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they're giving assistance to the people who is really in need of assistance.

President Bush. All right. We've got to go eat. I hope you do too.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq; and Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command. President Ciampi spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Interview With British Journalists
November 14, 2003

The Oval Office

The President. I wanted to show you this shrine to democracy here, kind of give you a sense of who I am.

Laura designed that—that would be my wife. I wanted people to, when they walk in here, to have a sense of optimism. I wanted people to say, "The person whose office is in here, or who works in here, is an optimistic person." And I thought she did a fabulous job capturing my sense about our future.

Well, as you can see, it's got sun rays.

Q. Has it worked? Have people coming in——

The President. See, that's what you're supposed to tell me. [*Laughter*]

Q. Can we—[*inaudible*]—the enemy to you? [*Laughter*]

The President. I don't ask everybody that comes in to work. I just want you to know why we do what we do with the rug. This looks like Texas; it's a Texas star. These are paintings of Texas. This is a guy named Onderdonk, a great Texas painter. That's what our ranch looks like. That's west Texas, where—far west Texas. Where I was raised, it's flatter than that. Laura's mother was raised in that country. It's a really special part of the room.

Q. Is that actually the ranch?

The President. No, it's not. It looks like it—two other Texas paintings. Obviously, I love Texas. It's very important for a President to know who he is before you take this job, a lot of pressure here, a lot of decisionmaking. If you try to figure out who you are on the job——

Q. It's too late.

The President. ——you're not doing a very good job. Exactly. Before I get to there—well, Washington, George Washington, of course. It's kind of hard to envision Rutherford B. Hayes above the mantel, isn't it?

Anyway, Lincoln is this country's greatest President, so I put him on the wall. I think he was the greatest President, because the job of President is to unite the country to achieve big objectives. It's hard to achieve big things if you're not united. We're achieving freedom and peace, so we'll spend a little time talking about it—Iraq.

At home, a compassionate America is a big objective. In order to do that, a President must call upon people to serve their neighbors in need. I understand the limits of government when it comes to compassion. The truth of the matter is, the great strength of our country is the heart and souls of our citizens, incredibly passionate people here. My job is to call them to, as I like to put it, to love their neighbor like they would like to be loved themselves, which leads to this painting here.

It's called "A Charge To Keep." It's based upon a Methodist hymn. As you know, there was a renegade Englishman

named John Wesley, and we are Methodists—at least, I am Methodist, and my wife is a Methodist. And we sang this hymn at my first inaugural church service as Governor. And my friend O'Neill, who is not a Methodist—he introduced Laura and me in their backyard in Midland—he said, "I've got a painting based upon that hymn, and would you like to hang it in the Governor's office?" I said, "I don't think it's going to fit." It turned out to be perfect.

The hymn talks about serving something greater than yourself in life. Personally, it speaks to my spirituality. But my job as the President is not to promote a religion. My job is to capture what I call the spirit of America, to call upon people to serve, and that painting reminds me of that.

Q. What painting is it again?

The President. Pardon me?

Q. What's it called?

The President. "A Charge To Keep I Have."

Q. Is that possible——

The President. I think it is, yes. This, by the way—now we're going to get to the—this is the beginning. I hope you're recording all this.

Q. Can we go again? [*Laughter*]

The Resolute Desk/Churchill Bust

The President. This desk was given to America by Queen Victoria. By the way, I would like to talk about two things here in the Oval Office, two articles, one the desk and one a bust, that should describe how I value the relationship with our close and unique friend, which is why I'm so grateful that I've been invited to go. You're about to get the preamble to the discussions.

This desk is called the H.M.S. *Resolute* Desk. The timber is from the H.M.S. *Resolute,* which was rescued in the Arctic, and Queen Victoria, out of gratitude for the relationship, made this desk from the timber. It's a beautiful desk. Not every President has used this.

It has some interesting features. Roosevelt put the door on the desk to cover up his infirmities. He didn't want people to know he was in a wheelchair. John-John Ken put his head out of the desk, probably the most famous Oval Office photo. His dad was looking out at the South Lawn there. Reagan put the bottom on the desk so his knees wouldn't hit. So it's been an interesting history. I love it.

Q. What are you going to do to it?

The President. I don't know. Good question. I'm just going to treat it like a treasure, which is what it is.

