

of our country are saddened by the fact that a Cabinet Minister was assassinated. It's just unacceptable behavior. I also told him that we continue to call upon Chairman Arafat to do everything he can to bring the killer to justice. It's very important that he arrest the person who did this, or those who did this act, and continue to arrest those who would disrupt and harm Israeli citizens. He must—he must show the resolve necessary to bring peace to the region.

And finally, I did express our concern about troops in Palestinian territory, and I would hope the Israelis would move their troops as quickly as possible.

**Q.** Did you get any satisfaction?

**The President.** Well, he's a very thoughtful man. He's a friend, a friend of America's, and I listened very carefully.

Your first question was?

#### **Linkage of Terrorist Acts**

**Q.** The link between September 11th and—

**The President.** Well, we don't have any hard evidence. But there's no question that anybody who would mail anthrax with the attempt to harm American citizens is a terrorist. And there's no question that Al Qaida is a terrorist organization. So it wouldn't put it past me that there—you know, it wouldn't surprise me that they're involved with it. But I have no direct evidence.

I do know that this country is strong enough to endure, to endure the evil ones. And we're making great progress on the ground in Afghanistan, and we'll bring the Al Qaida to justice, and we'll—we're doing everything we can to find out who mailed these letters.

Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

#### **President's Health**

**Q.** Mr. President, have you been tested for anthrax?

**The President.** I don't have anthrax.

**Q.** So you've been tested, sir?

**The President.** I don't have it.

NOTE: The exchange began at 4:48 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Foreign Minister Shimon Peres of Israel and Chairman Yasser

Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

#### **Statement on Northern Ireland**

*October 23, 2001*

I warmly welcome the announcement by the Chairman of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning, General John de Chastelain, that a significant act of decommissioning has been carried out by the IRA and verified by the Commission. This is an historic step by the IRA. The people of Northern Ireland are now measurably closer to the lasting peace which they richly deserve.

I hope all paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland will build on today's events, striving to achieve the total disarmament called for by the Good Friday agreement. I know I speak for all Americans when I express my heartfelt appreciation to General de Chastelain for his continuing efforts in support of the peace process. This act of decommissioning will, I hope, lead to the full functioning of the political institutions of the Good Friday agreement. All leaders should be prepared to intensify their efforts to resolve remaining outstanding issues.

#### **Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report of the Railroad Retirement Board**

*October 23, 2001*

*To the Congress of the United States:*

I transmit herewith the Annual Report of the Railroad Retirement Board for Fiscal Year 2000, pursuant to the provisions of section 7(b)(6) of the Railroad Retirement Act and section 12(1) of the Railroad Unemployment Insurance Act.

**George W. Bush**

The White House,  
October 23, 2001.