

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

June 7, 2002

Department of Homeland Security

The President. I want to welcome Members of the Senate and the House, members of both political parties, to the Cabinet Room this morning to discuss how best to implement the strategy that I talked about last night, that other Members of Congress have been talking about for awhile, and that is the development of the Department of Homeland Security.

We've got a lot of work to do to get this Department implemented. There's going to be a lot of turf protection in the Congress. But I'm convinced that by working together, that we can do what's right for America, and I believe we can get something done.

To this end, I'm going to direct Tom Ridge to testify before Congress about the need for the establishment of this Cabinet agency. I feel strongly that he is the—he can represent the interests of the administration on the Hill, and he can bring our message to the Hill.

And I look forward to working with Senators Lieberman and Specter and Members of the House to get this important legislation passed. Obviously, the sooner the debate begins, the sooner the passage of this bill can happen. And that's good for the country.

Again, I want to thank the Members who are here. I want to thank you for your leadership on this issue. Thank you for your willingness to speak out about the importance of protecting our homeland.

I'll answer a couple of questions. Yes, Ron [Ron Fournier, Associated Press]?

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Thank you. If I could look ahead the next couple days, it's been a couple months now since you asked all the parties to step up in the Middle East, and there are still

suicide bombings, still the incursions by the Israelis. Is there any hope for any progress in the next couple days with the President of Egypt and the Prime Minister of Israel?

The President. Yes, I mean, we're going to have good discussions, and that's always important. George Tenet has just come back from the Middle East. Ambassador Burns is coming back from the Middle East. There's been consultation with all the parties. And after my meetings with President Mubarak and Prime Minister Sharon, I'll talk to our country about how I think we should move forward.

Progress is being made. The Arab world now understands they need to be involved in pushing for peace and fighting against the terrorist actions that have—that make it very difficult to achieve a peace.

I still am disappointed in Mr. Arafat's leadership. He needs to cut off the terrorist activities.

Q. So you're talking about a speech on the Middle East?

The President. Well, I don't know if it'll be a speech. It may be a discussion. It could be a paper. I haven't decided the forum.

Q. But you'll lay out a new vision?

The President. No. I'm going to lay out—listen, if you're interested to know what I think, go back to the April 4th speech.

Department of Homeland Security

Q. Mr. President, how are you going to deal with some of the turf battles that come up? And what led you to change your mind about a Cabinet agency?

The President. Well, first of all, I have always been—ever since we first got going, I've been exploring this idea. My mind was never made up one way or the other. I knew I needed to act right after September the 11th, and that's why I called upon Tom

to serve in the capacity in which he has served. We needed to do something very quickly right after the attack.

We've been exploring this idea for awhile. I've been listening to Members of the Congress, who have been quite articulate on the subject. And after doing a lot of work on the feasibility of setting up this Cabinet position, we decided to move forward yesterday.

Now, in terms of turf battles, there's nothing wrong with a good turf-battle fight. And one way to win that argument is to call upon the good services of effective Members of the House and the Senate. And that's what this meeting is all about; it's the beginning of winning the turf battle.

I think most Members of Congress understand the need to act. I know Members of Congress know that we're in a new type of war, and there's been precedent. As I talked about last night, Harry Truman moved—asked Congress to move, in the reforms of our war-fighting capacities, and we need to do the same thing for the homeland.

And we've got Members here—if you look around this table, we've got Members here with plenty of seniority and plenty of stroke and plenty of credibility to move this package through both the House and the Senate.

Q. Mr. President, many Americans, when they hear about this plan, may think it is a growth in the size of Government, in the bureaucracy, another layer of bureaucracy. What do you say to people who might have that concern, might be concerned that this is just a shuffle and reshuffling of the deck?

The President. Well, I would tell them that there's going to be savings by—when we combine accounting units and savings when we combine people in place to worry about administration. You see, when you combine agencies that are scattered throughout the Government, there are inherent savings, which means that we're

going to be able to have more money on the frontline of our homeland security.

