

Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; former civilian U.S. Navy intelligence analyst Jonathan Pollard, convicted of treason and espionage in 1987; and

Leah Rabin, widow of Yitzhak Rabin. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

## Remarks at the New Psalmist Baptist Church in Baltimore, Maryland

November 1, 1998

Thank you, “Reverend” Cummings. [*Laughter*] It’s difficult enough to follow one sermon, much less two. [*Laughter*]

Let me say to Reverend Thomas, I never wanted your message to end. It was wonderful, thank you. I, too, join in wishing Mrs. Thomas a happy birthday. I thank all the wonderful staff and parishioners here at New Psalmist. I have to say that my staff especially appreciated the assistance from Dr. David Blow.

I thank Congressman Cummings for his welcome here. I tell you, I was here about 10 minutes, and I realized how Elijah got to Congress. [*Laughter*] And I thank all of his staff, Vernon Simmons and others. I thank Mayor Schmoke for all the help that your people gave us; thank you, sir. I thank your two wonderful Senators, Senator Sarbanes and Senator Mikulski. Senator Mikulski is running for reelection, but she’s going to win by acclamation, so nobody remembers that she’s on the ballot. But I think I should tell you that she is, and she would like it very much if you remembered that, as well.

I thank Governor Glendening and Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend for all they have done for Maryland, and I commend them to you. Congressman Cardin, thank you for being here. To Secretary of State John Willis, it’s his birthday, too, today, by the way. I would like to thank Senator Blount, County Executive Ruppberger, City Council President Bell, City Comptroller Joan Pratt. And I would like to say a special word of appreciation to a former Congressman and NAACP president and my wonderful, wonderful friend, Kweisi Mfume. Thank you for being here today. Thank you.

Now, it’s been more than 40 years since Rosa Parks gave up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama, to change America forever. Dr. King said it is better to walk in dignity than to ride in shame. And ever since then, America has

been on a long walk toward dignity. Some people who are not African-Americans don’t know it yet, but we’ve all been on that walk—not just black Americans, all Americans—for none live in dignity when any are oppressed.

It is a journey this church knows well. Just think about it: 100 years ago, starting with 5 members, to come to this congregation of 6,000 men, women, and children in this magnificent house of worship. This is the day the Lord has made, and we can rejoice in it. You have all this high technology, and you are very modern, but you have not forgotten your mission: not only here, to hear the word of God, but to do it with a food bank, with scholarships for college, with health care, with a Boys Club, with the Girl Scouts, all the things this church is involved in. You have helped each other walk in dignity. You have fulfilled the admonition of the Scripture to be doers of the Word and not hearers only. And on Tuesday you will once again have the chance to be doers.

Now, the message today was from Matthew. So I just kind of rumbled through Matthew at the beginning of the service, not so as to distract my concentration from the message—[*laughter*]—and there are a few things from Matthew I’d like for us to remember. In Matthew, Jesus says to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s. Now, back then that didn’t mean too much because Caesar was an emperor and all the people had to do to render unto Caesar was to pay their taxes and obey the law. But thank the Lord there is no Caesar in this country. And the good news is, there is no Caesar; the bad news is, the people who have to render have more to do, because you pick the people who make the decisions. You pick the people—or not—depending on what you do.

Elijah was so kind; he said those nice things to me. I’m proud of the fact that the American dream is closer to more Americans than it was 6 years ago, that more Americans can go to

college, that we have the lowest poverty rate ever recorded among African-Americans, that we have the smallest welfare rolls in 29 years, and the lowest unemployment in 28 years. I'm proud of all that.

But let me tell you something. If you helped me get there, then you did that. You did that. You heard the pastor say today when he preaches the Word of God, it is God's gift, not his. You heard that, when he said that, didn't you? That's the way democracy works, except you're in the driver's seat. You're Caesar, not me—you—if you are a doer.

Remember when John Glenn went up in space a couple of days ago, didn't we all feel good? It gave all of us who aren't young anymore something to look forward to. [Laughter] I was so proud—proud because I know him to be a wonderful, good man; proud because of what he gave our country 36 years ago; but also proud because that was an act of democracy. That space program is paid for by you, voted for by your Congress, supported by your President. But in the end, therefore, if you supported me and those who supported that program, then you had your hand on John Glenn's shoulder when he went up in space. That's what this means. You had your hand on him.

In the last several days as I have traveled around America, so many people have come up to me and said, "Thank you for working for peace in the Middle East. Thank you for staying up for a week"—literally, 39 hours at the end—"Thank you for doing that." And I say to them, "It is my job and my honor. But because you put me there, if you felt good about that, you should feel good about yourself because you helped to make the peace in the Middle East."

