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to have helped us—I'm just going to tell you: They were told it was legal by the Government, and they were told it was necessary by the Government. And here they are getting sued. It would be dangerous—the reason—the danger in all this is that because the private companies are fearful of lawsuits or being besieged by lawsuits, they would be less willing to help in the future.

If your Government has said this is legal and we want your help and then all of a sudden they get sued for billions of dollars, you can imagine how hesitant they'll be with future requests. And yet the threat is ongoing. And that's why we said, failure by the House to act on the Senate bill would create an intelligence gap that is unacceptable.

So I appreciate your interest in the subject. Thank you for giving me and the General a chance to come by, and God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:22 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to State Attorneys General Lawrence Wasden of Idaho, Patrick C. Lynch of Rhode Island, and Greg Abbott of Texas.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Lieutenant General Raymond T. Odierno

March 3, 2008

General Ray Odierno served for 30 months in Iraq. He's nominated to Vice Chairman [Vice Chief of Staff] * of the Army. And I asked him to come in for several reasons. One, I wanted to thank him. And in thanking the general, I'm really thanking everybody who has worn the uniform and served in this war against the extremists and terrorists. And in thanking the general, I'm also thanking Mrs. Odierno and every wife or every husband whose spouse has been far away from home and is serving.

And in listening to the general, I was listening carefully to make sure that the decisions that had been made were the right decisions and that the progress that's being made is real. I mean, this is a man who was there when times looked grim and a man who observed firsthand progress that was made as a result of the surge.

He was a straightforward fellow who gave me his candid advice on how best to proceed—not necessarily with troop levels, because that study is going on now, but in making sure that we continue programs such as what's called the CERP money. This is money for our commanders to make—to help these local folks rebuild and reconcile.

And so, general, I want to thank you for your service. And I appreciate the fact that you really snatched defeat out of the jaws of those who are trying to defeat us in Iraq. You were the—you and General Petraeus were a unbelievably strong one-two combination.

And my call and my assurance, sir, is that the gains that you and your teams have made will continue on, because stakes in Iraq are essential for peace, essential for freedom, and essential for the security of this country. I'm honored to be your Commander in Chief.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Linda Odierno, wife of Lt. Gen. Odierno; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Remarks on Presenting Posthumously the Congressional Medal of Honor to Woodrow W. Keeble

March 3, 2008

The President. Welcome. Thanks for coming. Mr. Vice President, Mr. Secretary, members of the Dakotan congressional delegations, Senator from Alaska, other Members of Congress, members of my Cabinet, members of the administration, members of the United States Armed Forces, distinguished guests: Welcome to the White House.

The Medal of Honor is the highest award for valor a President can bestow. And I'm honored recipients of the Medal of Honor have joined us. Thank you for coming.

* White House correction.

During my time in office, I've had the privilege of performing this duty on nine separate occasions. Every ceremony has been inspiring; many have been joyful; some have been poignant. But I'm not sure I can remember many ceremonies quite like this one.

It's taken nearly 60 years for Master Sergeant Woodrow Wilson Keeble to be awarded the medal he earned on the battlefield in Korea. His nominating paperwork was lost, and then it was resubmitted, and then it was lost again. Then the deadline passed, and Woody and his family were told it was too late. Some blamed the bureaucracy for a shameful blunder. Others suspected racism. Woody was a full-blooded Sioux Indian. Whatever the reason, the first Sioux to ever receive the Medal of Honor died without knowing it was his. A terrible injustice was done to a good man, to his family, and to history. And today we're going to try to set things right.

Few people worked harder for this day than Woody's family. I thank the members who are with us, including his son, Russell, who is accepting this award on their behalf, along with his cousin—cousin.

Audience member. Nephew.

The President. ——along with his nephew. I want to welcome you here. Thank you for supporting Woody. Thank you for your understanding, your patience, and, most of all, your persistence.

I also offer special thanks to the determined delegations of North and South Dakota, including the Governor of North Dakota and the former Governor of South Dakota. Woody has ties to both Dakotas. Each State claims him as his own. [*Laughter*] I think I'm going to stay out of the argument. [*Laughter*] I want to thank you for carrying Woody's banner to the Pentagon and to the Halls of Congress. You did the right thing.

