AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

to reform the review process for forest projects. The "Healthy Forests Restoration Act" would make forest health a high priority when courts are forced to resolve disputes, and it would place reasonable time limits on the litigation process after the public has had an opportunity to comment and a decision has been made. For the health of America's forests and for the safety and economic vitality of our communities, the Congress must complete work on this bill. The House has passed the legislation, and now the Senate must act.

As we protect America's forests, we must also preserve the beauty of America's nearly 80 million acres of national parkland. On Friday, I visited the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area in southern California. It is one of America's 388 national park areas, including historic sites and battlefields, recreation areas, monuments, and shores. Every one of them is a point of pride for the Nation and for local communities.

Yet in the past, not all of these sites have been given the attention they require. Some of our national park areas are not in good condition. And for many years, Government did not even have the basic information about which places were most in need of repair or restoration. To meet this challenge, I pledge to spend $4.9 billion over 5 years on needed work and maintenance in our national park areas.

With the support of Congress, we're keeping that commitment. In the first 2 years of my administration, Congress provided nearly $1.8 billion for park maintenance and roads. And my request for the next three budgets will bring total funding for park maintenance and roads to more than $5 billion over 5 years.

With this funding, we've already undertaken approximately 900 park maintenance projects. This year, the Park Service is working on 500 more projects, and nearly 400 more are planned for next year. As we attend to needed repairs, we're also putting in place a new system of inventory and assessment to assure that America's parks stay in good condition. We have set a new course for our national parks, with better management and renewed investment in the care and protection. After all, the parks belong to the people.

I look forward to traveling next week to Oregon and Washington State, and I will be carrying the same message: Our system of national parks and forests is a trust given to every generation of Americans. By practicing good management and being faithful stewards of the land, our generation can show that we're worthy of that trust.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:55 a.m. on August 14 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 16. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 15 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Interview With the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service
August 14, 2003

Liberia

Q. Thank you for joining us today. We really appreciate you being here and taking time out to talk with us.

I'd like to start out with a topic that's in the news this morning, and that's Liberia. Two weeks ago, you authorized Secretary Rumsfeld to send a small contingency into that war-torn country to help

out. And now this morning, we hear that a couple of hundred more U.S. forces are there to help out. What's the status there? Do you see this as a long-term deployment for our troops? Or do you think this is more short-term?

The President. No, I know it's short-term. Here's what I said. I said, look, we have a special obligation in Liberia to help with humanitarian aid, and therefore, we will. And I said, secondly, we will have a limited mission of limited duration and limited scope and that we will help what's called ECOMIL, which is the western African nations' militaries, go in and provide the conditions necessary for humanitarian aid to move.

We have yet to deploy anybody, really. Today you mentioned 200 troops. Those 200 troops will be the first really deployed, other than assessment teams, and their job is to help secure an airport and a port so food can be offloaded and the delivery process begun to help people in Monrovia. We'll be out of there by October the 1st. We've got U.N. blue-helmeted troops ready to replace our limited number of troops.

But our mission there is to help ECOWAS—help ECOMIL provide humanitarian aid.

Coalition Operations in Iraq

Q. I'd like to turn to Iraq now.

The President. Yes.

Q. On May 1st, you flew aboard the *Abraham Lincoln,* and you addressed the Nation, and you announced the end of combat operations.

The President. Actually, major military operations.

Q. Okay, I stand corrected.

The President. Because we still have combat operations going on.

Q. We do, sir; you're right. But as you say, duty there continues to be tough, dangerous work. But ironically, more of our troops have died since May 1st than during the main hostility. What do your advisers tell you about the security threat in Iraq today? Is it getting better? Is it worse? Where do we stand?

The President. Well, it's certainly getting better on a day-by-day basis. And the reason why is because we're routing out former Ba'athists and some foreign terrorists from the country. These are people who can't stand the thought of a free Iraq.

Really, the way I'd like for your viewers to understand the Iraq theater is that the—Iraq is an integral part on the war on terror. See, Saddam Hussein was funding terrorist activities. He was providing money. Who knows what kind of armament he was providing. We know he had illegal weapons, and those weapons in the hands of terrorists would be very dangerous to the United States.

Iraq is in the middle of a part of the region that has produced terror and terrorists. And therefore, a free Iraq is an integral part of winning the war on terror, because a free Iraq is going to be one that will help—will have an amazingly positive effect on its neighborhood. A free Iraq will no longer be a threat to the United States and our friends and allies. And so what you're seeing now is a continuation on the battle for Iraq; it's just a different kind of battle. The first wave of military operations was to get rid of—the first major goal of military operations was to get rid of Saddam Hussein and his regime, and we have done that. And now it is to make the country secure enough for democracy to flourish. And it's a different kind of combat mission, but nevertheless, it's combat—just ask the kids that are over there killing and being shot at.

Listen, as Commander in Chief, I grieve for any loss of life. And I stand in—I send my deepest sympathies to the loved ones who grieve over the loss of a soldier, a loved one. But the cause is a good cause, because we will never forget the lessons of 9/11. This is part of the war on terror. And the effect of what we have done in Iraq and what we're doing in Iraq will be a very positive effect on future generations

of Americans, and that's very important for people to understand.

