Week Ending Friday, March 22, 2002

The President's Radio Address

March 16, 2002

Good morning. In one week, boys and girls in Afghanistan will start a new school year. For many girls, this will be the first time in their young lives that they will have set foot in a classroom. Under the Taliban regime, educating women was a criminal act. Under the new government of a liberated Afghanistan, educating all children is a national priority. And America along with its coalition partners is actively helping in that effort.

When Afghan children begin their classes, they will find that the United States has already sent more than 4 million textbooks to their country. The textbooks are written in the Afghan languages of Pashto and Dari. And before the end of the year we'll have sent almost 10 million of them to the children of Afghanistan. These textbooks will teach tolerance and respect for human dignity, instead of indoctrinating students with fanaticism and bigotry. And they will be accompanied by blackboards, teacher's kits, and other school supplies.

America's children have been extremely generous in helping the children of Afghanistan. Through America's Fund for Afghan Children, they have raised more than $4.5 million, much of which is used for school supplies like notebooks and pencils, paper and crayons, soccer balls and jump ropes. The United States will also be funding 20 teams of teacher trainers to conduct training sessions with thousands of Afghan educators.

In helping the Afghan people rebuild their country, we have placed a central focus on education, and for a good reason. Education is the pathway to progress, particularly for women. Educated women tend to be healthier than those who are not well educated, and the same is true of their families. Babies born to educated women are more likely to be immunized, better nourished, and survive their first year of life. Educated women encourage their children to be educated as well. And nations whose women are educated are more competitive, more prosperous, and more advanced than nations where the education of women is forbidden or ignored.

We still have a lot of work to do in Afghanistan. The brave men and women of the American military continue to fight Al Qaida forces that are trying to regroup and would like nothing more than to strike America again. And even as we fight terror, American compassion is providing an alternative to bitterness, resentment, and hatred.

The United States has helped Afghanistan avert mass starvation. We're repairing its roads and bridges. We're rebuilding its health clinics and schools. And in one week, with textbooks in hand, the young girls of Afghanistan will begin school. This will be a remarkable moment in the history of Afghanistan and a proud moment for the people of America.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:25 a.m. on March 14 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 16. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 15 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on the Terrorist Attack in Islamabad, Pakistan

March 17, 2002

I am outraged by the terrorist attack that took place today in Islamabad, Pakistan, against innocent civilians. I strongly condemn them as acts of murder that cannot be tolerated by any person of conscience nor justified by any cause. On behalf of the American people, I extend my deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims of this

terrible tragedy, and I wish a full and fast recovery to those injured. We will work closely with the Government of Pakistan to ensure those responsible for this terrorist attack face justice.

Remarks Following a Roundtable Discussion on Small Business and an Exchange With Reporters in O'Fallon, Missouri

March 18, 2002

The President. Thank you so very much, Rolf, for your invitation to come. Rolf is a classic example of what makes America unique and strong. He had an idea and a dream. He built his own business. He employs good, hard-working people here in Missouri. He's got a vibrant business.

And I explained to these folks that one of my jobs is to create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit flourishes, in which small-business owners are able to keep making a living and keep people employed. I talked about making the death tax repeal* permanent, so that Rolf can pass his assets to a family member, if he so chooses. I talked about some expensing items, some items to make sure the small-business owner has got an incentive to invest more, which means more jobs. Tomorrow I'll be talking about regulatory relief. I'm also talking about ways so that a small-business owner such as Rolf can better afford health care for his employees, so that they're able to work here and, at the same time, enjoy health benefits like those from—large companies enjoy.

We had a good discussion. And it's important to the American people to understand the role of small business in our society. Most new jobs created are created by small businesses. And more people are able to realize the American Dream by starting their own business. And so one of things we've all got to work toward is an environment in which the small business flourishes. Rolf, thank you for letting me come. I want to thank you all for a great discussion. I'll answer a couple of questions.

*White House correction.

Terrorist Attack on Church in Pakistan

Q. Mr. President, do you have any sense of who carried out the attack yesterday in Pakistan at the church, why they did it? Do you think they're trying to undermine Musharraf and his support for the war on terrorism?

The President. Very interesting question. I talked to President Musharraf this morning, first thing. He is very sympathetic, obviously. He was deeply concerned about the American loss of life, and he wanted to share that with me. And I appreciated his phone call. We both talked about the need to continue fighting people that would kill for political reasons. And it goes to show that there is still some—that that part of the world is a dangerous place at times. And the tougher President Musharraf is and the more steadfast the United States is, the stronger we stand against terrorist activity, the more lives we'll ultimately save.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. He doesn't know who it is—excuse me for a minute. He doesn't know who it is yet. And when we find him, we'll bring him to justice.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Sir—thank you. Vice President Cheney is in the Middle East. Should he meet with Chairman Arafat? Would you like to see that happen? And if no, why not?

The President. I talked to the Vice President today, and he's had a very good visit in the Middle East. He is—matter of fact, he was 15 minutes away from going in to see Prime Minister Sharon. He had General Zinni with him. General Zinni is optimistic that we're making some progress in the Middle East.

And the answer to who the Vice President ought to meet with or not meet with depends upon General Zinni's recommendations. He's the man on the ground. He's in charge of trying to foster an environment such that we can get into Tenet and then eventually get into the Mitchell peace plan. Our Government has laid out a pathway to a peaceful resolution of a very difficult set of problems. And Zinni's over there working hard to get us into that process.