

that make Philadelphia a more compassionate place, and I want to thank you for that. I appreciate the fact that you have mentoring programs and internships and scholarships, that basically says the dream is for all who live in this country. I thank you for your efforts to preserve historical treasures. One can learn a lot from the past, and the Union League is doing its part to tell the true story of our great Nation.

In short, I thank you for your service to your community and our country.

I also thank you for preserving the legacy of Abraham Lincoln. I'm about to be a member of the ex-President's club, so I'll just call him Abe. [*Laughter*] If he were around I could say, "You call me W." [*Laughter*] He—I don't know if you know this or not, but there's a place in the Oval Office where the President puts the most influential President—portrait of, I guess you'd say, influential President. I'm somewhat conflicted about the influential President, so I say, 41's portrait hangs in my heart; 16 hangs on the wall.

I found it interesting that the League was founded in 1862 to support President Lincoln in a time when his leadership was deeply controversial. [*Laughter*] Look, I know how he felt. [*Laughter*]

But the principles on which he stood have stood the test of time. "All men are created equal under God," he said unflinchingly throughout his Presidency. Liberty is given to every man, woman, and child on the face of the Earth. I believe, like Lincoln, there is an Almighty, and a gift of that Almighty to every man is freedom. He has taught Presidents that you must act on your principles and make tough decisions, regardless of the political consequences.

I have been a—I have drawn strength from his example. I have learned lessons by reading about Abraham Lincoln. And I want to thank you for preserving his legacy.

And most importantly, I thank you for your kind words and your heartfelt prayers during the last 8 years. It has been—somebody said, "What's it's like to be President?" I said, "Some days you're happy; some days not so happy; every day joyous to serve the United States."

God bless you, and God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:38 a.m. in Lincoln Hall at the Union League of Philadelphia. In his remarks, he referred to painter Mark Carder; Frederick C. Haab, Jr., president, Union League of Philadelphia; Frank Giordano, member, and James B. Straw, chairman, board of trustees, Abraham Lincoln Foundation; and Bruce and Eileen Hooper, commissioners of the President's portrait.

Interview With Sam Ryan of CBS Sports in Philadelphia

December 6, 2008

Army-Navy Football Game

Mr. Ryan. Mr. President, we know this is one of the most storied rivalries in all of sports. What does the Army-Navy game mean to you?

The President. Well, it means to me that I have—I got a chance to come and be with people who will be joining the finest military in the history of the world.

Members of the U.S. Armed Forces

Mr. Ryan. When you look at these young players and the seniors, and you know that they enrolled in the academies after 9/11, what does that say about them?

The President. I stand in awe of somebody who would volunteer to serve America in a time of danger. It says that we are blessed to have people of such character in our country.

The Presidency

Mr. Ryan. Mr. President, I know you're probably doing a lot of reflecting here on December 6th. What will you miss the most about being President?

The President. I will miss a lot of things. But one of the things I have treasured the most is to be the Commander in Chief of men and women of courage and character and decency.

Mr. Ryan. Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The interview began at 12:11 p.m. at Lincoln Financial Field. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Nadia Bilbassy Charters of MBC TV

December 5, 2008

The Oval Office

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Mr. President, nice to see you always.

The President. Welcome, welcome.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you very much. Thank you, sir.

The President. We are glad you're here.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Thank you very much.

The President. Come on in to the Oval Office.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. We are grateful for this. Thank you. This is great.

The President. It's an interesting history here, and I kind of think one thing that your viewers might be interested in knowing is that the first decision I ever made as President—but I was actually President-elect—was, what color rug do you want? And one of the important things is to surround yourself with people who you can trust, and delegate. In this case, I delegated the rug design to Laura, my wife.

But I told her, I said, I want the rug to have a message, and that is "optimistic guy goes to work here." And so, as you can see, the rug really lights up the room. And I am optimistic about the future of the Middle East.

Freedom Agenda/Middle East

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Well, that's a great note, sir. You've been here 8 years. A few weeks and you're going to be leaving.

The President. I'm going home.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. You sat on this desk for 8 years, and you took many decisions regarding our region. You launched the greater Middle East initiative that you want to democratize, reform the Middle East. In retrospect, do you think that vision was realized? Would you do anything differently?

The President. Well, I think it began—it's the beginning of a very difficult vision to implement. But I felt it was necessary for a couple of important reasons. One, I believe we're in an ideological struggle against people who want to achieve their ideological vision through the use of violence and murder.

And I believe it is essential that you have an alternative available for people; the one I happen to believe in is based upon liberty. I don't think this is an American vision, see. And I tell people this, that I do believe there is a universal God, and a gift of that Almighty to all of us, whether we be Methodists or Muslims or nothing, is freedom. And so freedom is a great alternative.

But I also believe there's a moral calling. If you believe there's an Almighty God, and a gift of that Almighty to everybody is freedom, then I think you have to—if you can do something about it, that you have to act on that, so that moms can grow up in a society that is hopeful for their children, you know, that their children are—can realize dreams.

And to me the best type of society to do that is freedom. But it's very hard; it's difficult. And so you have to plant a seed, and you have to cultivate the seed, and eventually the crops will bloom. And we're beginning to see the crops beginning to bloom in parts of the Middle East.

War on Terror

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Sir, some people say that the war on terror is a war on Islam.

The President. Yes.

Ms. Bilbassy Charters. Yet you went to the first mosque after 9/11, and you spoke there. How do you convince people in the Middle East that George Bush is not fighting a war against Islam?

The President. No, I know, and it troubles my soul, because I believe we're all God's children. And I hear people say, "George Bush doesn't like Muslims; he wants to fight Muslims." And, first, I thank you for giving me the chance to, hopefully, set the record straight. But I am objecting to anybody who murders innocent people to achieve their objectives. I don't think people who murder in the name of religion are truly religious people. And secondly, I would hope that people would know that when we try to use some of our influence to help on education programs, for example, or we welcome students, Saudi students, to the United States to study here, that it's a sign of respect and a sign of my desire to reach out to all people regardless of their religion.