

his traveling companion, this will not be their last Thanksgiving. They will live out their days in comfort and care of Kidwell Farm of Herndon, Virginia. By virtue of an unconditional Presidential pardon, they are safe from harm.

May God continue to bless America, and I hope everybody has a happy Thanksgiving. Thank you for coming. We'll go over and see the turkey.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:48 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nick Weaver, chairman, and Stuart Proctor, Jr., president, National Turkey Federation.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

November 19, 2001

Operation Enduring Freedom

The President. We just had a very productive Cabinet meeting. We discussed a variety of subjects, spent a fair amount of time on the war and the progress we're making in Afghanistan. We have made great progress there, but there's still a lot of work to do. And the degree of difficulty is increasing as we work hard to achieve our objectives, not the least of which is to bring the Al Qaida to justice.

They're running, and they're trying to hide, and we're in pursuit. And we will stay the course until we bring them to justice. The American people must know it may take longer than some anticipate. They also need to know that we're a very patient group.

Secondly, we've been briefed by Andrew Natsios of the USAID about the humanitarian aid mission. And that, too, is a tough mission. There are millions of Afghans who were starving prior to September the 11th as a result of drought. Obviously, to complicate matters, there has been a war in that land. And yet, this good Nation is doing everything we can to move enormous amounts of food into the areas where people are likely to starve. I'm talking about thousands of tons, metric tons, of food. There are over 2,000 trucks now in place that are able to move more freely now that the Northern Alliance

and our military have liberated the northern part of Afghanistan, where the starvation is most likely to occur.

And so we've had a great discussion. And I'm proud of the way our Cabinet has been performing during these very difficult periods.

I'd be glad to answer a few questions. John [John Roberts, CBS News], have you got one?

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, your Secretary of State a little while ago said that he would use U.S. influence to try to bring the two sides together and forge a Middle East peace. Wouldn't it be swifter, sir, if you used the power of your office to do it personally, by meeting with these individuals? And at what point would you do that?

The President. Well, John, first of all, this administration has been working the Middle East ever since we came into office. I've been on the phone with the Prime Minister of Israel, our longtime friend, a lot, as has the Secretary of State. We've been dealing with the Europeans—all kinds of people are interested in the Middle East—reminding them that it takes willing parties. It takes—people must say that they want to work for peace.

And so our objective is to convince both parties to make a conscious decision to come to the peace table. And when they do so, we're more than willing to help. But first things first—is to convince the parties that peace is necessary.

It also is important for us to remind Mr. Arafat that in order for the peace discussions to begin, that the level of violence must substantially be reduced. And so we're working hard with not only the Palestinians but as well as with others who have an interest in the area to work to reduce violence, so that peace discussions can begin in relative security.

Our mind is, of course, on the war in Afghanistan, but it hasn't diverted our attention away from the need to work hard to bring peace to the Middle East. And we would hope to be able to do so.

Usama bin Laden

Q. Mr. President, there have been reports out of Afghanistan that the U.S. military knows or thinks they know where bin Laden might be. Does that mean—

The President. I certainly hope so.

Q. Does that mean the fellow to your left knows? And how soon might America see bin Laden—

The President. Listen, if our military knew where Mr. bin Laden was, he would be brought to justice. We're hunting him down. He runs, and he hides. But as we've said repeatedly, the noose is beginning to narrow; the net is getting tighter. But this is a difficult assignment. Things happened very quickly in Afghanistan recently, as—went to show that our strategy was a well-thought-out strategy. But the objective is yet to be achieved, and we're not leaving until we do achieve the objective.

And the Secretary of Defense and General Tommy Franks, who is doing a magnificent job, understand the objective. We talk about it every single morning. And we will achieve the objective. But I've told the American people right from the get-go of this effort: It may take a month; it may take a year; or however long it takes, we'll succeed.

Economic Stimulus Legislation

Q. Sir, what can you do personally to jumpstart negotiations further on an economic stimulus package? And do you still need one?

The President. Well, I think we need an economic stimulus package. I've said so from the beginning. I'll be meeting a week from tomorrow with the leadership of the Senate and the House and urge the Senators to bring a bill to the floor and get it into conference, so we can resolve whatever differences there may be.

There was a period of time when people said we'd never get an airline security bill. And after a lot of hours of hard work, we got a good bill, which I signed today. And I hope I'll be able to sign an economic stimulus package; I think I will be able to do so. But it's going to require the Senators to come together and move a bill, and then we can reconcile the differences with the House version.

