

Obama Celebrates Quiet Holiday At The White House

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama celebrated Thanksgiving quietly at the White House with his family, friends and some White House staff members after phoning 10 members of the U.S. armed services in Afghanistan.

Obama, as has been his practice during previous holidays, reached out to service members from the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps and Navy.

“The president thanked each of them for their service and sacrifice and wished them and their families a happy Thanksgiving,” the White House said.

The president was joining first lady Michelle Obama and their daughters, Sasha and Malia, later Thursday for dinner, where they were to be joined by White House staff members and guests.

The Thanksgiving dinner menu included ham, oyster stuffing and macaroni and cheese along with the traditional turkey, sweet potatoes and green bean casserole. For those with a sweet tooth, half a dozen pies, including Huckleberry, were readied.

In his weekly radio and Internet address, released in connection with the holiday, Obama urged Americans to put aside partisan differences and come together as a nation.

He said the country has “just emerged from a campaign season that was passionate, noisy and vital to our democracy.”

While the election required voters to make choices, Obama said that Thanksgiving offered “a chance to put it all in perspective — to remember that, despite our differences, we are and always will be Americans first and foremost.”

Holiday

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The boys didn't look up. “I guess they're over it,” the father said with a shrug.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg was reflective Thursday as he praised police, firefighters, armed services personnel, sanitation workers and volunteers involved in the storm response. His office was coordinating the distribution of 26,500 meals at 30 sites in neighborhoods affected by Sandy, and other organizations also were pitching in.

The disaster zones on Staten Island were flooded — this time with food and volunteers from Glen Rock, N.J., organized using social media.

“We had three carloads of food,” volunteer Beth Fernandez said. “The whole town of Glen Rock pitched in. ... It's really cool. It's my best, my favorite Thanksgiving ever.”

On Long Island, the Long Beach nonprofit Surf For All hosted a Thanksgiving event that fed 1,200 people. Carol Gross, 72, a Long Beach native, said she went to volunteer but was turned away because of a surplus of helpers.

“A lot of people like me, old-timers, we've never seen anything like this horror,” she said, recalling the destruction.

Gross' brother, Jerry, who moved to Arizona in the 1960s, was stunned by what he saw when he returned for Thanksgiving.

“To come back and see the boardwalk all devastated like it is, it's like going to Manhattan and finding Times Square gone,” he said.

George Alvarez, whose Toms River, N.J., home suffered moderate damage when Sandy hit the coast, said his family usually does “the traditional big dinner” on Thanksgiving. But this year, they chose to attend a community dinner held at an area church.

“This storm not only impacted us, it impacted a lot of our friends, our community, our psyche,” Alvarez said shortly before his family headed out for their meal. “We could have had our usual dinner here at home, but this year it felt like we should be with others who are experiencing the same concerns we are. We made it through this devastating storm, and that's something to celebrate.”

Across the country, other cities offered a mix of holiday cheer and acts of charity.

Thousands of people made the most of the mild, sunny fall weather to watch Detroit's Thanksgiving parade, hours ahead of the Lions' annual home game.

Floats and marching bands poured down Woodward Avenue on Thursday morning, with many spectators forgoing the cold-weather gear of past parades. Detroit's temperature hit 52 degrees at 11 a.m., with a warm wind blowing from the south.

Parade participants included NASCAR driver Brad Keselowski, a 28-year-old Rochester Hills native and the first Michigan-born driver to win the Sprint Cup Series.

In San Francisco, lines of the homeless and less fortunate began forming late Wednesday outside a church in the city's tough Tenderloin district that expected to serve more than 5,000 meals, said the Rev. Cecil Williams.

“We must make sure people can overcome all adversities,” Williams said. “You can, you will and you must.”

On New York City's Rockaway Peninsula, convenience store owner Mohamed Razack said he was able to open again Wednesday for the first time since the storm.

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