

Remarks by President Barack Obama and Governor Chris Christie After Surveying Damage from Hurricane Sandy in Brigantine, New Jersey

Wednesday, October 31, 2012 Tags: [Hurricane Sandy](#)



Photos from President Obama and Governor Christie's tour of the damage from Hurricane Sandy and stop in Brigantine are posted online here.

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: Good afternoon, everybody. And thank you all for coming today. I want to thank the members who are here as well. And obviously, I want to thank the President.

We spent a significant afternoon together surveying the damage up and down the New Jersey coastline; we were on Marine One together to be able to show the President that personally. I had an opportunity to see it, and we had an opportunity to discuss it at length. And then, going over to the shelter here, being able to meet with folks to have them see the President and his concern, and the concern that all of us have for making sure that things get back to normal as quickly as possible.

We have lots of challenges. One of our challenges now is to get back to normalcy. And so the things we need to do is to make sure that we get power restored as quickly as possible; make sure that people have clean drinking water, and waste water treatment plants are working; hospitals are taken care of the way they need to; and that we get kids back to school.

And so, I discussed all those issues today with the President, and I'm pleased to report that he has sprung into action immediately to help get us those things while we were in the car riding together. So I want to thank him for that. He has worked incredibly closely with me since before the storm hit. I think this is our sixth conversation since the weekend, and it's been a great working relationship to make sure that we're doing the jobs that people elected us to do. And I cannot thank the President enough for his personal concern and compassion for our state and for the people of our state. And I heard it on the phone conversations with him, and I was able to witness it today personally.

And so we're going to continue to work. The state government is here. We're doing what we need to do. We're coordinating with FEMA, and I want to thank Administrator Fugate for being here and for the input he's already had in helping to make our operation even better. And we will move on from here.

What I said yesterday I really mean. I know there has got to be sorrow, and you see that and the President has seen that today in the eyes -- the faces of a lot of the folks he's met. And that sorrow is appropriate; we've suffered some loss. Luckily, we haven't suffered that much loss of life and we thank God for that. But we have suffered losses, and this is the worst storm that I've seen in my lifetime in this state. But we cannot permit that sorrow to replace the

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resilience that I know all New Jerseyans have. And so we will get up and we'll get this thing rebuilt, and we'll put things back together, because that's what this state is all about and always has been all about.

And so for all of you who are here -- and I met a bunch of you today at Brigantine who disregarded my admonition -- (laughter) -- to get the hell out of here -- you're forgiven this time. You are forgiven this time, but not for much longer. We've got to make sure when all of you look around and you see all this destruction, that's fine -- but you know what, all that stuff can be replaced. You look to your right and to your left, to your husband or wife, your son or your daughter -- those are the things that can't be replaced. So I'm glad that we don't have that kind of loss of life to have to deal with.

So I want to thank him for being here today, for bringing his personal attention to it. And it's my honor to introduce to all of you the President of the United States. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, everybody. Let me just make sure that I acknowledge the folks who are here, because they've played an important role in this.

First of all, your congressional delegation -- Senator Bob Menendez, Senator Frank Lautenberg, Congressman Frank LoBiondo, Atlantic County Executive Dennis Levinson, and Brigantine Mayor Philip Guenther.

Obviously, this is a federal, state, and local effort. And the first thing I want to do is just to thank everybody who has been involved in the entire rescue and recovery process. At the top of my list, I have to say that Governor Christie throughout this process has been responsive; he has been aggressive in making sure that the state got out in front of this incredible storm. And I think the people of New Jersey recognize that he has put his heart and soul into making sure that the people of New Jersey bounce back even stronger than before. So I just want to thank him for his extraordinary leadership and partnership.

I want to thank the congressional delegation because part of the reason we're going to be able to respond quickly to all this is because they helped to make sure that FEMA financing was in place, and we're very appreciative of those efforts. And I want to thank Craig Fugate; sometimes people just think FEMA and they don't think the people behind them, but Craig lives and breathes this stuff, making sure that we're providing the help that people so desperately need in these situations.

I want to thank all the first responders who have been involved in this process -- the linesmen, the firefighters, the folks who were in here shuttling out people who were supposed to "get the hell out" and didn't. You've helped to save a lot of lives and a lot of property. And one of the things that you learn in these tragedies is, the first responders -- keep in mind their homes usually are underwater too, or their families have been affected in some way, and yet they make those personal sacrifices to help other people. So we really appreciate them.

I'm just going to make a couple of comments. Number one, and most important, our hearts go out to the families who have lost loved ones. It's true that because of some good preparation, the loss of life was kept lower than it might have been, but for those individual families, obviously their world has been torn apart. And we need to make sure that everybody who has lost a loved one knows they're in our thoughts and prayers -- and I speak for the whole country there.

For those like the people I just had the chance to meet on this block and throughout New Jersey and throughout the region whose lives have been upended, my second message is we are here for you, and we will not forget; we will follow up to make sure that you get all the help that you need until you've rebuilt.