Q. You talked about a democracy in Iraq. August 8th was the 100th day since the end of combat operations there. But we've got a lot of forces that are still there. I guess my question to you is, will U.S. forces continue to bear the brunt of the responsibility there? I believe down in Crawford you told the press that America was committed to staying in Iraq until they were free.

The President. Right.

Q. But will that responsibility continue to fall on U.S. forces, or will our coalition partners step up and give us some relief?

The President. Yes, I think what you'll find is, is that there will be a variety of different elements that will give relief to U.S. forces.

First of all, we will stay there until the job is done. If America pulls out, there's no telling what'll happen. It'll certainly embolden terrorists to think that we are going to a mission and don't complete it. But think about the following dynamics. First of all, Britain is still there. Polish troops are now moving in and will be in, I think, by September 4th of this year, which is in 2 weeks. That's a major Polish contingent. There will be other nations going in to support not only the Polish contingent but the British contingent.

We're developing an Iraq police force as well as an Iraqi army. And the idea is at some point in time, the Iraqi army is able to secure the powerlines and prevent the looting. See, what's happening there is there's a handful of people, an element of people who are willing to destroy the power grid as we rebuild it, in order to try to terrorize people. It would be helpful if other patrolled the power grid, other than our U.S. hunter-killer teams. And that's what's happening now. And this fall you'll see a lot of protective load, kind of the guarding role, being taken off the shoulders of U.S. troops and shared by coalition forces.

But you know, you mentioned 100 days. I want to put this in perspective. Saddam Hussein had 12 years or so, or more, to hide weapons and to fool the world. I say "12 years" because that's really the timeframe from '91, the last U.S. incursion, until today, but no telling what he was doing prior to '91. He has had years to terrorize people. This is the guy, if you disagreed with him, you're liable to be dead and your family would be tortured as well or killed as well.

And so we're dealing with a mindset and kind of a condition, an environment that has been in place for a long time, and yet we've only been there for 100 days. But we've done a lot in 100. In other words, my expectations aren't the democracy will flourish after 100 days. Of course, my expectations were that—I wasn't certain how long it was going to take for us to do an incredibly difficult, complex military operation. I knew that we had a good plan, because General Franks told me we had a good plan. But it happened a lot quicker than I thought.

So I don't—my point is, I don't tend to put time, artificial timelines; I try to be realistic, however, about how long it takes to accomplish a complex mission.

Afghanistan/War on Terror

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to talk about Afghanistan for a moment, formerly a hotbed of terrorist activity, and the first country to feel America's wrath and compassion in the war on terrorism after 9/11. But today, significant numbers of U.S. troops are still there helping to rebuild that country. My question for you is, is there a timetable for when U.S. forces will start to come home from there? Or is Afghanistan tied to Iraq?

The President. Well, listen, we've got about 10,000 troops there, which is down from, obviously, major combat operations. And they're there to provide security, and they're there to provide reconstruction help. But both those functions are being

gradually replaced by other troops. Germany, for example, is now providing the troops for ISAF, which is the security force for Afghanistan under NATO control. In other words, more and more coalition forces and friends are beginning to carry a lot of the burden in Afghanistan.

We'll still have hunter-killer teams there to chase down remnants of Taliban and Al Qaida, because—we want, of course, Afghanistan to be a secure and democratic country. And we want to use—now that we're locked and loaded, as they say in the military, we want to chase down those who could eventually come back and harm America.

In other words, Afghanistan and Iraq—they're linked. They're linked because they're both integral theaters in the war on terror. And a free Afghanistan and a free Iraq will make America more secure, and that's, after all, the mission that we're after. Nine-eleven taught us a lesson, that we're vulnerable, and 9/11 reminded me that my obligation as the Commander in Chief is to hunt down an enemy and bring them to justice before they would ever harm America again. And that's what we're going to do, so long as I am the President.

North Korea

Q. I'd like to go to the other side of the world for a moment, if I could, to North Korea.

The President. Yes.

Q. What is the status on their weapons of mass destruction and their ability to use them? And most specifically, how concerned should U.S. forces in the Pacific theater be—South Korea, Japan—that North Korea would use nuclear weapons against them?

The President. Well, you know, we believe he has got a warhead. We know he's got rockets. And we know he's a dangerous man, and that's why we take his threats seriously. You know, the best thing to do, in my judgment, is to convince others to join us to convince Kim Chong-il to change his behavior.

In other words, we tried the bilateral approach, and it didn't work because he didn't tell the truth. And so now our strategy is to get the Chinese involved, which they are, and to get the Russians involved and the Japanese involved and the South Koreans involved, all of us involved to tell Kim Chong-il that we expect him to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula for the sake of peace. And that's where we're headed.

I'd like to solve this diplomatically, and I believe we can. It's going to take a lot of persuasion by countries besides the United States to convince him. He loves the idea of, you know, making people nervous and rattling sabers and getting the world all anxious. And my job is to tell others that let's speak with one voice and convince this man that developing a nuclear weapon on the Korean Peninsula is not in his interests.