It's easy to understand why so many people argued so passionately for the medal once you hear the story of what Woody Keeble did. This story unfolded at an important time in our history. The year was 1951. The world was divided by a cold war. America was under threat and, some believed, overmatched and out of heart. The great evil of communism was said to be the future of the world. It was on the advance in Europe and in China and on the Asian peninsula of Korea.

On that peninsula, a battle raged between Communist forces in the North and the forces of freedom in the South. And Woody Keeble, a decorated veteran of Guadalcanal, raised his hand to serve his country once again. Woody said he volunteered for Korea because "somebody had to teach those kids how to fight." And that's exactly what he did.

In George Company, he quickly became a mentor, a teacher, and a legend. He was so strong that he could lift the back of a jeep and spin it around. Some people knew he had been scouted by the Chicago White Sox. He had a heck of an arm, and he threw grenades like a baseball. One soldier remembered the time Woody walked through a mine field, leaving tracks for his men to follow. Another recalled the time Woody was shot twice in the arm, and he kept fighting without seeming to notice.

That fall, Woody's courage was on full display during a major offensive called Operation No Man [Nomad] *. His company was ordered to take a series of hills protecting a major enemy supply line. High up in those hills and manning machine guns were Chinese Communist forces. After days of fighting, the officers in Woody's company had fallen. Woody assumed command of one platoon, then a second, and then a third, until one of the hills was taken and the enemy fled in wild retreat.

That first advance nearly killed him. By the end of the day, Woody had more than 83 grenade fragments in his body. He had bleeding wounds in his arms, chest, and thighs. And yet he still wanted to fight. So after a day with the medics, he defied the doctor's orders and returned to the battlefield. And that is where, on October 20th, 1951, Master Sergeant Woodrow Wilson Keeble made history.

Communist forces still held a crucial hill that was the pearl of their defenses. They had pinned down U.S. forces with a furious assault. One soldier said the enemy lobbed so many grenades on American troops that they looked like a flock of blackbirds in the

* White House correction.

sky. Allied forces had tried heavy artillery to dislodge the enemy, and nothing seemed to be working. The offense was failing, and American boys were dying. But our forces had one advantage. Woody was back, and Woody was some kind of mad.

He grabbed grenades and his weapon and climbed that crucial hill alone. Woody climbed hundreds of yards through dirt and rock, with his wounds aching, bullets flying, and grenades falling all around him. As Woody first started off, someone saw him and remarked, "Either he's the bravest soldier I have ever met, or he's crazy." Soldiers watched in awe as Woody singlehandedly took out one machine gun nest and then another. When Woody was through, all 16 enemy soldiers were dead, the hill was taken, and the Allies had won the day.

Woody Keeble's act of heroism saved many American lives and earned him a permanent place in his fellow soldiers' hearts. Years later, some of those tough soldiers' eyes would fill with tears when they saw Woody again. One said, "He was the most respected person I ever knew in my life." Another said, "I would have followed him anywhere." A third said, "He was awesome." Those brave boys battled tyranny, held the line against a Communist menace, and kept a nation free. And some of them are with us today. We are honored to host you at the White House. We thank you for your courage. We thank you for honoring your comrade in arms. And we thank you for your service to the United States.

As the war ended, Woody went back to North Dakota. In some ways, his return was a sad one. Within a few years, his first wife died. He would suffer from numerous effects of the war. A series of strokes paralyzed his right side and robbed him of his ability to speak. And the wounds he sustained in service to his country would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Yet Woody was not a bitter man. As a member of his family put it: "Woody loved his country, loved his tribe, and loved God." Woody even found love again with a woman named Blossom. Woody may not have been able to speak, but he could still get a message across. He wrote a note asking Blossom to marry him. She told him she needed some time to think about it. So while she was deliberating, Woody put their engagement announcement in the newspaper. [*Laughter*] This is a man who was relentless in love as well as war. [*Laughter*]

In his community, he was an everyday hero. Even in poor health, he would mow lawns for seniors in the summers and help cars out of the snow banks in the winters. He once picked up a hitchhiker who was down on his luck and looking for work. Woody wasn't a rich man, but he gave the man $50. Those who knew Woody can tell countless stories like this—one of a great soldier who became a Good Samaritan.