At this point, our main focus is on the states of New Jersey, which got hit harder than anybody; the state of New York, particularly lower Manhattan and Long Island. We are very concerned about some situations in Connecticut as well, and we're still monitoring West Virginia where there are heavy snows in some inaccessible areas. But for the most part, those four states are really bearing the brunt of this incredible storm.

What we've been able to do is to pre-position and stage commodities - water, power generators, ambulances in some cases, food, medical supplies, emergency supplies -- and we have over 2,000 FEMA personnel that are on the ground right now. Their job, now that we're moving out of the search-and-rescue phase, is to make sure that they are going out and talking to individual communities so that people know exactly how they can get the help that they need.

We expedited our emergency declarations for the state of New Jersey and local counties that have been affected. What that means is, is that people can immediately start registering for emergency assistance. And one of the things I want to emphasize to the people of New Jersey and throughout the region: Now that you're safe, your family is safe, but you're trying to figure out where you're going to stay for the next couple of days, et cetera, it's very important that you know that there is help available to you right now, for example, to find rental housing or to be able to pay for some groceries. Over at the community center we saw a young woman who had a newborn, or I guess probably an eight-month old, still needs diapers and formula, and has run out. Those are the kinds of basic supplies and help that we can provide.

If you call 800-621-FEMA -- 800-621-FEMA -- or DisasterAssistance.gov -- if you've got access to the Internet, you can go to DisasterAssistance.gov. What that allows you to do is to register right now so that you can immediately start receiving help. We want to make sure that you get everything that you need.

Just a couple of final points. Obviously, our biggest priority right now is getting power turned back on. We were very pleased that Newark got power yesterday; Jersey City is getting power we believe today. But there are still big chunks of the community, including this community right here, that don't have power. And so it's hard enough cleaning up

debris and dealing with boats that have been upended and roads that are blocked; when people don't have power, though, obviously they're disabled in all sorts of ways and it's hard to get back to normal.

So yesterday, I had a chance to speak to the CEOs of the utilities from all across the country. And a lot of the states that were spared, that were not hard hit, or some states as far away as California, they have pledged to start getting equipment crews, et cetera, here into New Jersey and New York and Connecticut as quickly as possible.

And one of the things that we've been able to do -- just to give you a sense of how this is an all-hands-deck approach -- we're able to get C-17s and C-130s, military transport planes, potentially, to move assets, personnel to speed up the process of getting power up and running as soon as possible.

Our first priority is water filtration plants and some other critical infrastructure in the state; for that, we've got emergency generators. We've got a Navy ship that has some helicopters that can help to move assets around the state as well. And so we're going to be working with Governor Christie's office and local officials to identify what are those critical infrastructure, how can we get what's needed as quickly as possible.

Just a couple of other things that we're concerned about -- one is, as power starts coming back on, we want to make sure that people can also get to work. Obviously, there are a lot of folks in Jersey who work in New York, in the city, and in other places where transportation may be hobbled. One of the things I mentioned to the Governor is the possibility of us using federal assets, military assets, as well as taking inventory of assets from around the country that can be brought in so that we can help people get to their work.

And Governor Christie also mentioned the importance of schools. The sooner we can get our kids back into school, the sooner they're back into a routine; that obviously helps the families and helps the kids as well.

So we're going to have a lot of work to do. I don't want anybody to feel that somehow this is all going to get cleaned up overnight. We want to make sure that people have realistic expectations.

But what I can promise you is that the federal government will be working as closely as possible with the state and local officials, and we will not quit until this is done. And the directive that I have given -- and I said this yesterday, but I will repeat; and I think Craig and others who are working with me right now know I mean it -- we are not going to tolerate red tape. We're not going to tolerate bureaucracy. And I've instituted a 15-minute rule, essentially, on my team: You return everybody's phone calls in 15 minutes, whether it's the mayors', the governors', county officials'. If they need something, we figure out a way to say yes.

As I was just gathering around, I had a chance to talk to some of the young people here who have been volunteering, going up and down the block cleaning up debris. And when we were over at the community center, there was a restaurant owner who, for the last 18 hours, had been cooking meals, just as his contribution to the recovery process. And some of the folks were saying the food was better than they got at home. (Laughter.) You had a 15-year-old young man whose mother was disabled, and he was making sure that she was okay, and taking on extraordinary responsibilities for himself but also for his mom.

And when you see folks like that respond with strength and resilience, when you see neighbors helping neighbors, then you're reminded about what America is all about. We go through tough times, but we bounce back. And the reason we bounce back is because we look out for one another and we don't leave anybody behind.

And so my commitment to the people on this block, the people in this community, and the people of this state is that that same spirit will carry over all the way through until our work is done. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

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Press Contact:
Michael Drewniak
Kevin Roberts
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-6000