

Statement on the Presidential Election in Lebanon May 25, 2008

I congratulate Michel Sleiman on his election as President of Lebanon. I am confident that Lebanon has chosen a leader committed to protecting its sovereignty, extending the Government's authority over all of Lebanon, and upholding Lebanon's international obligations under U.N. Security Council resolutions, including 1559, 1701, and 1757.

I am hopeful that the Doha agreement, which paved the way for this election, will usher in an era of political reconciliation to the benefit of all Lebanese. We look forward to working with President Sleiman in pursuit of our common values of freedom and independence.

Remarks at a Memorial Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia May 26, 2008

Thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you for the kind introduction. Members of my Cabinet, members of the administration, Admiral Mullen, Members of the United States Congress—Senator Warner and Congressman Skelton—members of the military, our veterans, honored guests, families of the fallen: Laura and I are honored to be with you on Memorial Day, and thank you for coming.

A few moments ago, I placed a wreath upon the tomb of three brave Americans who gave their lives in service to our Nation. The names of these honored are known only to the Creator, who delivered them home from the anguish of war, but their valor is known to us all. It's the same valor that endured the stinging cold of Valley Forge. It is the same valor that planted the proud colors of a great nation on a mountaintop on Iwo Jima. It is the same valor that charged fearlessly through the assault of enemy fire from the mountains of Afghanistan to the deserts of Iraq. It is the valor that has defined the Armed Forces of the United States of America throughout our history.

Today we gather to honor those who gave everything to preserve our way of life.

The men and women we honor here served for liberty, they sacrificed for liberty, and in countless acts of courage, they died for liberty. From faraway lands, they were returned to cemeteries like this one, where broken hearts received their broken bodies. They found peace beneath the white headstones in the land they fought to defend.

It is a solemn reminder of the cost of freedom that the number of headstones in a place such as this grows with every new Memorial Day. In a world where freedom is constantly under attack and in a world where our security is challenged, the joys of liberty are often purchased by the sacrifices of those who serve a cause greater than themselves. Today we mourn and remember all who have given their lives in the line of duty. Today we lift up our hearts, especially to those who've fallen in the past year.

We remember Army Specialist Ronald Tucker of Fountain, Colorado. As a young man, Ronnie was known for having an infectious smile and a prankster's sense of humor. And then he joined the United States Army, which brought out a more mature side in him. Ronnie transformed

from a light-hearted teenager into a devoted soldier and a dutiful son who called his mother every day from his post in Iraq. In his final act of duty, less than a month ago, he worked with other members of his unit to build a soccer field for Iraqi children. As he drove back to his base, an enemy bomb robbed him of his life. And today our Nation grieves for the loss of Ronnie Tucker.

We remember two Navy SEALs: Nathan Hardy of Durham, New Hampshire, and Michael Koch of State College, Pennsylvania. Nate and Mike were partners in the field, and they were close friends in the barracks. Through several missions together, they had developed the unique bond of brotherhood that comes from trusting another with your life. They even shared a battlefield tradition. They would often head into battle with American flags clutched to their chests underneath their uniform. Nate and Mike performed this ritual for the last time on February the 4th. They both laid down their lives in Iraq after being ambushed by terrorists. These two friends spent their last few moments on Earth together doing what they loved most, defending the United States of America. Today Nathan Hardy and Mike Koch lay at rest next to each other right here on the grounds of Arlington.

The men and women of American Armed Forces perform extraordinary acts of heroism every single day. Like the Nation they serve, they do not glory in the devastation of war. They also do not flinch from combat when liberty and justice are embattled. Ronald Tucker, Nathan Hardy, and Mike Koch make clear: They do not waver, even in the face of danger.

And so today, here in Washington and across our country, we pay tribute to all who have fallen, a tribute never equal to the debt they are owed. We will forever

honor their memories. We will forever search for their comrades, the POWs and MIAs. And we pledge—we offer a solemn pledge to persevere and to provide the security for our citizens and secure the peace for which they fought.

The soil of Arlington and other sites is filled with liberty's defenders. It is nourished by their heroism. It is watered by the silent tears of the mothers and fathers, and husbands and wives, and sons and daughters they left behind. Today we pray for God's blessings on all who grieve and ask the Almighty to strengthen and comfort them today and every day.

On this Memorial Day, I stand before you as the Commander in Chief and try to tell you how proud I am at the sacrifice and service of the men and women who wear our uniform. They're an awesome bunch of people, and the United States is blessed to have such citizens.

I am humbled by those who've made the ultimate sacrifice that allow a free civilization to endure and flourish. It only remains for us, the heirs of their legacy, to have the courage and the character to follow their lead and to preserve America as the greatest nation on Earth and the last, best hope for mankind.

May God bless you, and may God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Adm. Michael G. Mullen, USN, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Susan Arnold, mother of Spc. Ronald J. Tucker, USA. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The Prayer for Peace, Memorial Day proclamation of May 22 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Following a Meeting With NCAA Football Head Coaches May 26, 2008

The President. I just welcomed five of our Nation's university coaches to the Oval Office to thank them for going overseas to boost the morale of our troops. It was very interesting listening to them. Charlie Weis is going to say a few comments about what they saw and heard. But I wanted them to know how much I appreciate—and the—of going to say to these young men and women, “Thanks for what you're doing.”

This is Memorial Day. It's a day to honor not only those who have died in combat, but it's to honor those who continue to serve. And these men make a living motivating young men on the football field, and I am absolutely confident that when our soldiers and sailors and marine and airmen and Coast Guard men and women met them, that they inspired them.

And most importantly, I'm confident what they heard was America appreciates what they do. We can't thank our troops enough for the sacrifices they're making on behalf of the Nation. And so I want to—I'm so grateful for you all for going, and I'm really grateful that you expressed the gratitude of the American people.

Now, Charlie, you may want to say a few things.

Charlie Weis. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Notre Dame man.

Mr. Weis. I think that Mr. President definitely had the inspired part right, but that inspire part definitely worked both ways. Now, we went over there to help motivate the morale of the troops, but I think we came home probably more inspired than even they were. I mean, it was just an unbelievable experience to watch the enthusiasm and the pride and the teamwork over there.

And I mean, I can't—we saw thousands and thousands of troops, and when they heard that we were coming to the White

House on Monday, to a man and to a woman, almost everyone said, “Could you just pass on one message to the President,” and asked us to thank him for them—for him supporting them. I mean, think about it. They're there for 4 months, 6 months, a year—it was just unbelievable—from Germany, you watch—you know, seeing guys and girls that had gotten injured in battle and the—you know, their framework, their psyche—it was just an unbelievable experience.

And I think all five of us said we just wish we could have brought our players over there, you know, the 18-to-23-year-olds that we deal with, so they could see what maturity looks like at a young age and teamwork at its utmost. And I tell you what, on behalf of all five coaches—I can tell—it was just an invigorating experience, one that we'll always treasure the rest of our lives.

And we got something special going on over there, because there wasn't one person, of the thousands and thousands of soldiers we met, that had one negative thing to say. And that's almost overwhelming to think about it—not one. And there were a couple at the end of their year tours that were very much looking forward to getting their call to go home. But I'll tell you what, it was great. And what a perfect way to end up our trip, to end up at the White House on Memorial Day.

Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:17 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. Participating in the meeting were Tommy Tuberville, head coach, Auburn University