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Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

October 2, 2001

The President. I want to thank the leaders of the Congress for coming down for breakfast this morning. We had a really good discussion, starting with the progress we're making on the war against terrorism. I briefed the Members about the fact that we're beginning to make progress in freezing assets—freezing assets of the Al Qaida organization. I also talked about that the net we're casting is wide and strong, that we've put together an international coalition that is impressive, and that the members of that coalition are staying steady.

It is my desire to make sure that as this war unfolds, that the leaders of both the Senate and the House are fully informed of what the Government is doing. I can't think of a better way to conduct foreign policy than to consult regularly with the leadership.

We also talked about airport security. I told the Members that I'm going to be going to Reagan Airport today to announce its opening, and that we need to work together to make sure that the package that's evolving in the House and the Senate is put together pretty quickly.

We talked about economic stimulus. There is agreement that we've got to come together with a vision about how big the package ought to be, to make sure that we affect the economy in the short run in a positive way, but don't affect it in the long run in a negative way.

We agree on principles, that we've got to make sure that demand for U.S. products stays strong, demand for products throughout our economy stays strong. Therefore, we talked about ways to stimulate demand. We understand that investment has fallen off in the corporate sector, and we talked about constructive ways to stimulate investments so that the manufacturing sector, for example, of the United States has got some added wind in order to grow, to make sure that people find work. We talked about worker displacement. And we had a good discussion.

And there's one thing that the American people must understand: that as we work through these important subjects, we will do so in a spirit of cooperation and consultation.

And finally, all of us want to get a budget done as quickly possible, get the appropriations process done. We're making very good progress on coming up with the size of the ultimate budget. And once that's decided, we pledged to work together to get the appropriations bills moving as quickly as possible. That would be a welcome relief from the old budget battles of the past.

And I'm most pleased with the conversations we've had. I admired all four leaders prior to September 11th; I admire them even more after September 11th, because they're dedicated patriots, anxious to bring our Government together to make sure that we respond to the American people in a positive way.

I'll answer a couple questions.

Situation in the Middle East/Taliban

Q. Mr. President, is the time running out on the Taliban regime? Are you prepared, sir, to recognize a Palestinian state as a part of a broader Middle East peace process, itself?

The President. Those are two questions, Major [Major Garrett, Cable News Network].

Q. It's been a while since I've seen you.

The President. Don't take it personally.

Q. I never do, sir.

The President. The idea of a Palestinian state has always been a part of a vision, so long as the right to Israel to exist is respected.

But first things first, when it comes to the Middle East, and we've got to get to Mitchell, the Mitchell accord. Senator Mitchell put together a viable blueprint that most of the world agrees with as the necessary path to ultimately solving the problems of the Middle East. And we are working diligently with

both sides to encourage the reduction of violence so that meaningful discussions can take place.

Secondly, there is no timetable for the Taliban, just like there are no negotiations. I have said that the Taliban must turn over Al Qaida organization living within Afghanistan and must destroy the terrorist camps. And they must do so; otherwise, there will be a consequence. There are no negotiations; there's no calendar. We'll act on our time, and we'll do it in a manner that not only secures the United States as best as possible but makes the freedom in the world more likely to exist in the future.

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on the Middle East, sir. Were you prepared to support the idea of a Palestinian state before the United Nations conference that was canceled?

The President. Oh, I read all kinds of speculation about what this administration was or was not going to do. What I'm telling you is, is that we are fully committed to the Mitchell process. And we are fully committed to working with both sides to bring the level of terror down to an acceptable level for both. And I fully understand that progress is made in centimeters in the Middle East. And we believe we're making some progress.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

National Economy

Q. How big a stimulus package do you think is needed, sir, and what do you think is the best way to stimulate demand?

The President. Well, the definition—a stimulus package big enough—what is needed is big enough to get the economy moving in the short run but small enough so it doesn't affect long-term interest rates, for example. We are—all of us are listening to the voices of leading economists. We're all open for suggestions. The best way to stimulate demand is to give people some money, so they can spend it.

Domestic Reaction to September 11

Q. Mr. President, out of this terror comes fear.

The President. What? Out of what?

Q. Out of this terror on September 11th comes fear. Many Americans are still gripped with this fear, and they're buying gas masks in exuberant numbers. And they're also looking to—for anthrax vaccinations. What do you say to those people? Is their fear warranted?

