

They passed it; I signed it. [*Laughter*] I worked with them. And it says this: Every child can learn. See, every child can learn. And this country will challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. This plan recognizes it's so easy to quit on children whose parents may not speak English as a first language. It's easy just to shuffle them through—say, “You know, these kids can't learn; move them through.”

We insist upon strong accountability. If you receive Federal money, you've got to measure, because we believe every child can learn. And therefore, we want to know—we want to know. We must have the courage as citizens of the country to blow the whistle on failure when we find our children trapped in schools which will not teach and will not change.

A better America is one that takes care of our seniors, with a good health care system. Medicine has changed; Medicare hasn't. Medicine has changed, and yet the old system hasn't changed with it. And we've got to change Medicare. For the good of our seniors, we need prescription drug benefits for our seniors. We need a modern Medicare system.

But the best way to change America is for America to really rely upon the true strength of the country, which is the people of the country. See, Government can hand out money, but it cannot put love in people's hearts or a sense of purpose in people's lives. That is done when one of our fellow citizens finds somebody who hurts and puts their arm around him or her, and

says, “I love you. What can I do to help you? What can I do to make sure you understand the American Dream is meant for you?” That could be mentoring a child, teaching a child to read. That could be running a Boy Scout or Girl Scout troop, teaching a child values. That could be making sure somebody has got food if they're hungry.

See, the great strength of America is the heart and soul of the people of this country. And so what's happened is, and it seems like to me, is that the evil ones hit us; America took a step back and said, “In order to fight evil, we all must do some good.” And my call to the fellow—my fellow Americans is: Love somebody just like you'd like to be loved yourself; that if you're interested in fighting the evil done to us, it doesn't take much, just a small act of kindness and generosity on a daily basis. And it's that gathering momentum of the millions of acts of kindness and generosity and compassion which takes place in America that truly defines the character of this Nation.

I want to thank you all for serving this Nation. May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:59 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen and Judge Charles W. Pickering, Sr., whose nominations to be U.S. Circuit Judges for the Fifth Circuit failed.

Remarks Calling for Congressional Action on Terrorism Insurance Legislation

October 3, 2002

Thanks for coming today. We're talking about a serious subject, which is jobs—the ability for people to find work in America. I spend a lot of my time worrying about

the job security of our fellow citizens. And after last year's terrorist attacks that destroyed life and destroyed building, you've

got to recognize they hurt our economy as well.

We responded to those attacks with incredible unity, and I'm grateful. And the enemy is not. But we need to show the same unity and resolve to get our people back to work. Too many Americans are looking for work, and they can't find work. The economic signs are good—they are. Interest rates are low. Inflation is low. Our workers are the most productive in the world. Our entrepreneurs are the most productive in the world. And that's incredibly positive.

Yet, we can't be satisfied until anybody who is looking for work can find a job. That's what we've got to do here in America. And we can do more in Washington, DC. Before these folks go home, there is something they can do to help—help America's hardhats get back to work on big construction projects. If there is concern, like I know there is, about our fellow citizens, concern here in Washington about people being able to find work, the Congress can help by passing a terrorism insurance bill now.

We have been talking about this up here for a year. And our workers cannot wait any longer. And so my call on the Congress is to reach an agreement by tomorrow, so by the time they go home, I can sign a bill, a bill which will increase our job base by the thousands.

I want to thank the business leaders who are here who see the crying need for a terrorism insurance bill. I want to thank the carpenter union members who stand behind me who are here to represent the fellow members of their unions who, if they're not working, want to work—people that are putting bread on the table for their families.

I want to thank the members of the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental, and Reinforcing Iron Workers for coming here as well. We've been working with their leaders to try to convince Congress to move this important

piece of legislation. This is a jobs bill. It's important for our country.

After September the 11th, it's important for our fellow citizens to understand that many insurance companies stopped covering builders and real estate owners against the risk of terrorist attacks. One of the effects of the attack of September the 11th, 2001, was a lot of folks couldn't find insurance. Many of those who provide coverage provide only limited coverage at high rates, with too many restrictions to provide real security.

Congress's inaction on terrorism is threatening our jobs. They can move and need to, to help the economy, because, you see, one recent survey shows that more than \$15 billion in real estate transactions have been terminated or put on hold because the lack of terrorism insurance—\$15 billion of job-creating projects are not moving forward.