Usama bin Laden

Q. Mr. President, you just said the noose is getting tighter. Without compromising the search, do you have evidence you're getting closer to bin Laden?

The President. Well, it's going to be hard for me to tell you that without compromising the search, except I can point to the map of Afghanistan where more and more territory are now in friendly hands. And the people of Afghanistan understand what Al Qaida and the Taliban Government have meant to their ordinary lives. Women are treated lower than low. There's no respect for human life. There's jubilation in the cities that we have liberated. And the sooner Al Qaida is brought to justice, the sooner Afghanistan will return to normal. People understand that.

And so we've got—let me put it to you this way—the more territory we gain, the more success there is on the ground, the more people we've got looking to help us in our mission. The Secretary of Defense is doing everything he can, as are our military, to bring these people to justice, and we will.

Press Assistant Reed Dickens. Thank you all. Lights. Thank you all.

The President. Go ahead, Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

Military Order

Q. On the subject of justice, what do you say to the Members of Congress and people in law schools and civil liberties—

The President. On what subject?

Q. On justice, that your order establishing military—

The President. Yes.

Q. —to try terrorists, they argue, represents a retreat or an abandonment of traditional American principles.

The President. I say it's the absolute right thing to do. And it is—to set up the option to use a military tribunal in the time of war makes a lot of sense. We're fighting a war, Terry, against the most evil kinds of people. And I need to have that extraordinary option at my fingertips. I ought to be able to have that option available should we ever bring one of these Al Qaida members in alive. It's

our national interests; it's our national security interests we have a military tribunal available. It is in the interests of the safety of potential jurors that we have a military tribunal.

These are extraordinary times. And I would remind those who don't understand the decision I made, that Franklin Roosevelt made the same decision in World War II. Those were extraordinary times, as well.

This Government will do everything we can to defend the American people within the confines of our Constitution. And that's exactly how we're proceeding. And so, to the critics, I say, I made the absolute right decision.

Press Assistant Reed Dickens. Thank you all.

[At this point, the President turned toward Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.]

The President. Do you know where Al Qaida is? *[Laughter]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:12 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization.

Remarks at an Iftaar Dinner

November 19, 2001

Good evening, and welcome to the White House. I'm so honored to welcome such distinguished guests and ambassadors during the holy month of Ramadan.

America is made better by millions of Muslim citizens. America has close and important relations with many Islamic nations. So it is fitting for America to honor your friendship and the traditions of a great faith by hosting this Iftaar at the White House.

I want to thank our Secretary of State for being here, as well as members of my administration. I want to thank the Ambassadors for taking time in this holy month to come to join us in this feast.

Ramadan is a time of fasting and prayer for the Muslim faithful. So tonight we are reminded of God's greatness and His Com-

mandments to live in peace and to help neighbors in need. According to Muslim teachings, God first revealed His word in the Holy Koran to the Prophet Muhammad during the month of Ramadan. That word has guided billions of believers across the centuries, and those believers built a culture of learning and literature and science.

All the world continues to benefit from this faith and its achievements. Ramadan and the upcoming holiday season are a good time for people of different faiths to learn more about each other. And the more we learn, the more we find that many commitments are broadly shared. We share a commitment to family, to protect and love our children. We share a belief in God's justice and man's moral responsibility. And we share the same hope for a future of peace. We have much in common and much to learn from one another.

This evening we gather in a spirit of peace and cooperation. I appreciate your support of our objectives in the campaign against terrorism. Tonight that campaign continues in Afghanistan, so that the people of Afghanistan will soon know peace. The terrorists have no home in any faith. Evil has no holy days.

This evening we also gather in the spirit of generosity and charity. As this feast breaks the Ramadan fast, America is also sharing our table with the people of Afghanistan. We are proud to play a leading role in humanitarian relief efforts, with airdrops and truck convoys of food and medicine. America's children are donating their dollars to the Afghan children. And my administration is committed to help reconstruct that country and to support a stable government that represents all of the people of Afghanistan.

We are working for more opportunity and a better life for the people of Afghanistan and all the people of the Islamic world. America respects people of all faiths, and America seeks peace with people of all faiths.

I thank you for your friendship, and I wish you a blessed Ramadan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:50 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House.