To his last days, he was a devoted veteran. He proudly wore his uniform at local events and parades. Sometimes folks who loved him would see that uniform and ask him about his missing medal. They felt he was cheated, yet Woody never complained. See, he believed America was the greatest nation on Earth, even when it made mistakes. And there was never a single day he wasn't proud to have served our country.

Woody suffered his eighth and final stroke in 1982. His son, Russell, took him to the hospital and prayed it wasn't the end. But Woody knew, and he wasn't afraid. Woodrow Wilson Keeble died in graceful anonymity, unknown except to the fortunate souls who loved him and those who learned from him. Russell puts it this way: "Woody met death with a smile. He taught me how to live, and he taught me how to die."

I am pleased that this good and honorable man is finally getting the recognition he deserves. But on behalf of our grateful Nation, I deeply regret that this tribute comes decades too late. Woody will never hold this medal in his hands or wear it on his uniform. He will never hear a President thank him for his heroism. He will never stand here to see the pride of his friends and loved ones, as I see in their eyes now.

But there are some things we can still do for him. We can tell his story. And we can honor his memory. And we can follow his lead by showing all those who have followed him on the battlefield the same love and generosity of spirit that Woody showed his country every day.

At the request of the Keeble family and in accordance with the Sioux tradition, two empty chairs have been placed on this stage to represent Woody and Blossom and to acknowledge their passing into the spiritual world. The Sioux have a saying: "The life of a man is a circle." Well, today we complete Woody Keeble's circle, from an example to his men to an example for the ages. And if we honor his life and take lessons from his good and noble service, then Master Sergeant Woody Keeble will serve his country once again.

I want to thank you all for coming. May I ask for God's blessings on you and Woody Keeble and the Keeble family. May God continue to bless our country. And now I ask Mr. Hawkins and Mr. Bluedog to join me. Commander Thompson will read the citation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Senator Theodore F. "Ted" Stevens of Alaska; former Gov. William Janklow of South Dakota; Gov. John Hoeven of North Dakota; and Russell Hawkins, stepson, and Kurt Bluedog, grandnephew, of Mr. Keeble. Following the President's remarks, Maj. Mark Thompson, USMC, Marine Corps Aide to the President, read the citation.

Remarks Following Discussions With King Abdullah II of Jordan and an Exchange With Reporters

March 4, 2008

President Bush. His Majesty and I will take a couple of questions after opening statements.

Your Majesty, I value your friendship, and I value your leadership. And I appreciate you coming back. America has got no stronger friend in the Middle East than Jordan. And we appreciate the—we appreciate your firmness when it comes to dealing with terror and extremism. We appreciate the heart when it comes to people—your heart when it comes to people who suffer.

We spent a lot of time talking about the Middle Eastern peace process. A couple of points I want to reiterate. One is that the United States is engaged and will remain engaged in helping convince the Prime Minister of Israel and President Abbas that now is the time to formulate a vision of what a state will look like.

And secondly, I assured His Majesty this is a major focus of my administration and that I would like to see that vision, the process that we have started in Annapolis, finished prior to my departure from the Presidency. In other words, there is a—people say, "Well, you always set—you're hesitant to set timetables." But there happens to be a timetable, as far as I'm concerned, and that is, I'm leaving office. And Secretary Rice is in the region today, and she is making our views known, that we expect these leaders to step up and make hard decisions. And I told His Majesty I'm optimistic—still as optimistic as I was after Annapolis.

And so we welcome you, sir. And thank you for your passion.

King Abdullah. Thank you very much, Mr. President. It is obviously a great honor to be back here and to be with you. We tremendously appreciate the warm relationship and the great friendship between our two countries.

But as His Excellency, the President, just stated, we are very, very pleased with the continued commitment that the President has to solve the longest, most outstanding issue in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian process. And the words and discussions that we've had this morning will have, I think, a very great response back in our part of the world when I will go back and report to many of my colleagues the President's commitment to bringing a bright future to Israelis and Palestinians and to the whole area.

And we look forward to continuing to work with you, Mr. President, and many of us in the area to finally achieve a peace that will set the Middle East in the right direction.

President Bush. Thank you. A couple of questions apiece.

Ben [Ben Feller, Associated Press].

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President——

President Bush. Ben.

Q. Mr. President——

President Bush. Hold on a second. Ben.