Q. Does this mean we're forgiven for burning down the White House? [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, that's another part of the White House. This was built after that tragic occurrence. As a matter of fact, there's a painting hanging in there that we love to show people, where Dolly Madison cut out the picture of George Washington, rolled it up, and ran with it before the White House burned, thanks to a savage attack. [*Laughter*]

Q. It was all a mistake.

The President. Of course it was.

Q. Identification problem.

The President. Yes, exactly. Weren't sure where they were. This is, of course, Churchill. Tony Blair knew that I was an admirer of Churchill, and he arranged for this bust to be loaned here. I am an admirer. I thought Churchill was a clear thinker. I thought he was a—the kind of guy that stood tough when you needed to stand tough. He represented values that both countries hold dear, the value of freedom, the belief in democracy, human dignity of every person. I admired his wit. I wish I could be as witty as he was, because he had a fantastic mind and a charming guy.

And there's some interesting political lessons there. Sometimes you're up. Sometimes you're down. But you've got to do

what you think is right. And that's the lesson of Winston Churchill, who was a strong leader.

So anyway, he sits here, along with Lincoln and Ike.

All right. So welcome to the Oval Office.

Q. Thank you very much.

President's Upcoming Visit to the United Kingdom

The President. The President must understand in this office that the person is never bigger than the office. If you think you're bigger than the office, you'll fail as President. The Presidency is bigger than the person. It will last—stay here a lot longer than any individual. That's an important lesson here that Presidents must understand. Come on in.

Just a couple of comments, then we'll answer questions for a while. I am looking forward to the trip. It's going to be a really interesting and fun experience for Laura and me. Obviously, staying at Buckingham Palace is going to be an historic moment. I never dreamt when I was living in Midland, Texas, that I would be staying in Buckingham Palace. Buckingham Palace has got a resonance to it here in America which is pretty grand and pretty magnificent. I've been looking forward to it.

I'm really looking forward to spending time with my friend—and I emphasize "my friend"—Tony Blair. He's a smart, capable, trustworthy friend, and we've got a lot to talk about. We'll talk about Iraq. We'll talk about trade. We'll talk about commerce. We'll talk about issues that we can work together on to help human suffering.

I'll be doing different events. I'll be giving a speech there that I'm working on now, that will confirm my understanding of the importance of this relationship. But I'll talk about other ambitions that we can work on together to promote freedom and peace and a compassion agenda that I think our countries are uniquely suited to work on.

So I'm looking forward to it. It's going to be an exciting trip for us, and I really thank Her Majesty for opening the invitation. I've got my tails all set out and ready to go. [*Laughter*] Had to rent them, but—[*laughter*]—just don't tell anybody.

Q. It gets a bit noisy in the palace when the morning papers arrive, so you'll need to——

The President. They do? Yes. I guess I'll have to go to bed early and wake up early. Anyway, let's go around while we've got time.

President's Upcoming Meeting With Families of Fallen British Soldiers

Q. May I just begin by asking what you hope to take away from the visit? And in particular, can I ask you what message you will have for families of the British servicemen who have been killed in Iraq?

The President. Sure.

Q. Because I gather you'll get to meet.

The President. I am going to meet some. Look, there's two messages. One, the prayers of the American people and the prayers of the President are with them as they suffer. I believe in prayer. I believe that there is a comforting and healing Almighty, and I'll ask that their souls be comforted.

Secondly, that I will tell them that their loved one did not die vain. The actions we have taken will make the world more secure and the world more peaceful in the long run, that a free Iraq, free of weapons of mass destruction, free of tyranny, is not only good for the long-suffering Iraqi people, which in itself is important, but is going to be good for the long-term for countries which love freedom. Can you imagine the historic change, the landmark moment that is taking place now, where we've got a free—a country which is emerging to be free and peaceful in the midst of a part of the world where violence and tyranny and terror have reigned?

And I view this as an historic moment, and I will share with them, just like I share with our own families here, a deep grief,

my sorrow for the sacrifice, but the fact that what is taking place today is a noble cause.

Prime Minister Tony Blair

Q. Mr. President, to focus it back on Mr. Blair and Britain, here is a guy who has lost two Ministers, who has lost a large part of the Parliamentary party, and who—it could be said, polls—has lost the faith of a large part of the country over Iraq. He's still, as you saw the other night in the Lord Mayor's banquet speech, 100 million percent there, and this against the great tide of popular opinion. What have you got on him? What's the relationship? And what's the——

The President. Well, that's just Tony——

Q. And what's the payoff? [*Laughter*]

The President. Freedom and peace. Tony Blair is making decisions for the right reasons. He is a—in my relationship with him, he is the least political person I've dealt with. And I say that out of respect. He makes decisions based upon what he thinks is right.