Now, that's how this works. That's how this works, this march to dignity, a dignity that Rosa Parks talked about, the dignity that Martin Luther King died for, the dignity that Nelson Mandela spent 10,000 days in jail for. We had the President of Colombia here this week—a country ravaged by civil war, ravaged by drug traffickers—a man who himself was kidnaped, who just by the grace of God was not killed, with a wonderful wife who has had people in her whole family killed. I have worked with people in Colombia for 6 years now. Hundreds of law abiding people have been killed simply for trying to uphold the law. And we too often take this vote for granted and say, "Oh, it doesn't matter what we do."

If you think the things that Congressman Cummings said matter, don't pat me on the back, pat yourselves on the back. That's how this system works. If you think that the things that Senator Sarbanes votes for, that Senator Mikulski votes for, Congressman Cardin votes for; if you think it's a good thing that Lieutenant Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend made Maryland the first State in the country to say young children in school ought to serve their communities, it's a part of their education, it'll make them better citizens; if you think it's a good thing that Maryland, under Governor Glendening's leadership, has pioneered education reforms and environmental advances—if you like all that, you did that. You did that. You should feel that it is yours; it is part of your walk to dignity.

And that is what this is about. Tuesday there is no Caesar. Your vote counts as much as mine, counts as much as Speaker Gingrich. [Laughter] It does. It counts as much as anybody. It counts as much as people who can contribute vast fortunes to campaigns. Tuesday everything gets evened up again, if you show up.

Now, what I want to say to you is that this is not an ordinary time or an ordinary election. There is a lot at stake. This year, because the Members of Congress here present stood with me, we were able to stop a raid on the surplus before we saved Social Security, and we were able to get the funding for a big downpayment on our goal of 100,000 more teachers. And we did it, in the end, against the opposition of the members of the other party. But there is a lot more to be done.

We want to pass that Patients' Bill of Rights so medical decisions are made by doctors, not accountants. We want to pass that school construction proposal so all these teachers will have classrooms, not trailers, to teach our little children in. We want to raise the minimum wage because unemployment and inflation are low, but you still can't raise a family on \$5.15 an hour. We want to pass a juvenile justice bill, yes, that punishes people who have to be, but remembers that the only real answer is to keep more of our children out of trouble in the first place and save our children, give them a chance to have a brighter future.

We want not just to save this surplus and save our economy; we want to reform the Social Security system so that it doesn't go broke when the baby boomers retire and our children will

be able to continue to raise our grandchildren without having to take us on their backs. That's what we want to do.

Now, think of what was denied. We are fighting hard for the dignity of a living wage, in the face of partisanship that refused us last time; for a Patients' Bill of Rights, in the face of partisanship that listened to the health insurance companies the last time; for the dignity of sending our children to learn with good teachers and small classes in decent, modernized schools all hooked up to computers and the Internet, in the face of those who opposed us the last time; and we are fighting for the dignity of a secure retirement in old age way into the future, in the face of those who would squander this hard-won surplus on election-year promises.

Now, in this election we've had a tough time. Our friends in the other party have raised over \$100 million more than we have. Now, you can do that if you take the positions they took: killing the Patients' Bill of Rights; killing campaign finance reform; refusing to raise the minimum wage; be willing to endanger the rights of mothers and their children and child support in changing the bankruptcy laws; refusing to pass legislation to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco, which still kills more people every year than any other public health problem.

Now, why would this happen? Why would people who live in a democracy vote against modern schools when most people are for them? Because they think most people won't vote. Why would they kill a tobacco reform bill most people support? Because they think most people won't vote. Why would they kill a raise in the minimum wage that most Americans of all incomes support? Because they think most Americans won't vote.

Now, just in case, of course, we got news yesterday that there's actually an effort to keep African-Americans and other minority voters from voting, in voter intimidation in Maryland and in six or seven other States. But you know what? On Tuesday you're in control of the arithmetic again, and you can vote.

I say that not in an angry spirit. You know all over America today there are people in other churches who have a different view, who believe that their principles require them to vote only for people at the extreme right wing of the Republican Party. But if you go back through all America, what is this about?

You know, I used to think because I was a young boy growing up in the South and I came from people that didn't have a lot of money, it used to break my heart when I would see my people, poor working people, be among the most hostile toward our black brothers and sisters. And finally I figured out that they did that, instead of joining hands with them to lift everybody together, because they thought they needed somebody to look down on.