More than 300,000 jobs are on hold. That's a lot of folks. That's a lot of joiners and bricklayers and plumbers and other building professionals who can find good-paying work. Construction jobs are at a 3-year low, as nonresidential construction is down more than 15 percent from a year ago. The fact that there is no terrorism insurance is affecting commerce and job creation.

Last week the bond raters at Moody's downgraded \$4.5 billion worth of commercial mortgage-backed securities because of the lack of available terrorism insurance. Congress has failed to act. Congress has got to act now, before they go home. They've got to get a bill to my desk tomorrow, for the sake of creditworthiness and jobs.

One of the buildings affected, believe it or not, is Rockefeller Center, right there in Manhattan, which as of Tuesday has very little terrorism insurance. So Rockefeller Center will get a bad credit rating because we haven't acted here in Washington, DC. Lower security ratings affect people who

have money in the bond market. That includes pension funds, including the funds of many public service employees, like teachers and police and firefighters. See, when the bond ratings go down, bond prices fall, and workers' retirement savings are threatened. That's one of the effects of the failure to have terrorism insurance here out of Washington, DC.

The problem of finding terrorism insurance is widespread; it's just not isolated to New York City. We're talking about \$15 billion worth of projects on hold; we're talking about \$15 billion worth of projects all across America, not just where the terrorists hit. The Building and Owners—Building Owners and Managers Association found that more than a quarter of the owners in their survey could not get terrorism insurance at any cost. Of the owners who could get insurance, 80 percent of them faced caps on their coverage, higher deductibles, quick cancellation clauses, exclusions for chemical and biological attacks, or premium increases that ranged from 20 to 200 percent.

These costs, which are in the billions, get eventually passed on. We pay for them. Right now, hospitals and office buildings and malls and museums and many transportation companies are all having difficulty finding terrorism coverage. Without coverage, the economic impact of another terrorist attack would be incredibly serious. We could face a string of bankruptcies and loan defaults and layoffs that would intensify the economic effects of an attack. Enacting terrorism insurance will cost us nothing if we experience no further attacks.

And you need to know your Federal Government is doing everything we possibly can do so that we experience no further attacks. We're tightening up the homeland security, and I want the Senate to give me a good bill on homeland security. And we're chasing these killers down, one person at a time, to protect the homeland.

Yet, if there is an attack, without insurance it will be even more devastating than

the last attack. It will mean tens of thousands of new jobs if we can get a terrorism insurance bill. It will mean billions in new investment. It will mean healthier pension and retirement systems. If we have terrorism insurance and, God forbid, we have another attack on America, we will be able to compensate our victims more quickly and limit the economic damage. That's a reality.

Congress must get it done. I want to remind them that the House passed a terrorism insurance bill last November, and the Senate got one done in June. Under the legislation, private insurance would pay for damages up to a certain amount. The Federal Government would guarantee against catastrophic losses. I support that concept, for the reasons I've just described.

Major construction programs will go forward if we can get a good piece of legislation. Their friends will be working. The country will be more confident if we can get a good bill. Our markets will be reassured. It's an incredibly important piece of legislation. I met with members of both parties in both Houses this week. I told them essentially what I've described to you—the need to get something done. I believe they are close to an agreement. I know that they can come together.

And they ought to resolve the issue of liability as well. My position, I think, reflects the position of most Americans, and it's this—that we should prevent the victims of a terrorist attack from being held liable for punitive damages, which are damages over and above the amount needed to compensate the injured person. When an American business has been targeted for a terrorist attack, we should not further punish it and the people it employs, subjecting it to predatory lawsuits and punitive damages. Congress needs to hear that message.

This provision was agreed to by a bipartisan group in the Senate last fall. They have come together on it before. It was prevented from going forward. That must

not happen again, for the sake of our working people in America. The Members can decide at any moment to finalize the bill and send it to my desk. It's just not that far away. My call for getting it done tomorrow is realistic, if people could put their mind to it.

I know the Members involved. I know they care deeply about the future of our country. See, this isn't a political issue; this is a jobs issue. I know they care, and I know they can get it done. And for the sake of economic security, they must get it done. For the sake of good, hard-working Americans, they need to resolve their differences quickly and get me to the desk.

