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THE WHITE HOUSE

EXCHANGE OF REMARKS
BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT
AND
MARCELLO SERAFINI
MINISTER OF THE ITALIAN EMBASSY

THE ROSE GARDEN

3:40 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Mr. Vice President, Mr. Minister, distinguished Members of the House and Senate, distinguished guests:

This supplemental appropriations bill and our signing today provides over \$12 billion to fund very important programs of all Cabinet departments and many other agencies during the remainder of fiscal year 1976 and the transition quarter.

Although the bill contains a number of undesirable increases in spending levels, it contains funds that are needed very quickly in areas including education, health, energy research, veterans' benefits and including the United States' contribution to the new International Food and Agricultural Development Fund, a major United States initiative at the 1974 World Food Conference in Rome.

Of great importance, this bill contains \$25 million in disaster relief assistance, which I requested of the Congress on May 11 to help the Italian nation recover from the devastating effects of the earthquake of May 6.

Let me express my deep appreciation to both Houses of the Congress for their prompt and favorable action at a time when natural disaster has brought such great tragedy to the people of Italy. Americans everywhere are moved to respond quickly and in the spirit of profound friendship between our two countries.

These disaster relief funds will give us the welcome chance to build on the assistance we have already been able to give. Almost from the moment the earthquake struck, United States Ambassador John Volpe and the United States military forces stationed in Italy were on the scene, making our initial assistance contribution.

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On May 13 the Vice President and Daniel Parker, my special coordinator for international disaster assistance, went to Italy, at my request, to receive a firsthand report on the impact of the earthquakes and on the ways in which the United States could be of assistance.

I received their report on May 17 and based on this information, our specialists are now working with the Italian authorities to implement the most effective possible recovery program. The ties between the American and the Italian people are very broad and very deep. Our hearts and hands go out to thousands who have been stricken and who have lost their loved ones in this tragic disaster.

I know that all here join me in the profound hope that the funds and assistance programs made possible by this legislation will enable the people of Italy to rebuild their homes and their towns and to place this great tragedy behind them.

We in the United States, 215 million of us, want to do everything possible to assist our good friend and ally at this time of great need.

MR. SERAFINI: I am deeply moved, Mr. President. On behalf of the Italian Government, on behalf of the people of Italy, on behalf of those people who were stricken by this calamity, I wish to convey to the people of the United States, to those Congressmen and Senators who took the initiative to raise all these funds, to you personally, Mr. President, our feeling of deepest appreciation and gratitude for this token of friendship and human solidarity.

I am sure that this money that has been collected here in the framework of our friendly relations will be instrumental in helping those people who just want to build up their homes and go back to work.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

END (AT 3:47 P.M. EDT)