
I am glad to be able to report to the people of the Nation that in the worst catastrophe to strike the Northeast in the last twenty-five years, the Federal Government, through its several agencies and working under the personal direction of the President, is able to render immediate material assistance in the alleviation of suffering and distress.

In anticipation of the very situation which we now face, a fund of more than $18,000,000 for emergency flood work was set up within the WPA nearly a month ago. A great deal of preventive work has been done under this allocation, and I think it is safe to say that the loss of life and property would have been even greater than it is, had it not been for this foresight.

In addition to this, you will be interested to know that this afternoon President Roosevelt authorized an additional allotment of $25,000,000 to the Works Progress Administration, which is to be used for the rehabilitation of public properties damaged by the flood. We will cut right through the red tape to allocate this fund to the several states as rapidly as the extent of their losses can be determined. Not a moment will be lost in getting these emergency funds to the places where they are needed most.
The President has several times deferred his vacation trip to the South in order to keep in touch with the flood situation, and he has assumed personal direction of the government forces engaged in emergency work. A rough estimate compiled from telegraphic reports received up to an hour ago shows that approximately 250,000 WPA workers, in addition to many other thousands from the Army, Navy, Coast Guard and CCC, have dropped their regular tasks to join in the fight against disaster. Thousands of these people, along with local volunteers and the forces of the American Red Cross, are laboring without rest and without regard for their own safety, comfort and convenience.

The new fund of $25,000,000 will be spent without stint to recondition the roads and streets that have been washed away; the hundreds of bridges and culverts that have been demolished; to restore as rapidly as possible the damage done to publicly owned utilities.

Many communities are now smothered in thick layers of mud and debris which have been brought down by the swollen rivers. I am informed that some sections of Johnstown, Pennsylvania, are overlayed with a coating of mud between four and five feet thick. Scores of other cities are almost as badly off.

The President has directed us to expedite the work of digging out these communities, and this we are prepared to do. WPA administrators throughout the stricken area have placed their entire organizations at the disposal of officials in charge of the emergency work, and a tremendous force of manpower is ready to go to work as soon as the waters have subsided.

One of the principal concerns, now that the crisis is past in many stricken localities, is that of preventing the spread of disease. This condition frequently follows such catastrophes as we now face, and every effort is being made to prevent the occurrence of epidemics. In conjunction with the American Red Cross and local health departments, water supplies and wells will be checked and tested, and large quantities of disinfectants used.
The contribution of women workers, both within and without the WPA, should not be ignored in this crisis. Enormous quantities of clothing, bedding, and bandages already prepared in WPA sewing rooms, have been released through the Red Cross and other welfare agencies for distribution to the flood victims. In many instances, these sewing rooms are disregarding the usual Friday and Saturday lay-offs to continue their work on stepped up schedules in order to produce enough goods to meet the demand. The Federal Surplus Commodities Corporation has received a number of requests for additional cloth to be turned into such necessities as shirts, work pants, dresses, sheets, and comforters, and these requests are being met wherever possible.

Scores of relief kitchens have also been set up. Nutrition workers from the WPA and from local relief agencies are manning these posts and feeding thousands of hungry people whose personal belongings have been swept away. There has been a magnificent response to local appeals for food and I do not believe there are many localities in which actual suffering has been experienced on this account.

The Government has turned more than 37,000,000 pounds of foodstuffs and canned meat over to local relief organizations for free distribution, and this has helped greatly to diminish the danger of hunger. Other supplies of food are being mobilized for shipment next week.

You will probably be interested in a telegram which was sent today to the governors of the states most acutely hit by the flood. I quote from the message itself:

"WPA is prepared to repair damage to public property including bridges, streets, sewer systems, water systems and public buildings. WPA may also do emergency work on private property where health is endangered or where there is a hazard to life. Full resources of the WPA will be placed behind the program of rehabilitation of public property and State WPA is now authorized to do this. You
may be sure we will act promptly in meeting all proper requirements. American Red Cross has the responsibility and facilities for meeting relief problems resulting from flood insofar as it concerns food, shelter, clothing and medical care for relief sufferers. The Red Cross also includes in their program rehabilitation of private homes under appropriate restrictions."

There have been few occasions in peace-time history when the cooperative efforts of so many branches of the Federal Government have been called into play. The heavy snows of the past winter were a warning signal that flood conditions might be expected this spring. But there was no intimation that we would be faced with a deluge of such devastating proportions. The people of the country may well be proud of the splendid manner in which the various agencies, both public and private, have risen to the occasion.

In closing, let me add my appeal to that of President Roosevelt and other public spirited citizens, for your immediate and generous support to the American Red Cross. This splendid organization deserves unlimited praise for the manner in which it is meeting the demand for food, clothing, and shelter in the devastated areas. But the enormity of the demand is far beyond its normal resources, and the Red Cross is asking for $3,000,000 by public subscription. This plea must be met if human suffering is to be averted for the thousands of families whose homes and last scrap of food and clothing have been swept away.

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