

better prepared for any challenge of nature or act of evil men that could threaten our people.

The United States Congress also has an important oversight function to perform. Congress is preparing an investigation, and I will work with members of both parties to make sure this effort is thorough.

In the life of this Nation, we have often been reminded that nature is an awesome force and that all life is fragile. We're the heirs of men and women who lived through those first terrible winters at Jamestown and Plymouth, who rebuilt Chicago after a great fire and San Francisco after a great earthquake, who reclaimed the prairie from the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Every time, the people of this land have come back from fire, flood, and storm to build anew and to build better than what we had before. Americans have never left our destiny to the whims of nature, and we will not start now.

These trials have also reminded us that we are often stronger than we know—with the help of grace and one another. They remind us of a hope beyond all pain and death, a God who welcomes the lost to a house not made with hands. And they remind us that we're tied together in this life, in this Nation, and that the despair of any touches us all.

I know that when you sit on the steps of a porch where a home once stood or sleep on a cot in a crowded shelter, it is hard to imagine a bright future. But that future will come. The streets of Biloxi and Gulfport will again be filled with lovely homes and the sound of children playing. The churches of Alabama will have their broken steeples mended and their congregations whole. And here in New Orleans, the streetcars will once again rumble down St. Charles, and the passionate soul of a great city will return.

In this place, there's a custom for the funerals of jazz musicians. The funeral procession parades slowly through the streets, followed by a band playing a mournful dirge as it moves to the cemetery. Once the casket has been laid in place, the band breaks into a joyful "second line," symbolizing the triumph of the spirit over death. Tonight the gulf coast is still coming through the dirge, yet we will live to see the second line.

Thank you, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:02 p.m. at Jackson Square. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; and Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Service

September 16, 2005

On this Day of Prayer and Remembrance, our Nation remains in the shadow of a storm that departed 2 weeks ago. We're humbled by the vast and indifferent might of nature and feel small beside its power. We commend the departed to God. We mourn with those who mourn, and we ask for strength in the work ahead.

The destruction is immense, covering a city, a coastline, a region. Yet the hurt always comes down to one life, one family. We've seen the panic of loved ones separated from each other, the lonely pain of people whose earthly possessions were swept away, and the uncertainty of men and women and children driven away from the lives they knew. Many did not survive the fury of the storm. Many who did ask, "Why?" and wonder, "What comes next?"

In this hour of suffering, we're prayerful. In a wounded region, so many place their faith in a God who hears and helps. And so many are bringing their grief to a Savior acquainted with grief. Our Nation joins with them to pray for comfort and sorrow, for the reunion of separated families, and a holy rest for the ones who died.

Through prayer, we look for ways to understand the arbitrary harm left by this storm and the mystery of undeserved suffering. And in our search, we're reminded that God's purposes are sometimes impossible to know here on Earth. Yet even as we're humbled by forces we cannot explain, we take comfort in the knowledge that no one is ever stranded beyond God's care. The Creator of wind and water is also the source of even a greater power, a love that can redeem the worst tragedy, a love that is stronger than death.

In this hour of suffering, our Nation is thankful. We have been inspired by acts of courage and goodness: Coast Guardsmen and military personnel reaching out of helicopters and lifting victims from rooftops; firefighters wading through mud and debris to search for victims and survivors; doctors and nurses defying danger so their patients might live. Many of those who saved others lost their own homes and were separated from their own families. And many stories of heroism and rescue will never be told because they are known to God alone.

We're thankful for a spirit, seen across the gulf coast, that faces the worst and chooses to hope. We're thankful as well for the many ordinary citizens who heard the cries of neighbors and answered them. Across the country, Americans saw the hungry and gave them something to eat, saw the thirsty and gave them something to drink, saw strangers and invited them in. One man who was rescued and given shelter after the storm said, "I didn't think there was so much love in the world."

In this hour of suffering, our Nation is also mindful of the work ahead. Through this tragedy, great duties have come to our Nation. The destruction of this hurricane was beyond any human power to control, but the restoration of broken communities and disrupted lives now rests in our hands. And we accept this responsibility not as a burden or a chore but as an opportunity to serve our fellow Americans, as they would do for us.

This task will measure our unity as a people. Americans of every race and religion were touched by this storm, yet some of the greatest hardship fell upon citizens already facing lives of struggle, the elderly, the vulnerable, and the poor. And this poverty has roots in generations of segregation and discrimination that closed many doors of opportunity. As we clear away the debris of a hurricane, let us also clear away the legacy of inequality. Let us deliver new hope to communities that were suffering before the storm. As we rebuild homes and businesses, we will renew our promise as a land of equality and decency. And one day, Americans will look back at the response to Hurricane Katrina and say that our country grew not only in prosperity but in character and justice.

On this National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, we pledge ourselves to the demanding work of revival and renew the faith and hope that will carry that work to completion. In the worst of storms and in the rush of flood waters, even the strongest faith can be tested. Yet the Scriptures assure us, "Many waters cannot quench love; neither can the floods drown it."

So now we go forward, confident in the good heart of America and trusting that even among the ruins, the love of God remains at work.

May God bless and keep the souls of the lost. May His love touch all those in need, and may He always watch over the United States of America. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. at the Washington National Cathedral.

Proclamation 7930—National POW/MIA Recognition Day, 2005

September 16, 2005

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

In every generation, members of our Armed Forces have answered the call of service in our Nation's hour of need. These patriots have defended our freedom and way of life, triumphed over brutal enemies, and answered the prayers of millions. On National POW/MIA Recognition Day, we honor the Americans who have been prisoners of war and recognize them for enduring unimaginable hardships while serving in military conflicts around the globe. We also remember those who are still missing in action, and we renew our commitment to keep searching until we have accounted for every Soldier, Sailor, Airman, and Marine missing in the line of duty.

On National POW/MIA Recognition Day, the flag of the National League of Families of American Prisoners and Missing in Southeast Asia is flown over the White House, the Capitol, the Departments of State, Defense, and Veterans Affairs, the Selective Service System Headquarters, the National Vietnam