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National Committee; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Statement on Senate Passage of the "Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act for Defense and for the Reconstruction of Iraq and Afghanistan, 2004"

November 3, 2003

I commend Congress for providing vital funds to support our mission and our troops deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. These resources, coupled with the growing assistance of international donors, will provide essential support to make Iraq more secure and to help the Iraqi people transition to self-government. The funds will also enable us to continue our efforts to help Afghanistan become a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous nation that contributes to regional stability.

Our country is being tested. Those who seek to kill coalition forces and innocent Iraqis want America and its coalition partners to run so the terrorists can reclaim control. The strong bipartisan show of support for this bill underscores that America and the world are united to prevail in the central front in the war on terror by helping build a peaceful, democratic, and prosperous Iraq.

I thank Chairmen Stevens and Young for their efforts and look forward to signing this bill.

Remarks on the California Wildfires and an Exchange With Reporters in Harbison Canyon, California

November 4, 2003

The President. A lot of people in this neighborhood lost all their possessions, but the spirit is strong. America has got some wonderful citizenry who just refuse to be defeated. I met some families here that are obviously crushed by the material loss, and they look forward to rebuilding—rebuilding their lives. And the role of government, the Federal Government and the State government and the local government, is helping as best as we can.

You know, the worst of nature can bring out the best in our fellow human beings. And to a person, they were thankful for the fact that neighbors do care about neighbors and people are helping people here. It's just tough for a lot of folks who live in this part of the world.

I want to thank the supervisor and firefighters for welcoming us here.

Let me answer a few questions, and we'll keep going.

Q. What do you say to these people——

The President. Hold it one second, please. We've got an order——

Q. I'm sorry.

Iraq/California Wildfires

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. I've got a couple questions. One, what's your evaluation, your assessment of this scene you've seen here? And two, to more and more Americans, the situation in Iraq is looking like

a hot war. Are we back to major combat operations?

The President. No, we're back to finding these terrorists and bringing them to justice. And we will continue to find the terrorists and bring them to justice. These people want to—"these people" being the terrorists and those who would kill innocent life—want us to retreat. They want us to leave, because they know that a free and peaceful Iraq in their midst will damage their cause. And we will stay the course. We will do our job.

First question?

Q. What's your—what do you see when you look at this scene here?

The President. I see more tragedy and heartache. I see the loss of a lot of material possessions. However, I see a strong spirit which exists here. I see people who are resolved to rebuild their lives. Amidst their tears, they do see hope, and that is a great tribute to the people in this part of California. This State has been devastated: Over 3,300 homes have been destroyed; 4,000-some-odd structures have been destroyed; hundreds of thousands of acres have been burned. And yet the spirit is strong. People are resolved to move on with their life, and we want to help them. That's why I'm here with Federal agencies, with the Governor and Governor-elect, as well as local officials, all of whom are determined to provide the resources necessary to help.

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, again on Iraq, sir. Are you moving to a process of Iraqification, trying to use Iraqi——

The President. What was the word?

Q. Iraqification—to accelerate the transition to the Iraqi people, instead of bringing in more international aid. Are you having trouble getting a broader——

The President. Randy, [Randall Mikkelsen, Reuters] we'll do both. We'll bring in aid from those countries that want to help. We had a very successful donors' conference. We just passed the supplemental yesterday. As you know, I look forward to signing it. I believe I'm going to sign it tomorrow. And it is a commitment by our Government and our country to help the Iraqis rebuild their society. And that rebuilding is part of the development of a peaceful and free Iraq. And a peaceful and free Iraq is essential to the security of the United States. This will help change the world in a positive way, so that years from now, people will sit back and say, "Thank goodness America stayed the course and did what was necessary to win this battle in the war on terror."

Q. You seem to be accelerating the process of turning it over to Iraqis. Is that correct?

The President. As you know, from the moment of liberating the country from Saddam Hussein, we have now stood up over 70,000 Iraqi citizens to be police, border patrol, and beginnings of the military, so that Iraqis will be able to run their own country. That has been our mission all along, to develop the conditions such that a free Iraq will emerge, run by the Iraqi citizens.

You remember early on, I kept saying I've got great confidence in the capacity of the Iraq people to run their own country. And it is to this Nation's advantage that there be a peaceful and free Iraq. It's in our security interests. And it will help promote world peace for Iraq to emerge as a free and peaceful country.

Edward [Ed Chen, Los Angeles Times].

California Wildfires

Q. Mr. President, clearly the residents here appreciate your coming and your seeing the devastation here. Do you bring additional help, beyond what has been announced, sir?

The President. No, what I do is I answer questions, Ed, as to whether or not the help that is available is being delivered. Hopefully, I get the truth. I mean, if there is a frustration at the Federal level, I need to know about it. I haven't heard that yet.

I've been—frankly, Mike Brown and FEMA have been getting high marks. But I want to see, as best as the President can possibly see, the truth.

First of all, I've seen the truth of the devastation of a fire. That's evident. Now I want to know whether or not the help that is available is being expedited and made available. So far the marks appear to be good. But if we're slow and if we're not doing what we need to be doing, we'll adjust and respond.