There is—one of the things that's important about Government is that there be accountability within Government. And as I mentioned last night, there's over 100 different agencies involved in homeland security. In other words, the ability to protect the homeland is scattered throughout, so there really is no accountability.

I mentioned the example of Customs. You know, they collect tariffs, but they report to the Secretary of Treasury, who really isn't in charge of homeland security. And so the idea is to configure those existing agencies into a—that are responsible for pieces of our security into one agency, so that accountability is clear.

And obviously—Harry Truman said, "The buck stops here," in the White House. I understand that. But if that's the case, I want to make sure that accountability to me is clear, that we've aligned responsibility and authority. And so this is a very important reorganization to—it'll enable all of us to tell the American people that we're doing everything in our power to protect the homeland.

Q. Mr. President, we were told yesterday that this would lead to no substantial changes at the FBI and the CIA. Since those are the two agencies under the most scrutiny right now, how can Americans rest assured that this reorganization will really do anything to address the root intelligence failures behind the September 11th attacks?

The President. Well, first of all, the FBI and the CIA are changing. They understand that there have been gaps in intelligence sharing. If you listen to the testimony of FBI Director Mueller, you will understand that the FBI is making changes.

Now, FBI Mueller came to work one week before September the 11th. He'd been here one week on duty. And he has taken the testimony of the lady, the FBI woman out of Minneapolis, very seriously. He's looked at the report from Arizona. And he's reacted with reform.

The CIA and the FBI—I've said this in many, many speeches—that is, if you were paying attention to them—that the CIA and the FBI now talk like they've never talked before. In other words, we've learned lessons from what took place prior to September the 11th. And so the reforms, they're already going on, and they're making great progress and communicating in a much more seamless way, in a much more—in a way that will help protect the homeland.

Thank you all.

Death of Martin Burnham

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Yes, one question. I want to answer this. Yes?

Q. Are you satisfied that the Philippine troops did all they could in the rescue attempt of the Burnhams? And have you contacted their family here at home?

The President. First, let me say how sad we are that Martin Burnham lost his life, and I will call his parents. I'm pleased that Mrs. Burnham's alive; that's good.

I talked to President Arroyo of the Philippines. She told me that she had called

the Burnham parents, and I thanked her for reaching out. She assured me that the Philippine Government would hold the terrorist group accountable for how they treated these Americans, that justice would be done.

We are obviously going to look at all the particulars and the facts, and the State Department will be talking about that later on today.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:31 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Minneapolis, MN, FBI Agent Coleen Rowley; and President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo of the Philippines. He also referred to Martin Burnham, an American missionary who was held hostage in the Philippines by the Abu Sayyaf terrorist group and killed on June 7 during a rescue attempt; his wife, Gracia, who was held hostage with Mr. Burnham but rescued; and Mr. Burnham's parents, Paul and Oreta Burnham.

Remarks at the World Pork Expo in Des Moines, Iowa June 7, 2002

The President. Thank you for that warm welcome. David, thanks for your kind remarks. It's a great honor to be here. It's a great pleasure to get out of Washington. [Laughter] It feels like I'm kind of getting closer to home, to be with people who make their living on the land. I'm honored to be with the good folks who supply our country with food and the good folks who live the values of the farm.

I am honored to be traveling today with Tom Ridge. I gave a speech last night to the Nation that talked about the need to make sure we do everything we can to se-

cure the homeland. And Tom—I convinced him to leave the Governor's—the state-house of Pennsylvania to join me in Washington, and he's done a really good job, really good job.

I want to thank some of my friends who flew down from Washington with me. I don't know if they wanted a free ride or not, but they came. [Laughter] You know how Senator Grassley is. [Laughter] Congressman Ganske, Leach, and Latham also came down with me, and I was honored to travel with them. I appreciate their friendship. We spent a lot of time talking