

Exchange With Reporters During a Tour of the Squire Peak Fire Area in Ruch, Oregon August 22, 2002

Healthy Forests Initiative

Q. Mr. President, if I may, your proposal to thin out the forest a little bit—some critics say it might cause a drastic increase in commercial logging. What do you say—

The President. What the critics need to do is come and stand right where I stand. It's—what the critics need to do is come and see firsthand the effects of bad forest policy. That's what they need to come and see. And by the way, there's nothing wrong with people being able to earn a living off of effective forest management. There are a lot of people in this part of the State that can't find work because we don't properly manage our forests. And this is the second fire site I've been to this summer, and it's the same story. Had we properly managed our forests, the devastation caused would not nearly—have been nearly as severe as it has been. And it's a crying shame.

You heard the man say that when a forest like this burns, there's more likely to be disease. The beetles will come and start—we've got to do a better job. And that's why I'm here. I'm going to talk about how the administration can move, and I'm going to call upon Congress to enact some reasonable legislation to make sure we better manage our forest, so these guys aren't having to fight fires every year—particularly, one of the biggest we've seen in a long time, the Biscuit fire. And the point is, is that we can prevent fire by good sound practice.

[At this point, the tour continued.]

President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan

Q. Mr. President, do you have any reaction to President Musharraf's rewriting of the Pakistani Constitution?

The President. My reaction about President Musharraf—he's still tight with us on the war against terror, and that's what I appreciate. He's a—he understands that we've got to keep Al Qaida on the run and that, by keeping him on the run, it's more likely we will bring him to justice. And I appreciate his strong support.

Obviously, to the extent that our friends promote democracy, it's important. We will continue to work with our friends and allies to promote democracy, give people a chance to express their opinions the proper way. And—so we'll stay in touch with President Musharraf in more ways than one.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Yes.

Healthy Forests Initiative

Q. —back to the fire. Do we have enough money in the Federal coffers to pay for all the things needed throughout the West?

The President. Well, we'll—if we don't, we'll deal with it, because I mentioned to the Governor, Congress has got a way of spending money. My job is to make sure they spend on priorities, and if I didn't think the forest of the United States was a priority, I wouldn't be here. It is a priority.

The other thing is, is that there are partnerships which can be put together to the benefit of those who care about conservation, the State and those who employ people. And the approach I'm going to talk about and the approach, frankly, that the Governor has worked with Governor Kempthorne of Idaho on is a balanced approach, one that recognizes more than one party involved, that there are a variety of folks involved with the health of our forests. And all voices ought to be listened to, and a strategy ought to be developed that will—

that will achieve goals. One of the goals is prevent fire, healthy forests. Another goal is going to be to conserve our forests. Another goal will be to provide jobs. So we believe we can do that.

California Gubernatorial Candidate Bill Simon

Q. Sir, Bill Simon's family's investigation fund was found guilty of fraud. How do you reconcile that fact with your visits tomorrow to California to campaign for him, given your corporate accounting—

The President. I agree—I understand your question. Bill Simon assures us that

when the courts look at this case, he'll be innocent, and I take the man for his word.

Okay. You're tired of me answering questions, I know. [*Laughter*] It's unbelievable, 2 days in a row.

Q. We like it.

The President. What?

Q. We like it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:33 a.m. In his remarks, the President referred to Gov. John A. Kitzhaber of Oregon and Gov. Dirk Kempthorne of Idaho. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Remarks on the Healthy Forests Initiative in Ruch
August 22, 2002

Good morning. Thank you all for being here.

I just got a firsthand look at the terrible effects of the Squire fire. First, I want to thank the fire crews, the men and women of Oregon and surrounding States who risk their lives to put these fires out. On behalf of a grateful nation, I want to thank you for your service to the country, and thank you for what you do.

I flew over the Biscuit fire today when we were coming in. It's devastating. I mean, it is big, and it's a powerful fire that has been raging for more than a month. It's amazing the scope of the devastation that's taken place in Oregon as well as other Western States. Here in this State, a million acres have burned. A million acres have caught on fire. Hundreds of millions of trees have been destroyed. Countless lives have been affected—the same thing all across the West, a lot of people whose lives have been turned upside down. I saw firsthand the effects of fire in Arizona. I remember going to that school, Governor, where the people were just emotionally

spent because of what the fire had done to them.

These devastating fires are—threaten the safety of our communities, obviously the lives of the firefighters. They destroy homes. They ruin farms. These fires destroy critical wildlife habitat, and they leave behind long-lasting environmental damage. And as we work to put out the fires and to bring relief to the victims, we have a responsibility as a nation to work together to prevent the devastation that can be caused by future fires. We have a responsibility to bring sensible policy and put it in place.

Today I'm announcing some steps my administration is going to do to restore the health of America's forests, steps that I believe and we believe will help prevent the kind of destruction we've seen this year.

Before I talk about that, I do want to thank Secretary Ann Veneman and Secretary Gale Norton for coming and for working together, for listening to the voices, such as the voices of our Governors. These two ladies understand that not all the genius in the world is in Washington, DC,