The President. I say that America ought to be on alert, but we need to get back to business. That's why I'm opening up Reagan Airport. That's why we had Cabinet members get on commercial airlines over the weekend. The good news is, is that some of the load factors on American airlines looked like they increased over the weekend. Americans know their Government is doing everything they can to disrupt any terrorist activity that may occur. We're following every lead; we're interrogating every possible suspect. We're on full alert in America.

But the good news is, Americans also realize that in order to fight terrorism, they're going to go about their lives in a normal way. And Americans are.

National Economy

Q. Are we in a recession, sir?

The President. Are we in a what?

Q. Are we in a recession?

The President. You let the number-crunchers tell us that. But there's no question our economy is hurt as a result of September 11th. And the leaders here understand that. These Members go back to their districts and hear the plight of families who have been laid off. I, of course, hear it all the time, as well. And we're going to do something about it. That's exactly what these discussions are about.

In terms of how you call it, what the numbers look like, we've got statisticians who will be crunching the numbers and let us know exactly where we stand. But we don't need numbers to tell us people are hurting.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:13 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator George J. Mitchell, chairman, Sharm al-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee.

Remarks Announcing the Reopening of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport in Arlington, Virginia

October 2, 2001

The President. Thank you all. Governor, thank you very much. I am here to make an announcement that this Thursday, ticket counters and airplanes will fly out of Ronald Reagan Airport.

The ticket counters will be open for business. We will start a schedule of airplane flights that will reflect the new and tight security concerns that all Americans share. Ronald Reagan Airport is very important for our local economy, but it's also a national symbol, as the Governor mentioned. So Thursday flights will resume.

I want to thank all the captains and flight attendants and maintenance folks and ticket counter personnel, people who make this good airport run, for your patience and understanding.

We're doing the right thing. We've taken our time. We can assure the American public as best as we can, that we're taking the necessary safety precautions. Now it's time to start flying again.

I want to thank the Governor of Virginia for his hard work and concern about the working people in this part of the State. I want to thank Secretary Norm Mineta, the Transportation Secretary, for working hard to bring people together, to bring sensible policy to airports all across America. He's been working overtime. That's what we expect from the Secretary of Transportation during this period of time. And I'm proud of the work he's done.

I want to thank the Mayor of Washington, DC, for being here. The Mayor's a good, solid man. I want to thank Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton from Washington, DC, for being here, as well. Two United States Senators from the State of Virginia, John Warner and George Allen, have been deeply concerned about this airport. Members of the congressional delegation, Tom Davis, Jim Moran, and Frank Wolf, as well, have been working hard with us to come up with reasonable, sound policies to get the Reagan Airport started. I'm glad you all are here, as well as Connie Morella from the neighboring State of Maryland.

There really is no greater symbol that America's back in business than the reopening of this airport. After all, this is the airport that brings our Nation's leaders to Washington to do the people's business. It's the airport that welcomes millions of tourists to our Nation's Capital. And of course, the Mayor would want me to say, we want the tourists coming back to see our great monuments.

But one of the things those of us who live in the area understand, this airport is really important for the local economy, as well. There's a lot of people, a lot of small-business people, a lot of people who service the airport, obviously a lot of people who work here, depend upon this airport being open. And I understand that. And I appreciate once again your patience and understanding, as our Nation obviously is dealing with a tragedy, the likes of which we never envisioned.

I also know full-well that the Nation is asking this question: Are we taking the necessary safety precautions as we open not only Ronald Reagan Airport but other airports? The answer is, you bet. We sure are. We're spending a lot of time consulting with local officials to make sure that the security that all of us expect is in place. Not only have we worked with Members of the Congress to develop what we hope is a security plan that will enhance confidence from the traveling public, but we work with local officials, as well, to make sure this airport has got the toughest security measures possible.

We also, as you well know, are increasing the number of air marshals, armed marshals on airplanes. They'll be undercover—let me rephrase that—they'll be wearing civilian clothes. [*Laughter*] They will blend in. But we'll have many more air marshals on flights. It should send two signals: One to the American public that there will be protection; and to somebody who thinks they can disrupt America, we're watching for you; we're paying attention to you.

Every person who gets on an airplane, who goes to work, who takes their family to visit relatives, is taking a stand against terrorism. You see, the terrorists, they want to intimidate America. The terrorists, by conducting