He's plenty independent. If he thinks—if he thought the policy that we have both worked on was wrong, he'd tell me. He believes it's in his country's interest that we work for a free and peaceful Iraq. He, as much as any world leader, saw the consequences of September the 11th, 2001. Obviously, there are more—those consequences and that moment has directly affected my foreign policy. See, it changed the nature of the Presidency. It changed the security arrangements of the United States of America. I vowed to the American people I would never forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001, and that is we are no longer protected by oceans. We're vulnerable to attack by terrorists.

Tony Blair understands the devastation that terror can bring to a country in a civilized world. He knows the tactics of the terrorists are to create fear and chaos. He knows what they want is for the civilized world to retreat so that their tyranny and their bloodshed and their unbelievable barbaric form of government, like the Taliban, will take hold. And he refuses to allow his country to be terrorized, and he refuses to allow peoples to become subjugated to that kind of ideologies. And I respect him greatly for that.

And I admire him as a strong leader. He tells you what he thinks, and he does what he says he's going to do. And that's about as high a compliment as I can pay a fellow leader.

President's Popularity/Decisionmaking

Q. Mr. President, you're going to find, I think, quite a large number of people on the streets demonstrating during your visit for a variety of reasons, which highlights a rather striking contrast between—you're still a pretty popular President at home, but you're not a very popular President in various states around the world.

The President. Yes.

Q. Does that—how do you account for the lack of popularity around the world? And does it matter to you?

The President. Well, first of all, I—it's kind of—all I can tell you is I went to the Philippines. There was thousands and thousands and thousands of people out there, and they were waving with all five fingers. [*Laughter*]

No, look, I frankly haven't paid that much attention to what you just described. But first, I admire a country which welcomes people to express their opinion. I'm proud of Great Britain's tradition of free speech. I remember going to Hyde Park and seeing Speaker's Corner—what do they call it, Speaker's Corner?

Q. Yes.

The President. People up there expressing their opinion. And it's kind of—it's a longstanding tradition. People speak their mind.

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Let me finish here.

Q. Sure.

The President. And I fully understand not everybody is going to agree with the decisions I've made. I don't expect everybody to agree. And I make decisions based upon—in the foreign policy arena, made decisions based upon a couple of principles. One, how best to secure America? That's my biggest responsibility. See, I was there right after September the 11th. I saw the smoke. I saw the devastation. I heard the grief. I hugged the firefighters whose—the families of the firefighters who rushed in to save. I saw the heroism. And I vowed right then and there that I would use everything in my power to prevent America from being attacked again.

But there's a greater ambition as well, because I understand that free societies are societies which do not breed terror. And I gave a speech the other day, and in that speech I said the are certain folks who I think don't believe that freedom can take hold in parts of our world. And I reminded them about some of the statements about the post-World War II Japan, that there were some skeptics who said that, well, Japan couldn't possibly be a free society or a democratic society.

I thought about that when I was eating dinner with Koizumi, Prime Minister Koizumi—he's a good friend—thinking about what would happen if we had not done a good job with the peace after World War II. Would America and Japan be able to work together, for example, on the North Korean issue, had it not been done right?

My point to you is that free societies and democratic societies are transforming societies. And we have a chance to transform by working together, transform in a positive way whole societies and whole regions of the world.

And finally—and people don't—I can understand people not liking war, if that's what they're there to protest. I don't like war. War is the last choice a President should make, not the first. And it was the last choice, after endless years of diplomacy took place—resolution after resolution after resolution after resolution that was put forth in the U.N. condemning the—and warning the world, frankly, of the dangers of Saddam Hussein and condemning his programs and insisting that he disarm. And finally, in 1141, as you know, by unanimous vote, the world said—at least the U.N. Security Council said, "Disarm or there will be serious consequences."

And he didn't disarm. He had no intention of disarming. And so then the fundamental question came down to a couple of things, one, the definition of serious consequence. Serious consequence is not another resolution or another debate inside the U.N. And I understand people loathe war. So do I. And yet, we are war. That's what September the 11th taught us. It's a different kind of war. And I intend to, so long as I'm the President, wage that war vigorously to protect the American people.

