

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:45 a.m. on August 8 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 9. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 8

but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on the Healthy Forests Initiative in Summerhaven, Arizona August 11, 2003

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks a lot. Good morning. Thanks for welcoming me to this beautiful part of the world that has been scarred by nature. Senator McCain and I drove up the hill and he was saying, "You know, this part of Arizona is a lot prettier than anywhere in Texas." [Laughter] I didn't believe it at first—[laughter]—but it is beautiful. And all of us are sorry that fire has devastated life in the countryside here.

I want to thank the people for Summerhaven for allowing us to come up to visit your beautiful part of the world. You know, any time a community has been devastated like Summerhaven has been devastated, you could determine the character of the people. And the character of the people of Summerhaven and this part of Arizona have been tested, and you've met the test, and our Nation admires your courage and strength.

Too many communities like this have known too many hardships that fire causes. We've got a problem in the country, a problem which has built up over decades, and a problem we better fix before more people go through the griefs the people of Summerhaven have gone through, or the people that were affected by the Rodeo fires in northern Arizona.

See, our job as policy people and Members of Congress—have got to fix problems when we see them. They don't ignore problems. They don't hope the problems go

away. We come up with commonsense solutions to the problems that affect the daily lives of our citizens, and that's what we're here to talk about today.

One of the people I've tasked with coming up with solutions to the problems we face is Secretary Ann Veneman. She's done a fabulous job on behalf of the people of the United States. She is a commonsense purpose—person. She asks the practical questions about how do we solve problems in America. She's also done a fine job of running the Forest Service. And I appreciate Dale Bosworth being here. He's the Chief of the Forest Service. And thank you for coming, Chief. I appreciate your commonsense policy. And I want to thank all the Forest Service employees, not only here in this part of Arizona but all across the country, for your dedication and service. Thank you, sir.

I appreciate Big Dan being with us. He is a firefighter's firefighter. The Senator and I and Madam Secretary had a chance to hear him talk about the courage and valor of the firefighters in this part of the State of Arizona as well as the others he commands. He and his partner, Larry, who I met last year, are just solid commanders. They're guys who set the course, set the strategy, and encourage the people to get after it.

And Dan, I want to thank you for your service to our country as well. I'm honored that you've given us a tour. I appreciate

your service. I'm glad Ron called you into action—sad you had to come, but he called you into action because you're the best at what you do, and that's great for our country that you are. Thanks, Chief. Thank you and your wife for your service to America.

Ron, I want to thank you for your hospitality, and I want to thank all the good folks who work here in this park, in this park area, for working hard to make sure the environment is safe and sound and secure and that this park remains a beautiful part of the country.

I want to thank John McCain for being with us. He's a commonsense conservative who understands that we can do a better job of managing our national resources. I also want to thank Ben Nighthorse Campbell, who is over from the great State of Colorado. Colorado has also faced a lot of fire, too many fire. And he understands we need better policy.

Jim Kolbe is with us today; he's the Congressman from this area. I asked the county commissioner here, I said, "Has the response been good?" His first—right off, he said, "McCain and Kolbe have been incredibly responsive to the people of this part of the world." And I want to—and Kyl, he didn't show up, so he doesn't get any credit. [*Laughter*] Kyl is a good man. He deserves credit.

But I do want to thank the Senators and the Member of Congress for responding so quickly to the needs of the people here. I also want to thank other members of the congressional delegation from Arizona: Jeff Flake and Trent Franks, Big J.D. Hayworth and Rick Renzi, all fine Members of the United States Congress. All represent their State and their district with distinction and class, and I want to thank you all for joining us on this event.

I appreciate Janice Brewer, the secretary of state of the great State of Arizona, for being here. All the members of the legislature and the State senate who are here, the county commissioner, our fellow citi-

zens, thank you for coming by to give us a chance to say hello.

I particularly want to thank the "hot shot" fire crews, the men and women who wear yellow, the people who put their lives on the line, those who respond to emergencies. The forest-fire crews have been put to incredible tests recently. A lot of it has to do with failed policy, backward policy, when it comes to maintaining the health of our forests.

Last year alone, it's important for our fellow citizens all across America to know that catastrophic wildfires burned about 7 million acres of land. And in trying to protect the natural resources and the people affected by those fires, we lost 23 firefighters, men and women who served our country with distinction. Our Nation is grateful for those who are willing to take risk on somebody else's behalf, and we extend our deepest sympathies to the loved ones who still mourn the lives of those which were lost.

