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THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
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President Bush Meets with Community Leaders in New Orleans

Galatoire's Restaurant
New Orleans, Louisiana

- [In Focus: North American Leaders' Summit](#)
- [In Focus: Gulf Coast Recovery](#)

2:07 P.M. CDT

THE PRESIDENT: I want to thank the governor, thank the mayor, thank the parish presidents, congressmen; thank you all very much -- city council leaders, impassioned citizens from New Orleans. Thank you very much for briefing me and my team, and the new coordinator from the White House, Doug O'Dell, for keeping us abreast of progress that has been made down here and challenges that remain.

You know, one of the things, I came to New Orleans and spoke about the federal commitment, and I said, it's been a devastating period and the federal government is committed and will remain committed to helping. Thus far, the federal has committed \$120 billion -- little more than that -- of taxpayers' money to help all along the coast. I think it's money well spent. I think it's important for our country that the Gulf Coast region and the great city of New Orleans recover as quickly as possible.

My impression is that -- you know, that there's a lot more hope now than there was, even from a year ago. I mean, there's just -- people have a little different bounce in their step. But there are some significant problems. One is we got to make sure these levees meet the obligations and meet the standards.

Secondly, I am concerned about the health care system that was torn up and needs to be rebuilt in a way that encourages there to be good health care and in a way that recognizes the changing population of New Orleans.

Thirdly, I have been concerned about the stories on crime, just like the citizens have been worried about the stories on crime. I appreciate the federal attorney giving me an update and I appreciate the mayor's efforts to work hard to hold people to account for breaking the law. That's what the average citizen expects, that's what the taxpayers who are helping the people down here want to see.

All in all -- and then, finally, public housing restoration. It's a big issue in New Orleans, but it's an issue where there is a plan and we just need to follow through on the plan.

So there are some hurdles, but this city has come a long way -- to the point where I felt very comfortable hosting the international conference with the President of Mexico and the Prime

Minister of Canada. And I will tell you that not only did the leaders feel welcomed in New Orleans and feel comfortable in New Orleans and feel relaxed in New Orleans, but so did the delegations they brought with them. New Orleans is a great city to host a meeting or host a convention; they know what they're doing down here. The city is recovered, it's on its feet and it's bouncing back and it is an honor to be back here.

And I want to thank you all for sharing your thoughts with me and thank you for being leaders and helping this part of the vital part of the country recover. (Applause.)

END 2:10 P.M. CDT