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Remarks Following a Meeting With Judicial Nominees and an Exchange With Reporters

November 13, 2003

The President. I have the job of nominating people to serve on the Federal benches. I have handled my duty in the right way by picking superb men and women to serve our country as Federal judges, people of integrity and honor, people of high intelligence, three of whom are with me today. Carolyn Kuhl, Janice Brown, Priscilla Owen really represent the best of America—superb, superb women.

And yet, these three women are being denied a chance to serve on the bench because of ugly politics in the United States Senate. These folks deserve an up-or-down vote on the Senate floor. If they get an up-or-down vote on the Senate floor, they will be confirmed because the majority of justices believe they should serve. And yet a few Senators are playing politics. And it's wrong, and it's shameful, and it's hurting the system.

I have told these three ladies I will stand with them until the bitter end because they're the absolute right pick for their respective positions. And the Senators who are playing politics with their nominations are acting shamefully. And I want to thank you all for being such stalwarts for justice and fairness and decency, and I appreciate you standing here.

Carolyn Kuhl. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Let me answer a couple quick—please.

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, could you tell us your ideas about how you would like to see—speed up the transfer of power in Iraq? Are you interested in setting up, for example, an interim government before a constitution is written?

The President. What I'm interested in doing is working with Ambassador Bremer and the Governing Council to work on a plan that will encourage the Iraqis to assume more responsibility. Ambassador Bremer sat right here yesterday and talked to me about the Iraqis' desire to be more involved in the governance of their country. And that's a positive development because actually that's what we want. We want the Iraqis to be more involved in the governance of their country. And so Ambassador Bremer, with my instructions, is going back to talk to the Governing Council to develop a strategy. And he'll report back after he's consulted with the very people that we want to assume more responsibility.

Yes.

Steel Tariffs

Q. Mr. President——

The President. You're in there, Stretch [David Gregory, NBC News].

Q. What's your timetable for deciding on whether to lift the steel sanctions? And how far do you think the U.S. industry has gone now in restructuring toward——

The President. Well, that's exactly what I'm reviewing now. Part of the—the decision was based upon the International Trade Commission's finding that our industry had been harmed, and therefore, I imposed some tariffs in order to allow for a restructuring of the industry. I'm in the process of reviewing the extent to which the industry has been restructured. I'm going to make a decision within a reasonable period of time.

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes, Stretch.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. Excuse me, I couldn't tell if you wanted to ask a question or not today. [*Laughter*]

Iraq

Q. How worried——

The President. Is this about the judges?

Q. Yes, right.

The President. Okay.

Q. I would—if I had time, I would. What are you prepared to do about the fact and how worried are you about the fact that ordinary Iraqis appear to be more irritated with the presence of U.S. troops and more supportive of Iraqi insurgents?

The President. Well, first of all, the goal of the terrorists, whether they be Ba'athists or mujahideen fighters or Al-Qaida-type fighters, is to create terror and fear amongst average Iraqis, is to create the conditions where people are just so fearful for their lives that they cannot think positively about freedom. That's their goal.

Our goal, of course, is to continue to work with those Iraqi citizens who understand that freedom is a precious commodity, those who understand that there is a hopeful life possible in a part of the world where a lot of hope has been diminished in the past. And that's the struggle—that's the struggle. And we're going to prevail because, well, one, we got a good strategy to deal with these killers. Two, I believe by far the vast majority of Iraqis do understand the stakes and do want their children to grow up in a peaceful environment and do want their children going to a school and do want to be able to live a free life that is prosperous. That's what I believe. And I—recently, I was told by—for example, Bremer was telling me about a survey done by an American firm in Baghdad, for example, and it said that by far the vast majority of people understand that if America were to leave and the terrorists were to prevail in their desire to drive us out, the country would fall into chaos. And no one wants that, and so I'm confident we'll prevail in the long run. And I'm confident we're doing good work right now.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, are you——

Judicial Nominations

The President. Do you have a followup on the judges?

Q. Yes, well, the Democrats say they have confirmed 98 percent of your judges——

The President. Yes.