Former President Saddam Hussein's Role in Iraq

Q. You said that Saddam Hussein is no longer a menace, but there's reports that he may be behind these attacks. So how can we be sure that he is, in fact, no longer a menace?

The President. Well, he's no longer running a country. He's no longer got rape rooms, no longer raping young girls, having young girls raped because their families don't agree with them. He's no longer torturing people. He's no longer developing mass graves. Remember, we discovered thousands and thousands and thousands of men, women, and children in mass graves in Iraq. He's no longer running the—no longer threatening people, and he is no longer in power. We'll get him. We'll find him.

Q. He's not behind these attacks, though?

The President. Oh, I'm sure he's trying to stir up trouble. As I've said, Saddam loyalists, those are the people, the torturers and murders and thugs that used to benefit from Saddam Hussein's regime are the ones—some of the ones creating the havoc, trying to create the conditions so that we leave, testing our will. And I'm sure that—I don't know, look, I can't tell you what he's doing. All I can tell you is, he's not running Iraq. And all I can tell you as well, there's a lot of—some people who are upset by the fact that he's no longer in power.

Loss of Life in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, as you know, Sunday was the deadliest day in Iraq since the end of major combat. What was your reaction to the downing of the Chinook and the 16 soldiers who were killed on board? And also, should Americans be prepared for more such deadly days ahead?

The President. I am saddened any time that there's a loss of life. I'm saddened, because I know a family hurts. And there's a deep pain in somebody's heart. But I do want to remind the loved ones that their sons and daughters—or the sons in this case—died for a cause greater than themselves and a noble cause, which is the security of the United States. A free and secure Iraq is in our national security interests. We are at war.

And it's essential that the people of America not forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. We are vulnerable to attack. There are people that hate us, and there are people who are willing to take thousands of lives in acts of tremendous violence. And the United States must understand that and adjust to the new realities. And part of that reality is defeating terrorism and defeating the terrorists.

And that's precisely what the loved ones who died on that day were doing. They were making America more secure. And I want to thank their families for the ultimate sacrifice.

Yes, ma'am. You've been very patient, unlike some of the others in the press corps——

Q. Well, they took all my questions.

The President. ——that's the case.

California Wildfires

Q. No, I'm kidding. You've had a chance to talk to a few of the families here. You know, I live here so I've seen the destruction, as I'm seeing it firsthand here for the first time. How do you continue to get these—give these folks hope? I mean, sometimes we're giving up.

The President. That's a really good question. The best thing I can do is to listen and hug and empathize as best as I can empathize. It's very difficult for me to put myself in their position, because it's their home and their possessions. As the lady just said, she said, "All my pictures are gone. All my memories have been destroyed in one act of nature." And it is a sad moment for me to hear that.

On the other hand, best as I possibly can, I try to encourage her and lift up her spirit by reminding her that some of the most precious things are still there, her husband, her daughter, who is, by the way, serving in the United States military. This was the lady up here with whom hopefully she'll be reunited soon and can hug and kiss and love.

But it's a very sad moment to listen to the stories of those who are obviously devastated by what has taken place. And all our jobs, for those of us who are still standing, have got our lives intact, is to comfort and provide comfort and help.

I met a lady at the airport when I landed at Miramar. She's a Red Cross volunteer. She spent 100 hours this week helping people who hurt. And I suspect the citizens here who are—at the darkest moments will find light when a fellow citizen loves them. And the response, as I understand, in this neighborhood had been terrific, where people have come together and they want to help their—help their fellow citizens.

Okay, listen, thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:37 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Governor Gray Davis and Governor-elect Arnold Schwarzenegger of California; Dianne Jacob, supervisor, second district, County of San Diego; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Mike Brown, Under Secretary for Emergency Preparedness and Response, Department of Homeland Security; and Red Cross volunteer Suellen Mayberry. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to Off-Duty Firefighters and Volunteers in El Cajon, California
November 4, 2003

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for such a warm greeting. I want to say a couple of things. First, I want to say it's a great pleasure to be in the presence of people who have dedicated their lives to saving life, people who have heard a call, and the call is to serve something greater than yourself.

And I saw firsthand the—Governor Davis and Governor-elect Schwarzenegger and I saw firsthand what it means for people to draw a line in the sand and say, "This fire is not getting any farther." We saw devastation on one side—and for those victims, we send our prayers and our love—but we saw what heroic efforts meant, for people who said, "We're not going to yield." And we're here, first and foremost, to thank you all for setting such a great example and for serving your community and for saving lives. There's no better calling, is there? God bless you for that. Thank you.

I want to thank all the State officials who are working hard. See, one of the things I'm looking for is to make sure that there's good cooperation between the Federal Government and the State government and the local firefighters. I want to make sure FEMA is doing its job. Sometimes the President gets the Cook's tour, if you know what I mean. [*Laughter*] I'm interested in hearing the truth, and I believe I've been told the truth and that there has