Last month, the people of this beautiful part of America saw the devastating effects of the Aspen fire, which consumed over 85,000 acres. It destroyed hundreds of homes and buildings. We flew over Summerhaven. We saw the devastation. We saw the effects of a fire run wild, not only on the hillsides but also in the communities—burnt buildings, lives turned upside down because of the destruction of fire.

We also were able to see—I was able to hear the fact that our Government responded quickly, and that's important. In June, shortly after the fire began, FEMA issued a fire management assistance grant, granting millions of aid to the State of Arizona to cover a significant portion of the firefighting costs. That is a legitimate role of the Federal Government. And I will remind the House of Representatives and Members of the Senate that we have an obligation to help people fight fires in America.

The disaster declaration I signed authorized Federal assistance to the State and

Pima County for rebuilding public infrastructure and facilities. The SBA is providing low-interest loans to help small-business people in Summerhaven get their feet back on the ground and get the businesses started again. The Forest Service is putting down seed and hay to prevent soil erosion. We got to see some of the project, the hay project, on the hill right over there, right behind us.

The Federal Government has acted, and we need to act. But there's more we can do with good, sound policy. That's what we need to do at the Federal level. The University of Arizona Steward Observatory and the surrounding trees on Mount Lemmon are still standing today because of good, sound forest management practices. They didn't have fires in the area because there wasn't enough fuel to burn through the area, like that happened here.

There are campgrounds still intact, campgrounds used by church groups and scout troops which exist today because of good forest management. Forest-thinning projects make a significant difference about whether or not wildfires will destroy a lot of property. We need to thin our forests in America.

Our citizens must understand there are millions of acres of forest around this country that are vulnerable to catastrophic fire because of brush and small trees have been collecting for decades. As Senator McCain reminded me, it has taken decades for this problem to develop, and therefore, it's going to take a while to solve the problem. And we better get after it now with good, sound forest management projects.

It's important for people who don't know anything about forests and forest fires to understand that overgrowth chokes off nutrients to older and taller trees. It provides breeding grounds for insects and disease, which weaken our forests and make them more susceptible to fire. The kindling can turn small fires into large, raging fires that burn with such intensity that the trees literally explode. The devastation of a fire

destroys not only trees but wildlife and its habitat. It causes flooding and soil erosion. It can ruin water supplies. Catastrophic fires burn so hot that it is incredibly hard to put them out. The kindling on the ground, the decades of neglect, the decades of failed policy have meant that our forest fires are incredibly hot, incredibly catastrophic. If you don't believe me, ask people like Dan who make a living fighting these fires.

And so we've listened to the people who are the frontline of making sure our forests are preserved and healthy. See, we listen to them because we have an obligation in America to preserve our forests. Our forests are treasures that must be preserved for future generations. It's important that we have good, sound forest policy. And the best way to do so is to listen to the experts who understand that by thinning out our forests, we risk—we reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, that we can and we should have good, sound forest management policy all across the United States of America.

And that's why I outlined what I called a Healthy Forests Initiative. The forest policies of the past operated to discourage efforts to thin forests. And unfortunately, well-meaning people proposed—put policy in place that made the health of the forests at risk, not better off.

And so the initiative said we're going to take a new approach. I called upon Ann and the Secretary of Interior and the Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality to cut through bureaucratic redtape so that we can get urgently needed thinning projects moving. See, when you hear "redtape," that means there's a lot of rules and regulations that generally are in place to prevent something from happening. And our job is to slice through the redtape to get thinning projects moving forward.

We're speeding up the process of environmental assessment and consultations required now by current law, while considering both the health of the forest and our obligation to protect endangered species.

We're expediting the administrative appeals process, so that disputes over projects are resolved quickly. In other words, not everybody agrees with thinning; there will be objections. But we want those objections heard, of course. Every citizen needs to hear a voice, but we want the process to work quickly so we can get on about the business of saving our forests.

We believe in bringing people together to try to reach agreement on forest projects. We believe all voices should be heard. But we want to expedite the process to avoid the legal wrangling and the delays that take place in our courts. Delays in our courts prevent us from doing the job necessary to maintain healthy forests.

We're working with the western Governors, most of—a lot of the problems exist in—out West, and we understand that. This is a place for good, sound policy to take place—out West on the Federal lands. Above all, we will continue to rely upon the informed judgment of the forest professionals and those who fight the fires.

