

01/27/94
REMARKS AT THE EARTHQUAKE
PRESS CONFERENCE

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT THE EARTHQUAKE PRESS CONFERENCE

MRS. CLINTON: One of the real challenges of the next weeks will be getting all of the schools back in working order -- I think there are still about 75 that are closed or partially closed; getting crisis counseling, particularly to children, but to others. And, based on my conversations with the children upstairs, this is an experience that they keep living over and over again. Lots of fear and concern.

At least they're talking about it, and they're writing about it, and they're drawing pictures. And they're getting good information about how to be better prepared. We're concerned about the health care facilities. And some of the people who came from Washington with me today from the HHS Department are looking at health care facilities.

But I also want to say a special word of thanks to everybody who has worked so hard in this recovery effort. The cooperation among the federal and state and local officials and the volunteers, the National Guard -- everybody that has been involved has really worked as hard as they know how. And I know many of them have not slept very much for more than a week.

And the President and everybody involved in the kind of work that I just saw today that we're going above and beyond to spend time with the people. Everybody (inaudible) severe experience in some way (inaudible) and other things that have happened. So I'm just glad I had the chance to come here to see some of the people were living through this.

I would be glad to answer any questions, if I can.

REPORTER: Mrs. Clinton, I understand you made a specific request to come to the school. Why is that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, one of the things that I have

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worried about ever since the earthquake hit was the impact on the children, because I've been through natural disasters before. In the State of Arkansas, we have a lot of tornadoes. We had a lot of floods. And schools were often the hardest hit. And sometimes, the children, if they had to live in temporary housing, didn't have anywhere to go.

During Hurricane Andrew down in South Florida, the problems with the schools were so severe. And, when you have children -- and, even though many of the schools are now back functioning, you have about 75 schools that aren't. And we estimated that probably 15,000 to 20,000 children are still not back in school.

It's very important to try to work to get back to normalcy as soon as possible, to give the children some sense of security again, going back to school and seeing their friends, seeing their familiar teachers and having people around them who will help them. And, you know, I listened to the children read these descriptions that they wrote. And being able to talk about it is very important, plus getting back to their usual (inaudible). It's very, very significant.

I wanted to come out and see the schools and do what I could to help bring some attention to what's happening.

REPORTER: Mrs. Clinton, some people in Congress have said that as long as they are not documented residents, (inaudible). What do you say to that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think we are trying to all that we can to help the people right now. People are affected by a natural disaster like this and have needs ranging from safe drinking water to housing. And the important thing is to try to get the situation stabilized. Secretary Dewitt, who has been here on the ground from the very beginning knows that the first and the primary obligation of the federal government is to try to get things stabilized, try to give people the necessities of life.

And that's what we're trying to do. And that's what I think is the important first obligation.

REPORTER: Yesterday, the head of the Office of

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(Inaudible) said he thought that they had \$7.5 million were on (inaudible). Do you agree with that?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that everyone knows that the President is committed to helping do whatever can be done from the federal level to bring about as complete a recovery as possible. And the (inaudible) very effective response from the federal government, including requests for additional funding, I think evidences how seriously this problem is viewed in Washington. And it will continued to be monitored. And we'll see what is needed.

And James DeWitt and Secretary Cisneros and Secretary Pena and Secretary Riley and Secretary Kunon here with me from the Department of Education, everybody's going to be assessing what needs to be done and will be reporting back to the President.

REPORTER: Mrs. Clinton, is there a reason that you're not going to the valley, the Huntington area? Is it a matter of time?

MRS. CLINTON: Well, I think that there has been so much work being done all over the area, certainly the President's visit and all of the members of the Cabinet were trying to get to as many different parts of the community as possible. James DeWitt and others who are working on the disaster recovery effort I think have tried to be everywhere and have tried to visit every significant area.

So it's not any comment at all about where I'm going or what I'm doing, except in the time that I have available. I particularly wanted to come see what was happening with schools, to be greeted by the school officials, to see what was happening with the children here firsthand. You know, a lot of the children asked me if we had the earthquake at the White House, because it was such a momentous event, and it was so overwhelming to them, that they couldn't imagine anybody who hadn't been affected.

And just hearing them after that, hearing them tell me about what happened with their mothers and their fathers and their uncles and with their aunts -- one girl has an aunt with a miscarriage. The little girl's worried about her aunt. (Inaudible) real and alive for all of us.

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We were very far away when it happened. And I think that, you know, part of what we're trying to do is to rebuild a sense of community in our whole country and to respond when people who are hurt and needing help anywhere. So I don't think I have to go to everyplace to know what is happening and what kind of terror and insecurity still exists. But we tried, and all the people who are working have gone everyplace and seen everything.

Thank you all very much.

(Whereupon, the press conference was ended.)

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