And there's all kinds of ways to wage it. And the best way to win, in the long run, though, is the spread of freedom. And that's what's happening. But sure, I can understand people not agreeing with the decision I made.

Q. But it is striking, isn't it, that opinion poll after opinion poll——

The President. I don't know. I don't read them.

Q. ——huge solidarity after 9/11——

The President. I just don't pay attention to the polls. If I were trying to be President paying attention on the polls, I'd be running around in circles. It's a great—that's one of the reasons I've got Winston Churchill's bust here is, at least from my reading of the history, he pretty much said what he thought, did what he thought was right, and led. He was courageous in his leadership.

And you know the interesting thing about Presidents and Prime Ministers is you're never going to be around to judge history, judge the true merit of the history, of the decisions you make. Short-term history is—

it's hard to call it unobjective. It's very subjective, I guess, is the best way to put it. After all, the person who has written the history hasn't had a chance to see the full effects of the decisionmaking.

And in my case, most of the short-term historians probably aren't that thrilled with me being President in the first place, which might color the short-term history. [*Laughter*] But my only point is, I think a President must not try to write the legacy of every moment. The President just does what he thinks is right and try to explain as clearly as I can—part of the purpose of my visit to your great country is to use the opportunities I've had to speak directly, like I'm doing right now, to people about why I made the decisions I made.

Go ahead, go ahead.

Iraq

Q. On Iraq, you mentioned you're having intensive consultations these days——

The President. Constantly.

Q. Yes.

The President. With Blair, by the way.

Q. Indeed.

The President. Weekly.

Q. Seeming to point to the need to hand over—or a desire to hand over power faster to the Iraqis? Where is this going?

The President. Yes. Well, we—Jerry Bremer is here in town today. I think he just had a press availability. And we discussed all options and just to make sure we understand where we are relative to the situation on the ground.

We want the Iraqis to understand that we believe they're plenty capable of running their own country. See, we're of the school of thought, this administration—and Tony is the same way, if I could put words in his mouth—that believe the Iraqi people are plenty capable of running a peaceful country.

And therefore, the sooner the people—the more the people realize that, I think the more comfortable they'll be with their future. And the sooner that sovereignty is handed over in a way commensurate with a—with a stable country, the better off it is. That's been our position all along. So we're constantly reviewing the progress.

There's been—obviously, it's tough. We lost Italian police today. These killers are—they're hardnosed people. They'll kill because they want to intimidate. They want us to leave. That's their goal.

They've got different ambitions. Some would like to see a Taliban-type government, that would be the mujahideen-type people. Some want to revenge the loss—the defeat in Afghanistan. They would be your Al-Qaida-types. And the Ba'athists, of course, want to get back in power. They represent roughly 18 percent of the people, and they've had 100 percent of the power, and they like that. And obviously, in a free society, that's not going to be the case, power sharing as opposed to not power sharing.

And so there are elements of the Ba'athists and Saddam holdouts that are desperately trying—and I use the word "desperate" because they see the progress being made. And there is progress being made. And I certainly don't want to underestimate the security situation. I know how tough it is. I know how tough it is firsthand.

And yet, on the humanitarian side, in 7 months we've got a new currency moving through the system, which is pretty remarkable when you think about it. The oil revenues, which belong to the Iraqi people, are now up to 2.1 million barrels. Prior to going in, I think if you were to review some of the writings and speculation, they would have said, "Well, that's what's going to take place if the oil reserves are destroyed. How is the coalition going to handle that?"

You might remember there was talk about sectarian violence, that all we would do is create a vacuum and longstanding bitterness and hatred would take hold, and Shi'ites and Sunnis and Kurds would all be after each other. That hasn't happened.

Electricity is up to prewar levels, although it has dipped this month because of maintenance. My only point to you is that these killers are beginning to see a society begin to emerge, a peaceful society, which is a major defeat for terror. And you bet we're consulting on a regular basis to determine how best to deal with the tactics on the ground. The enemy is changing tactics, and we'll change tactics with them.

But I do—I talk to Tony a lot. He's got good wisdom on this subject. Our intelligence services are very close. Our militaries are talking to each other. You've got this—Government officials there amongst the CPA, and our relationship is good there. And it's very important for us to continue to discuss these issues closely. And then, of course, I stay in touch with Bremer. And—sorry.

Q. Well——

The President. Are you trying to dominate? You're doing a fine job. [*Laughter*] No, go ahead.

