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The President's Radio Address

September 14, 1996

Good morning. Today I know the thoughts and prayers of every American are with our men and women in uniform serving in the Persian Gulf, standing up for America's interests. I want to speak with you about why 10 days ago I ordered our Armed Forces to strike Iraq, what we have accomplished, and where we go from here.

America's vital interests in the Persian Gulf are constant and clear: to help protect our friends in the region against aggression, to work with others in the fight against terrorism, to preserve the free flow of oil, and to build support for a comprehensive Middle East peace. Any group or nation that threatens the stability of the region threatens those interests.

For the past 5 years, Saddam Hussein has repeatedly threatened the stability of the Persian Gulf and our allies Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Time and again, he has lashed out recklessly against his neighbors and against his own people. America's policy has been to contain Saddam, to reduce the threat he poses to the region and to do it in a way that makes him pay a price when he acts recklessly. That is why when Saddam sent his troops into the Kurdish city of Urbil in Northern Iraq 2 weeks ago, we responded strongly, immediately, and strategically.

If we had failed to answer Saddam's provocation, he would have been emboldened to act even more recklessly and in a manner more dangerous to our interests. That is why we did respond and why we did so in a way that made our interests more secure. We acted in southern Iraq, where our interests are the most vital and where we had the capacity to increase the international community's ability to deter aggression by Saddam against his neighbors.

I ordered the attacks in order to extend the no-fly zone in Iraq, the air space through which Iraq's military is not allowed to fly. Now, we control the skies over Iraq from the border of Kuwait to the southern suburbs of Baghdad. This action tightened the strategic straightjacket on Saddam, making it harder for him to threaten Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and easier for us to stop him if he does. In so doing, we advanced America's fundamental interests in the region.

Of course, our interests also must include protecting the safety of our own pilots who are patrolling the expanded no-fly zone. That is why our cruise missiles struck the bulk of Saddam's air defense system in southern Iraq. The United States will take whatever steps are necessary to protect our pilots as they enforce the expanded no-fly zone and to defend our strategic interests. I have ordered sufficient forces to the region to give us that capability.

On another note, let me say that I deeply regret the very week our Armed Forces advanced America's interests halfway around the world. Here at home, the Senate missed an historic opportunity to make our soldiers and citizens safer by failing to vote on the Chemical Weapons Convention. The fact that our troops are facing off against Saddam Hussein, who once amassed stockpiles of chemical weapons and still seeks to develop them, should have underscored the importance of this treaty. But the treaty seems to have gotten caught up in election year politicking.

It's been nearly 4 years since the Bush administration signed the Chemical Weapons Convention and 3 years since I submitted it to the Congress. We've been at this a long time, and I have no intention of letting this treaty die. Our military supports it, leaders of our Nation's foreign policy, both Democrats and Republicans, including President Bush, General Colin Powell, and Senator Dick Lugar, support it.

We all agree that we should be sending a strong message as a united country that America will do its part to banish poison gas from the Earth. And meanwhile, we must do everything we can to protect our soldiers and to keep such weapons out of the hands of terrorists. The Chemical Weapons Convention will clearly help us to do that.

So I want the American people to know that I will work with the Senate to pass the Chemical Weapons Convention when a calmer political climate prevails. We cannot afford to play partisan politics with America's security. Our troops, who are doing such an outstanding job in the Gulf and all around

the world, and all the American people deserve better than that.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9:25 p.m. on September 13 in the Map Room for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 14.

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion on Hurricane Fran in Raleigh, North Carolina

September 14, 1996

The President. Thank you, Governor. I don't want to say too much right now. We mostly just came down to listen and to see what we could do to help. But I would like to say, first of all, that like most Americans, I've followed the course of the hurricane and the storms and the rains. I have followed very closely. I did see the video on the way down of the—specifically focusing on your damage along the beach, but I also have watched over the last several days as the damage took its toll and then this remarkable job of cleaning that has been done.

I want to thank all of you who have worked on this. I frankly was amazed when we flew over the damaged area and how much had been done to at least prepare the way to rebuild the homes and to get the trees up and do the other things that have been done, and I take my hat off to you. And we will do whatever we can to help. A lot of our administration people have been down here. Secretary Riley—I asked Secretary Riley this morning, I said, ''Dick, why are you coming with us today?'' And he said, ''Well, I'm a Carolinian,'' he said. [*Laughter*] He said, ''Besides, there were schools damaged; I belong down there.''

And I thank you for what you said about James Lee Witt. I thought I should send someone down here who did not speak with an accent—[*laughter*]—so that you would—there would be no time lost in translation. But I believe that if we can perform as well over the next several weeks as the people of North Carolina have performed in the last week, we will be able to recover from this.

I also know, Governor, you told me on the way down there has been an enormous amount of loss to the agricultural crops, to the tobacco, the corn, perhaps some others, and I'd like to hear about that. We just want to know what the full dimensions of the problems are and what we can do to help, and we'll do our best.

[*At this point, the roundtable discussion began.*]

The President. First of all, I would like to—let me begin by thanking all of you who have spoken and those who worked in public capacities and the citizens who told their stories. Thank you in Wilmington, Mr. Mayor, and the others for joining us by satellite. The wonders of modern technology have given us a picture of that house, which proves that no matter how modern technology gets, we are not in total control, and I thank you all for what you have done.

What I'd like to do in the time we have available here is just to—first of all, let me tell you that we talked—the Governor and Congresswoman Clayton and I talked on the way down here with Leon Panetta and Mr. Witt and others about what we could do before the Congress goes home, maybe, to get a little help here for North Carolina and for the other States that were damaged not as badly, but there was still quite a bit of significant damage from Hurricane Fran in some other States and whether we could get something done. So we're looking at that.

What I'd like to do is to have the clearest picture I can when I leave here today of what your priorities are. Phil Lader, our Small Business Administration director, is here. Jim, you told me, I think, 50,000 small businesses have been hurt by this hurricane, and I think we've acknowledged everyone else here. North Carolinian Martin Lancaster is here from the Defense Department, and General Genega, the head of the Corps of Engineers.

We'd like to know exactly what you need done the most quickly, and what priority—what we need to be sensitive to. And we want to do the best we can to try to fashion this relief package that's as adequate as possible within the limits of the law. We also want to organize our own efforts in a way that is most helpful to you.

We've been dealing with the emergencies in the last week, but Mr. Culbreth just said—