

U.S.

Trump Returns to Gulf Coast After Hurricane Harvey's Devastation

President and first lady travel to Texas and Louisiana to meet with flood victims and volunteers



President Donald Trump and first lady Melania Trump helped volunteers hand out meals during a visit with flood survivors of Hurricane Harvey at a relief center in Houston. PHOTO: KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS

By Joseph De Avila and Quint Forgey

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LAKE CHARLES, La.—President Donald Trump visited Texas on Saturday for his second trip to the devastated Gulf Coast, as rescues continued amid floodwaters that were still rising in some areas.

The president and first lady Melania Trump traveled to Louisiana after they met flood survivors and volunteers in Houston.

The two joined Texas Gov. Greg Abbott at the NRG convention center, which has been serving as one of Houston's main shelters, as the president posed for photos, greeted victims and spoke with children playing games.

“The message is that things are working out well,” Mr. Trump said. “Really, I think people appreciate what’s been done. It’s been done very efficiently, very well, and that’s what we want.”

We're very happy with the way everything is going. There's a lot of love."

The visit comes a day after Mr. Trump asked Congress for \$7.9 billion for the first round of relief from a disaster that has killed dozens of people, displaced tens of thousands, inundated hundreds of thousands of homes and required thousands of rescues. Mr. Abbott has said the state may need more than \$125 billion in aid.

The White House said Saturday that it would make additional disaster assistance available to Texas for debris removal and emergency protective measures. Mr. Trump authorized increased cost sharing to 90% for federal funding for debris removal and 100% federal funding for emergency protective measures. Mr. Trump's original disaster declaration on Aug. 25 permitted 75% for federal cost sharing.

Hurricane Harvey, which first made landfall last week, has had the worst effect for communities along 250 miles of the Texas coast with its high winds and record rainfall. More than 45 people have died due to the storm, local officials say. That number could still rise pending investigations of other deaths.

The Louisiana city of Lake Charles, while affected by flooding, emerged as a point of refuge for residents of storm-battered towns in Southeast Texas, including the hard-hit cities of Beaumont, Orange and Port Arthur, where officials said thousands of people have been evacuated. Many Texans crossed the state line to shelters such as the Civic Center, which housed more than 800 storm victims last week.

At a staging area in Orange, Bill Borchert, a 53-year-old volunteer with a group from Louisiana that came to distribute food and hot meals to displaced residents, said some evacuees hadn't eaten in three days.

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"When we tell them we got jambalaya and pulled pork and vegetables, they get excited," he said.

Mr. Abbott on Friday warned that floodwaters remained dangerous and told residents to exercise caution. Areas in Houston and surrounding counties remain flooded, including Brazoria County where roads are still closed, and portions

of Fort Bend County to the southwest still have mandatory evacuation orders.

Even as parts of Houston clean up, Harvey's toll elsewhere in Texas and Louisiana worsens. The city asked residents in eight Houston ZIP Codes on Saturday to conserve water and not flush toilets or use extra water for showers, baths, laundry and dishes until further notice.

The Environmental Protection Agency said Saturday it conducted initial assessments of 41 Superfund sites in areas where Harvey has had an impact. The EPA found that 13 sites have been flooded or were damaged due to the storm. Of those sites, two have been inspected and don't require emergency cleanup.

The agency said response teams haven't been able to reach 11 other sites. When the water recedes and it is safe, response teams will move in to check out those sites, the EPA said. The agency also said 28 other sites don't have any damage or excessive flooding.

Water service was disrupted on Thursday in Beaumont and most of the city remains without water on Saturday. City officials have instructed residents that do have water to boil it for cooking, drinking and cleaning. On Saturday, the city said it would donate bottled water to residents.

City officials said Saturday that pumps are in place to refill water at the local water plant where it is being treated before it is pumped into the city. Once water pressure is restored and water is flowing, residents will still need to boil their water. This is only a temporary solution until water along the Neches River recedes and two water-intake facilities can be assessed for damage, city officials said.

Officials in the Texas county of Brazoria on Saturday declared mandatory evacuations for parts of the county that previously had voluntary evacuations. About half of the county is now under mandatory evacuation.

Hurricane Harvey: One Week After Landfall

One week after Harvey blasted into southeast Texas as a Category 4 hurricane, some residents have returned to their homes to clean up while rescuers search for people trapped in flooded homes



Jenna Fountain carries a bucket down Regency Drive in Port Arthur, Texas, to recover items from her flooded home on Friday. Hurricane Harvey, which first made landfall last week, has had a devastating effect on communities along 250 miles of the Texas coast with its high winds and record rainfall. EMILY KASK/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGE

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More than 42,000 people in Texas remain in shelters, according to the Red Cross. An additional 1,500 people are in six emergency shelters in Louisiana, the organization said. In Houston's convention center, the numbers have fallen to 1,740 evacuees down from a high of 10,000, according to a Red Cross spokesman, as some people have returned to their homes or gone elsewhere.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency said it has received more than 481,000 registrations for more \$105.6 million for housing assistance and financial support to replace personal property, transportation, and disaster-related medical needs.

More than 30,000 federal staff have been deployed to Texas and Louisiana for storm response, according to FEMA.

Meanwhile, Houston upgraded a voluntary evacuation order issued Friday to a mandatory order. There are 300 people still in the West Houston neighborhood. The mayor says those residents are putting themselves and first responders in danger by continuing to stay there. The local power company is also cutting off power to this neighborhood starting tomorrow morning.

“Mandatory evacuation order is to prevent harm to residents and make first responder work more feasible in that zone,” said Mayor Sylvester Turner, in a tweet.

Also, the Houston Independent School District said Saturday that 53 of its schools have major damage and 22 have extensive damage. At least 202 of the district’s schools took on water. Some 115 schools can be deep cleaned and will be ready for school on Sept. 11, and another 32 schools still need to be assessed. The district, which began providing free meals at nine Houston schools on Saturday, said it was working to dry out buildings out of fear of mold contamination.

“The Houston community needs our support now more than ever,” said Wanda Adams, Board of Education President Trustee, in a statement.

Hundreds of evacuees in Lake Charles were provided gas cards Friday, and left in their personal vehicles for longer-term shelters in Alexandria, La., Shreveport, La., and College Station, Texas.

Some displaced Texans have been steadily shuttled to long-term shelters over the past 48 hours in accordance with a national security response plan.

The evacuees were nervous to move to yet another unfamiliar location, but “it’s really what’s best for them,” said Bruce Baker, who directs the disaster relief unit of a Lake Charles nonprofit organization helping manage the Civic Center shelter. “If you’re from Texas, you need long-term shelter,” he said.

Lake Charles’ Civic Center was set to completely shut down as a shelter on Saturday.

“We just have to get out. They’re making everybody get out of here,” said Latanya Bushnell, 48, who was rescued from her flooded Lake Charles home by men in canoes on Sunday.

“I had no idea who they were,” she said. “We just got on.”

She and her husband, Travis, 40, have been at the Civic Center for nearly a week.

On Saturday morning, the couple was huddled in the corner of the arena, asking to borrow cellphones from remaining evacuees and frantically calling local motels.



Travis and Latanya Bushnell at the Civic Center in Lake Charles, La., on Saturday. They were rescued from their home by men in canoes last Sunday. 'I had no idea who they were,' she said. 'We just got on.' PHOTO: QUINT FORGEY FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

“I have no idea,” she said, shrugging her shoulders and stifling tears. “I’m very sacred. I’m petrified.”

—*Tawnell D. Hobbs contributed to this article.*

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