Q. No, go——

The President. We'll make it around. I promise you. I'll wait. Nice try. I call down to these characters all the time for hogging the mike, as we say. He's one of the worst of them.

Blair/Bush Relationship

Q. Regarding the nature of the pressure that Prime Minister Blair is under, is that putting pressure on the decisionmaking, your own relationship——

The President. Not as far as I can tell.

Q. Or pressure for change or change of tactic or anything?

The President. Never once has he said to me, ever, "Gosh, I'm feeling terrible pressure." Our discussions go as you would hope leaders of two allies would go: What can we do to help each other? What can we do to succeed? I have never heard him complain about the polls or wring his hands. I'm telling you, the relationship is a very good relationship because I admire him, and I admire somebody who stands tough. And I admire somebody who has got a vision which is a vision that is peaceful, and somebody who shares that same deep feeling that freedom is an incredibly important part of changing the world. Free societies do not attack each other. And Tony Blair doesn't hold an elitist view that says only certain people should be free or can be free or capable of freedom. And I admire that in him.

And so to answer your question, you say he's—look, it may be hard for you to believe, and these guys will tell you, I—and ladies will tell you, excuse me, guys and ladies—that my style of leadership is to lay out an agenda based upon principle and lead. And I don't pay that much attention to what is written about me or polls. And I think they will verify that what I've just told you is true. And it's not to say I don't respect the press. I do respect the press. But sometimes it's hard to be an optimistic leader. A leader must project an optimistic view. It's hard to be optimistic if you read a bunch of stuff about yourself, if you know what I mean.

I don't know how much time Tony looks at polls or anything. I'm just telling you from my perspective, my relationship, he is the kind of person with whom I like to consult, a person I'm proud to call friend, because he's willing to make the tough decision and stand by it. And he makes a tough decision based upon what he thinks is right.

Flexibility in Foreign Policy

Q. Mr. President, we've heard—or heard from the administration emanating the phrase, "No war in '04."

The President. Who said that?

Q. Behind the scenes.

The President. Oh, yes. Is that you, Lindlaw [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press]? [*Laughter*]

Q. Well, there you go. It's now in the lexicon.

The President. We're at war. We are at war, see? I don't mean to anticipate your question, but I'm just going to tell you, we're at war now. We're at war with terror. But go ahead.

Q. My point is——

The President. And Iraq is just one of the—is a front in the war on terror.

Q. That's where I'm going. I'm going to Syria, and I'm going to Iran. These are countries which, by the criteria of Iraq, you could argue, have the same application.

The President. Not really, because remember, the—first of all, not every situation needs to be resolved through military action, and I would cite you North Korea and Iran. Secondly, the case in Iraq was unique, is unique, because the world, for over a decade, had spoken. The diplomatic route was tried. No one can argue with that. We tried, I think it was 12 resolutions, if I'm not mistaken, culminating in 1441 which said, "Disarm, or you face serious consequences." I remember going to the U.N. to give that speech. And basically I was looking forward to giving that speech because I wanted the U.N. to understand that they are a vital institution, but their vitality depended upon their willingness to have some meaning to their words.

And we're at war. Okay? The war on terror goes on. And the war on terror is going to take a while. America is vulnerable to attack. So is your country, by the way. And the only way to win this war is to do everything you can to protect your homeland but to stay on the offensive, which is what we're going to do.

And having said that, not every situation requires a military response. As a matter of fact, I would hope very few situations would require a military response. Let me talk about Iran. The Iranians must hear from a unified world that it is unacceptable for them to develop a nuclear weapon. And I want to thank—I thanked Tony the other day on our videoconference we had, for he and his Foreign Minister Straw and the French Foreign Minister and the German Foreign Minister, delivering a message on behalf of all of us that a nuclear weapon is unacceptable. The IAEA, an international organization, as you know, based out of the United Nations, is now very much involved in this issue. The United States position is, is that we appreciate their focus, and we expect there to be a transparent regime inside of Iran. They admitted they had—were enriching, that they hadn't disclosed their enrichment under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. They had made that admission, which says that we need to be on guard.

My point to you in regards to your question on war is that there is a way to deal with this issue in an international forum, which we are now doing. There's bilateral pressure; there's trilateral pressure; and there is multilateral pressure, I guess is the best way to put it. And that's the best way to deal with it.

