

Five former presidents unite to raise funds for hurricane victims

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 10.25.17

Word Count **652**

Level **1170L**



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 — For the first time since 2013, the five living former presidents put aside politics and appeared together at a concert on October 21. The event's goal was to raise money for victims of devastating hurricanes 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, home of Texas A&M University. They hoped to unite the country after the storms.

Texas A&M is home to the presidential library of the elder George H.W. Bush. At 93, he has a form of 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.

Grammy award winner Lady Gaga made a surprise appearance at the concert. Also performing were country music band Alabama, Rock & Roll Hall of Famer "Soul Man" Sam Moore, gospel legend Yolanda Adams, and Texas musicians Lyle Lovett and Robert Earl Keen.

The appeal backed by the ex-presidents has raised \$31 million since it began on September 7, said Jim McGrath, spokesman for George H.W. Bush.

A Call For Unity

President Donald Trump offered a video greeting that avoided his past criticism of the former presidents and called them "some of America's finest public servants."

"This wonderful effort reminds us that we truly are one nation under God, all unified by our values and devotion to one another," Trump said in the greeting, played during the concert.

Four of the five former presidents — Obama, George W. Bush, Carter and Clinton — made brief remarks that did not mention Trump. The elder Bush did not speak but smiled and waved to the crowd. They appealed for national unity to help those hurt by the hurricanes.

"The heart of America, without regard to race or religion or political party, is greater than our problems," said Clinton.

Presidents Come Together After Disasters

The last time the five were together was in 2013 when Obama was still in office. They all attended the dedication of George W. Bush's presidential library in Dallas.

Former presidents have joined forces in the past for post-disaster fundraising. George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton raised money together after the 2004 South Asia tsunami and Hurricane Katrina the next year. Clinton and George W. Bush combined to seek donations after Haiti's 2011 earthquake.

"It's certainly a triple, if not a home run, every time," said Brandon Rottinghaus, a political science professor at the University of Houston. Presidents are able to rally people to donate money more than any other politicians in the world, Rottinghaus adds. "When they send out a call for help, especially on something that's not political, they can rake in big money."

"The Nation's Grandfather"

Trump has faced criticism that his administration was initially slow to aid ravaged Puerto Rico. He has accused island leaders of "poor leadership." He later tweeted that, "Electric and all infrastructure was a disaster before hurricanes" while saying that Federal Emergency Management Agency, first responders and military workers wouldn't be able to stay there forever.

But Rottinghaus said ex-presidents are seen as less divisive than the current president.

"They can't get away from the politics of the moment," he said of current White House occupants. "Ex-presidents are able to step back and be seen as the nation's grandfather."

Hurricanes Battered Texas, Puerto Rico

Hurricane Harvey slammed into Texas and Louisiana Gulf Coast as a Category 4 hurricane on August 25, unleashing historic flooding in Houston and killing more than 80 people. Shortly thereafter, 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, while both devastated the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Quiz

- 1 Which of these statements would be MOST important to include in an objective summary of the article?
 - (A) In an uncommon show of humility, President Trump congratulated the past presidents for their relief efforts.
 - (B) All living past presidents met in Texas in a show of financial and moral support for hurricane relief.
 - (C) This is not the first time past presidents have come together to support a humanitarian effort.
 - (D) Hurricane Harvey was the most destructive of the hurricanes to hit the United States this summer.

- 2 Which of the following details from the article is MOST important to the development of the MAIN idea?
 - (A) Democrats Barack Obama, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter and Republicans George H.W. and George W. Bush gathered in College Station, Texas, home of Texas A&M University.
 - (B) President Donald Trump offered a video greeting that avoided his past criticism of the former presidents and called them "some of America's finest public servants."
 - (C) The elder Bush did not speak but smiled and waved to the crowd.
 - (D) They appealed for national unity to help those hurt by the hurricanes.

- 3 Which of the following people quoted in the article would be MOST likely to agree that former presidents are highly skilled at soliciting donations from the public?
 - (A) George W. Bush
 - (B) Donald Trump
 - (C) Brandon Rottinghaus
 - (D) Bill Clinton

- 4 Which of the following answer choices would BEST describe President Trump's alleged reaction to the disaster in Puerto Rico?
 - (A) abnormally critical
 - (B) curiously neutral
 - (C) extremely empathetic
 - (D) moderately reassuring

Answer Key

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