

he referred to Robyn Williams, district judge, Kentucky's 40th Judicial District; and Gen.

David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

## Remarks Following a Briefing on Tornado Damage in Enterprise, Alabama *March 3, 2007*

You know, Mayor, I told the people yesterday that I come down with a heavy heart, and I will try, to the best of my ability, to comfort those who lost life and property. I know you and your council and the citizens here have done that as well.

I hope it helps for the citizens here to hear that we declared your county a major disaster area, which will provide some relief. You can never heal a heart, but you can provide comfort, knowing that the Federal Government will provide help for those whose houses were destroyed or automobiles were destroyed. And I would strongly urge the citizens here to—if you've got a question, to call 1-800-621-FEMA, and there will be somebody answering your call and will give you a chance to find out whether or not you will qualify for the relief under the major disaster declaration.

Secondly, I was talking to the Governor, and he has said that there have been some funds set up to help the people who suffered. And my call to people here in Alabama and around the United States is, if

you feel the generosity in your heart to help people affected by this terrible tornado, I would ask you to contribute. One such fund is the Red Cross. There will be others. We will make sure that USA Freedom Corps will have posted on it a place where people can contribute money. Some people are going to need your help. There have been some poor citizens who may or may not qualify for Federal help, but are going to need the help of our fellow citizens. And I would ask you to, out of the generosity of your heart, to help the folks down here.

This storm is a tough storm. It went 8 miles and affected a lot of lives. And this country is a prayerful country. There are a lot of people praying for you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:40 a.m. at Enterprise Municipal Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Kenneth W. Boswell of Enterprise, AL; and Gov. Robert R. Riley of Alabama.

## The President's Radio Address *March 3, 2007*

Good morning. One of my most solemn experiences as President is visiting men and women recovering from wounds they suffered in defense of our country. Spending time with these wounded warriors is also inspiring, because so many of them bring the same courage they showed on the battlefield to their battle for recovery.

These service men and women deserve the thanks of our country, and they deserve the best care our Nation can provide. That is why I was deeply troubled by recent reports of substandard conditions at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Most of the people working at Walter Reed are dedicated professionals. These fine doctors, nurses, and therapists care deeply about

our wounded troops, and they work day and night to help them. Yet some of our troops at Walter Reed have experienced bureaucratic delays and living conditions that are less than they deserve. This is unacceptable to me; it is unacceptable to our country; and it's not going to continue.

On hearing the reports about Walter Reed, I asked Secretary of Defense Bob Gates to assess the situation firsthand and report back to me. He confirmed that there are real problems at Walter Reed, and he's taken action to hold people accountable, including relieving the general in charge of the facility. Secretary Gates has also formed an independent review group that will investigate how this situation was allowed to happen, how it can be fixed, and how we can prevent it from happening again. Walter Reed has a long tradition of outstanding medical service, and my administration will ensure that the soldiers recovering there are treated with the dignity and respect they have earned.

As we work to improve conditions at Walter Reed, we're also taking steps to find out whether similar problems have occurred at other military and veterans hospitals. So I'm announcing that my administration is creating a bipartisan Presidential commission to conduct a comprehensive review of the care America is providing our wounded service men and women. This review will examine their treatment from the time they leave the battlefield through their return to civilian life as veterans, so we can ensure that we are meeting their physical and mental health needs. In the coming days, I will announce the members of this commission and set a firm deadline for them to report back to me with their recommendations.

We will use the commission's recommendations as part of our ongoing effort to improve our service to our Nation's veterans. Since 2001, we've helped over one million more veterans take advantage of the VA health care system, and with my 2008 budget proposal, we will have increased the

VA's health care budget by 83 percent over the past 6 years, from about \$20 billion to more than \$36 billion. Overall, I'm asking Congress for more than \$86 billion for veterans' services this year. If Congress approves my request, this would amount to a 77-percent increase since I took office and the highest level of support for veterans in American history.

The men and women recovering at Walter Reed and our other military hospitals are remarkable individuals. Many have suffered wounds that even time will never fully heal. Yet they're facing the future with optimism and a determination to move forward with their lives.

One of these brave warriors is Army Specialist Eduardo Leal-Cardenas. He was injured when an improvised explosive device blew up his vehicle in Iraq. The blast shattered bones in both legs, broke his ribs, and broke his back and neck. Some questioned whether he would ever regain the ability to walk. There was no doubt in Eduardo's mind, and he began his rehab while still bedridden. Today, he's left Walter Reed, he's walking again, and he has something else he is proud of: During his recovery, Eduardo became a U.S. citizen. I was proud to be with him at Walter Reed when he took his citizenship oath. If you ask Eduardo what American citizenship means to him, he answers with just one word: "Freedom."

Our Nation is blessed to have so many fine Americans who are willing to serve. We're blessed to have so many compassionate volunteers who give their time to care for our injured soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. We're blessed to have so many fine medical professionals who dedicate their lives to healing our troops. This country has a moral obligation to provide our service men and women with the best possible care and treatment. They deserve it, and they will get it.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:25 a.m. on March 2 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 3. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on

March 2, but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. Due to the 1-hour time difference, the radio address was broadcast between the President's remarks in Enterprise, Alabama.

## Remarks Following a Tour of Enterprise High School and an Exchange With Reporters in Enterprise

March 3, 2007

The heart of a community like Enterprise, Alabama, is the schools. And today I have walked through devastation that's hard to describe. Our thoughts, of course, go out to the students who perished. We thank God for the hundreds who lived. I want the folks of Enterprise to know that to the extent the Government can, our Federal Government can, in working with the State, we'll help rebuild the school system—this high school. We can never replace lives, and we can't heal hearts, except through prayer. And I know—I want the students to know and the families to know that there's a lot of people praying for them.

I met with the president of the student body, who recognizes that the end of her senior year is going to be difficult. But as a student leader, she will have the opportunity to help people rebuild, and that she will learn that out of the devastation—and her classmates will learn that out of the devastation can come hope and a better tomorrow.

And so we ask for the blessings on the students and their families. We ask for the blessings on the principal and the administrator. We thank this good community for rallying strongly by the side of those who have been affected. And I thank the people of Enterprise for the warm welcome I have received here.

The people of America have got to know that the citizens here, even though affected by devastation, have shown great courage

and compassion for their citizens in need. And it's really part of the strength of the United States to know that there's such decent folks.

God bless everybody. Thank you all.

### *Aerial Tour of Areas Damaged by Tornadoes/Recovery*

*Q.* How did it look from the air, sir?

*The President.* It looks as bad from the air as it looks from the ground. And you can see right here the effects of the storm. But the biggest effect of the storm is the shattered lives. We can rebuild buildings, and the fundamental question is, will the spirit stay strong in Enterprise, Alabama? And I predict that it not only will stay strong, it will be strengthened. That's my prediction. And it's easy to tell when you talk to the people, whether it's young or old, this town refuses to be devastated. This town is a town full of people that will not be—will not succumb to the effects of the storm. The mayor is strong, the principal of the school is strong, the Lieutenant, and the children, the high school seniors.

And so it's a—these are very tough times for the people here, and there are going to be tough times for the people in Georgia that were affected. And I just hope they know that a lot of people are praying for them, that a lot of strangers that they'll never have met care for them, and that out of this rubble will emerge a better tomorrow, and that's the commitment that I hear here in Enterprise. And the role