



The Two-Way

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Obama, Bush, Clinton, Past Adversaries, Combine For Haitian Relief

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By Frank James



President Barack Obama asked his White House predecessors George W. Bush and Bill Clinton to lead a massive fund-raising effort for Haiti.

Pablo Martinez Monsivais/AP Photo

In a show of bipartisan unity, President Barack Obama was joined with his predecessors George W. Bush and Bill Clinton who he named to lead a new money-raising effort for Haitian relief, recovery and rebuilding efforts.

It was Bush's first time back at the White House since leaving a year ago on Inauguration Day and just the visual of the three men who at various times have been adversaries with each other was for more striking than anything that was said.

Nevertheless, it was an event meant to underscore the nation coming together for the sake of helping a hemispheric neighbor.

Obama noted that the use of former presidents was patterned after what then-President Bush did in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian tsunami when he asked his father, the 41st president, George H. W. Bush, and Clinton to lead relief efforts in a demonstration that an extraordinary disaster required leadership of the highest of stature that transcended politics.

"As the scope of the destruction became apparent, I spoke to each of these gentlemen and they each asked the same simple question: 'how can I help?'

"In the days ahead, they'll be asking everyone what they can do -- individuals, corporations, NGOs, and institutions."

Obama also provided the address of a new website for people who want to make donations to the relief and recovery efforts --- www.clintonbushhaitifund.org.

"We're fortunate to have the service of these two leaders. President Bush led America's response to the Asian tsunami, aid and relief that prevented even greater loss of life in the months after that disaster. His administration's efforts to fight HIV in Africa treated more than 10 million men, women and children."

"As president, Bill Clinton helped restore democracy in Haiti. As a private citizen, he has helped to save the lives of millions of people around the world. And as the United Nations special envoy to Haiti, he understands intimately the daily needs and struggles of the Haitian people.

"And by coming together in this way, these two leaders send an unmistakable message to the people of Haiti and to the people of the world. In these difficult hours, America stands united. We stand united with the people of Haiti who have shown such incredible resilience and we will help them to recover and to rebuild."

When it was his turn to speak, Bush said:

"I commend the president for his swift and timely response to the disaster. I am so pleased to answer the call to work alongside President Clinton to mobilize the compassion of the American people. Like most Americans, Laura and I have been following the television coverage from Haiti. Our hearts are broken when we see the scenes of little children struggling without a mom or a dad or the bodies in the street or the physical damage of the earthquake..."

*... The most effective way for Americans to help the people of Haiti is to contribute money. That money will go to organizations on the ground who will be able to effectively spend it.
I know a lot of people want to send blankets or water. Just send your cash. One of the things the president and I will do is to make sure your money is spent wisely.*

The "send cash" message is one that former president Clinton has stressed every day since the earthquake struck on Tuesday, Jan. 12.

Because of his closer relationship to Haiti, Clinton's message bore a more personal touch.

I have no words to say what I feel. I was in those hotels that collapsed. I had meals with people who are dead. The cathedral church that Hillary and I sat in 34 years ago it a total rubble (sic). But what these men said is true. It is still one of the most remarkable, unique places I have ever been. And they can escape their history and build a better future if we do our part.

Update at 12:55 p.m. ET. Here's some video of the presidents together, courtesy of the Associated Press:

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