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Remarks by President Biden on Rebuilding the Francis Scott Key Bridge and Reopening the Port of Baltimore | Baltimore, MD

BRIEFING ROOM | SPEECHES AND REMARKS



Top

Maryland Transportation Authority
Baltimore, Maryland

3:21 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, thank you, thank you. (Applause.) Please, please. Thank you.

By the way, folks, I say to my dad: Dad, they're mispronouncing *Baltimore*. (Pronounced in an accent.) (Laughter.) My dad and the Biden — please, sit down — the Biden family goes all the way back to being watermen in this bay for a long, long time back in the la- — mid-1800s. And my father was born and raised here in Baltimore. And there's a strong, strong connection. Still have family in the region as well.

Governor Moore, Senator Cardin, Senator Van Hollen, Congress[man] Mfume, Mayor Scott, County Executive Johnny O. — (laughter) — I like that — Johnny "O-ho-ho" — (laughter) — to all the military members and first responders and, most importantly, to the people of Maryland, I'm here to say: Your nation has your back, and I mean it. Your nation has your back. (Applause.)

And you've got, without exaggeration, one of the finest delegations in the Congress of any state in the Union. And they know how to get things done, and we're going to get this paid for. Aren't we?

PARTICIPANTS: Yes.

THE PRESIDENT: All right. I was just briefed by the United — Uni- — Unified Command about the ongoing impact of this tragic collapse of the Francis Scott Key Bridge last Tuesday.

The damage is devastating, and our hearts are still breaking. Eight — eight construction workers went into the water when the bridge fell. Six lost their lives. Most were immigrants, but all were Marylanders — hard-working, strong, and selfless.

After pulling a night shift fixing potholes, they were on a break when the ship struck.

Just seconds before, one of the men named Carlos, who was only 24, left a message for his girlfriend. Here's what it said: "We just poured cement, and we're waiting for it to dry," he said.

Well, to all the families and loved ones who are grieving: I've come here to grieve with you. We all are.

It's not the same, but I know a little bit about what it's like to lose a piece of your soul — to get that phone call in the middle of the night to say family members are gone. I've been there. It's feeling like having a black hole in your chest, like you're being sucked in, unable to breath. The anger, the pain, the depth of the loss is so profound.

And we know it's hard to believe, and you're probably not going to believe me, but I can tell you now from personal experience: The day is going to come when the memory of your loved one, as you walk by that park or the church or something that you shared together, it's going to bring a smile to your lips before it brings a tear to your eye.

It's going to happen. It's going to take a while, but I promise you, it will happen. And that's when you know you're going to be able to make it. I promise you it will come. And our prayers for you is that time comes sooner rather than later — but it will come.

We'll also never forget the contributions these men made to this city. We're going to keep working hard to recover each of them.

And, you know, my vow is that we will not rest, as Carlos said, until the cement has dried on the entirety of a new bridge — a new bridge. (Applause.)

Earlier this afternoon, we took an aerial tour to survey the wreckage. You know, from the air, I saw the bridge that's been ripped apart. But here on the ground, I see a community that's been pulled together.

I want to thank you all — the first responders, the port workers, state and local officials — who sprang into action before dawn, who've been here ever since.

And we did talk at, I think it was, 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning. You were out here. You were here.

Within minutes of the collapse, the U.S. Coast Guard arrived on the scene. Within hours, I ordered personnel from the Army Corps of Engineers, the Navy, the Department of Transportation to assist in every way possible.

Within a day, we stood up a Unified Command.

In the weeks to come, I want you to know: We're going to continue to have your backs every step of the way. I guarantee you. I guarantee you.

First — our first is our priority to reopen the port. This is one of the nation's largest shipping hubs. And it's the top port in America both in importing and exporting of cars and light trucks — the number one.

Simply put: The impact here has a significant impact everywhere — up and down the coast and around the country.

Thousands of tons of mangled steel remain lodged in the water, blocking ships from moving in and out of the harbor.

I've dec- — I've directed the Coast Guard, the Navy, and the Army Corps of Engineers — who are, by the way, the finest engineers in the world — and the state officials to work together to help remove this steel as quickly as possible and as safely as possible.

So far, our team has been able to clear two small channels for essential ships helping clear the wreckage.

And, yesterday, the Army Corps announced that by the end of April they will be able to open the third channel for some commercial traffic, including car carriers. And by the end of May, we'll open the full channel — the full channel. (Applause.)

