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Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim March 3 through March 9, 2002, as Save Your Vision Week. I urge all Americans to make eye care and eye safety an important part of their lives and to include dilated eye examinations in their regular health maintenance programs. I invite eye care professionals, the media, and all public and private organizations dedicated to preserving eyesight to join in activities that will raise awareness of measures we can take to protect and sustain our vision.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this second day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand two, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-sixth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 5, 2002]

NOTE: This proclamation was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 4, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on March 6.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Educators and an Exchange With Reporters in Eden Prairie, Minnesota

March 4, 2002

The President. We had a really good discussion about education, the importance of public education in America. The better our public schools are, the better the quality of life for all our citizens. I also had a chance to listen to Minnesota teachers, people who have dedicated their lives to making our communities better by teaching children how to read and write and add and subtract, but also teaching children how to behave and how to learn through example. I cannot thank the teachers enough.

I hope that, through my words and deeds, I'm able to convince people to become a teacher, because it's such a noble profession, and it's such an important profession for America and our future. I absolutely believe there are—that this country can achieve anything we want. That includes making sure every child can read and every child has got a hopeful future because he or she has gotten a great public school education.

So I want to thank you all very much. I'm really looking forward to speaking to your school. Thanks for the hospitality, and thank you all very much for serving our country by being a—by being such good teachers.

Let me answer a few questions, then, of course——

Operation Anaconda

Q. Mr. President, will you need to increase the U.S. troop presence in Afghanistan or delay an expansion of the war on terrorism beyond Afghanistan as a result of the Al Qaida resurgence——

The President. Well, first of all, we've always known Al Qaida exists in Afghanistan. And from the beginning of this, I have cautioned the American people that this is going to take a while, that it's going to take a while to rout out Al Qaida wherever it tries to hide. The American people understand that.

And as you well know, over the weekend we've started an operation against a significant nest of Al Qaida fighters. These are people that, if they were to escape, could conceivably harm the United States again. And therefore, we're going to hunt them down wherever they try to hide.

And I am so proud of the men and women who wear our uniform. I appreciate the efforts of our coalition to chase down Al Qaida, to bring them to justice. I'm obviously saddened by the loss of life. All America is saddened when one of our soldiers loses life.

On the other hand, I think most Americans and I hope these parents and loved ones understand, the cause is important, and the cause is just. I rely—obviously, rely upon the advice of our commanders on the ground as to what is necessary to win. But we'll take whatever means is necessary to protect our service men and women. And we'll win this battle, and we'll keep battling Al Qaida wherever we find them.

In terms of the overall scope, the international scope, I have always said that sometimes the American people will see us—see our military in action, and sometimes they won't. But we will keep the pressure on Al Qaida. Our country is still under threat, and

so long as our country is under threat, this great Nation will hunt down those who want to harm innocent Americans.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, how important is it for you to round up a lot of Al Qaida leaders in this particular battle that's going on? And do you have any indication at all whether Usama bin Laden might be in this area?

The President. I haven't heard from him since September—December the 11th. He's been awfully quiet. I don't know why. But I know he's on the run, if he's running at all. And I know there's no cave deep enough for Usama bin Laden. He hit a country that he thought was weak and feeble, and instead, he found out he hit a country that is determined to defend freedom. And that's exactly what we're going to do. We will defend our freedoms.

And the first part of your question? Leaders——

Q. Do you expect to——

The President. We're after any Al Qaida person.

Q. Do you have any reason to believe that there's a lot of them in this particular area?

The President. I believe there are some, and I'm not sure how many—enough for us to put together a significant coalition of Afghan, American, and other forces to rout them out. These are people that have got one thing in mind: They're going to harm innocent Afghan citizens. They want us to leave; they want us to be soft; they want us to let down our guard. And we're not going to do that, so long as I'm the President of the United States.

And we've been called into action. This Nation has been called to defend history—history has called us to defend freedom, and we're going to do that. And you should not be surprised that our troops will go into action in Afghanistan again. I have said repeatedly, we are in a dangerous phase of this war and—as we learned, much to our horror, the last couple of days when we lost life. But nevertheless, it is worth it, and it is necessary to bring these people to justice. If we do not, America could remain more vulnerable. If we do not find them, then we will have missed a great opportunity to make the world a safer place for our children and grandchildren.

Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

Q. Mr. President, you said that one of the calculations that Al Qaida might have had is they thought Americans couldn't stomach the casualties.

The President. Yes.

