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Yet, his entire career is a tribute to the power of great ideas.

President Reagan believed deeply in American character and destiny. He believed deeply in the power of freedom to improve the lives of average men and women. These ideas changed America, and they changed the world, not only because he eloquently explained them, because they are right and they are true. Ronald Reagan believed that prosperity is another—another name for economic freedom, and his policies of freedom laid the foundations for a prosperous and for a generous society.

Ronald Reagan believed that history is on the side of human liberty, that all tyranny must be temporary, because liberty is the universal hope of all mankind. He believed that the aspirations of our country require the might of our military. And he knew that the cause of freedom is served by moral clarity, a willingness to call oppression and evil by their proper names.

Above all, Ronald Reagan believed in the strong character of the American people, even when some on both the left and right were quite skeptical of that character. He would recognize the country we have seen since September the 11th. He would look at the spirit and sacrifice of the firefighters and police officers, the men and women of our military, average Americans, and he'd be proud. He wouldn't be surprised. He knew the courage and decency and generosity at the heart of this country because he shared it and he embodied it.

At every step of an amazing life, Nancy Reagan has been at Ronald Reagan's side—right by his side. As his optimism inspired us, her love and devotion strengthened him. As first lady of California, Mrs. Reagan spoke out on behalf of POWs and American servicemen missing in action. As our First Lady of the United States, Nancy Reagan led an antidrug campaign that helped significantly reduce teen drug use. Now she has joined the fight against the terrible curse of Alzheimer's.

Ronald and Nancy Reagan were married in 1952, and their love for one another has only grown greater with the passage of time. They set out to make a life together, and this amazing partnership helped change the world. Now on a difficult journey, we admire Nancy Reagan's eloquent example of loyalty and love.

May God bless you and your husband, Mrs. Reagan. And may God bless this country he loves so much.

And now I'm honored to present the Gold Medal, along with the Speaker and Senator Byrd, President pro tempore.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the Rotunda at the Capitol. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of former First Lady Nancy Reagan.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Welfare Reform Legislation

May 16, 2002

Today the House passed welfare reform legislation that will help millions of Americans realize a life of hope, dignity, and independence. This compassionate approach builds upon our past successes by moving more Americans from welfare to work, encouraging strong families and healthy marriages, and freeing States to innovate as they help people find the independence of a job.

I commend the House for moving quickly and now urge the Senate to act on behalf of those who seek a better life.

Statement on Completion of the NATO Mission in the United States

May 16, 2002

I thank NATO for the steadfast support and cooperation after the attacks on September 11. Today marks the end of NATO aircraft and crews patrolling American skies as part of Operation Noble Eagle. These aircrews began their deployment soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. This deployment, coupled with the declaration that the attacks on the United States were attacks on all NATO members, affirmed NATO's commitment to collective defense.

For 220 days, NATO aircrews from 12 nations, based at Tinker AFB in Oklahoma, flew missions over the United States. On behalf of the American people, I thank them

for their important contribution to the defense of this Nation.

Proclamation 7562—Armed Forces Day, 2002

May 16, 2002

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The words of President Dwight D. Eisenhower written in 1953 remain true today: "It is fitting and proper that we devote one day each year to paying special tribute to those whose constancy and courage constitute one of the bulwarks guarding the freedom of this nation and the peace of the free world." On Armed Forces Day, our grateful Nation salutes the brave men and women who protect our country, defend freedom, and help make our world a better place.

During these extraordinary times, we are reminded that our achievements in peace and war stand upon the service and sacrifice of those in uniform. Today, we have troops fighting overseas to defeat terrorism. These brave men and women follow in the footsteps of previous generations who, since our Nation's founding, have stepped forward to defend our homeland and secure liberty for our country and our friends and allies. The members of our military exemplify the true spirit of patriotism—a love of country expressed through a commitment to serve our Nation and defend our freedom. Their selfless dedication and determination are an inspiration to every American.

In difficult times, America has called on members of our Armed Forces to protect the democratic ideals on which our country was founded, and they have never let our country down. As we confront the challenges of this new era, we will continue to rely on our military's extraordinary skill, sense of honor, devotion to duty, and courageous commitment to service.

More than 50 years ago, President Harry S. Truman helped establish a day for Americans to join together and thank our military members for their service to our country. In 1949, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson announced the establishment of Armed Forces Day to replace separate Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force Days. A year later, President Truman issued a Presidential Proclamation, observing that the day "marks the first combined demonstration by America's defense team of its progress, under the National Security Act, towards the goal of readiness for any eventuality. It is the first parade of preparedness by the unified forces of our land, sea, and air defense."

The theme of this year's celebration is "United For Freedom." During this celebration, I encourage Americans to show the world that we are unified as a people and ready to defend our way of life, our freedoms, and our homeland. As President and Commander in Chief, I urge all our citizens to join me in expressing appreciation for the dedication and selfless service of the members of our extraordinary Armed Forces.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, continuing the precedent of my ten immediate predecessors in this Office, do hereby proclaim the third Saturday of each May as Armed Forces Day.

I direct the Secretary of Defense on behalf of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, and the Secretary of Transportation on behalf of the Coast Guard, to plan for appropriate observances each year, with the Secretary of Defense responsible for soliciting the participation and cooperation of civil authorities and private citizens.

I invite the Governors of the States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and other areas subject to the jurisdiction of the United States, to provide for the observance of Armed Forces Day within their jurisdiction each year in an appropriate manner designed to increase public understanding and appreciation of the Armed Forces of the United States.

I also invite national and local veterans, civic, and community service organizations to join in the observance of Armed Forces Day each year.

I call upon all Americans not only to display the flag of the United States at their homes on Armed Forces Day, but also to learn about our system of defense and about