Q. ——and by focusing on the few that they are opposing, that you're picking essentially an unfair fight.

The President. Well, our circuits—circuit courts remain, in some cases, dangerously vacant. And here are three cases where people are being treated unfairly. My question is, why won't they give these three ladies an up-or-down vote? Where's the justice? These are eminently qualified people. These are three women who are—represent the best of American jurisprudence. And why won't they let them come to the floor? If they're so fair, bring them up to a vote—today. Let these three nominees get onto the floor of the United States Senate for an up-or-down vote, and then I will listen to whether or not they're fair or not.

Yes, last question, then I've got to go.

President's Upcoming Visit to the United Kingdom

Q. Are you concerned, Mr. President, that the massive amount of protesters that are going to be in London next week will undercut your message of unity in Iraq?

The President. I am so pleased to be going to a country which says that people are allowed to express their mind. That's fantastic. You know, freedom is a beautiful thing. And the fact that people are willing to come out and express themselves says I'm going to a great country.

And secondly, I don't expect everybody in the world to agree with the positions I've taken. But certainly, those should agree with the goals of the United States, which is peace and freedom. You see, we believe that freedom is not America's gift to the world. We believe freedom is the Almighty's gift to everybody in the world. We

believe free societies are peaceful societies. We believe in human justice and human dignity and human rights. We cry when we hear stories about people being tortured, women being raped in rape rooms. We weep when we discover mass graves of innocent Iraqis. We understand that tyranny is not the form of government that will bring hope and justice. And therefore, we're not only willing to defend our own security; we're also willing to defend the rights of others.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:30 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House, following a meeting with Carolyn B. Kuhl, nominee to be U.S. Circuit Judge for the Ninth Circuit; Janice Brown, nominee to be U.S. Circuit Judge for the District of Columbia Circuit; and Priscilla Owen, nominee to be U.S. Circuit Judge for the Fifth Circuit. In his remarks, he referred to L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq.

Remarks at a Bush-Cheney Luncheon in Orlando, Florida
November 13, 2003

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming. Thanks, Jeb—I mean, Governor. [*Laughter*] It's hard to get used to it. [*Laughter*] The thing I love about Jeb is he's a modest fellow. When the Florida Marlins won, he was trying to take credit for their success. [*Laughter*] I told him he doesn't have any idea what it takes to run a championship baseball team. [*Laughter*] He reminded me I don't either. [*Laughter*]

Love being back in Florida with our friends. Thank you all for coming. I appreciate your support a lot. It means a lot to me. Listen, the political season is going to come in its own time. I'm loosening up, and I'm getting ready. But I've got a job to do for everybody who lives in this country. And I'm going to continue doing that job. And as you work the phones and go to the coffee shops and houses of worship, I want you to remind the people that I'm going to work hard to keep America strong, to keep America secure. I'll work hard to make sure we're prosperous and free.

I regret one thing about this event, and that is Laura is not with me.

Audience members. Oh-h-h.

The President. I know it. I know it. [*Laughter*] You drew the short straw. [*Laughter*] She is a fabulous sister-in-law. She's a great wife, a wonderful mother, and she's doing a heck of a good job as the First Lady of this country. I'm really proud of her. She sends her very best to all our friends here in central Florida.

I'm proud of my brother. I tell you, he is a—he has been a superb Governor. He is a principled man, principled man. When he says something, you can book it. He is a man of his word. He is a courageous person, and he's got his priorities absolutely right. He loves his faith. He loves his family, and he loves his Florida.

I want to thank the other cast of characters who have joined me on this stage. That would be Tom Petway, Zach Zachariah, and David Brown, all of whom are working hard to make sure that this campaign is well-financed. I want to thank you for your hard work. I appreciate your efforts.

Mel Martinez is here today. He serves in my Cabinet. Where are you? There he is. Mel. He's done a superb job in my Government. You'll hear me talk a little bit about the homeownership gap a little later on. He's the leader in making sure that we promote ownership here in America. He is a—I love his story—it's the story