

Mar. 10 / Administration of George Bush, 1991

Remarks at the Ford's Theatre Gala March 10, 1991

Thank you all very much. Please be seated. You know, when Americans get together to celebrate country, we sure do it right. We sure do it in style. What a magnificent performance here tonight.

A lot of marvelous country songs—one I like is just a little story of an American family. And I know what it feels like for me and Barbara here tonight. The music and the words and all of these emotions remind us of what we truly are, each and every one, part of the proud and great American family.

To Andy Andrews I would only say, now I know exactly how I will treat with those 14 grandchildren of mine. [Laughter]

But tonight America's family is gathered here in America's theatre. And we all want to thank the people, all the people, who made this gala possible. Of course, Peatsy Hollings and Ann Simpson here, Mary Jane Wick, Frankie Hewitt. Her vision brought about this theatre's resurrection, and the others are saluting this theatre's reality every year.

I want to congratulate Bill McSweeney for his well-deserved honor. And I want to thank Lod Cook of ARCO also, and salute some of the country's special friends who are with us tonight. We have the Vice President and Mrs. Quayle here tonight. We have many members of our Cabinet. Perhaps it would not be inappropriate at this patriotic moment to single out Secretary Cheney and, of course, General Powell. We might ask them to stand. [Applause] We have many distinguished leaders in the United States Congress.

You know, for over 100 years after Lincoln's assassination this theatre was closed, a dark reminder of an American tragedy. But tonight shows how this place can come back to life as a living symbol of the American spirit. And I can't think of a better theme than "A Celebration of Country" because it means not just country music but also our country, the United States of America.

The incredible feeling here in this theatre tonight shows really what I love best about

country music: It hits all the right chords, like caring for your family, having faith in God—Ricky Skaggs' "Somebody's Praying" said it very well indeed, that part of it—songs about people who care for each other with the biggest hearts on Earth.

And country songs are about real people. Randy Travis, I must say I love that new song about the Points of Light. And—where did he go? And I want to thank Don Schlitz and Tom Schuyler for doing that. Senator Hollings told me this song has real merit, it has a real beat. [Laughter] But certainly the message does. And I think Don and Tom know exactly how to put our feelings into words.

I think that at this moment in our history, our family—American family, if you will—is closer than it's ever been. We know who made this exhilarating moment possible. I'm talking about the men and women that serve in the Armed Forces of the United States, as Morgan Freeman said, "thousands of miles from here." What a wonderful job they've done for all of us.

It is very, very exciting. And as they come home, I expect every family is like Barbara's and mine with the tears coming down our faces today and almost every day since they started back. But as they come home, we're going to take all the pride and the excitement that this country feels and give them the biggest welcome-home party that this country has ever seen.

And so, thank all of you here tonight, each and every one of you, for reminding us that we can dream and achieve together. A good night and thanks to all of you. And once again, Ricky, someone was praying, someone was praying.

Thank you very much.

Note: The President spoke at 9:49 p.m. from the stage of the theatre. In his remarks, he referred to comedian Andy Andrews, who performed at the gala; Rita "Peatsy" Hollings, wife of Senator Ernest Hollings, and Ann Simpson, wife of Senator Alan Simpson, general chairmen of "A Festival at

Ford's"; Mary Jane Wick, gala chairman; Frankie Hewitt and Bill McSweeney, Ford's Theatre executive producer and chairman of the board; Lodwick M. Cook, chairman and chief executive officer of ARCO; Vice President Dan Quayle and his wife, Marilyn; Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney; Gen. Colin

L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; country music performers Ricky Skaggs and Randy Travis; songwriters Don Schlitz and Tom Schuyler; and actor Morgan Freeman, who delivered a tribute to Abraham Lincoln.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Prime Minister Michel Rocard of France

March 11, 1991

Q. Mr. Rocard, are the French still pressing for a Middle East conference?

The Prime Minister. We are pressing for a solution. And we think in the Middle East, as I think the American authorities inferred—the President, President Bush, who said that last week—the Israelis and Palestinians have to find an issue. And if the international community can contribute to create the conditions for their direct meeting, any type of institution of conference would be useful—the heart of the matter, the substance, more than the procedure. It was proposed once—one. We do hope there will be a solution anyway, and I'm sure the United States and France will act in a converging way to permit a solution.

The President. That I'm certain of. You know, one of the great things about this recent effort was that we were just solidly together. And I think that sent a very strong signal to others around the world. And I hope you will convey to the President my thanks and my sentiments of deep appreciation on behalf of the American people. Because France is a key, terribly important country with special knowledge and interest in that part of the world. And we just came together at the U.N. and elsewhere, and it was a wonderful thing.

So, carry my thanks back to everybody that was involved, please, sir, including yourself.

The Prime Minister. Mr. President, thank you very much for those words. We were happy to be, again, very close together, as we have been in many difficult periods of history. But there again, we are very close

in acting together and having victory together.

The President. That's right. That's right. I mentioned your distinguished General, my French is terrible, but Roquejeoffre.

The Prime Minister. Roquejeoffre. Marvelous.

The President. Pretty close, pretty close. But General Schwarzkopf was very high in his praise of him and the way he conducted the French forces, led the French forces.

So, all of that worked out. You remember in the very beginning there were all these predictions with these different countries, that it would be very hard to sort out a proper structure for coordinating them. And it came fine.

The Prime Minister. Quite well.

The President. Probably better coordinated than the politicians.

The Prime Minister. And the idea to—soldiers of both countries under the same command—

The President. Now, we've got some business to do, so with all appreciation for this interest and concern, thank you very much.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International], you didn't say a word today.

Q. Thanks for not answering any questions.

The President. That's all right. You're welcome. [Laughter]

Note: The exchange began at 10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, President Bush referred to President Francois Mitterrand of France; Gen. Michel Roquejeoffre, commander of the French