

Five living presidents raise money for victims of hurricanes

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.25.17

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Former Presidents (from right) Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, George H.W. Bush and Jimmy Carter gather on stage at the opening of a hurricane relief concert in College Station, Texas, October 21, 2017. The concert raised money for relief efforts after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas, Hurricane Irma hit Florida, and Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Photo by: AP Photo/LM Otero

AUSTIN, Texas — This year, hurricanes have brought destruction to much of the United States. Now, a famous team has come together to help: the five former presidents.

The group of former presidents appeared together at a concert on October 21. The event raised money for victims of the storms in Texas, Florida, Louisiana, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Democrats Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter and Republicans George H.W. and George W. Bush gathered in College Station, Texas. It's the home of Texas A&M University, where the oldest Bush president has a presidential library named after him. Age 93, George H.W. Bush has Parkinson's disease and appeared in a wheelchair at the event. His wife, Barbara, and George W. Bush's wife, Laura, were in the audience.

Pop star Lady Gaga made a surprise appearance at the concert. Texas musicians Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen and country music band Alabama also performed.

Helping Those Hurt By The Hurricanes

The fundraiser backed by the ex-presidents has raised \$31 million since it began on September 7.

President Donald Trump appeared at the event in a video. He called the past presidents "some of America's finest public servants." In the past, Trump has criticized the former presidents.

"This wonderful effort reminds us that we truly are one nation under God," Trump said. The nation is "all unified by our values and devotion to one another," he continued.

Four of the five former presidents — Obama, George W. Bush, Carter and Clinton — made brief remarks that did not mention Trump. George H.W. Bush did not speak but smiled and waved to the crowd. They all asked for the country to come together to help those hurt by the hurricanes.

"The heart of America ... is greater than our problems," said Clinton. It doesn't matter what a person's background is, he said.

Together, They Bring In A Lot Of Donations

The last time the five were together was in 2013, to celebrate the creation of George W. Bush's presidential library in Dallas. At that time, Obama was still in the White House.

Former presidents have joined forces in the past to raise money after disasters. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton raised money together after the 2004 South Asia earthquake and Hurricane Katrina the next year. Clinton and George W. Bush combined to raise funds after Haiti's 2011 earthquake.

Brandon Rottinghaus is a professor at the University of Houston. He says presidents are able to persuade people to donate money more than any other lawmakers anywhere. "When they send out a call for help, especially on something that's not political, they can rake in big money."

Ex-Presidents Can Take A Step Back

Some have said Trump's government was slow at first to help troubled Puerto Rico. Trump has accused island leaders of "poor leadership." He spoke poorly of Puerto Rico's electric systems and roads before the hurricane hit. He also said that government emergency workers wouldn't be able to stay there forever.

But Rottinghaus said former presidents are seen as less likely to cause disagreement than the current president.

"Ex-presidents are able to step back and be seen as the nation's grandfather," he said.

"We Love You, Texas"

Hurricane Harvey slammed into Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast on August 25, unleashing historic flooding in Houston and killing more than 80 people. Shortly after, all five ex-presidents appeared in a commercial for a fundraising effort known as "One America Appeal." In it, George W. Bush says, "People are hurting down here." His father, George H.W. Bush, then replies, "We love you, Texas."

Hurricane Irma subsequently hit Florida, and Hurricane Maria battered Puerto Rico. Both storms devastated the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Quiz

1 One MAIN idea of the article is that past presidents are united in supporting hurricane victims.

What is another MAIN idea of the article?

- (A) Past presidents gathered in President Bush's home state of Texas.
- (B) President Trump complimented the event and efforts organized by past presidents.
- (C) Not all of the past presidents made speeches at the fundraising event.
- (D) Guests like Lady Gaga and Lyle Lovett impressed the concert crowd.

2 Read the sentences summarizing the MAIN ideas of the article below.

Hurricanes throughout the United States caused major damage this year. All living past presidents have come together to raise money for those impacted by hurricanes.

Which answer choice would complete this summary?

- (A) Past presidents are good at raising money and \$31 million has been collected so far.
- (B) Past presidents are able to get famous singers to attend their events.
- (C) George H.W. Bush was the only past president who did not give a speech.
- (D) George W. Bush is most passionate about the effort because he lives in Texas.

3 What is the relationship between the public's view of the current president versus their view of past presidents?

- (A) The public believes that past presidents now have an easy life because they have already proved themselves.
- (B) The public sees the current president as more political than past presidents who are now less interested in politics.
- (C) The public likes past presidents more because they no longer cause problems for people in the United States.
- (D) The public sees past presidents as helpful individuals who work to bring people together for the greater good.

- 4 What effect did past presidents have on relief immediately after Hurricane Harvey?
- (A) More people got involved with relief efforts after George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush called for Americans to help.
 - (B) By giving their support to President Trump, the past presidents helped the families of those killed by Hurricane Harvey.
 - (C) More money was donated to relief efforts due to their fundraising, which included events and ads on TV shortly after the hurricane.
 - (D) People joined Bill Clinton as he taught survivors how to stay safe from future hurricanes.

Answer Key

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