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Barack Obama

Address on Hurricane Sandy After ERT Briefings

delivered 29 October 2012, James S. Brady Press Briefing Room



AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio

Hello, everybody. I just received a full briefing from our emergency response teams, including FEMA, and agencies that are going to be helpful in the response and recovery efforts -- the Department of Energy, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

Obviously, everybody is aware at this point that this is going to be a big and powerful storm. And all across the Eastern seaboard, I think everybody is taking the appropriate preparations.

I've spoken to all the governors in all these states. They have issues emergency declarations. Those have been turned around quickly here in the White House. We have prepositioned assets so that FEMA personnel are working closely with state and local governments. We're making sure that food and water and emergency generation is available for those communities that are going to be hardest hit.

We anticipate that the center of the storm is going to land fall sometime this evening. But because of the nature of this storm, we are certain that this is going to be a slow-moving process through a wide swath of the country, and millions of people are going to be affected.



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So the most important message that I have for the public right now is, please listen to what your state and local officials are saying. When they tell you to evacuate, you need to evacuate. Do not delay. Don't pause; don't question the instructions that are being given, because this is a serious storm and it could potentially have fatal consequence if people haven't acted quickly.

The good news is, is that the governors and local officials I think have had a few days of preparation. There's been extraordinarily close coordination between state, federal, and local governments. And so we're confident that the assets are prepositioned for an effective response in the aftermath of the storm.

But keep in mind that for folks who are not following instructions, if you are not evacuating when you've been asked to evacuate, you're putting first responders at danger. We're going to have to have search-and-rescue teams in and around multiple states all at the same time. And although we've got Coast Guard and the Department of Defense all positioned, if the public is not following instructions, that makes it more dangerous for people and it means that we could have fatalities that could have been avoided.

Transportation is going to be tied up for a long time. And probably the most significant impact for a lot of people, in addition to flooding, is going to be getting power back on. We anticipate that there are going to be a lot of trees down, a lot of water. And despite the fact that the power companies are working very closely with their various state officials and local officials to make sure that they are bringing in as many assets as possible and getting those ready in preparation for the storm, the fact is that a lot of these emergency crews are not going to be able to get into position to start restoring power until some of these winds have died down. And because of the nature of this storm, that may take several days.

So the public should anticipate that there's going to be a lot of power outages, and it may take time for that power to get back on. The same is true with transportation; there are going to be a lot of backlogs, and even after the storm has cleared, it's going to take a considerable amount of time for airlines, subways, trains, and so forth, potentially to get back on schedule, depending on the amount of damage that has occurred.

Let me summarize just by saying that I'm extraordinarily grateful for the cooperation of our state and local officials. The conversations that I've had with all the governors indicate that at this point there are no unmet needs. I think everybody is taking this very seriously. We've gotten prepositioned all the resources that we need.

But right now, the key is to make sure that the public is following instructions. For those of you who still need additional information about how to respond, you can go to Ready.gov -- that's Ready.gov. And that website should provide you with all the information that your family needs in terms of how you can prepare for this storm.



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Our thoughts and prayers go out to all the people who are potentially affected. We are extraordinarily grateful for our first responders, because they're going to be working 24/7 around the clock, non-stop. And I want to make sure that our thoughts and prayers go out to all those who may end up be dealing with a very difficult situation over the next several days.

Last point I'll make, though -- this is going to be a big storm. It's going to be a difficult storm. The great thing about America is when we go through tough times like this we all pull together. We look out for our friends. We look out for our neighbors. And we set aside whatever issues we may have otherwise to make sure that we respond appropriately and with swiftness. And that's exactly what I anticipate is going to happen here.

So I want to thank all the federal teams, state and local teams that are in place. I'm confident that we're ready. But I think the public needs to prepare for the fact that this is going to take a long time for us to clean up. The good news is we will clean up and we will get through this.

Question: What about the impact on the election, sir?

President Obama: I am not worried at this point about the impact on the election. I'm worried about the impact on families, and I'm worried about the impact on our first responders. I'm worried about the impact on our economy and on transportation.

The election will take care of itself next week. Right now, our number-one priority is to make sure that we are saving lives, that our search-and-rescue teams are going to be in place, that people are going to get the food, the water, the shelter that they need in case of emergency, and that we respond as quickly as possible to get the economy back on track.

Thank you, everybody.