

is an example of what I'm talking about, about the strength of the country. Right after September the 11th, she left North Carolina to volunteer at Ground Zero in New York City. Nobody had to tell Jane. There wasn't a Government edict. There wasn't a telegram from Washington, DC, directing her to go to Ground Zero. She followed her heart. She knew it was the right thing to do. It's the Jane Davises that really defined America for the world to see.

And you can be—you can help a neighbor in all kinds of ways. You can walk across a street to a shut-in and say, "What can I do to help your day?" Or you can mentor a child, or you can teach in a classroom. If you want to help, you can get on the Internet and dial up usafreedomcorps.gov and see. And we've got a member of the Senior Corps here, which is a part of the USA Freedom Corps. If you want to be involved, there's all kinds of ways—all you've got to do to act. But if you're interested in joining the war against terror, do something to make your community a more vibrant and kind place.

It is what I like to call the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness that define America for what we are. And I'm proud to be the President of a nation that is dedicated and firm in our defense of liberty, that will stand strong when we defend freedom and not blink or tire. And likewise, I'm proud to be the President of a nation whose true strength are the hearts and souls of citizens from all walks of life.

May God bless you all, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:54 a.m. at the Cumberland County Coliseum Complex. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Dan K. McNeill, USA, commanding general, 18th Airborne Corps; Gen. Charles R. Holland, USAF, Commander in Chief, Headquarters U.S. Special Operations Command; Lt. Gen. Bryan D. Brown, USA, commander, U.S. Army Special Operations Command; North Carolina senatorial candidate Elizabeth Dole; and Col. Gary N. Matteson, USA, commander, Womack Army Medical Center. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Exchange With Reporters at Fort Bragg, North Carolina

March 15, 2002

President's Visit

Q. Mr. President, it was a little noisy over there; could you give us your impression of what you—

The President. I was very impressed. We've got the finest soldiers in the world. We've got a great training mission, and I'm glad those soldiers are on my side.

Q. What kind of message should that display send to adversaries?

The President. Well, what the adversaries need to know is we're going to do what is necessary to have a well-trained military to accomplish a major objective, an important objective, which is, defend freedom. And the adversaries need to know that we're going to be in this for a long time, that we're going to be steady, relentless, and we're going to win.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Sir, what are you hearing from General Zinni? Is his mission making any headway?

The President. Haven't heard from him yet, but I believe there's good progress in the Middle East. Obviously, the Israelis have moved back some of their troops. That's a positive development. And I have yet to hear from Zinni, but we will soon.

Q. [Inaudible]—troop withdrawal from Ramallah?

The President. Well, we're very pleased with it. As I said, that one of the things we've got to do is to work with both parties to establish the conditions for eventual peace. And I appreciate Prime Minister Sharon's decision. General Zinni is in the region now. We're hopeful that he'll have an impact on setting the conditions for peace, which begins with getting into the Tenet plan and then, eventually, the Mitchell plan. I thought that was a positive development yesterday.

Q. How hopeful are you that he'll be able to succeed?

The President. If I wasn't hopeful, I wouldn't have sent him.

Mikey, Mikey, Mikey [Mike Allen, Washington Post].

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Did that get any national play, that “Mikey, Mikey, Mikey”?

Q. With my family.

President’s Visit

Q. What about lunch, Mr. President? What do you think of it? Are you getting ready to dig in? What have you seen today? Are you pretty happy?

The President. Well, first of all, I knew our troops were good because I’ve been reading reports about how good they are. I got to see firsthand—I’m going to see all day long, firsthand—the esprit de corps is very high here. These soldiers are proud to wear the uniform. Great command staff; they’ve got highly motivated officers; they are well-trained. Every one of the troops, as I moved down the line, spoke a foreign language. To give you an example of how well-trained they are, the medics, these highly trained young men, can conduct—they can pull a tooth, or they can amputate a leg, if need be. I mean, these are fabulously trained soldiers. I’m real proud of their training.

One of the things we’ve got to make sure that Congress understands is that we’ve got to spend the money necessary to keep them highly trained. They all know we’re in for a long struggle. They’re prepared to make the sacrifices to meet that struggle.

I had the honor of meeting with the widows of two of the soldiers who died—and their dad and their mom of one of the guys—and to a person, they said, “Mr. President, don’t falter.” These people just lost a loved one, and they are just as resolved about winning this war on terror as I am. And I was very impressed by their steadfast support for what we’re doing and their understanding of the sacrifices necessary to defend freedom.

Now I’m going to eat my lasagna. If it gets cold, you have to eat the lasagna. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The exchange began at 12 noon while walking through the lunch line. In his remarks, the President referred to U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.); and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this exchange. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President’s public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 9

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush attended a Gridiron Club dinner.

March 11

The White House announced that the President and Mrs. Bush will visit Germany on May 22–23, Russia on May 23–26, and France on May 26–27.

March 12

In the morning, the President traveled to Philadelphia, PA, where he visited the People’s Emergency Center, a social service agency for homeless women, teenagers, and their children. Later, he returned to Washington, DC.

In the afternoon, the President had separate meetings in the Oval Office with Minister of Defense Sergey Borisovich Ivanov of Russia and President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan.

The President declared a major disaster in Oregon and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm with high winds on February 7–8.

March 13

In the morning, the President had intelligence and FBI briefings and met with the National Security Council.

In the afternoon, the President attended a Friends of Ireland luncheon hosted by Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Dennis Hastert in the Rayburn Room at the U.S. Capitol. Later, he returned to the White House and dropped by a White House symposium on writers of the Harlem Renaissance, hosted by Mrs. Bush.