

U.S.

Trump Calls Federal and Local Officials ‘a Real Team’ in Responding to Harvey

President says ‘We want to do it better than ever before’



President Donald Trump receiving a briefing on Tropical Storm Harvey relief efforts in Corpus Christi, Texas, on Tuesday. PHOTO: CARLOS BARRIA/REUTERS

By Michael C. Bender

Updated Aug. 29, 2017 5:03 pm ET

President Donald Trump praised the response to Tropical Storm Harvey on Tuesday, saying federal and local officials have become “a real team” as life-saving missions continue amid poor weather in southeast Texas.

“We want to do it better than ever before,” Mr. Trump said about the relief efforts. “We want to be looked at in five years, 10 years from now, as this is the way to do it.”

Mr. Trump made his remarks from an impromptu meeting room inside a firehouse in Corpus Christi, a Gulf Coast city about 200 miles southwest of Houston. The president received a briefing on relief efforts from local officials and nonprofit groups in Corpus Christi, and again later from state officials in Austin.

Brock Long, the Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator, described a dire situation to the president and said the priority remained rescuing Texans from the flood. Discussing the Houston convention center, which is sheltering residents, Mr. Long said: “This is not the Superdome.” He was referencing the dangerous conditions that developed at that facility after Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005.

Mr. Trump told Mr. Long he has become “very famous on television” in the wake of the storm, and praised FEMA’s work with local officials.

“You have been just outstanding,” Mr. Trump told Mr. Long. “And I can tell you that my folks are telling me how great your representatives have been in working together. It’s a real team.”

After the briefing, Mr. Trump climbed a ladder outside the firehouse to address a crowd of several hundred people. He said that “Texas can handle anything” and waved a state flag.

“What a crowd, what a turnout,” the president said.

After arriving in Corpus Christi, the presidential motorcade passed broken trees, knocked down signs and fences askew. “No one has ever seen anything like this,” Mr. Trump said about the storm.

While he praised his cabinet and local officials, he warned that he “won’t say congratulations.”

“We’ll congratulate each other when it’s all finished,” he said.

The president traveled on Air Force One with his wife, Melania. White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, Deputy Chiefs of Staff Joe Hagin and Dina Powell, press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Marc Short, the president’s legislative-affairs director, also traveled with the president.

Mr. Trump was also joined by Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson, Small Business Administrator Linda McMahon and acting Secretary of Homeland Security Elaine Duke.

On Monday, Mr. Trump said he expects Texas to recover fully from Harvey and anticipated that “you’re going to see very rapid action from Congress” in the form of disaster relief funds.

“We think you’re going to have what you need and it’s going to go fast,” Mr. Trump said at a news conference.

Vice President Mike Pence is also scheduled to visit southeast Texas later this week, he said in an interview Tuesday morning with a Corpus Christi radio station.

Mr. Pence told KKTU radio that there were more than 8,600 federal officials on the ground in Texas, who were being coordinated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The government has helped deliver more than 2.5 million meals and two million liters of water, he said.

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There were more than three dozen Coast Guard vehicles, helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft in the region, and more than 100 shallow-water rescue boats, Mr. Pence said. He said “hundreds and hundreds” of volunteers were in the area, and that more than 22,000 families have started applying for federal financial assistance. He estimated more than 500,000 Texans will be eligible for assistance.

The vice president said the scale of the disaster was “stunning” and that it was “an unprecedented storm by every calculation.”

“We’re going to provide all of the resources necessary to advance the efforts to rescue people that are enduring this storm,” Mr. Pence said in the interview. “We’ll be with you through the long, long recovery that awaits Texas.”

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Appeared in the August 30, 2017, print edition as ‘Trump Views Damage, Lauds Response.’

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