

U.S.

# Trump Praises Government's Harvey Relief Efforts

Storm poses test of his ability to manage a crisis involving multiple government agencies



President Donald Trump walks to Marine One on the South Lawn of the White House on Friday. Tuesday he will travel to Texas to see the damage from tropical storm Harvey. PHOTO: BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE/GETTY IMAGES

*By Peter Nicholas and Yuka Hayashi*

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President Donald Trump will fly to Texas on Tuesday, the White House said, where he will see firsthand the damage from a deadly tropical storm that has flooded Houston, the nation's fourth-largest city.

Mr. Trump returned to the White House on Sunday afternoon after monitoring the storm from the presidential retreat in Camp David. Tropical storm Harvey poses a test of his ability to manage a crisis involving multiple government agencies and offer reassurance to a state that will take years to recover from the damage.

A dozen years ago, Hurricane Katrina marked a turning point in then-President George W. Bush's tenure, raising doubts about the White House's competence as Louisiana residents endured what a U.S. House after-action report would call a "failure at all levels of government."

“@ChuckGrassley - got your message loud and clear,” Mr. Trump tweeted Saturday, referring to a warning from Sen. Chuck Grassley (R., Iowa), who urged the president in a tweet to “keep on top of hurricane Harvey” to avoid repeating Mr. Bush’s mistakes.

Using his Twitter feed, Mr. Trump portrayed the response to Harvey as both coordinated and effective, while also remarking on the storm’s severity.

“Wow - Now experts are calling #Harvey a once in 500 year flood! We have an all out effort going, and going well!” Mr. Trump tweeted Sunday.

Mentioning that he was about to participate in a cabinet meeting by teleconference, he wrote that “Even experts have said they’ve never seen one like this!”

The White House released a picture of Mr. Trump taking part in the meeting. He is shown sitting at a conference table, a red “USA” hat pulled low over his forehead.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott praised the administration’s early response to the disaster, saying that the federal government has provided everything his state has asked for so far.

“We are having a White House that has been very responsive, very concerned about the people of Texas and tremendous help to us,” Mr. Abbott, a Republican, said on CNN’s State of the Union.

Calling the storm a “dangerous and frustrating event,” Brock Long, the Federal Emergency Management Agency director, said the president has given him “all the power” to coordinate the assets and resources of the federal government to help state officials.

The ability to coordinate closely and quickly is based on a law enacted after Hurricane Katrina, making the government’s response “vastly different” from what it was during the 2005 disaster, he said.

Federal agencies—including FEMA—are facing the damage caused by the storm at less than their full capacity, with a number of senior positions remaining unfilled by the Trump administration. Nominees for two FEMA deputy directors are still waiting for confirmation and the National Hurricane Center is lacking its director. The National Flood Insurance Program, administered by FEMA, is set to expire next month with a huge deficit, even before Harvey creates new claims.

Mr. Long said he didn’t have time to worry about that now and instead praised his staff and the smooth communication with Mr. Trump.

“We are setting up and gearing up for the next couple of years,” Mr. Long said.

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