

Received(Date): 11 SEP 2001 17:23:22
From: Clay Johnson III (CN=Clay Johnson III/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])
To: [REDACTED] P6/(b)(6) @ inet [UNKNOWN])
Subject: : Karen Hughes Statement
[P_CG0N3004_WHO.TXT_1.doc](#)

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RECORD TYPE: PRESIDENTIAL (NOTES MAIL)
CREATOR:Clay Johnson III (CN=Clay Johnson III/OU=WHO/O=EOP [WHO])
CREATION DATE/TIME:11-SEP-2001 17:23:22.00
SUBJECT:: Karen Hughes Statement
TO [REDACTED] P6/(b)(6) @ inet [UNKNOWN])
READ:UNKNOWN
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ATT CREATION TIME/DATE: 0 00:00:00.00
File attachment <P_CG0N3004_WHO.TXT_1>

Statement from Karen Hughes, Counselor to President Bush
3:30 p.m. EST

I am here to update you on the activities of the federal government in response to this morning's attacks on our country. As you heard from President Bush a short time ago, the federal government is acting to help local communities with search and rescue and emergency management operations, to take all appropriate precautions to protect our citizens and to identify those responsible for these despicable attacks on the American people.

While some federal buildings have been evacuated for security reasons and to protect our workers, your federal government continues to function effectively. We have a federal emergency response plan and at President Bush's direction, we are implementing it. We began implementing it immediately after the first attack this morning.

We contacted American forces and embassies throughout the world and placed them on high alert. The United States Secret Service immediately secured the President, Vice President, and Speaker of the House and they are all safe. They have also secured members of the National Security team, the President's cabinet and senior staff.

As you know, the President was in Sarasota Florida when the first attack occurred this morning – Air Force One has landed at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha Nebraska and the president is in a secure location. He is in continuous communication with the vice president and key members of his cabinet and national security team.

The Vice President and National Security Advisor are in a secure facility at the White House -- I've just come from there -- the Secretary of Transportation and members of our senior White House staff are gathered at a command center there and coordinating with other branches of our government.

The Secretary of Defense remains at the Pentagon and the Secretary of State is en route back to Washington from his trip to South America. President Bush is conducting a meeting of the national security council as we speak .

As many of you have been reporting, the Federal Aviation Administration ordered all airports closed and all planes which were in the air were directed to land at the nearest airport. International flights were diverted to alternate locations outside the United States. Secretary Mineta has directed the federal aviation administration to suspend operations until at least noon tomorrow --- so no flights will operate until the FAA announces operations will be resumed. Secretary Mineta also issued orders controlling the movement of all vessels in United States navigable waters.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency has activated eight urban search and rescue task forces in New York – and four of these highly trained teams are at work in the Pentagon. Every federal agency has implemented continuity of operations plans to make sure the government continues to function effectively.

While the markets closed today because of the situation in Manhattan, the United States financial system is operating – banks have been open all day. The federal reserve has operated regularly and continuously.

The Dept of Health and Human Services has mobilized medical personnel and supplies to provide help to local authorities who are responding to help victims of these attacks.

President Bush has committed the full resources of our intelligence and law enforcement communities to identify and bring to justice those responsible for these despicable attacks.

The Department of Justice is setting up a hot line for families who are concerned their relatives may have been victims of these attacks, and we will be announcing that number shortly.

Our fellow citizens and our freedom came under attack today – and no one should doubt America's resolve. President Bush and all our country's leaders thank the many Americans who are helping with rescue and relief efforts – we ask our fellow Americans for your prayers for the victims, their families, for rescue workers and our country.

Thanks you all very much – we will continue to update you as information is available and confirmed.