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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 Discusses Hurricane Katrina Emergency Disaster Relief**

Room 350

Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building

[Fact Sheet: President Bush Announces New Initiatives to Provide Relief](#)

[In Focus: Hurricane Relief](#)

2:25 P.M. EDT

**THE PRESIDENT:** I want to thank the members of my Cabinet who have joined me today. Today I'm going to take this opportunity to speak directly to our citizens who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina.

Many of you have been evacuated from the flooded and destroyed areas and now find yourselves far from home -- without proper identification or even a change of clothes. So today I'm announcing two important steps that we are taking to provide you the help you need, steps that will cut through the red tape so that we get that help into your hands as quickly and easily as possible.

The first step is providing every household with \$2,000 in emergency disaster relief that can be used for immediate needs, such as food or clothing or personal essentials. For those of you who are living in the large centers, such as the Houston Astrodome, I know that you don't have cars or transportation and cannot get yourselves to the centers to collect these funds. I also know that some of you do not have access to a savings or checking account, or ways to cash a check. FEMA and Red Cross teams are either -- are working or soon will be working with your shelters to meet your challenges and to get assistance into your hands as soon as possible. By registering for the first \$2,000, you will begin the process of arranging for the delivery of other, longer-term assistance that will be made available in the coming weeks for eligible households.



For those of you who are staying with family members or in a rented room or a hotel or apartment, FEMA is also working to get these funds in your hands. Here are two ways that you can register for this assistance. You can call 1-800-621-FEMA, that's 1-800-621-FEMA; or if you have the capability to use the Internet you can log on to [www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov). A FEMA representative will arrange for your assistance to be delivered by mail or deposited into your bank account. If you have special needs, the FEMA representative can help arrange to get the money to you in another way.

Now, we have 3,000 people who are working around the clock to take the calls. We're in the process of training more, and that number will be increasing dramatically. More than 400,000 families have already been registered. We still have tens of thousands more people who need to be processed, so I ask for your patience if you experience problems in trying to contact FEMA.

To those of you in our faith-based and community groups who have opened up your hearts and homes, I want to thank you for your service to our fellow Americans. If you've not been in contact with a FEMA representative, please do so to help the people in your shelters. And, again, you can call 1-800-621-FEMA. By calling a FEMA representative, you can assure that the people you've taken in are registered and able to receive the emergency assistance funds.

As we work to deliver this emergency relief, we're also working to ensure that those of you who have received federal benefits administered by the states of Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana will continue to get those benefits in the states where you're now staying.

So the second step we're taking today is designed to make it easier for you to register and collect these benefits in any state in the country. We will start by granting evacuee status for all of you who have lived in counties that have been declared disaster areas. We know that many of you no longer have the legal documents or the records to prove your eligibility for the benefits you've been getting. We understand that. And so with this evacuee status, you will be able to register for your benefits without many of the traditional administrative requirements for verification and enrollment.



The special evacuee status applies to the full range of federal benefits administered by the states. These programs include Medicaid; temporary assistance for needy families; child care; mental health services and substance abuse treatment; food stamps; housing; foster care; women, infants and children nutrition; school lunch; unemployment compensation; and job training.

The states that have opened up their doors should not be penalized for coming to the aid of Americans in distress. And so I'm going to work with the Congress to reimburse the states that are taking in evacuees from the affected areas along the Gulf Coast.

I want to thank the governors and the leaders of the states that have taken in so many of our fellow citizens. I want to thank you for your compassion. And we understand that this is going to strain your budget, so the federal government, as I just said, will operate under this principle: You should not be penalized for showing compassion. State enrollment teams are already set up in many shelters, and many have 1-800 numbers that people can call. Any evacuee can contact the nearest state or local benefits office to get the information about enrolling.

And those of you who are staying in a home or church that has access to the Internet can find out how to receive these benefits by going to [www.govbenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov). These are just some of the many steps we'll be taking in what will be a long relief effort. We have much more work to do. But the people who have been hurt by this storm know that -- need to know that the government is going to be with you for the long haul.

In all the steps we take our goal is not to simply provide benefits, but to make them easy and simple as possible to collect. The responsibility of caring for hundreds of thousands of citizens who no longer have homes is going to place many demands on our nation. We have many difficult days ahead, especially as we recover those who did not survive the storm. I've instructed all agencies to honor their memory by treating the dead with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Throughout our history in times of testing, Americans have come together in prayer to heal and ask for strength for the tasks ahead. So I've declared Friday, September the 16th, as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. I ask that we pray -- as Americans have always prayed in times of trial -- with confidence in His purpose, with hope for a brighter future, and with the humility to ask God to keep us strong so that we can better serve our brothers and sisters in need.

Thank you.

END 2:33 P.M. EDT