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Remarks at a Veterans Day Ceremony in Arlington, Virginia

November 11, 2004

Thank you for that warm welcome. Laura and I are honored to be here today. Mr. Secretary, thank you for your kind introduction, and thank you for your strong leadership in making sure our veterans have got the very best care possible. Secretary Principi has done a fantastic job for the American veteran.

I thank the members of my Cabinet who have joined us today. I appreciate the Chiefs of Staff and other members of the United States military who have joined us. I want to thank all the veterans who are here today. I want to thank the representatives of veterans organizations. And I want to thank my fellow Americans.

Veterans Day is set aside to remember every man and woman who has taken up arms to defend our country. We honor every soldier, sailor, airman, marine, and coastguardsman who gave some of the best years of their lives to the service of the United States and stood ready to give life, itself, on our behalf. Twenty-five million military veterans walk among us, and on this day, our Nation thanks them all.

These are the hidden heroes of a peaceful nation, our colleagues and friends, neighbors and family members who answered the call and returned to live in the land they defended.

Our veterans are drawn from several generations and many backgrounds. They're Americans who remember the swift conflict of the Persian Gulf war and a long cold war vigil, the heat of Vietnam and the bitter cold of Korea. They are veterans in their eighties who served under MacArthur and Eisenhower and saved the liberty of the world. And still with us in the year 2004 are a few dozen Americans who fought the Kaiser's army and celebrated the end of the Great War on this day in 1918. The last doughboys are all more than 100 years old. Our Nation will always be proud of their service.

Some of our veterans are young men and women with recent memories of battle in mountains and in deserts. In Afghanistan, these brave Americans helped sweep away a vicious tyranny allied with terror and prepared the way for a free people to elect its own leaders. In Iraq, our men and women fought a ruthless enemy of America, setting the people free from a tyrant who now sits in a prison cell.

All who have served in this cause are liberators in the best tradition of America. Their actions have made our Nation safer in a world full of new dangers. Their actions have also upheld the ideals of America's founding, which defines us still. Our Nation values freedom, not just for ourselves but for all. And because Americans are willing to serve and sacrifice for this cause, our Nation remains the greatest force for good among all the nations on the Earth.

Some of tomorrow's veterans are in combat in Iraq at this hour. They have a clear mission, to defeat the terrorists and aid the rise of a free government that can defend itself. They are performing that mission with skill and with honor. They are making us proud. They are winning.

Our men and women in the military have superb training and the best equipment and able commanders. And they have another great advantage: They have the example of American veterans who came before. From the very day George Washington took command, the uniform of the United States has always stood for courage and decency and shining hope in a world of darkness. And all who have worn that uniform have won the thanks of the American people.

Today we're thinking of our fellow Americans last seen on duty, whose fate is still undetermined. We will not rest until we have made the fullest possible accounting for every life.

Today we also recall the men and women who did not live to be called veterans, many of whom rest in these hills. Our veterans remember the faces and voices of fallen comrades. The families of the lost carry a burden of grief that time will lighten but never lift. Our whole Nation honors every patriot who placed duty and country before their own lives. They gave us every day that we live in freedom. The security of America depends on our active leadership in the world to oppose emerging threats and to spread freedom that leads to the peace we all want. And our

leadership ultimately depends on the commitment and character of the Armed Forces.

America has needed these qualities in every generation, and every generation has stepped forward to provide them. What veterans have given our country is beyond our power to fully repay, yet today we recognize our debt to their honor. And on this national holiday, our hearts are filled with respect and gratitude for the veterans of the United States of America.

May God bless our veterans and their families, and may God continue to bless our great Nation. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:36 a.m. in the Amphitheater at Arlington National Cemetery. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

November 12, 2004

President Bush. Thank you. Welcome. I'm pleased to welcome a statesman and a friend back to the White House. Prime Minister Blair is a visionary leader. I've come to know him as a man of unshakeable convictions. America's alliance with Great Britain has never been stronger, and we're working closely every day to spread that freedom that leads to peace.

Our two nations have shared in some of the most hopeful and positive achievements of our time. The people of Afghanistan have now chosen their President in a free election. The Taliban and the terrorists did everything they could to intimidate the long-suffering people of that country. Yet men and women lined up at the polls, some of them waiting for hours to have their first taste of democracy. The success of Afghanistan's election is a standing rebuke to cynicism and extremism and a testimony to the power of liberty and hope. The people of the United States and Great Britain can be proud of the role we have played in aiding the rise of a free nation and, in so doing, making our countries more secure.

Together we're serving the same cause in Iraq. Prime Minister Allawi authorized military operations to rid Fallujah of Saddam holdouts and foreign terrorists, and American and Iraqi forces have made substantial progress in the last several days. Our coalition is training Iraqi security forces who are performing bravely and taking increasing responsibility for their country's security. British, American, and other coalition forces are helping provide stability that is necessary for free elections. And U.N. officials are helping the Iraqi people prepare for those elections, to be held in January.

As those elections draw near, the desperation of the killers will grow, and the violence could escalate. The success of democracy in Iraq will be a crushing blow to the forces of terror, and the terrorists know it. The defeat of terror in Iraq will set that nation on a course to lasting freedom and will give hope to millions, and the Iraqi people know it.

The United States and Great Britain have shown our determination to help Iraqis achieve their liberty and to defend the security of the world. We'll continue to stand with our friends, and we will finish the job.

Prime Minister Blair and I also share a vision of a free, peaceful, a democratic broader Middle East. That vision must include a just and peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Our sympathies are with the Palestinian people as they begin a period of mourning. Yet the months ahead offer a new opportunity to make progress toward a lasting peace. Soon Palestinians will choose a new President. This is the first step in creating lasting democratic political institutions through which a free Palestinian people will elect local and national leaders.

We're committed to the success of these elections, and we stand ready to help. We look forward to working with a Palestinian leadership that is committed to fighting terror and committed to the cause of democratic reform. We'll mobilize the international community to help revive the Palestinian economy, to build up Palestinian security institutions to fight terror, to help the Palestinian government fight corruption, and to reform the Palestinian political system and build democratic institutions. We'll also work