Let me talk about North Korea, if you don't mind, right quick, to show you, at least, how I think on foreign policy issues. North Korea is a—had a bilateral relation with the United States, and the leader would insist that the United States come to the table and provide different aid, and he, the leader, would not—"he," Kim Chong-il, would not develop a nuclear weapon. And so our country agreed to that. It turns out he was developing highly enriched uranium suitable for a nuclear weapon. The thought of Kim Chong-il having a nuclear weapon is very dangerous and/or the capacity to export a nuclear weapon into the hands of terrorists.

By the way, terrorist networks who are willing to kill with car bombs are also willing to kill on a massive scale. The idea of weapons of mass destruction in the hands of terrorist organizations is a dangerous, dangerous thought for the 21st century. And we've got to deal with it.

So I looked at the history and realized that the bilateral relations with Kim Chong-il hadn't worked. There's a real politic here, when somebody says they're going to do

something and they don't do it. That should be a warning signal, and it was. So I went and worked with the Chinese and convinced the Chinese through a variety of means of argument that they need to be involved, and they now are involved. They're hosting these talks. So you've got the Chinese, and you've got the Americans, and of course, South Korea and Japan and now Russia are all involved. So you've got five countries saying the same message to Kim Chong-il: We expect you not to develop a nuclear weapons program.

And my point to you is, is that there are ways to rally constituencies and nations toward a common objective, which is precisely what we're doing. That is exactly what the U.N. tried to do and others tried to do, and the U.N., as far as Iraq went. It's just at the end, some countries decided that serious consequences meant something other than—something different than what I thought serious consequences meant, I guess is the best way to put it.

Steel Tariffs

Q. Can I ask a question about trade?

The President. Please, yes. Let me guess. [*Laughter*]

Q. You had a ruling on Monday——

The President. We did.

Q. ——which was not favorable to the U.S. decision last year. Are you going to lift the tax?

The President. Well, let me kind of review the bidding right quick on this issue. The International Trade Commission ruled that imports were harming the industry. Therefore, I felt obligated to take a look at that ruling and make a decision based upon that ruling, which as you know, I did. And we're now in the process of looking at a lot of things. One, of course, is whether or not the respite given helped the industry to restructure and to the extent at which it did restructure.

Somebody went off.

Q. Not me.

The President. I would hate for this profundity to be lost. [*Laughter*] To answer—a very short answer—I am listening, looking, and we'll decide at an appropriate time. I haven't made up my mind yet.

Iraq and Afghanistan/Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Just one last question on Iraq and Afghanistan.

The President. Sure.

Q. Is it really—it's inconceivable that you could consider pulling out——

The President. It is inconceivable.

Q. However, bin Laden is at large, and Saddam Hussein. How close are you to finding these people?

The President. No, first of all, I wouldn't—I think that your—let me answer your question this way. We will find them. Okay? Yes, we're not pulling out until the job is done. Period.

Q. And that includes finding those two?

The President. Yes, that's part of it. But even bigger is a free and democratic society. That is the mission. And again, I'd repeat—I know I'm sounding like a broken record to you. I just want you to get a sense for how strongly I feel for the mission we are on.

I gave a speech the other—I think I might have—or mentioned it to you. I gave a speech about democracy in the Middle East. I believe a—first of all, I believe that the Middle Eastern countries are plenty capable of being democratic countries. Their democracy won't be Western. We don't expect them to look like America. We expect the governments to be modern, however, and that includes, well, women's rights and including women into the future of their societies.

So the mission in Iraq is a free and peaceful and stable country. It will be a—this is a transforming mission. It is a milestone, as I said it, a milestone in the history of liberty. And Tony Blair understands that. He looks—and I would hope—what they would say this of me: I look beyond the

signs and the moment to be able to see out, out in years, out in history.

It's an exciting time to be leaders of our two countries. It is exciting in the sense that, working together, we can transform society in a positive way. And I say, "working together," I mean with everybody. There's some unbelievable devastation besides terror going on in the world. And I look forward to reminding the British people that our country proudly is leading the world when it comes to the battle of AIDS. I put forth an initiative of $15 billion, $10 billion new money on top of $5 billion we're already spending over a 5-year period of time, to help get antiretroviral drugs into the hands of the healers and helpers that are in these ravished countries. Can you imagine living in a world—we are living in a world, you don't need to imagine it, it's happening—in a world in which the pandemic of AIDS is wiping out an entire generation on a continent? And we must do something about it. And it's sad, and yet, we have an opportunity to lead.

