

Remarks to the Military Community at Elmendorf Air Force Base in
Anchorage, Alaska
November 11, 1994

Thank you very much, General Boese, General Cox, General Case, General Needham. On this Veterans Day, I would be remiss if I did not say a special word of thanks to General Needham for his work in trying to recover the information we need about our POW's and MIA's in Vietnam. I thank you, sir, for your work there. Governor Hickel, Senator Stevens, Mayor Mystrom, former Governor Sheffield, ladies and gentlemen, I'm glad to be here in Alaska. I've been trying for 2 years to get here to Alaska. At times I find the President is Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces but not of his own schedule. *[Laughter]*

Twenty-five years ago, before I met her, my wife came to Alaska and worked for a summer. So you can say to me, welcome to Alaska, but for Hillary, it's welcome back to Alaska. I've heard so much about it I always felt that I had imagined it, seen it all in my mind. Those of you who, like me, have been married for a while, we've told each other the same stories so many times I feel that I could tell you what it was like when I worked in Alaska 25 years ago. *[Laughter]* But I'm glad to be here to see the real thing.

I've also heard a lot about Alaska from another group, the veterans of the 208th Coastal Artillery, a National Guard unit from my home State of Arkansas that defended Dutch Harbor in the Aleutians during World War II. One of my best friends and one of my former chiefs of staff lost his brother in that brave struggle. And I just want you to know that I know you're a long way from the rest of our country territorially, but we're proud to be here in the United States and proud of the contribution that Alaska has made to the United States of America.

I am especially pleased to be here on Veterans Day because, as all of you know, Alaska is veteran country, the State with the highest concentration of both current armed forces personnel and former servicemen and women in the entire State of the Union.

I began this morning at Arlington National Cemetery, and that's what this little pin is. This is the pin the National Cemetery did for Vet-

erans Day this year, honoring all those who served. It was a beautiful day there—a little warmer. *[Laughter]* The sun was shining; there were still a few autumn leaves on the trees. And the great amphitheater at Arlington is being closed for—it's being repaired. Many of you have seen that amphitheater there. So instead, we celebrated Veterans Day at the foot of the long steps up to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. And it was so incredibly moving, walking up those long flight of stairs to put the wreath down and then turning around and looking just as far as you could see down a sweeping, beautiful hillside with American veterans, their families, their supporters standing in the midst of the magnificent graves of Arlington Cemetery.

I'm on my way to Manila now to honor other soldiers, those who fought in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War—to recall those who left home and family for places they never heard of, places they could barely imagine, for dangers they certainly could not have imagined. To those of you here who defended us in that war, whether in the islands of the Far East or here in Alaska with distinguished units like the Eskimo Scouts, on this Veterans Day, I salute you, and on behalf of all the American people, I thank you.

We also honor and remember all those who, in war and peace, have given so much to America so that we could remain free and strong. To all the veterans of our Armed Forces, your country will never forget the extraordinary service you have performed. We owe you the safety of our shores and the liberty we enjoy. We have a special obligation to all of you who are veterans. Even when your service in uniform ends, the country's service must continue.

In recent weeks I signed into law two bills that addressed the concerns of thousands of veterans. The Veterans Health Program Act of 1994 extends the Veterans Administration's authority to provide hospital, outpatient, and nursing home care to veterans of the Gulf war, Vietnam, and World War II to any exposure they may have had from toxic substances. The act also provides about \$400 million—*[applause]*—thank you, thank you. The act also provides nearly

\$400 million for the VA to build, lease, and repair medical facilities around our country. The Veterans Benefit Improvement Act of 1994 authorizes compensation to Gulf war veterans suffering from undiagnosed illnesses from Operation Desert Storm. No one who wears our uniforms, no member of their families should have to suffer because of difficulty in diagnosing a particular illness. Thanks to this act, we will be able to respond quickly and compassionately to veterans' needs plainly related to what they have done in the service of our country.

Today we also must pay tribute to those of you who at this very moment are standing watch for freedom, demonstrating skill and professionalism here in Alaska and around the world. I know that personnel from Elmendorf and Fort Richardson are now deployed in support of the operation in Haiti, where our troops have helped a nation turn from fear, oppression, and intimidation back to democracy and hope. And I thank you for that. I thank you also for your service in humanitarian missions, from Rwanda to Papua New Guinea. You have shown that we stand by our ideals. Thank you. *[Applause]* Somebody back there sounds like he wants to go back. *[Laughter]* Thank you.

Here at the Alaskan Command, your strength and preparedness has helped America to keep its security commitments in Asia as well. Alaska Command plays a vital role in maintaining security on the Korean Peninsula, where I have visited our troops and where we have just concluded an agreement with North Korea to make sure that that nation becomes a nonnuclear state and does not contribute to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

And finally, I thank you for the support of our troops in the Persian Gulf, where we moved with amazing speed and strength to make sure that Iraq poses no threat to its neighbors or to the stability of the vital Gulf region. I thank you for your contribution in that.

