

Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for the National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week Proclamation
November 9, 2001

Welcome to the White House. Thank you all for coming.

I am pleased to be here today to salute the national guardsmen and reservists and their employers for serving their country and to announce some important new measures to make air travel more secure over the holidays.

America is engaged in a long and difficult struggle. At a key moment in our history, an important moment in the history of freedom, members of the National Guard and Reserve are answering their country's call. They are performing their duty with skill and with courage. And by supporting their mobilization, many employers are demonstrating their own patriotism.

In a moment, I will sign a proclamation naming next week National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week. It is a way to express our appreciation to these employers and to thank them for their selfless devotion to our great country.

I want to thank the Secretary of Transportation, who is here, Norm Mineta. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary, for your hard work. I appreciate Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz for being here as well. Thank you, Paul. And of course, I want to thank John McHugh, Representative from New York. Thank you for coming, John.

America faces an evil and a determined enemy. They committed mass murder against innocent citizens, and they have brought misery and terror to the people of Afghanistan. They persecute women. They destroy great monuments of human culture and religious faith. They execute people who convert to other religions. They steal food that we send to help starving people. They hope to spread their terror

around the world, but we're not going to let them.

The Al Qaida terrorist network and every nation that supports it are enemies of liberty and human dignity. We will oppose them. We'll find them. And we'll defeat them.

The American people have responded magnificently to this challenge. The terrorists thought they could break the spirit of this country. They really didn't understand America. Their attacks have had the opposite effect, for we're strong. We're united. We are patient. We're determined. And all of us are ready to serve the great cause of freedom.

The National Guard and Reserve are examples of this service. Since September the 11th, we have called to active duty nearly 53,000 Guard and Reserve personnel. They are guarding energy plants. They are meeting the military's intelligence, medical, and supply needs with specialized training. And they are securing our airports.

In order to increase security of airline travelers during the holiday season, we will increase by 25 percent the number of National Guard personnel who protect our airports and airlines and American travelers. We are calling up these guards men and women immediately. This increase in security will last through the busy holiday period, and it is in addition to more than the 6,000 members of the Guard already mobilized at airports since September the 11th. These are temporary measures, and we believe they'll help a lot. And we are making fundamental changes to airport security as well.

The Federal Government must take and, I believe, will take control of aviation security. I am pleased that both Houses of Congress have passed bills that do just that.

And I urge Congress to work hard to resolve the differences between the two bills—they're not that far apart—and to get to my desk as quickly as possible a bill that will make air travel much safer for the American people.

While Congress finishes its business, I have instructed our good Secretary, Secretary of Transportation Mineta, to begin a series of high-level transition planning sessions with airport operators, security device manufacturers, airline CEOs, and other parties that will play a direct role in the transition to the new airport security system.

There are additional steps we are taking to increase the public's safety and its confidence in air travel. The FAA is deploying a core team of security professionals to improve oversight of screening and other security functions at our airports. I am instructing the Inspector General of the Department of Transportation to conduct undercover audits of security performance at airports nationwide, to ensure the strict compliance of FAA security standards. And in September, I announced a \$300 million grant program to secure airport—secure cockpit doors on airplanes. And I commend the airlines for acting quickly. Major airlines have now fortified cockpit doors on 100 percent of their airplanes.

We're fighting a war on many fronts. It's a diplomatic war; it's a financial war. The military is performing brilliantly in Afghanistan, and we could not win the war without the help of the Guard and the reservists. And they, in turn, could not do their vital work without the support of their employers. Many employers are putting the national interests above their own self-interest, including the five recipients of the Secretary of Defense Employers Support Freedom Award. They have representatives with

us today: Southwest Airlines, Boeing, EDS Electronic Data Systems, BAE Systems, and the City of Bedford, Virginia.

These employers are supporting the National Guard and Reserve in practical and important ways, including providing full pay, benefits, and job security to employees who are called to active service. Employers do these things because they recognize that their workers are fighting to keep America free. They recognize that we have such huge stakes. They also know that America's military forces are the best trained in the world. And when you hire a member of the Guard or Reserve, you bring that training to your workplace.

Since September the 11th, more than 1,000 State and local chambers of commerce have signed statements of support for employees who serve in the Guard and Reserve.

Well, the Federal Government, it turns out, is the largest employer of Guard and Reserve personnel in America. And I am proud to sign a statement of support on behalf of our Federal Government.

I am also pleased to sign the proclamation naming next week National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week. I would like to welcome up to the stage for the signing Paul Wolfowitz, who represents the Defense Department, and the five winners of the Secretary of Defense Employers Support Freedom Award.

I want to thank you all for your service to America. Thank you for coming to the White House. And may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:33 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.