

us to act in a bold way, and we are doing just that.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, are you now operating on the assumption that the September 11th attacks and the anthrax attacks, anthrax letters, are linked? And if I may shift gears for a second and ask about your meeting with Foreign Minister Peres. Would an Israeli failure to withdraw from the Palestinian areas make it harder to keep Arab states in the international antiterrorism—

The President. Well, I told Shimon Peres that, first of all, our country and the people of our country are saddened by the fact that a Cabinet Minister was assassinated. It's just unacceptable behavior. I also told him that we continue to call upon Chairman Arafat to do everything he can to bring the killer to justice. It's very important that he arrest the person who did this, or those who did this act, and continue to arrest those who would disrupt and harm Israeli citizens. He must—he must show the resolve necessary to bring peace to the region.

And finally, I did express our concern about troops in Palestinian territory, and I would hope the Israelis would move their troops as quickly as possible.

Q. Did you get any satisfaction?

The President. Well, he's a very thoughtful man. He's a friend, a friend of America's, and I listened very carefully.

Your first question was?

Anthrax and September 11 Attacks

Q. The link between September 11th and—

The President. Well, we don't have any hard evidence. But there's no question that anybody who would mail anthrax with the attempt to harm American citizens is a terrorist. And there's no question that Al Qaida is a terrorist organization. So it wouldn't put it past me that there—you know, it wouldn't surprise me that they're involved with it. But I have no direct evidence.

I do know that this country is strong enough to endure, to endure the evil ones. And we're making great progress on the ground in Afghanistan, and we'll bring the Al Qaida to justice, and we'll—we're doing everything we can to find out who mailed these letters.

Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

President's Health

Q. Mr. President, have you been tested for anthrax?

The President. I don't have anthrax.

Q. So you've been tested, sir?

The President. I don't have it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 4:48 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Northern Ireland

October 23, 2001

I warmly welcome the announcement by the Chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, General John de Chastelain, that a significant act of decommissioning has been carried out by the IRA and verified by the

Commission. This is an historic step by the IRA. The people of Northern Ireland are now measurably closer to the lasting peace which they richly deserve.

I hope all paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland will build on today's events,

striving to achieve the total disarmament called for by the Good Friday agreement. I know I speak for all Americans when I express my heartfelt appreciation to General de Chastelain for his continuing efforts in support of the peace process. This act of decommissioning will, I hope, lead to the full functioning of the political institu-

tions of the Good Friday agreement. All leaders should be prepared to intensify their efforts to resolve remaining outstanding issues.

NOTE: This statement was released on the White House web site.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report of the Railroad Retirement Board

October 23, 2001

To the Congress of the United States:

I transmit herewith the Annual Report of the Railroad Retirement Board for Fiscal Year 2000, pursuant to the provisions of section 7(b)(6) of the Railroad Retirement

Act and section 12(1) of the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
October 23, 2001.

Remarks to Employees of the Dixie Printing and Packaging Corporation in Glen Burnie, Maryland

October 24, 2001

Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Newth, thank you very much. And Ray and Susan Blavatt, thank you for being here, as well. I'm glad my SBA Director is here; Hector Barreto is in charge of the Small Business Association. And Hector, thank you for coming. I want to thank the employees of Dixie Printing and my fellow Americans.

Some might ask why, in the midst of war, I would come to Dixie Printing. They say, "Here you are conducting a campaign against terrorists, and you take time to come to a small business." And the answer is, because we fight in the war on two fronts. We fight a war at home, and part of the war we fight is to make sure that our economy continues to grow.

When the terrorists struck our homeland, they thought we would fold. They thought our economy would crater. That's what they wanted. But they don't understand America. They don't understand the entrepreneurial spirit of our country. They don't understand the spirit of the working men and women of America. They don't understand that small-business owners all across our country are saying, "We're not going to allow you to terrorize us." We're going to make sure our—[*applause*].

I am here to report that we're doing well on both fronts. Overseas, our diplomatic efforts are strong. Nations all across the globe have bound with the United States to send a clear message that we'll fight terrorism wherever it may exist.