

Statement on Completion of the NATO Air Mission in the United States May 16, 2002

I thank NATO for the steadfast support and cooperation after the attacks on September 11. Today marks the end of NATO aircraft and crews patrolling American skies as part of Operation Noble Eagle. These aircrews began their deployment soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. This deployment, coupled with the declaration that the attacks on the United States

were attacks on all NATO members, affirmed NATO's commitment to collective defense.

For 220 days, NATO aircrews from 12 nations, based at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma, flew missions over the United States. On behalf of the American people, I thank them for their important contribution to the defense of this Nation.

Remarks on Presenting the Commander in Chief's Trophy to the United States Air Force Academy Falcons May 17, 2002

Please be seated. Thank you. Well, it's my honor to welcome back—[laughter]—the Mighty Falcons. It seems like Coach DeBerry is the charter member of the White House frequent visitor club. [Laughter] I'm real proud of you all and want to congratulate you for a great season and for winning the Commander's Trophy again.

I recognize Pete Pace. You look a little out of place here, Pete—[laughter]—but I'm glad you're here. You're doing a fine job. General John Jumper, as well, is here. I want to thank the Lieutenant General, John Dallager; thank you, Superintendent, wherever you are. One of these days, you'll invite me to the graduation ceremonies. [Laughter]

I do want to thank the players for their hard work and the example they set. And of course, I want to congratulate the coach again. I was reading where he is going to go to the South Carolina Athletic Hall of Fame. That's a big deal, if you're from South Carolina. So Coach, congratulations for that.

The interesting thing about this group of seniors is, they have never lost to Army

or Navy. But upon graduation, they're going to be on the same team, and that's important for them to remember.

During last May's visit, I said of Coach DeBerry, he is not just recruiting to win football games; he is recruiting to win our Nation's wars, if we have one. That was May. And on September 11th, war came to our country. And I want to thank you, Coach, for recruiting those who will help us win our Nation's wars, because unlike the last time we met, we're at war. We're in the midst of a war against a determined and fierce enemy.

I want the troops here to know that I take my job as the Commander in Chief very seriously, that my most important job is to protect America and to protect our homeland. I do whatever it takes, and I know you'll join me in doing whatever it takes to prevent the enemy from attacking America again, like they did, and causing thousands to suffer and to mourn and to grieve.

You know, what's interesting about Washington, it's a town—unfortunately, it's the kind of place where second-guessing has become second-nature. The American

people know this about me and my national security team and my administration: Had I known that the enemy was going to use airplanes to kill on that fateful morning, I would have done everything in my power to protect the American people. We will use the might of America to protect the American people.

We're in for a long struggle. It's a tough war. This is an enemy that's not going to quit. So therefore, in order to protect innocent lives, this country must have the will and the determination to chase these killers down one by one and bring them to justice. And that's exactly what is going to happen, so long as I am the President of the United States of America.

I'm proud of what this group of Americans have done on the football field; no more proud than those who wear the blue, I might add. And I'm proud of your commitment to our country. See, this enemy of ours, they don't understand the Air Force Academy or what it stands for. They thought we were weak—of course, they never saw the Air Force football team play.

They thought we'd just roll over. They thought we might file a couple of lawsuits. They found out we think differently here in America.

We think differently because this is a nation that loves our freedom, loves our country. And this is a nation that has got citizens who are willing to sacrifice for a cause greater than themselves. We're here to honor a football team; we're also here to honor soldiers, men and women who wear our uniform and who are willing to sacrifice for the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

Welcome back to the White House. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Fisher DeBerry, head football coach, and Lt. Gen. John R. Dallager, USAF, Superintendent, U.S. Air Force Academy; Gen. John P. Jumper, USAF, Air Force Chief of Staff; and Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Remarks to the Coalition for Medicare Choices

May 17, 2002

Well, thanks for that warm welcome, and welcome to the people's house, the White House. I am so glad you're here to discuss an incredibly important subject, and that is how we can work together to strengthen Medicare.

The most eloquent spokespersons for Medicare are our senior citizens. And I share the determination of people in this room to make sure that Medicare is—not only works for this generation, the generation now on Medicare, but works for generations to come. Our Nation has a moral commitment to fulfill Medicare's promise of health care security for American seniors and for people with disabilities. Yet, we

need to do more to meet the commitment, and that's what we're here to talk about today.

Two problems demand immediate action: Medicare must provide prescription drug coverage, and all seniors should be able to choose an affordable Medicare coverage option that best suits their needs. We're going to keep our commitment to senior Americans, and we'll work together to make Medicare work better.

I want to thank Tom Scully from Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services for being here—that used to be called HCFA. [*Laughter*] He joins me in a strong commitment for that which I'm about to talk