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Remarks Prior to Discussions With President Vladimir Putin of Russia and an Exchange With Reporters in Kananaskis

June 27, 2002

President Bush. First——

Q. Okay, President Bush——

President Bush. Wait a minute, please. I first want to say how pleased I am to meet with Vladimir Putin again. Every time we meet, we have a very constructive dialog, and we have a very important dialog. And I appreciate so very much his leadership and his continued willingness to find a new common ground in this most important relationship.

Yesterday a court in America made a ruling that I want to comment on. America is a nation that is—a nation that values our relationship with an Almighty. Declaration of God in the Pledge of Allegiance doesn't violate rights. As a matter of fact, it's a confirmation of the fact that we received our rights from God, as proclaimed in our Declaration of Independence. I—I believe that it points up the fact that we need commonsense judges who understand that our rights were derived from God. And those are the kind of judges I intend to put on the bench.

Mr. President, do you want to make a comment or just answer questions?

[*At this point, President Putin began his remarks in Russian.*]

President Bush. Do you want to interpret this for the American press?

President Putin. I want to say that I'm also very glad to meet with President Bush. And moreover, I'd like to emphasize that the President and I are having very good personal relations, and our colleagues in our capitals also note that interaction between our countries is becoming very efficient, not only from the viewpoint of bilateral relations and solving bilateral issues but also as regards to resolution of major international problems.

And there is one subject that is of particular importance and responsibility the U.S. and Russia undertook; that is the promotion of international security. And during the time since the signature of our international treaties on stability, international stability between our countries, we have had an opportunity to evaluate these documents and pass them to the parliament for further ratification—I mean the treaty between the United States and Russia on cutting strategic offenses.

And I'm simply very glad to meet George again and have a chat with him and discuss all the problems that are of concern for both our nations.

President Bush. Thank you.

Patience, please. Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

WorldCom/Corporate Responsibility

Q. Mr. President, there are some Democrats who think they can make some political hay out of the WorldCom failure and other business scandals by, first, noting that polls show a lot of Americans think you're too close to big business and, second, arguing that because of that, your reform proposals aren't tough enough. What do you think the political impact of WorldCom will be? Are you concerned about it?

President Bush. I'm concerned about the economic impact of the fact that there are some corporate leaders who have not upheld their responsibility. If you are a responsible citizen and you run a corporation in America, you must fully disclose all assets and liabilities, and you must treat your shareholders and employees with respect.

President Putin. During the general discussion at the G–8 meeting, the President paid attention to this issue. And for me and my other colleagues, it was very important to listen to the President's opinion, because under the circumstances of the globalized community and world, a lot depends on the state of the U.S. economy these days. And therefore, the willingness of the President of the United States to secure the stock market and market of the securities is very important, as well as the notion of transparency in the U.S. business, and is a very good signal.

President Bush. Do you want to call on a Russian media?

Middle East Peace Proposal

Q. President Bush, were you astonished by the European reaction towards your proposal in regards to Arafat?

President Bush. I'm very pleased with my—the response to my proposal in the Middle East. The response has been very positive. And the reason why is, most European leaders understand something has to change in order for there to be peace. And that starts with free elections, a new constitution, transparency, rule of law amongst the Palestinians. And that's the hopeful way to get to where we need to get, which is two states living side by side in peace. The response has been very positive, and for that I'm grateful.

Q. And one question to you, Mr. Bush.

Press Secretary Ari Fleischer. A question from the American reporters.

President Bush. Martha [Martha Brant, Newsweek].

President's Personal Faith

Q. Thank you, sir. In light of the comments you just made about the Pledge of Allegiance, I'm wondering if you could talk about how your personal faith has helped you as President.

President Bush. Well, I appreciate you saying that, Martha. I—know, yesterday when I went to see the—or 2 days ago when I was—or yesterday—[*laughter*]—2 days ago, I went——

Q. Mr. President——

President Bush. Please, let me at least finish the answers.

I was amongst people whose lives were hurting a lot. And I was trying to figure out how to bring a sense of hope, and I thought that the best thing I could say was that there is a God who loves them. And I believe that's the case. And as a result, I feel comfortable in my life because I have that belief and that understanding.

You know, it's interesting, there is a universal God, in my opinion, and the first conversation I ever had with Vladimir Putin was about God—in Slovenia. It was a way that we—we'd never met each other, and the first discussion we had was about our personal beliefs.