Military Pay and Benefits/Military Families

Q. I'd like to talk about people for a minute. You've talked about them earlier, and nobody knows better than you the sacrifices that our servicemembers are making day in and day out on the war on terrorism, whether it's Iraq, Afghanistan, here at home. What can servicemembers look for in the way of benefits, pay, housing, health care, that kind of thing, to repay them for their unselfish sacrifice to the Nation?

The President. When I first came in, I made the commitment that help was on the way. I said that during the campaign to the military, help was on the way, and I've lived up to that commitment.

Pay is going up. I think if you talk to the servicemen, they do feel the pay increases that we've—that I proposed and Congress has passed. And when you couple that with two significant tax cuts, our servicemen have got more money in their pocket than before.

I ask the question all the time to troops. I don't know if I got—I hope I get the straight answer. You don't know; it must be a little awesome for a sergeant to talk to the Commander in Chief.

Q. It's very awesome, sir. [*Laughter*]

The President. And I turn to the guy and say, "Can you feel your pay raise?" And to a person, the answer is yes, they feel their pay raise, which is good. And that's what I want.

The other thing is that when you and I first met at Fort Stewart, Georgia, I was given a tour of substandard housing. And I went back and talked to Don Rumsfeld about that and said, "We've got to do something about that." Pay is one thing, and housing is another. And both of them are compatible; both of them are important for families in the military.

And I think you'll find that we have—we're living up to our commitment to have a full-scale housing program ongoing for our troops. And the housing issue is getting a lot—the housing condition is improving, compared to the way it was in the past, and so I'm mindful of it.

And health care is good for our troops. I think, again, if you ask the troops—that's who I ask, and they tell me they're pleased with the health care. And so the key is to continue the progress that we've made about making sure that the human condition in the military is excellent.

Q. One final question, Mr. President. The families of America's fighting forces, they make huge sacrifices in the name of freedom, just like the servicemembers. You touched on it earlier. You touched on it in your speech today. For months at a time, they give up their servicemembers. They don't know where they are. They don't hear from them. They don't know if they're safe. They don't know if they're dead or alive. What message do you have for the families today?

The President. Well, my message is that what your loved one is doing is the right thing for the country. We are called upon to defend the United States of America. I take that oath, and every soldier takes that oath. And on 9/11, our world changed, and we realized this country is vulnerable and we better do something about it. And the best way to secure the homeland is to get the enemy before he gets us. At least, that's my attitude. And so, I—first of all, the commitment that their loved ones have made, the families of the service ones have made, is in line with this business about winning and fighting war.

Every person is a volunteer in our military. They've chosen to defend the United States of America. And therefore, they need to get the best—if that's their attitude, and they made up their mind that's what they want to do, then my job is to get them the best equipment, the best pay, the best training possible, so that if we ever have to send them in, they'll be able to do the job.

And I hope their loved ones understand that, that this is a volunteer army and it requires sacrifice. Look, I understand what it must mean for the moms and dads and sons and daughters to wonder about their loved one. It must be a nerve-wracking experience. On the other hand, it's for a good cause.

I would tell you as well, as I think our military does is—I'm going to tell you two things I think the military does really well that will hopefully give comfort to people. One, there is a lot of communication that takes place with troops overseas and their loved ones at home. There are—there's e-mail efforts that go on, a lot of e-mail efforts. In other words, there's a capacity to communicate from afar, the likes of which our military has never had.

Secondly, I have visited our wounded. One of my jobs as the Commander in Chief is to try to comfort those who grieve and to comfort those who are wounded—those who grieve as a result of loss of life, and those—and to comfort those who have been wounded, and I do. I'm responsible for putting them into combat, and I know

that. And so I go to hospitals on occasion, Walter Reed or Bethesda.

Ours is a country that can take a young, wounded soldier off the battlefield and have him in the best care in a number of days. I met many a troop that was wounded in Iraq and 3 days later was at Bethesda Naval Hospital getting the best possible treatment. And to me that speaks volumes about the commitment of our country to take care of our fighters and our soldiers and marines and sailors and airmen. If somebody gets hurt far from home, we will deliver the best care in the world in a rapid time. And I understand that doesn't replace an injured limb for a loved one, but it certainly should say loud and clear that this country cares deeply about those who are willing to sacrifice on its behalf.

Q. As you say, sir, freedom isn't free.

The President. That's right.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, very much. I really appreciate the time.

The President. You bet. Thank you, sir. Good job.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:55 p.m. in Hangar Five at the Marine Corps Air Station in Miramar, CA, for later broadcast, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 18. In his remarks, the President referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Gen. Tommy R. Franks, USA (Ret.), former combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; and Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on Signing the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003

August 18, 2003

Today, I have signed into law H.R. 1412, the "Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003." This Act permits the Secretary of Education to waive or modify Federal student financial assistance program requirements to help students and their families or academic institutions affected by a war, other military operation, or national emergency. The executive branch shall construe section 2(c) in a manner consistent with the President's authority under the Recommendations Clause of the Constitution to submit for the consideration of the Congress such measures as the President shall judge necessary or expedient.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
August 18, 2003.

NOTE: H.R. 1412, approved August 18, was assigned Public Law No. 108–76.