My task force on Supply Chain Disruption has been able to — been engaging with union, rail, trucking, shipping, state and local leaders to minimize the impact on our supply chains.

And I'm proud to announce that the federal government will provide over \$8 million in grant funds to make the infrastructure improvements at Sparrows Point, as the only [part of the] port unaffected by this collapse, which will allow Sparrows Point to take on more ships. And that's happening now — will happen shortly.

Second, we're focusing on protecting the workers and businesses. Folks, 20,000 jobs depend on this port. Twenty thousand families depend on this port to buy groceries, to make rent, to pay their bills.

Today, my administration is announcing the first tranche of Dislocated Worker Grants — fancy phrase to — which is dined — all of it is there to make sure it — it helps create jobs for workers involved in the cleanup of this incident — additional jobs.

My Small Business Administration has also issued a disaster declaration, which will allow the SBA to offer low-interest loans for small businesses impacted by the collapse in order to keep things moving.

The state, the city, the county are also stepping up in impressive ways to help workers and businesses who have been affected by this disaster.

But, folks, we all need to step up. Amazon, Home Depot, Domino Sugar, and many other companies all rely on this port. And they have committed to keep workers and payrolls on their — and their businesses in Baltimore and [as we] move as quickly and clearly as possible to clear the channel. (Applause.)

I'm calling on every company at and around the port to do the same thing — the same exact thing: commit to stay.

And to the customers who use this port, we're coming back, and we're coming back soon.

Folks, finally, we're going to move heaven and earth to rebuild this bridge as rapidly as humanly possible. And we're going to do so with union labor and American steel. (Applause.) For a simple reason: They're the best workers in the world, and that's not hyperbole.

Every day, over 30,000 vehicles traveled across this bridge, and I was one of those people. I commuted every day from Delaware for 36 years year to Washington, D.C., back and forth, and about one fourth of that time by automobile. I've been to every part of this port.

Folks, we now face a question no American should ever have to ask: How will I get to work? How will I go to school? How will I get to a hospital?

A response — in response, everyone, including Congress, should be asking only one question, and they're going to be asked the question by your delegation: How can we help? How can we solve that problem?

My administration is committed — absolutely committed to ensuring that the parties responsible for this tragedy pay to repair the damage and be held accountable to the fullest extent the law will allow.

But I also want to be clear: We will support Maryland and Baltimore every step of the way to help you rebuild and maintain all the business and commerce that's here now. (Applause.)

As the governor — as the governor can tell you, within hours of the American req- — the Maryland request, we approved \$60 million in emergency federal funding. I fully intend — I fully intend, as the governor knows, to have the federal government cover the cost of rebuilding this entire bridge — all of it — all of it — (applause) — as we've done in other parts of the country in similar circumstances.

And I stand here, I call on Congress to authorize this effort as soon as possible.

Let me close with this. This port is over 300 years old. As a matter of fact, as I said, my great-great-grandfather worked here as a waterman in this bay. This port is older than our Republic. And it's been through tough, tough times before.

During the war of 1812, a young Marylander named Francis Scott Key, to whom the bridge is named after, sat in a boat in this very harbor, and he watched — he watched the British troops launch an attack after attack on American forces.

But as the dawn broke, we saw the American flag still flying, Baltimore was still standing, and our nation, as he wrote in the "Star-Spangled Banner," had made it through a perilous fight.

Folks, this is going to take time, but Governor Moore, Senator Cardin, Senator Van Hollen, Congressman Mfume, Mayor Scott, County Executive Johnny O., and others are going to rebuild this bridge as rapidly as possible. And, folks, we're determined to come back even stronger.

We're the only nation that has gone through every crisis that we've had — we come out stronger than we went in. And we're going to do it here as well. And once more to make this perilous challenge — this perilous challenge.

You know, because we're the United States of America, there's nothing — nothing, nothing beyond our capacity when we do it together. Think about that. Remember who we are. We're the United States of America. Nothing is beyond our capacity.

May God bless you all. And may God protect our troops, our first responders, and all those who gave their soul.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. (Applause.)

3:33 P.M. EDT

Readout of NSA Sullivan's Call with Sri Lankan National Security Advisor Sagala Ratnayake

APRIL 05, 2024 • STATEMENTS AND RELEASES

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