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President; Lt. Gov. Win Rockefeller of Arkansas; Mark Evans, senior pastor, and Greg Kirksey, pastor, The Church at Rock Creek; and Mayor Jim Dailey of Little Rock. The discussion participants were Spring Davidson, Jeanette Cain, and Vivian Webb.

Exchange With Reporters at Fort Meade, Maryland
June 4, 2002

Intelligence Prior to September 11, 2001

The President. How are we doing?

Q. Not bad, sir. I wanted to ask you, yesterday you said in Little Rock that a better job could have been—a better job needs to be done to prevent terrorism. Does that mean, in hindsight—which, obviously, is 20/20—a better job could have been done?

The President. Well, I think there's no question that the FBI, for example, did not have as its primary mission a prevention of an attack, and now it does. In other words, the FBI was a fine law enforcement agency, chasing down white collar criminals and people that were committing crimes in America. And that's good, and that's still an important function of the FBI. But now the focus is on—the primary focus is on preventing a further attack. So the mission has changed, and that's a positive change.

In terms of whether or not the FBI and the CIA were communicating properly, I think it is clear that they weren't, and that they—now we've addressed that issue. The CIA and the FBI are now in close communications; there's better sharing of intelligence. And one of the things that is essential to win this war is to have the best intelligence possible and, when we get the best intelligence, to be able to share it throughout our Government.

And as you've seen the reforms that both Director Tenet and Bob Mueller have put in place, a lot of those reforms had to do with how able—the two are able to talk to each other. And it's a very positive reform.

Q. If the reform had been put in place beforehand, if the FBI had been——

The President. Well, it's hard—it's hard—I haven't seen any evidence——

Q. ——could the attacks have been stopped?

The President. I've seen no evidence to date that said this country could have prevented the attack.

Upcoming Visit by President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt

Q. Mr. President, President Mubarak told the New York Times this morning that he is proposing the idea of declaring a Palestinian state and then negotiating the hard things—borders—later. Does that make any sense to you?

The President. Well, I look forward to talking to President Mubarak. I'd rather—you know, I think it's probably wise for me to listen to what he has to say and not read it, you know, through the filter of a fine newspaper. So I'm going to look forward to my meetings with him at Camp David.

Egyptian Intelligence Prior to September 11

Q. He also—one of the things he said in that was that the Egyptian intelligence services had told the United States that they were expecting an Al Qaida attack a week before September 11th. Is there any—do you know of any reason to believe that?

The President. No, listen, there's all kinds of speculation. As I said, I have seen no evidence that would have led me to believe that we could have prevented the attacks.

And obviously, if we could have, we would have prevented the attacks.

Intelligence Community/Congressional Investigation

Q. Sir, is there any concern at all that all this finger-pointing between the FBI and the CIA is distracting them a bit from the mission at hand, preventing future terrorist attacks?

The President. Well, you know, one of the things I've said is that, for example—yes, I'm concerned about distractions from this perspective: I want the Congress to investigate, but I want a committee to investigate, not multiple committees to investigate, because I don't want to tie up our team when we're trying to fight this war on terror. So I don't want our people to be distracted.

In terms of the gossip and the finger-pointing—level three staffers trying to protect, you know, trying to protect their hide—I don't think that's of concern. That's just typical Washington, DC.

But what I am concerned about is tying up valuable assets and time and possibly jeopardizing sources of intelligence. And that's why it is very important that the Congress do investigate, but they do so in a way that doesn't jeopardize our intelligence gathering capacity. That's why they have intelligence committees on Capitol Hill, and that's the appropriate forum, as far as I am concerned, for these investigations.

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you've got a lot going on foreign policywise right now, the Middle East meetings later this week, the continued efforts here. Is this all moving Iraq to the back burner?

