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Historical Documents Service/III

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

Internal Transcript

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE KAUI HYATT

Kauai, Hawaii

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you all. Thank you very much. The other part of the story the Governor just told is that in mid-March, Washington was under about two feet of snow, and I wanted everybody to be able to come to Kauai at that very moment. And I hope they will, from all parts of the world, because they need to come back to see what has happened here. (Applause)

I started my morning with an excellent briefing by the Governor and the Mayor and General Richardson, who is here today, who headed up what I think has to be the most remarkable and efficient response effort to a disaster that we have had in our country. I want to congratulate the General and everybody who worked with him. (Applause)

Looking at the slides and film of the destruction wrought by the hurricane this morning, I was reminded again and again by the words of the General or the representatives of FEMA or the Governor or the Mayor as to what you faced just a few months ago, the kind of devastation that wiped out so many of your homes, destroyed essential services, shut down your businesses.

And yet, at the very same time that I was viewing those slides and being reminded so forcefully of what you were up against, I heard story after story of how you responded. Yes, it is true that the federal, state, and county efforts in response, I believe, will become a model as to how governments need to work together and to streamline bureaucracies to get immediately where people are and what their needs are to be met. But the bigger story that comes out of the hurricane is what the people of this island did for themselves and for each other, the spirit of response and reaching out, the opening of arms and hearts that began almost immediately. (Applause)

As I flew over in the helicopter, and I was having areas pointed out to me, I could see in my own mind the difference between what I saw on the slide this morning and what I saw before me now. I heard about the people who showed up at the shelters with their

MORE

chainsaws in hand, ready to go to work as soon as they were able to get out. I heard about the private contractors and the workers from the sugar cane plantations who got ready to get out and clear those roads. I heard about the courageous county workers who worked around the clock for day after day after day. I heard about the people who rushed to the food bank in order to supplement their efforts, and the people who took one another in.

That is the real story of what happened here, and it is that spirit which has rebuilt and will continue to continue the rebuilding of the island, but it is the spirit as much as the beauty that surrounds us that should welcome people from all over the world here.

The lesson of this island's response is not just told in how quickly roads were cleared, utility services restored, schools opened, businesses restarted, all of those tangible pieces of evidence about how you were able to come together. The story is really one of spirit and community, and I wish I could bottle it and take it all over our country. I wish the rest of our states could have some sense of what this state and this island were able to achieve.

As the Governor and the Mayor alluded, we've had our share of natural disasters in America in the last several years, and we're in the middle of another terrible one in our Middle West. We have learned a lot as to how to put back together the infrastructure, how to put the roof back on this beautiful hotel. But we may not have learned as well as you have what we need to do to help heal what is not seen, the people who still are not back to work, the people who are still traumatized by what happened to them. Your efforts here to deal with the heart as well as the hand, to help each other, is what I will take back with me not just tomorrow, but for the rest of my life. (Applause)

I cannot stand here in this hotel without saying a special word to the management and the employees of this Hyatt. This is a visible demonstration of what can be done, putting this hotel back into service, being already over 60 percent occupancy, being told that it will be over 80 percent occupancy next month. Knowing how much hard work went into that and that the employment level are back to where they were before the hurricane, says a lot about the dedication of the Hyatt people and all who worked with them, and I want to thank them for doing this and having us here. (Applause)

As Joanne told you, I was privileged to be here last summer. What she didn't tell you is that her husband took me on a journey that made Jurassic Park look like it was child's play. We hacked our way through somewhere, ending up in a waterfall somewhere

MORE

else, where I had the time of my life, and just think about it all the time, especially at stressful moments. If you ever see an expression on my face on television like I look like I'm not wherever I'm supposed to be, I am here. That's where I am. (Applause)

And my hope and prayer for all of you is that you will remember what you accomplished together, that you will hold in your hearts that sense of togetherness and commitment that cut across all the lines that too often divide us, that put aside the bickering and the problems that make up the daily stuff of life, so that we could focus on what needed to be done immediately, and that that spirit will sustain you as you finish the task before you.

A lot of the work that has already been done can be pointed to -- roofs being put back on. Some of the rest of the work of getting our people back to work, getting people back to our island here, that needs to continue with the same intensity that you've brought to what you've already done the last 10 months.

I want you to know that the President and I will be there with you in spirit. We will be back again in the future, and we want to invite the whole world to come see what you've done. Thank you all very much. (Applause.)

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