And I look forward to talking to my good friend about how we can work together. And it's not only the United States working with Britain; it's the United States working with Europe, whole, free, and at peace—whole, free, and at peace. Today I was able to present the Medal of Freedom, which is the highest civil award that I give, to Lord George Robertson. I don't know if you all were in there and saw it or not. Were you there?

Q. On TV.

The President. Yes, I'm sorry. Well, you know, security risk. [*Laughter*]

Anyway, it was a—but the reason I bring that up is that during my tenure here as President, we worked with George and Tony Blair and other countries to expand NATO and the most significant expansion ever, except for the initial thrust. And we expanded to the Baltics. And by the way, we not only expanded to the Baltics, but at the same—in the same period of time, got rid of the ABM Treaty, which I felt codified hatred and distrust.

And yet, relations are good. And we're moving forward. NATO is an incredibly important institution, and NATO is an instrument for freedom.

Yes, one last.

Q. One last question. Can I ask a question about European defense?

The President. Yes. Anyway, what I was going to say is, is that the relations with Europe are vital and important. We've got good relations. Obviously, there was some disgruntlement about the decision made on Iraq, but I would remind you that Germany has troops in Afghanistan supporting that mission there, for which we're very grateful. And they're doing a darn good job.

Yes, last question. Yes, okay, last two questions, then I've got to go. I'm heading toward television. I'm trying to beam my way into Great Britain.

Q. David Frost will wait. [*Laughter*]

The President. That's easy for you to say. He gets to ask the questions, not you. Go ahead. [*Laughter*]

European Defense Force

Q. There was a fuss from American officials after Tony Blair met with Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schroeder in Berlin and appeared to take forward the European initiative on defense. I wanted to ask you what your administration was worried about—whether you could trust Tony Blair to keep the thing—Atlantic alliance——

The President. Let me make sure you understand our position. What we believe, that Europe needs to take more of a defense posture and should act independently of NATO if NATO chooses not to take on the mission. We also believe that the European Defense Force—we agree with Tony Blair that it should not undermine the vitality of the NATO mission. And I trust Tony Blair to make the right decision there.

I don't know what chirping you're hearing about it, but at least in the President's

chair, I'm confident that when he says—this is the man, remember, he has told me things and has stuck to his word. And therefore, I say with confidence that when he says to me that NATO is a vital relationship and the European Defense Force will not undermine NATO's capacities and/or ability to move when it needs to move, I believe him.

Last question.

President's Upcoming Visit to the United Kingdom

Q. Yes, if I may, I gather your program includes a visit to the northeast of England——

The President. It does.

Q. ——which is Jordyland. And I was wondering how your Jordy was, and how you might all understand each other?

The President. My Jordy is probably just about as bad as my English. [*Laughter*] And I hope they understand Texan. You know what I'm saying?

Q. Yes, exactly.

The President. We may be talking above each other. I can't wait to go to his constituency. It's going to be—it will be good to get out into the countryside. I like—it's hard for a President to get out to the countryside. I travel in somewhat of a bubble.

Q. You'll need your phrase book.

The President. What?

Q. You'll need your phrase book while you're out there.

The President. Yes. They'll need theirs too, I'm afraid. [*Laughter*] But I'm looking forward to it. This is going to be an historic trip, and it's going to be one that will be in my memory for a long time. I'm really looking forward to it.

I appreciate you all giving me a chance to visit with you. Thanks for coming by.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 2:08 p.m. on November 12 in the Oval Office at the White House. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 12 but was embargoed for release until noon, November 14. In his remarks, the President referred to Joseph I. O'Neill III, managing partner, O'Neill Properties, Ltd.; Queen Elizabeth II and Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Jack Straw of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq; Minister of Foreign Affairs Dominique de Villepin of France; Minister of Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer of Germany; Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea; and Secretary General Lord Robertson of NATO. Journalists referred to Lord Mayor Robert Finch of London, United Kingdom; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; television journalist Sir David Frost of the BBC; President Jacques Chirac of France; and Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany. Participants in the interview were: Andrew Gowers, Financial Times; Martin Newland, Daily Telegraph; and Paul Potts, Press Association. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on Signing the National Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Week Proclamation

November 14, 2003

Thank you all for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. Welcome to the people's house.

In a few moments, I will sign a proclamation in honor of employers across America who have shown their support for our