I want to thank you all for coming. I want to assure you that we are making progress on a lot of fronts, most notably on securing the homeland.

Now that I've got you stuck here—[laughter]—I want you to understand this is a different kind of war that we fight. See, in the old days you could measure progress by saying, "Well, we've destroyed X tanks or Y airplanes or sunk several ships." That's not the kind of war this Nation now fights. We fight a war against coldblooded killers who hide in caves and send youngsters to their suicidal death. They do so because—and they hate us because we love freedom. See, they hate for what we love. We love our freedoms, and we're not going to relinquish our freedoms. And the stronger we hold on to our freedoms, the more they hate us.

And so we've got to button up our homeland. And I spoke to that earlier today. You'll hear the debate about homeland security. The Congress—some in the Congress want to take away some of the powers that every President has had to be able to more securely affect, in this case, homeland security. I'm not going to let them do that. It just doesn't make any sense not to have managerial—the managerial ability to move the right people to the right place at the right time to protect America. And I insist that that happen.

But the best way to protect the homeland is to find these killers. And that's exactly what our country is doing, one person at a time. It's like an international man-hunt. And we're making progress.

The reason I want to talk to you real quick is because I want you to understand that we are making progress on making America more secure. We—that is, a coalition of like-minded nations—have hauled in over a thousand, couple of thousand of these people. One fellow popped his head up the other day, bin al-Shibh, and he's no longer a threat because he has been detained. See, the doctrine that says, "Either you're with us or with the enemy," still holds. It's an important doctrine. It's as important today as it was 13 months ago. And a like number of those folks aren't quite as lucky. They're not around to hurt us, either, but for different reasons. We're dismantling the terrorist network, which hates America, one person at a time.

And if you've got a relative in the military, you need to know I've got a lot of confidence in our folks who wear the uniform. And I want to thank you for their sacrifice.

I asked the Congress to pass a defense bill which says if our troops go into harm's way, they deserve the best pay, the best training, and the best possible equipment. I have yet to see the defense bill. And not only do I want to see a terrorism insurance bill before they go home, I want to see a defense bill on my desk before they go home as well. We owe that to our soldiers. We owe it to the soldiers' families, and we owe it to the world for them to hear that no matter how long it takes, no matter how long it takes to defend our freedom and defend civilization, itself, the United States of America will stay the course.

See, we love freedom, and we're not going to relinquish that love. And the war on terror extends beyond just a terrorist network. The war on terror extends to the world's worst leaders, which have and want

to develop and hurt us and our friends and allies with the world's worst weapons. We must not allow these people—this guy, Saddam Hussein—to continue to defy the world. He has said he would disarm. I have called upon the United Nations to disarm him. I have given this body a chance to show the world whether they will be the United Nations, an effective body, or the League of Nations. And I don't believe we can afford to have a League of Nations again. And I want them to be effective; I want it to work.

There is a coalition of friends that are joining us to call upon accountability—accountability with Mr. Saddam Hussein, who lies, kills his own people, poisons his own citizens with weapons of mass destruction, who hates America, hates Israel, hates our friends and allies. He must be held to account. The choice is his, and the choice is the United Nations to deal with this man, to hold him to account. And if they won't, for the sake of our freedoms and our securities, we cannot allow the world's worst leader to hold us hostage and to harm America with the world's worst weapons. We owe it to our children.

The war on terror is more than just Al Qaida. And I believe we can achieve peace by speaking clearly, by delineating good and evil, by talking about terror and its effects, and by leading people who understand the stakes.

And so out of the evil done to this country, I believe there's going to come some incredible good, and that's peace. I long for peace for America. I want to be able to say that history has called us to action, and we left the world more peaceful for our children.

But I believe by remaining strong, we can leave a legacy of peace in other parts of the world too. I believe peace is possible in the Middle East, if we're tough and determined and delineate good from evil and fight terror at all costs. And I believe we can achieve peace in South Asia.

No, the enemy hit us, but they didn't know who they were hitting. They probably thought we'd file a lawsuit or two. [*Laughter*] But instead, they found a nation which is strong and determined, a nation which will stick to our values, a nation which is a compassionate nation as well.

Listen, thank you all for coming. I appreciate the chance to—God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Ramzi bin al-Shibh, an Al Qaida operative suspected of helping to plan the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, who was captured in Karachi, Pakistan; and President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.