

to comfort their families, and witnessed the unwavering commitment of their community. Our hearts broke when three brave rescue workers gave their own lives in the search for the missing miners.

The people of the central Utah mining community have inspired us all with their incredible strength and courage in the face of tremendous loss. Last night, a difficult decision was made to end the search. Laura and I are deeply saddened by this tragedy and continue to pray for the families of these men.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Iraqi Leaders at Al Asad Air Base, Iraq

September 3, 2007

[The President's remarks are joined in progress.]

—as reinforcements. And together with the brave Iraqis, we've gone into Al Qaida strongholds and have driven them out.

Today, Anbar is a really different place. The level of violence is down; local governments are meeting again; police are more in control of the city streets; and normal life is returning. The people of this Province are seeing that standing up to the extremists is the path to a better life, that success is possible. And soon I'm going to meet with some of the leaders here in Anbar Province who have made a decision to reject violence and murder in return for moderation and peace.

I'm looking forward to hearing from the tribal leaders who led the fight against the terrorists and are now leading the effort to rebuild their communities. I'm going to speak with members of Anbar's Provincial council, which has reestablished itself and returned to the capital city of Ramadi. I'm going to reassure them that America does not abandon our friends, and America will not abandon the Iraqi people. That's the message all three of us bring.

Earlier, we just met with the leaders of Iraq's national Government: President Talabani and Prime Minister Maliki, Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, Vice President Abd Al-Mahdi, Vice President Hashimi, and President Barzani of the Kurdish region. We

had a good, frank discussion. We share a common goal: a free Iraq that has a government that responds to the people. The Government they represent, of course, is based in Baghdad, but they're here in Anbar because they know the success of a free Iraq depends on the national Government's support from the bottom up. They know what I know, that when you have bottom-up reconciliation like you're seeing here in Anbar, it'll begin to translate into central Government action.

The national Government is sharing oil revenues with this Province, and that's a positive development. The challenges are great, and I understand the pace of progress is frustrating. It's frustrating for the American people; it's frustrating for the Iraqi people. These people are working under difficult circumstances after having lived under the thumb of a brutal tyrant. Iraq's local and national leaders are working to ensure that the military success in places like Anbar is quickly backed up by real improvements in the lives of ordinary Iraqis. That's what we discussed today. Secretary Gates, Secretary Rice, and I discussed with the Iraqi leaders that there has been some security success, and now it's important for government to follow up.

Our troops and diplomats and civilian experts will support the Iraqis in these efforts as they follow up. General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker gave us an update on how things are looking. They gave us an update on the way forward, and I was pleased with what I heard. The strategy we put into place earlier this year was designed to help the Iraqis improve their security so that political and economic progress could follow. And that is exactly the effect it is having in places like Anbar.

We can't take this progress for granted. Here in Anbar and across Iraq, Al Qaida and other enemies of freedom will continue to try to kill the innocent in order to impose their dark ideology. But General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker tell me if the kind of success we are now seeing continues, it will be possible to maintain the same level of security with fewer American forces. These two fine Americans will report to Congress next week, and I urge members of both

parties in Congress to listen to what they have to say. Congress shouldn't jump to conclusions until the general and the Ambassador report.

When you stand on the ground here in Anbar and hear from the people who live here, you can see what the future of Iraq can look like. That's why Members of Congress from both parties who have visited Iraq have come back encouraged by what they have seen. For all the differences over the war, we can agree on what's working. And we can agree that continuing this progress is vital to making the strategic interests—vital in meeting the strategic interests of our Nation. It's vital to bring in—it's vital that we work to bring America together behind a common vision for a more stable and more peaceful Middle East.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke between approximately 11 a.m. and 12 noon. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Remarks to United States Military Personnel at Al Asad Air Base

September 3, 2007

The President. Thank you all. General, thank you very much. It's an honor to be with you.

As you know, today is Labor Day back home—

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. —so I thought I'd come by to thank you for all your hard work.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. Every day—every day, you show bravery under incredibly difficult circumstances. Every day, you're doing work on the sands of Anbar that is making it safer in the streets of America. And every day, the United States of America is grateful for what you're doing. I want you to tell your families the Commander in Chief stopped by to say hello, and he said, I'm incredibly proud to be the Commander in Chief of such a great group of men and women.

I'm keeping pretty good company, as you can see. I brought out the A team so they could be with the folks who are making a

significant difference in this war against these radicals and extremists. In Anbar, you're seeing firsthand the dramatic differences that can come when the Iraqis are more secure. In other words, you're seeing success.

You see, Sunnis who once fought side by side with Al Qaida against coalition troops now fighting side by side with coalition troops against Al Qaida. Anbar is a huge Province. It was once written off as lost. It is now one of the safest places in Iraq.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. Because of your hard work, because of your bravery and sacrifice, you are denying Al Qaida a safe haven from which to plot and plan and carry out attacks against the United States of America. What you're doing here is making this country safer, and I thank you for your hard work.

Audience members. Hooah!

President Bush. The surge of operations that began in June is improving security throughout Iraq. These military successes are paving the way for the political reconciliation and economic progress the Iraqis need to transform their country. When Iraqis feel safe in their own homes and neighborhoods, they can focus their efforts on building a stable civil society with functioning government structures at the local and Provincial and national levels. And that's important because a free Iraq, an Iraq that's an ally against these extremists and murderers will be a major defeat for the terrorists.

Earlier today I met with some of the tribal sheiks here in Anbar. It was a really interesting meeting. And at the table were the leaders of the central Government as well. They told me that the kind of bottom-up progress that your efforts are bringing to Anbar is vital to the success and stability of a free Iraq. See, Iraqis need this stability to build a more peaceful future. And America needs this stability to prevent the chaos that allows the terrorists to set up bases from which they can plot and plan attacks on our homeland.

The very people that you helped the Iraqis defeat in Anbar swore allegiance to the man that ordered the attack on the United States of America. What happens here in Anbar matters to the security of the United States.