Any skeptic about what I'm talking about ought to come and talk to the people who know what they're talking about, who make a living fighting fires, who understand the devastation that is caused by backward forest policy. Every forest will be treated according to its unique circumstances. Federal policy must be flexible to be able to deal with the problems in each particular part of our country.

Saving millions of acres of forest through better management will require a lot of hard work in a lot of States and, interestingly enough, will not only save our forests but will create jobs. You see, not all the work of thinning will be done by Government. In order to meet some of the goals we've proposed, we have to rely upon local contractors who will clear away and be able to sell smaller trees, the trees that provide the kindling. And this way, the work of thinning overgrown forests improves public safety, will save taxpayers' money, and will help local economies.

This initiative that I outlined, the Healthy Forests Initiative, is producing results. Last year, we treated 2¼ million acres of overgrown forests. That's a million acres more than were treated in the year 2000, and that's good. By the end of the fiscal year in September, we will have treated more than 2.6 million acres of forest and range land, and that's important. In Arizona, we're treating 224,000 acres this year, about twice as many acres as were treated in 2001.

We're making progress, but current law makes it very difficult to expedite the thinning of forests. Laws on the books make it very difficult for us to set priorities, to listen to those who manage our forests and fight the fires, and to get after the thinning that is necessary to prevent catastrophic fires from occurring in the first place.

All too often, the litigation process delays forest projects for years and years, and that's a reality. Our forests remain unprotected; our communities are vulnerable. So I asked Congress to reform the review process for forest projects. The "Healthy Forest Restoration Act" now pending in Congress will do just that. It directs courts to consider long-term threats to forest health that could result if thinning projects are delayed. In other words, it says to the courts, the health of our forests is a national goal. It makes forest health the priority when it comes to the courts resolving disputes. It places reasonable time limits on the litigation process, after the public has had an opportunity to comment and a decision has been made.

For the sake of our forests, the Congress must act. The House of Representatives has passed a bill which includes these reforms, and I want to thank the Members from the great State of Arizona for their leadership. A bill—such a bill has passed the Senate Agriculture Committee. And now it's time for us in the administration and for Members in the Senate who agree with

this policy to reach across the partisan divide and get a good bill out of the United States Senate.

The issue I speak about is not a political issue. It's not a partisan issue. This is an American issue that requires consensus to do what is smart and right about preserving and protecting our national forests. I look forward to working with members of both parties to get a good bill out of the United States Senate.

Within sight of where we stand are the results of wise forest policy and the ruins of unwise forest policy. For those who live here, it's the difference between lives surrounded by natural beauty and lives disrupted by natural disaster. We can serve the interests of this country by working together, by listening to people who know

what they're talking about, and putting together commonsense policy to preserve our forests, to make them healthy so that when we step back after our time and service, people will say, "Job well done."

Thanks for coming. May God bless those who suffer, may God bless those who serve our country, and may God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. at Inspiration Rock. In his remarks, he referred to Dan Oltrogge and Larry Humphrey, incident commanders, Type I Southwest Area Incident Management Teams; Ron Senn, Santa Catalina District Ranger, U.S. Forest Service; Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado; and Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona.

Remarks Announcing the Nomination of Governor Michael O. Leavitt To Be Environmental Protection Agency Administrator in Aurora, Colorado August 11, 2003

The President. Good afternoon. First, I want to make a comment about some foreign policy. Today's departure of Charles Taylor from Liberia is an important step toward a better future for the Liberian people. The United States will work with the Liberian people and with the international community to achieve a lasting peace after more than a decade of turmoil and suffering.

The United States will help ECOWAS and the humanitarian relief organizations to get aid to those who need it. I appreciate the efforts of many African leaders, most especially Nigerian President Obasanjo, Ghanaian President Kufuor, South African President Mbeki, Mozambican President Chissano. Their continued leadership will be needed in the weeks and months ahead as a new government is formed and the Liberian people seek to chart a future of peace and stability.

Earlier today, I spoke in Arizona about the urgent need to safeguard America's forests from wildfire. It's one of the many environmental challenges that face our Nation. Those challenges go beyond our forests. We must also be vigilant in protecting the air and soil and waters around us.

This is the primary responsibility of our Environmental Protection Agency, and today I am pleased to introduce my nominee to lead that Agency, Governor Mike Leavitt of Utah. I appreciate so very much Jackie being here, as well as Michael, Taylor, Anne Marie, Westin, and Chase, who's not with us. The Leavitt family is a great American family, primarily because Dixie and Anne, the mom and dad of the Governor, worked hard to make it such, and I'm honored they are here as well. Thank you all for coming.