

Louisiana Governor Denies Donald Trump 'Photo Op' With Flood Devastation

U.S. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump and his running mate arrived in the flood-damaged city of Baton Rouge on Friday but the state's Democratic governor advised against touring areas affected by recent deadly rains.

Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards' office said Trump had not called to discuss plans for his visit, but that the New York businessman was welcome to volunteer or make a sizable donation towards helping victims.

"We welcome him to (Louisiana), but not for a photo op," the governor's office said in a statement. "Instead we hope he'll consider volunteering or making a sizable donation to the LA Flood Relief Fund to help the victims of this storm."

Some 40,000 homes were damaged and at least 13 people died in Louisiana after a deluge of more than 2-1/2 feet (meters) in what has been described as the worst U.S. storm since Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

Television footage showed the presidential candidate disembarked from his plane sporting a white baseball cap with his campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" on it and shook hands with officials on the tarmac before leaving the airport in a motorcade.

Trump and vice presidential running mate Indiana Governor Mike Pence traveled to the state capital Baton Rouge separately. The pair were planning to meet with families in the flood-hit areas, according to Fox News.

Hillary Clinton, Trump's Democratic rival in the Nov.

8 presidential election, said in a Twitter post earlier this week she was closely monitoring the situation and directed people to the Red Cross.

Trump's campaign team was changed again on Friday when Paul Manafort resigned as chairman days after the candidate effectively demoted him in a leadership shakeup.

Some people in Louisiana have urged President Barack Obama to cut short a vacation in Martha's Vineyard to visit and view the flood devastation. Obama's vacation is due to end on Sunday.

Edwards said he urged the president to wait a few weeks before visiting as the huge security undertaking involved would interfere with recovery efforts.

"It is a major ordeal," he told MSNBC late Thursday, the same day U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson met with Edwards to see the emergency response.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Craig Fugate defended Obama's decision not to visit.

"We still have response operations going on," Fugate told CNN. "To move the president into a disaster area actually takes away some time from the response and the focus on" saving people.

Fugate has said he talked with Obama this week about the response. The president has also declared it a federal disaster, freeing up emergency resources.

In 2005, then-President George W. Bush, a Republican, drew criticism for flying over extensively damaged New Orleans, Louisiana, and then giving a speech in the still-flooded city following Hurricane Katrina.

Although waters have receded in many deluged parts, some areas around Lafayette, in the southwestern part of the state, are

now experiencing major flooding as the water moves, according to the National Weather Service.

Some 86,500 people have already filed for federal aid following the historic levels of rainfall.

Thousands of people must now contend with flood-hit homes and about 4,000 people were in shelters, according to state officials. The Red Cross has said recovery efforts will cost at least \$30 million. {eo}

© 2016 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.