

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.

Q. —as you have promised—sorry.

Q. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. Are you—what are your thoughts about the fact that President Abbas has not resumed peace talks? Are you disappointed? And very quickly, sir, you said you're still as optimistic as you were after Annapolis.

President Bush. Yes.

Q. What gives you that optimism?

President Bush. I'm optimistic because I am absolutely convinced that Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas understand that this is now a key moment in achieving peace. Both leaders are committed to a democracy—two democracies living side by side in peace. Both leaders understand that there has to be a vision of what that state will look like. Both leaders fully understand that there has to—you know, have to work out agreements on borders and right of return and other issues. Both leaders understand that a vision that respects people and promotes freedom stands in stark contrast to the extremists who are willing to murder people to stop the advance of democracy and to, you know, dash the ambitions of the Palestinians.

I'm optimistic that they understand that. I understand the difficulties, but I also believe both leaders have—when it—ultimately will have the courage necessary to reach an agreement. And my job as the President and my administration's responsibilities are to help them understand what is possible and to keep them moving on a process. And so I'm optimistic. I am.

Q. Are you disappointed about the lack of resumption in peace talks?

The President. This is a process that, you know, always has two steps forward and one step back. We just got to make sure that it's only one step back. Condi is out there in the region. And sometimes, you know, there's matters going behind the scenes that aren't apparent in the public arena. And so, yes, I'm optimistic. And we'll continue to work hard to help achieve the vision.

Step one is to convince the leaders it's necessary and to help them define a vision so that a state can come into being after conditions are met. But a lot of Palestinians are probably—are saying, "We've heard this kind of rhetoric before. Show us what a state looks like." And I said, a state has got to be contin-

uous—a contiguous territory; it can't look like Swiss cheese. You know, the Palestinians have got to understand that this is an option available for them, and it will stand in stark contrast to the vision of Hamas, which has been nothing more than violence and deprivation.

You want to call on somebody?

Q. Mr. President, as you mentioned—you know, as you approach the end of your term in office, you mentioned that you still feel that establishing the Palestinian state is still achievable.

President Bush. Yes.

Q. What is the exact vision that you have, you know, with this short time left?

The President. Sure, I appreciate it. First of all, 10 months is a long time. May seem short to you, but it's—there's plenty of time to get a deal done.

Secondly, I have visited with the leaders, you know, on a one-on-one basis quite frequently, and I understand that it's—this is a difficult subject. But I also feel very comfortable with the commitment they have made to try to work out subjects that have been difficult for other leaders to work out in the past.

The role of the United States—we can't impose peace. We can help leaders come to agreement and come to the table and make hard decisions. We can help facilitate the bridging of gaps, if there are gaps. And that's exactly what our diplomacy is in the process of doing.

And by the way, there is—and one of the reasons why His Majesty is so important in this process, as are other leaders in the Middle East, including my close friend King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia and President Mubarak of Egypt, is that the—both these leaders are going to need the support of the Arab world in order to make tough decisions. But first, it's up to them. And so I'm optimistic that they can conclude tough negotiations. And we'll try to facilitate that.

Matt [Matt Spetalnick, Reuters].

Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)/Oil Prices

Q. Yes, sir. Every indication out of the OPEC meeting of ministers in Vienna is that they will be holding output steady. What is

your reaction to that, sir, in light of your recent visit to the Middle East in which you appealed for an increase in output?

The President. Yes. I think it's a mistake to have your biggest customer's economy slow down—or your biggest customers' economies slowing down as a result of high energy prices. It's not the only result—our economy is slowing down. I mean, obviously, we've got a housing issue and some credit issues. But no question, the high price of gasoline has hurt economic growth here in the United States. And if I were a member of OPEC, I'd be concerned about high energy prices causing people to buy less energy over time.

And the other thing high energy prices of course does—which is stimulate alternative fuels, which we're doing a lot here in America. We're spending a lot of money on biofuels and ethanols and new ways to make ethanol. So my advice to OPEC—of course they haven't listened to it—but my advice to OPEC is to understand the consequences of high energy prices, and—because I do. And I understand that this is affecting our American citizens. It's making it harder for people to be able to drive, and it's making it tough for families to save.

And so not only is it—high energy prices having an effect on—a macroeffect on our economy; it's affecting a lot of our families, which troubles me as well. And by the way, the higher energy prices stay, the more likely it is countries will quickly diversify. And that's part of our strategy.

You want to call on somebody?

King Abdullah. I think one more.

President Bush. One more?

King Abdullah. Yes—[inaudible].

President Bush. Here's a great—ask this lady here; she's good.

Iraqi Refugees/Lebanon/Syria

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Apart from the Palestinian issue, did you also discuss Lebanon and Iraq and whether there's a common position between you and Jordan regarding the crisis in Lebanon and the situation in Iraq?

President Bush. Yes, thank you. We did. His Majesty—and he, of course, can answer as well—but His Majesty made it very clear

to me that stability in Iraq is important for Jordan. He also pointed out something which I knew, but I wasn't exactly sure how it was affecting his country, that there are roughly three-quarters of a million Iraqi citizens who have moved to Jordan. And we talked about a common strategy about how to make sure that those citizens ended up, hopefully, going home to Iraq as the security situation improved, but also, while they're in Jordan, not create terrible issues for the Government.

And of course we talked about Lebanon. We strongly—I strongly support Prime Minister Siniora and the March 14th coalition. I strongly condemn a Syrian interference in the Lebanese political process. It is—I am extremely disappointed that the Syrian leader continues to make it hard for the Siniora Government to succeed, and I really don't appreciate the fact that they've made it hard for this Government to elect a President. We had diplomatic success in the past, when the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution seeing to it that Syria left this young democracy to be able to grow on its own. And now here they are once again interfering inside the politics of this country.

And so, yes, we discussed the subject.

King Abdullah. And all I can add to that, on the issue of Lebanon, is how we discussed the role of Arab countries and how we can be effective in supporting the process in Lebanon, so that as quickly as possible a government is formed which will be able them—to take them to the future.

President Bush. Thank you all very much. We've got to go have lunch with our wives.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:47 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; and President Bashar al-Asad of Syria.

Remarks on the Situation in Colombia

March 4, 2008

This morning I spoke to President Uribe of Colombia. He updated me on the situation