This kind of decisive action tells the world that when America makes a commitment, we keep that commitment. And I want you to know that we all understand it is your strength, your ability, your preparedness, and your devotion to duty that makes it possible for me as President to make and keep commitments on behalf of the United States. We are all in your debt on this Veterans Day for that, and on every day. And because of that, it is imperative that you remain the best equipped, best trained, best

prepared fighting force in the world, and we will see that you do so.

You know, here in Alaska, the home of Senator Ted Stevens and Senator Frank Murkowski and Congressman Don Young, I want to say that in light of the elections last Tuesday giving a majority of the Congress to the Republican Party, I want to pledge again to work with them on issues of concern to the State of Alaska and to work with them, more importantly, as well as all others of both parties, in a nonpartisan way on behalf of problems of this country, which are in many cases new, different, challenging, unlike anything we have faced before, and unable to be put into clean and neat partisan categories. Let us now join together to move this country forward in the best American spirit.

All over our country today, we have a unique situation, as far as I know, in the history of America. We are in the midst of an economic recovery that is the envy of the world, and yet still, a majority of ordinary Americans, the people who keep this country going, who get up every day and work hard to try to build their families and raise their kids to do the right thing and have a good life, a majority of those people feel personal insecurities, insecurities that are economic, insecurities that are social. They're worried about the crime in our streets or the stability of their jobs or the security of their health care benefits.

Interestingly enough, when I went to Europe to celebrate D-Day, I met on two separate occasions with very large numbers of American service personnel who were celebrating the end of the cold war with the D-Day celebration and with the other celebrations because they knew that we were able to reduce our force in Europe somewhat. But over and over and over again these fine people who had worn our uniform said, "Well, if I go home, Mr. President, will I be able to find a job? If I find a job, Mr. President, will it be a job with health benefits with my kids, or without them? Because as long as I'm in the military, I have that."

This is a significant new development in the history of our country where, because of the radical changes in the global economy and because of social problems we've been dealing with in our Nation for 30 years now, you have a majority of ordinary Americans feeling uncertainty in the midst of developments which appear to be very, very hopeful.

Well, I can tell you that both are true. The events are hopeful, the trends are good, but the reasons for insecurity and uncertainty are real. We have to continue to work together to reduce the size of our Government where it is too big, to make sure that you get better value for the dollar, to make sure that people at the State and local level, where folks are in touch with the grassroots realities, have more freedoms to pursue reforms in their schools, in their welfare systems, in their health care systems. We have to do what we can also, together, to keep this economic recovery going so that we not only get more jobs, we get higher paying jobs and greater stability and security and support for those jobs.

Finally this year, after a very long time, we are beginning to see high-wage jobs come back into the American economy, more this year than in the previous 5 years combined. But folks, make no mistake about it, you here on America's frontier know that we are in a global economy, know that we have to fight and struggle for every single opportunity we have, and know that we have to be as competitive, as efficient, and as dominant where we can, economically as we are militarily. Your strength must be mirrored in the strength of every American business, every American community, and every American family. If we can equal your performance economically, we will do just fine well into the 21st century for our children and our grandchildren.

Believe it or not, I know you'd never know it from the press, but we've actually worked together some before in the last 2 years. I thank—for example, I would like to thank Senator Stevens and Senator Murkowski for supporting the Family and Medical Leave Act, which made it possible for 66,000 people here in Alaska to take a little time off when a baby was born or a parent was sick without losing their job.

And so I say to you, we've got a lot of work to do as a country. In the military, you've done a brilliant job of setting up a continuous, continuous education and training program. Why are we doing so well? Because the military is always changing but still rooted to its traditional values. That is what America must do.

One of the little-known facts about the success of our operation in Haiti and the success of our operation in the Gulf recently is that both of them reflected lessons learned in the

last 2 years to increase our mobility by land, by air, by sea; to pre-position materials; to train people to do new and different skills; to have the services working together as never before. The Haitian operation was the most integrated, jointly planned, jointly executed operation in American history. That is what we have to do in our private lives as well, always learning, always growing, always moving forward.

That is a new challenge for America. It does not have a partisan label on it. It is very important; the national interest is at stake. We've always done what it took for the national defense. We have always understood that national security required us to be strong around the world. But we know ultimately that the security of America is in our strong families, our strong communities, our education systems, our ability to generate good jobs, and our ability to keep our streets safe and our laws sacred—strong at home and strong abroad.

On this Veterans Day, I want to say that one of my most prized possessions as President are the coins that I get whenever I visit any base, any unit. I now must have 100 on a big table in the Oval Office. Anybody that comes in to see the President of the United States sees a big, flat table covered with military coins from all over the world and all over the United States, a constant reminder of the service that you have rendered to our country. And I ask you to think about that on this Veterans Day. Being strong abroad and being strong at home are two sides of the coin we should have for America and we should leave to our children.

God bless you all, and God bless America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:15 p.m. in Hangar 1. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Lawrence E. Boese, commander, Alaskan Command; Maj. Gen. Hugh L. Cox III, adjutant general, Alaska National Guard; Brig. Gen. Thomas R. Case, commander, 3d Wing; Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Needham, USA, commander, U.S. Armed Forces, Alaska; Gov. Walter J. Hickel of Alaska; and Mayor Rick Mystrom of Anchorage. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.