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today. For months at a time, they give up their servicemembers. They don't know where they are. They don't hear from them. They don't know if they're safe. They don't know if they're dead or alive. What message do you have for the families today?

The President. Well, my message is that what your loved one is doing is the right thing for the country. We are called upon to defend the United States of America. I take that oath, and every soldier takes that oath. And on 9/11, our world changed, and we realized this country is vulnerable and we better do something about it. And the best way to secure the homeland is to get the enemy before he gets us. At least, that's my attitude. And so, I—first of all, the commitment that their loved ones have made, the families of the service ones have made, is in line with this business about winning and fighting war.

Every person is a volunteer in our military. They've chosen to defend the United States of America. And therefore, they need to get the best—if that's their attitude, and they made up their mind that's what they want to do, then my job is to get them the best equipment, the best pay, the best training possible, so that if we ever have to send them in, they'll be able to do the job.

And I hope their loved ones understand that, that this is a volunteer army and it requires sacrifice. Look, I understand what it must mean for the moms and dads and sons and daughters to wonder about their loved one. It must be a nerve-wracking experience. On the other hand, it's for a good cause.

I would tell you as well, as I think our military does is—I'm going to tell you two things I think the military does really well that will hopefully give comfort to people. One, there is a lot of communication that takes place with troops overseas and their loved ones at home. There are—there's e-mail efforts that go on, a lot of e-mail efforts. In other words, there's a capacity to communicate from afar, the likes of which our military has never had.

Secondly, I have visited our wounded. One of my jobs as the Commander in Chief is to try to comfort those who grieve and to comfort those who are wounded—those who grieve as a result of loss of life, and those—and to comfort those who have been wounded, and I do. I'm responsible for putting them into combat, and I know that. And so I go to hospitals on occasion, Walter Reed or Bethesda.

Ours is a country that can take a young, wounded soldier off the battlefield and have him in the best care in a number of days. I met many a troop that was wounded in Iraq and 3 days later was at Bethesda Naval Hospital getting the best possible treatment. And to me that speaks volumes about the commitment of our country to take care of our fighters and our soldiers and marines and sailors and airmen. If somebody gets hurt far from home, we will deliver the best care in the world in a rapid time. And I understand that doesn't replace an injured limb for a loved one, but it certainly should say loud and clear that this country cares deeply about those who are willing to sacrifice on its behalf.

Q. As you say, sir, freedom isn't free.

The President. That's right.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, very much. I really appreciate the time.

The President. You bet. Thank you, sir. Good job.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:55 p.m. in Hangar Five at the Marine Corps Air Station in Miramar, CA, for later broadcast, and the transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 18. In his remarks, the President referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Gen. Tommy R. Franks, USA (Ret.), former combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; and Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on Signing the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003

August 18, 2003

Today, I have signed into law H.R. 1412, the "Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students Act of 2003." This Act permits the Secretary of Education to waive or modify Federal student financial assistance program requirements to help students and their families or academic institutions affected by a war, other military operation, or national

emergency. The executive branch shall construe section 2(c) in a manner consistent with the President's authority under the Recommendations Clause of the Constitution to submit for the consideration of the Congress such measures as the President shall judge necessary or expedient.

George W. Bush

The White House,
August 18, 2003.

NOTE: H.R. 1412, approved August 18, was assigned Public Law No. 108–76.

Memorandum on Resumption of U.S. Drug Interdiction Assistance to the Government of Colombia

August 18, 2003

Presidential Determination No. 2003–32

Memorandum for the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense

Subject: Resumption of U.S. Drug Interdiction Assistance to the Government of Colombia

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by section 1012 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1995, as amended (22 U.S.C. section 2291–4), I hereby certify, with respect to Colombia, that: (1) interdiction of aircraft reasonably suspected to be primarily engaged in illicit drug trafficking in that country's airspace is necessary because of the extraordinary threat posed by illicit drug trafficking to the national security of that country; and (2) that country has appropriate procedures in place to protect against innocent loss of life in the air and on the ground in connection with such interdiction, which shall at a minimum include effective means to identify and warn an aircraft before the use of force is directed against the aircraft.

The Secretary of State is authorized and directed to publish this determination in the *Federal Register* and to notify the Congress of this determination.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., August 22, 2003]

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 19, and it was published in the *Federal Register* on August 25.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters in Crawford, Texas

August 19, 2003

Proposed Energy Legislation/Power Blackout

The President. Good morning, everybody. How are you? Last night I talked to Pete Domenici and Billy Tauzin. Pete is the chairman of the Senate committee dealing with energy and Billy is the chairman of the House committee dealing with energy. Pete believes they can get the conference up and running in 20 days to deal with this very important energy bill. Both Members are very optimistic about reaching agreement, obviously, on infrastructure modernization but, as importantly, other issues related to energy.

One thing is for certain. There is—very confident they'll have mandatory reliability standards in the energy bill. What that means is that companies transmitting energy will have to have strong reliability measures in place; otherwise, there will be a consequence for them. There will be incentives in the new bill to encourage investment in energy infrastructure.

So I'm very pleased with the attitude of the two Members, their desire to get a bill done quickly and get it to my desk. I have been calling for an energy bill for a long time. And now is the time for the Congress to move and get something done.

I also talked to Energy Secretary Abraham. Tomorrow the joint inquiry with the Canadians will begin. I don't know how long it's going to take to find out what went wrong, but I know it's not going to take long to get the meeting started to determine what went wrong.

I'll answer a couple of questions; then I've got to get moving.