I appreciate—you hear me say that I appreciate the fact that our country prays for me and Laura. And I do. I do. I feel the prayers of the people. And so there is a—I think that the Almighty is important—obviously, important part of my life but very important part of the life of our country. And that's why the ruling of the courts was out of step with the traditions and history of America.

Press Secretary Fleischer. Final question from a Russian reporter.

Russia-U.S. Cooperation in the War on Terrorism

Q. Mr. Bush, the G–8 was supposed to carry out the six points having to do with terrorism. What is the relationship of the United States and Russia vis-a-vis this battle against terrorism, jointly? I only ask the Russian translation when you're speaking. Thank you.

President Bush. It sounds like you speak better English than some of us. [*Laughter*]

Q. Thank you very much.

President Bush. Fournier [Ron Fournier, Associated Press] included. [*Laughter*]

First of all, President Putin has been a stalwart in the fight against terror. He understands the threat of terror, because he has lived through terror. He's seen terror firsthand, and he knows the threat of terrorism. One of the first—go ahead, do you want to translate?

He understands what I understand, that there won't be peace if terrorists are allowed to kill and take innocent life. And therefore, I view President Putin as an ally, strong ally in the war against terror. And his actions are more than—speak louder than his words. He has been a man of action when it comes to fighting terror, and I appreciate that very much.

Thank you all. We've got to have our bilateral. Thank you.

[*At this point, a question was asked in Russian, and no translation was provided.*]

President Putin. What I would like to say—that the military of our nations and special services of our countries are built up in a way so that they carry this global nature. And unfortunately, terrorism is of a global nature as well today. And therefore, we have repeatedly mentioned that joint efforts are essential if you want to be a success in this fight.

Therefore, we welcome the firm position of the U.S. President in this regard. And

therefore, we welcome his courage and consistency with which he persists his policies, in spite of any elements that interfere with that. And we expect that our interaction will have—will make a significant and decisive contribution to the elimination of terrorism worldwide.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:54 a.m. in the Delta Lodge at the Kananaskis Village resort. A reporter referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Supreme Court Decision on Cleveland's School Choice Program

June 27, 2002

This landmark ruling is a victory for parents and children throughout America. By upholding the constitutionality of Cleveland's school choice program, the Supreme Court has offered the hope of an excellent education to parents and children throughout our country. This decision clears the way for other innovative school choice programs, so that no child in America will be left behind.

School choice offers proven results of a better education, not only for children enrolled in the specific plan but also for children whose public schools benefit from the competition. The Milwaukee choice plan, begun in the early 1990s, has resulted in substantially improved reading and math scores for thousands of low-income children. The program has also had a positive impact on the entire public school system, which has responded to competition with better results.

The education reforms we enacted earlier this year give unprecedented new options to parents of children trapped in low-performing schools. My budget builds on this act by adding important new options to empower parents—particularly low-income families—to improve their children's education. I urge Congress to move quickly to build on the momentum generated from this decision to enact my education priorities.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Defense Appropriations Legislation

June 27, 2002

I commend the Members of the House for their strong, bipartisan show of unity in our war against terrorism with passage of the defense appropriations bill. I urge the Senate to work in a similar bipartisan fashion and pass the bill in July so that our men and women in the armed services have every resource they need to continue defending freedom. It is critical in this time of war that the defense appropriations bill be at the front, not the end, of the legislative line. Our troops deserve nothing less.

Remarks at a Luncheon for Representative Connie Morella

June 28, 2002

I hate to disagree with our distinguished honoree, but the reason people are here, Connie, is because they love you, they trust you, and like me, want you reelected to the United States Congress.

I appreciate so very much the Morella boys for being here. That, of course, is Tony, the husband, Mark, the son, and Michael, the grandson, who led us in the Pledge of Allegiance. It's good to be here with the Morellas. It's clear that they love each other. They value their family. They understand that in family you can find strength of purpose and love and compassion and comfort. And I want to thank the Morella men for allowing Connie to serve our Nation and encouraging her to serve our Nation. She makes an important contribution, and therefore, you do as well.

I regret that my wife wasn't here today. But I want you to know she's doing fine. I can't tell you how proud I am of the First Lady. She really wasn't interested in politics when I asked her to marry me and frankly didn't care for politicians, if the truth be known. [*Laughter*] But now the people of the country are figuring out why I asked her to marry me. She's calm and steady and a gracious lady. A lot of people wonder why