And if you look around the whole world today from the Middle East to Ireland, where my people come from, to the tribal warfare in Africa, to the problems in Bosnia and Kosovo, you see all of this turmoil and human misery caused by people who believe that politics is about gaining power over somebody you can look down on. It's about dividing the country between us and them.

Now, that's why Elijah said the Pledge of Allegiance to you. That's why he said the Pledge of Allegiance. One Nation, indivisible. But make no mistake about it, in the 1950's, when I was a kid growing up, communism was a big problem and stayed so until the end of the cold war, so the dividers in our country would just try to paint their opponents as a little too pink, a little too close to the Communists. Then, we had race as an issue; now, immigrants—always some way to divide up the electorate so that there is us and them.

Now, why don't we have that view? Partly because you know what it's like to be treated like them. Partly because you read the whole Scripture. The Corinthians says, "Now we see through a glass, darkly." What does that mean? We just don't know everything. We don't have a right to look down on people and sort them out because we don't have the whole truth. The whole promise of the Scripture is that we will someday have it: "Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then we will know even as we are known. And now abideth faith, hope and love—charity—and the greatest of these is love." Why is love the greatest of these? Because we're all in this boat together. That's why.

Yes, you know, there's some divisions out there. But Matthew cautions us not to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. And Matthew reminds us that a city and a house divided against itself cannot stand. What does the Bible say? What does the Bible tell us? One thing the Bible tells us hundreds of times—hundreds

and hundreds of times about politics—the only thing it tells us hundreds and hundreds of times is to care for the poor, the weak, the needy. In Matthew, Jesus says, “Verily I say unto you, even as you have done this unto the least of these my brethren, you have also done it unto me.” And then down the way a little bit, down the way a few verses it says, “And I say to you, even as you have not done it unto the least of these my brethren, you have not done it unto me.”

So I say to you, we believe that our politics should be guided by what our Lord said was the first and most important commandment, and the second is like unto it. First we must try to love the Lord, our God, with all our heart. “And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

So I say, Tuesday is about whether we’ll have a Patients’ Bill of Rights, whether we’ll have good schools for all our children, whether we will raise the minimum wage, whether we will save Social Security for the 21st century. But in a larger sense, it’s about that march to dignity. It’s about whether your hand is going to be on the shoulder of every person doing every good thing that will be done. It’s about whether the people who believe they should divide America can leave you out because you stay home. It’s about whether you believe that you have to be a doer.

I appreciate your applause. And I am more grateful by far for just having the chance to share this worship service with you, to be reminded of the truths that I need to hear, too, just like you. You remember that in this country there are only two places—only two, only two—where we have fulfilled both the admonition

of the Scriptures and the promise of the Founders that all of us are created equal—only two. One is when you come into your house of worship on Sunday, and the other is when you show up at the ballot box.

So I ask you: There are thousands here. You will see tens of thousands more between now and Tuesday. Be a doer. Tell them they should show up, too. Take them by the hand and bring them. Tell them about Rosa Parks. Ask them not to forget what Dr. King died for. Ask them not to forget what the issues in this election are.

But ultimately, it really is all about what Congressman Cummings said. I have done everything I could to bring this country together, to reconcile the American people to one another so we could go forward together. But in the end, that must be done by all of us together. And Tuesday, it’s your turn. Take it.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:58 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rev. Walter Scott Thomas, pastor, and David L. Blow, assistant pastor, New Psalmist Baptist Church; Reverend Thomas’ wife, Patricia; Vernon Simms, district administrator for Representative Elijah E. Cummings; Mayor Kurt Schmoke of Baltimore; Gov. Parris N. Glendening of Maryland; State Senator Clarence W. Blount; Baltimore County Executive C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger; Baltimore City Council President Lawrence A. Bell; Baltimore City Comptroller Joan M. Pratt; civil rights activist Rosa Parks; President Nelson Mandela of South Africa; and President Andres Pastrana of Colombia and his wife, Nohra.

## Interview With April Ryan of the American Urban Radio Networks in Baltimore

*November 1, 1998*

### *African-American Support/Voter Turnout*

*Ms. Ryan.* Mr. President, thank you so much for joining us today. The focus: the African-American vote, getting African-Americans to the polls on November 3d. For so many weeks some members of the—some White House officials have been saying that you’re trying to get every-

one—that there is, indeed, a definite effort to get the African vote; that’s why you’re at New Psalmist today, to talk to black congregations and blacks throughout the country. Is the African-American vote a make-it-or-break-it vote for this election?