

You know, the true strength of our country is much greater than our military. The true strength of America are the hearts and souls of loving American citizens. And we have an obligation in our free society to work to make our society as compassionate and as kind as it can possibly be.

Today I had the honor, when I landed here, to meet Jane Davis. Where are you, Jane? There she is. Jane, thank you. Don't clap yet until you hear about her. She's the wife of Colonel Gary Matteson of Fort Bragg. The reason I mention Jane is because she is an example of what I'm talking about, about the strength of the country. Right after September the 11th, she left North Carolina to volunteer at Ground Zero in New York City. Nobody had to tell Jane. There wasn't a Government edict. There wasn't a telegram from Washington, DC, directing her to go to Ground Zero. She followed her heart. She knew it was the right thing to do. It's the Jane Davises that really defined America for the world to see.

And you can be—you can help a neighbor in all kinds of ways. You can walk across a street to a shut-in and say, "What can I do to help your day?" Or you can mentor a child, or you can teach in a classroom. If you want to help, you can get on the Internet and dial up usafreedomcorps.gov and see. And we've

got a member of the Senior Corps here, which is a part of the USA Freedom Corps. If you want to be involved, there's all kinds of ways—all you've got to do to act. But if you're interested in joining the war against terror, do something to make your community a more vibrant and kind place.

It is what I like to call the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness that define America for what we are. And I'm proud to be the President of a nation that is dedicated and firm in our defense of liberty, that will stand strong when we defend freedom and not blink or tire. And likewise, I'm proud to be the President of a nation whose true strength are the hearts and souls of citizens from all walks of life.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:54 a.m. at the Cumberland County Coliseum Complex. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Dan K. McNeill, USA, commanding general, 18th Airborne Corps; Gen. Charles R. Holland, USAF, commander in chief, Headquarters U.S. Special Operations Command; Lt. Gen. Bryan D. Brown, USA, commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command; North Carolina senatorial candidate Elizabeth Dole; and Col. Gary N. Matteson, USA, commander, Womack Army Medical Center.

Exchange With Reporters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina March 15, 2002

President's Visit

Q. Mr. President, it was a little noisy over there; could you give us your impression of what you—

The President. I was very impressed. We've got the finest soldiers in the world. We've got a great training mission, and I'm glad those soldiers are on my side.

Q. What kind of message should that display send to adversaries?

The President. Well, what the adversaries need to know is we're going to do what is necessary to have a well-trained military to accomplish a major objective, an important objective, which is, defend freedom. And the adversaries need to know that we're going to be in this for a long time,

that we're going to be steady, relentless, and we're going to win.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Sir, what are you hearing from General Zinni? Is his mission making any headway?

The President. Haven't heard from him yet, but I believe there's good progress in the Middle East. Obviously, the Israelis have moved back some of their troops. That's a positive development. And I have yet to hear from Zinni, but we will soon.

Q. [*Inaudible*]-troop withdrawal from Ramallah?

The President. Well, we're very pleased with it. As I said, that one of the things we've got to do is to work with both parties to establish the conditions for eventual peace. And I appreciate Prime Minister Sharon's decision. General Zinni is in the region now. We're hopeful that he'll have an impact on setting the conditions for peace, which begins with getting into the Tenet plan and then, eventually, the Mitchell plan. I thought that was a positive development yesterday.

Q. How hopeful are you that he'll be able to succeed?

The President. If I wasn't hopeful, I wouldn't have sent him.

Mikey, Mikey, Mikey [Mike Allen, Washington Post].

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Did that get any national play, that "Mikey, Mikey, Mikey"?

Q. With my family.

President's Visit

Q. What about lunch, Mr. President? What do you think of it? Are you getting ready to dig in? What have you seen today? Are you pretty happy?

The President. Well, first of all, I knew our troops were good because I've been reading reports about how good they are. I got to see firsthand—I'm going to see all day long, firsthand—the esprit de corps

is very high here. These soldiers are proud to wear the uniform. Great command staff; they've got highly motivated officers; they are well-trained. Every one of the troops, as I moved down the line, spoke a foreign language. To give you an example of how well-trained they are, the medics, these highly trained young men, can conduct—they can pull a tooth or they can amputate a leg, if need be. I mean, these are fabulously trained soldiers. I'm real proud of their training.

One of the things we've got to make sure that Congress understands is that we've got to spend the money necessary to keep them highly trained. They all know we're in for a long struggle. They're prepared to make the sacrifices to meet that struggle.

I had the honor of meeting with the widows of two of the soldiers who died—and their dad and their mom of one of the guys—and to a person, they said, "Mr. President, don't falter." These people just lost a loved one, and they are just as resolved about winning this war on terror as I am. And I was very impressed by their steadfast support for what we're doing and their understanding of the sacrifices necessary to defend freedom.

Now I'm going to eat my lasagna. If it gets cold, you have to eat the lasagna. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at noon while the President was walking through the lunch line. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.); and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this exchange.

The President's Radio Address *March 16, 2002*

Good morning. In one week, boys and girls in Afghanistan will start a new school year. For many girls, this will be the first time in their young lives that they will have set foot in a classroom. Under the Taliban regime, educating women was a criminal act. Under the new government of a liberated Afghanistan, educating all children is a national priority. And America, along with its coalition partners, is actively helping in that effort.

When Afghan children begin their classes, they will find that the United States has already sent more than 4 million textbooks to their country. The textbooks are written in the Afghan languages of Pashto and Dari. And before the end of the year, we'll have sent almost 10 million of them to the children of Afghanistan. These textbooks will teach tolerance and respect for human dignity, instead of indoctrinating students with fanaticism and bigotry. And they will be accompanied by blackboards, teacher's kits, and other school supplies.

America's children have been extremely generous in helping the children of Afghanistan. Through America's Fund for Afghan Children, they have raised more than \$4.5 million, much of which is used for school supplies like notebooks and pencils, paper and crayons, soccer balls and jump ropes. The United States will also be funding 20 teams of teacher trainers to conduct training sessions with thousands of Afghan educators.

In helping the Afghan people rebuild their country, we have placed a central focus on education, and for a good reason. Education is the pathway to progress, particularly for women. Educated women tend

to be healthier than those who are not well educated, and the same is true of their families. Babies born to educated women are more likely to be immunized, better nourished, and survive their first year of life. Educated women encourage their children to be educated as well. And nations whose women are educated are more competitive, more prosperous, and more advanced than nations where the education of women is forbidden or ignored.

We still have a lot of work to do in Afghanistan. The brave men and women of the American military continue to fight Al Qaida forces that are trying to regroup and would like nothing more than to strike America again. And even as we fight terror, American compassion is providing an alternative to bitterness, resentment, and hatred.

The United States has helped Afghanistan avert mass starvation. We're repairing its roads and bridges. We're rebuilding its health clinics and schools. And in one week, with textbooks in hand, the young girls of Afghanistan will begin school. This will be a remarkable moment in the history of Afghanistan and a proud moment for the people of America.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:25 a.m. on March 14 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 16. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 15 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.