The President. Well, I think you need to read my speech that I gave at West Point. If you haven't, I'll get you——

Q. I was there, sir.

The President. Oh. I think you need to have listened to my speech I gave at West Point. [*Laughter*]

No, the war on terror is—and my strong desire to protect our homeland is of paramount importance to me. And I think people understand my position on these closed regimes that harbor and desire to have weapons of mass destruction. And as I said in my speech, we'll use all the tools at our disposal to deal with these nations that hate America and hate our freedoms. And one option, of course, is the military option, but as we've said repeatedly, I have no plans on my desk at this point in time. But nevertheless, these nations that I have named need to take—they need to take America seriously. When it comes to defending our freedoms, they need to be worried about how we defend our freedom. We're very serious about this, and we expect them to change their behavior.

Global Warming

Q. Mr. President, good morning, sir. Do you plan any new initiatives on—to combat global warming?

The President. No, I've laid out that very comprehensive initiative. I read the report put out by a—put out by the bureaucracy. I do not support the Kyoto treaty. The Kyoto treaty would severely damage the United States economy, and I don't accept that. I accept the alternative we put out, that we can grow our economy and, at the same time, through technologies, improve our environment.

Morale in the Intelligence Community

Q. Sir, are you concerned about the morale in the intelligence agencies, given the criticism that's been lodged so far, and is that part of what you're going to be talking about today with the employees of the NSA?

The President. I believe morale is high. I glean that from the leaders with whom I meet on a regular basis. These—our intelligence communities understand they are on the forefront of one of the most important wars in our Nation's history. And they're—I think I'm more worried about

them being overworked. These good people are putting in long, long hours.

And one of my jobs is to remind those who sacrifice on behalf of our Nation that we appreciate it a lot. And I'd rather have them sacrificing on behalf of our Nation than, you know, endless hours of testimony on congressional hill. The appropriate place to do that, of course, is the intelligence committees. And again I repeat, the reason why that's important is because we have got to guard the methodology—methodologies of our country, of how—it's important for us to not reveal how we collect information. That's what the enemy wants, and we're fighting an enemy.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:45 a.m. in the Operations Center at the National Security Agency.

Remarks to Welfare-to-Work Graduates
June 4, 2002

The President. Thank you all for coming. Welcome. Please be seated. Well, thank you all for that warm welcome, and welcome to the people's house.

All of you here today who have gone from welfare to work really represent courage and strength. And I want to thank you for your examples of what is possible and for your stories of success. You've earned independence and the respect of your families and your communities, the respect of your President. I congratulate you—I want to congratulate you on using and utilizing your God-given talents to their fullest. So, welcome.

I want to welcome Tommy Thompson, who's the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Tommy, thank you for being here. He's a former Governor—nothing wrong with former Governors. [*Laughter*] But Tommy has been a leader in welfare reform, which is really a leader in helping people. He did a great job as the Governor of Wisconsin. He's doing a great job here in Washington. Thank you, Tommy.

Elaine Chao is here as well, who is the Secretary of Labor. I want to thank you for coming, Elaine, as well.

I want to thank Members of the Congress who are here. Wally, thank you for coming—Wally Herger from California, Buck McKeon of California, Michael Bilirakis of Florida. I appreciate your interest. I thank you for coming.

I want to thank Rodney Carroll, who is here. Rodney is the president and CEO of the Welfare to Work Partnership. What that means is, Rodney is really in charge of convincing corporate America to do their duty, and that is to help people who want to find work. And Rodney's done a great job. There's—millions of people have been placed in employment because of the Welfare to Work Partnership.

And one of the really terrific companies that has responded to the call to be a responsible corporate citizen in America is UPS. And I want to thank the representatives of UPS who are here; "Big Brown," I think you call yourself now. [*Laughter*]

On the stage with me is Al and Ann Briscoe. They're going to have something to say if we can ever get the President to stop talking. [*Laughter*] But I want to welcome the Briscoes and all the welfare-to-work graduates from the States of Pennsylvania and Michigan and Connecticut and Florida. We're really glad you're here.

I want to thank the Briscoes for their willingness to share the inspiring story—stories, by the way, which we heard yesterday in Arkansas as well. These are stories