Q. Do you think the American people are ready for this?

The President. I think any time somebody loses their life, the American people will mourn and are sad, and I feel that way, too.

On the other hand, I am just as determined now as I was a week ago or 3 months ago to fulfill this mission, and that is to make sure our country is safe from further attack. These people have made it absolutely clear—these people being Al Qaida—that they want to harm America again. And we will do everything in our power to not let them do so, and that means chasing them down from the mountains of Afghanistan or in Yemen or in the Philippines, using our vast coalition to bring these people to justice. These are killers; they're murderers. And I am—my job is to protect America and support our military during this historic time. And that's exactly what I'm going to do.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, the Mideast situation is—do you believe the Mideast situation has escalated out of control? And do you think the U.S. needs to do more to try to seize control?

The President. We are on the phone every single day, nearly—I say nearly; we might have missed a day or two—to the leaders in the Middle East, urging there to be a—less violence. I have said repeatedly that Chairman Arafat must do everything he can to convince those Palestinians who want to derail any possible peace to lay down their arms.

And the situation is terrible, anytime you lose as many innocent lives as has been lost in the Middle East. But that won't deter us from working hard, working the issue. I'm meeting with Hosni Mubarak tomorrow, and I'm sure we'll talk the Middle East and the process to try to get to the Tenet—and the Tenet plan, laid out by George Tenet, which is the first step toward bringing the violence down and making the area more secure, so

that we can eventually get into the Mitchell process, which then eventually will lead to some kind of settlement.

I appreciate the fact that the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia has laid out a vision for some political solution. But the first thing is, we've got to reduce the violence in order to be able to get the discussion started. And so we're spending a lot of time trying to get the people of that region to stop killing each other.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in classroom E2000 at Eden Prairie High School. In his remarks, he referred to Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. The President also referred to the Tenet plan, the Israeli-Palestinian ceasefire and security plan of June 13, 2001, negotiated by Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet; and the Mitchell report, the Report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, issued April 30, 2001.

Remarks at Eden Prairie High School in Eden Prairie

March 4, 2002

Thank you for that warm welcome. It's nice to be here at the home of the Screaming Eagles. They tell me you've got a good football team and a good high pom squad. But I'm really not interested in talking about athletics. I'm here because of the achievements, the academic achievements of the students, the quality of the teaching, and the involvement of the parents. I'm here because this is one of America's finest public schools.

I believe strongly in the hope and promise of the public school system all across America. And I know how important it is to thank our teachers, to thank those who come to your classrooms every day, to wish them the best, and to herald such a noble and important profession for the future of our country. I'm here to talk about teaching and its responsibilities and how our country can do a better job of supporting America's teachers. I know—look, I am sure a lot of you are out there saying, "The guy is still talking about teaching. I really get tired of seeing my teacher"—[*laughter*]—"particularly at test time." [*Laughter*] Trust me, you're going to miss your teachers. They're an important part of your life, and they're an important part of our country's future.

I really want to thank the—[*applause*]—I just had a meeting with a group of teachers from all over the area, and I want to thank them for being there to share some thoughts about how to make sure the school systems work as good as they possibly can. I want to thank Jeff, your school's principal, for, gosh, opening up this huge facility and inviting so many people here. I want to thank the superintendent of schools, Bill Gaslin. I want to thank my friend Mark Yudof from the University of Minnesota, who understands that—[*applause*]. About seven people appreciate you, Mark. [*Laughter*] I want to thank—the reason Mark—I want to herald Mark is that he understands that in order for a teacher to be able to teach, the teacher colleges have got to teach a curriculum that actually works in the classroom. And I appreciate his leadership.

I want to thank members of the U.S. congressional delegation, Gutknecht and Kennedy and Ramstad, for being here as well. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank my friend Norm Coleman, former mayor of St. Paul, Minnesota. Mary Kiffmeyer, the secretary of state, is here as well; thank you, Mary. And Christine Jax, the education commissioner of Minnesota, is here too. Thank you all for coming.

Before I talk about the importance of education and teaching, I do want to talk to the students about my desire to defend freedom, to try to put some context to what's taking place overseas into your life.

You know, I'm sure it must have been troubling for high school seniors to turn on their TV—or high school juniors or sophomores, for that matter—to see America under attack. When we grew up, the baby boomers and everybody else, we never really thought we'd be attacked. I mean, the last thing that I entered my mind when I was getting out of high school in 1964 is that an enemy would attack America. And yet, here you are graduating from high school, the first high school class to ever have seen the 48 contiguous States attacked by an enemy.