technology that imposes on us the responsibility of telling people what we think is going to happen. And there is no question that because we can do this, thousands and thousands of lives will be saved. Governor Hunt said today, there is no question in his mind that lives were saved in North Carolina, because of the people who did evacuate.

So while we thank goodness that the storm was not as bad as we had feared, I just want to reaffirm my absolute conviction that the people in the emergency services work did the right thing to issue the warnings, did the right thing to recommend evacuation. And we got a lot of good practice here, which is going to save a large number of lives in the future.

I also would just like to say, in closing, that the United States, at times like this, always pulls together. There are a lot of people out there today without power; there are a lot of people with their homes flooded; a lot of people feeling fairly desperate. And I know I speak for all of you when I say, we don't want them to feel alone. We will do everything we possibly can to be good, loyal, helpful neighbors to them and get them through this.

Thank you very much.

Coastal Development

Q. Mr. President, with Federal flood insurance, is the Government encouraging coastal development at a time when we may be in a new cycle of more dangerous and more frequent storms?

[*Federal Emergency Management Agency Director James Lee Witt answered the question.*]

Agricultural Assistance

Q. Mr. President, will there be any central hurricane relief for farmers whose crops have been damaged, Mr. President? There seems to be a shortfall in the hurricane relief they've gotten.

The President. Well, that's one thing that Governor Hunt asked me about yesterday,

and I am looking at that, because the general disaster assistance performers tends to be targeted to the big, grow-crop places in the Middle West primarily—not exclusively—as is natural, because that's where a lot of the big dollar-volume losses have been.

So we've got to go back and look, now, and see what we're doing, because we've got not only this flooding, but also, in this part of the country we've had the biggest drought that these farmers had ever had. So most of them—not most but a large number of farmers from Maryland north, in this country, had lost their crops before the flood came. So we need to look at that, and we will now go back, obviously, down to the Carolinas, and go upward and see where we are. And I'll do my best to work with Congress to get appropriate relief for them.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. at the Federal Emergency Management Agency headquarters. In his opening remarks, he referred to Gov. Jim Hodges of South Carolina.

Statement on the Announcement of the Gates Millennium Scholarships

September 16, 1999

I applaud the leadership and foresight shown by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation today with its $1 billion pledge to provide full college scholarships for minority students in the fields of education, math, science, and engineering. These landmark scholarships will help address important needs: the need to encourage young people to become teachers, the need to ensure that our children are well-prepared in math and science, and the need to open the doors of higher learning to all students. The Gates Millennium Scholarships remind us what vital role philanthropies can play in American life and how urgent it is for all of us to invest now in our Nation's young people.

Statement on Robert E. Rubin's Acceptance of the Chairman of the Board Position at the Local Initiatives Support Corporation

September 16, 1999

I am pleased that Bob Rubin has accepted the job as Chairman of the Board of LISC. This service is consistent with his longstanding commitment to bring economic opportunities to America's most underserved communities. His selection is not only a tremendous boost for LISC but also for those who advocate community economic development to ensure that all Americans share in our economic prosperity.

Statement on Transmitting the Montreal Protocol on Substances That Deplete the Ozone Layer to the Senate

September 16, 1999

Today, on the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer, I am transmitting to the Senate for its advice and consent an amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.

Preservation of the ozone layer is critical to life on Earth. The Montreal Protocol has led to a dramatic reduction in the production and use of ozone-depleting chemicals, and scientists report that the ozone layer is on its way to recovery. The amendment I transmit today builds on this progress, in part by strengthening measures to promote compliance with the Protocol. I urge the Senate to approve this amendment.

It also is critical that the United States support efforts by developing countries to phase out their use of ozone-depleting chemicals. Regrettably, appropriations measures now before Congress would deny funds I have requested for the Montreal Protocol Fund, which has a long record of success in these efforts. I call on Congress to approve the funds needed to help preserve the Earth's protective ozone layer.