

Remarks Following a Briefing on Hurricane Rita in Lake Charles,
Louisiana
September 27, 2005

The President. Governor, thank you very much for your hospitality. It's been my honor to talk to some of these parish presidents and mayors of the affected area. I came down to make sure that things are going as best as they possibly can go.

First of all, I want to compliment the local folks for the heroic efforts they made to save life. I understand there's a lot of frustrations with the people who left this part of the country. People that are scattered around want to come back and see their homes, and they want to come back to the communities they love. But it's very important for them to understand that now is not the time to come back, until they get the utilities up and running and until they can get the sewer systems running and until they get some water people can drink.

I heard loud and clear from the parish presidents and the mayors that, you know, people are getting frustrated. And I understand that frustration. But I think it's very important to listen to the Governors—the Governor and the local folks about the conditions at home. People are working hard to get the utilities up. They're working hard to get fuel here for people. And this area is going to rebuild, and it's going to grow again.

Those who've been displaced, those in the affected areas know that they can call a FEMA number to get a \$2,000 check for each family. And that will help you in your time away from your home, so please call and register. Last night we made the decision that the people affected by Rita will be treated the same way, with a \$2,000 check, as those treated—those affected by Katrina.

So anyway, Governor, thanks for having me. Senators and Congressmen, thank you for coming. I particularly want to thank these parish presidents and mayors for

their—if you look at them, you see—if you look in their eyes, you see people who have been through a lot. And they're showing strong leadership, and I admire their stand and the courage they take.

Governor, if you'd like to say something.
Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco. Well, Mr. President, first, let me say thank you for joining us today. You know, as you understand well, our people have been through a lot in southwest Louisiana. I do want to tell you that some things worked right this time. We learned a lot of lessons from our previous experience with Katrina. Our communications network stayed up. All of these folks could continue communicating their needs to us because there was a communications system that was—not in place; it was brought in by your people and our people, working together.

I want to thank you because we have to continue a very close partnership in order for our recovery to be effective and in order for Louisiana to become whole again. We want to be players in this national economy. Our industries across this State have been impaired for the time being, but we know we can bring them back. The oil and gas industry is dependent on our health—on a healthy Louisiana. The fisheries are dependent on Louisiana. We provide food to the people of the United States out of these parishes. Our agricultural industry is tremendously stressed.

But we know we can make it back, but we only can make it back with your help. So thank you again for coming. Thank you for letting all these folks tell you about their personal experiences. And we believe that we're going to make it back because you're here with us, and we know we have a good partnership.

The President. Listen, thank you all. Appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:36 p.m. at Chennault International Airport. In his re-

marks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana.

Remarks on the War on Terror *September 28, 2005*

Good morning. I just had a good meeting with Generals Abizaid and Casey. We discussed the war on terror in which this country is engaged. General Abizaid talked about the global scope of this war. He talked about the nature of an enemy we face, an enemy which is ruthless and brutal, an enemy which has got strategic goals and tactics necessary to achieve those goals. We also talked about the fact that we're determined to defeat the enemy. We discussed our strategy for victory in Iraq as well. After all, Iraq is a key battlefront in this war on terror.

I asked the Generals to go up to Capitol Hill to brief Members of the House and Senate on our strategy for victory, on our operations in Iraq. They updated me on what recently took place in Baghdad, in which Iraqi and coalition forces tracked down and killed Abu Azzam, the second most wanted Al Qaida leader in Iraq. This guy is a brutal killer. He was one of Zarqawi's top lieutenants. He was reported to be the top operational commander of Al Qaida in Baghdad. He is one of the terrorists responsible for the recent upsurge in attacks in the Iraqi capital, which is part of their campaign to stop a referendum on the Iraqi constitution and is part of their efforts to break the will of the American people and the will of our coalition.

Our strategy is clear in Iraq. We are hunting down high-value targets like Azzam and Zarqawi. We're coordinating aggressive counterterrorism operations in the areas where the terrorists are concentrated. We're constantly adapting our tactics to the changing tactics of the terrorists. We're training more Iraqi forces to assume in-

creasing responsibility for their country's security.

The growing size and increasing capability of the Iraqi security forces are helping our coalition address a challenge we have faced since the beginning of the war. And General Casey discussed this with us in the Oval Office.

See, it used to be after we cleared the terrorists out of a city, there wasn't enough qualified Iraqi troops to maintain control, so when we left to conduct other missions, the terrorists would move back in. Now, the increasing number of more capable Iraqi troops has allowed us to better hold onto the cities we have taken from the terrorists. The Iraqi troops know their people. They know their language, and they know who the terrorists are. By leaving Iraqi units in the cities we've cleared out, we can keep the cities safe while we move on to hunt down the terrorists in other parts of the country.

We saw such success in the country's northwest region, where Iraqi and coalition forces recently targeted an area that was one of the main routes that foreign terrorists use to enter Iraq from Syria. During the operations in the key town of Tall 'Afar, Iraqi security forces outnumbered coalition forces for the first time in a major offensive operation. General Casey brought us up to date on that operation. Because of our joint efforts, hundreds of terrorists have been killed or captured or flushed, which makes it more difficult for the foreign terrorists to enter Iraq through the northwest route.

As part of General Casey's strategy, Iraqi forces remain in Tall 'Afar to ensure that the terrorists are not allowed to return and