

Q. But let me follow, if I could——

The President. There will only be three questions.

Q. Okay, sorry. But if you say they're killers——

The President. They said they're killers.

Q. ——what makes them eligible to go to the tribunal?

The President. I told you, if any evidence that is required to convict them jeopardizes the national security interests of the country, we'll use the tribunal.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, are you frustrated by the continuing violence in the Middle East, that looks—one day it looks good, the next day it's——

The President. Of course, I am. I am frustrated by the violence in the Middle East, and so are a lot of people who live in the Middle East. I know there are some people who do not want us to achieve any kind of peaceful settlement of a longstanding dispute. And they're willing to use terrorist means to disrupt any progress that's being made. And that frustrates me. It frustrates mothers and dads who happen to be Palestinians and Israelis, because they want to raise their children in a secure environment.

Nevertheless, we'll continue to work the issue and work it hard. Zinni is over there; he's making some progress. He's saying to both parties, "Stay the course. Work hard to get into Tenet." And hopefully we can achieve what we all want to achieve, which is eventually a political settlement. But first and foremost, we've got to come up with a security agreement. We made some progress, and I want to thank Zinni for his job that he's doing there. And I'm looking forward to being briefed by the Vice President tomorrow morning when he gets back from—he's getting back this afternoon, but he's going to come in tomorrow morning. We'll have breakfast first thing in the morning, prior to me leaving for Mexico.

Q. Mr. President, just yesterday the Vice President was suggesting that he could meet with Chairman Arafat if there was a cease-fire. Does a cease-fire mean an end to all suicide bombings?

The President. Well, what he said was, was that there are certain conditions under which he would meet with Mr. Arafat, and that is getting into the Tenet agreement and meeting the conditions. And we've also said that we expect there to be a 100 percent effort by Chairman Arafat. We expect him to be reining in those people with whom he's got influence. Clearly, he's not going to have influence with every single suicide bomber. I understand that. But we expect him to be diligent and firm and consistent in his efforts to rein in those who would like to disrupt any progress toward peace and rein in those who would harm our friends the Israelis.

And as I've said in the past, I didn't think he has done a very good job of doing that up to now, and I believe he can do a better job. And that's exactly the message the Vice President is delivering in his statement.

Listen, thank you all very much. I don't want to hold two press conferences in one week.

NOTE: The exchange began at 1:25 p.m. in the mini-auditorium at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School. In his remarks, the President referred to U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.); and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. The President also referred to the Tenet plan, the Israeli-Palestinian cease-fire and security plan of June 13, 2001, negotiated by Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included Mrs. Bush's closing remarks.

Remarks at Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School in Alexandria, Virginia

March 20, 2002

Thank you, Laura, for that warm introduction. I appreciate what a fine job she's doing as the First Lady. She's a pretty calm voice in a time—in turbulent times for our country, and I'm lucky to be married to her.

I want to thank all the Tucker Tigers for letting me come by to say hello. Gosh, it's good to see you all. I want to thank the fact that you understand that you can make a big difference in somebody's life, that you can

help a boy and girl who needs help, and you've done a darn good job. I understand you raised \$2,500. That's a lot of money to raise, but you did it by reading books.

So you accomplished two things: One, you helped somebody in Afghanistan who needs your help; and secondly, you practiced reading, which is one of the most important things you can do. I hope you read more than you watch TV. That's really important. How many of you are going to go to college? Can you raise your hands if you're thinking about going to college? Boy, that's great. Guess what? That means you've set an important goal. That's what that means; you've set a good, important goal. It also means you'd better learn how to read. So by reading all those books, it's really a good step toward meeting your goal.

So thanks for letting us come. I also want to thank your teachers. Thank you all for being teachers. Teaching is a noble profession, an incredibly important job. So make sure you listen to your teachers. They care about you a lot, and they want you to meet your goal, and they want you to learn how to read. And Laura and I want to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for taking on this important, vital profession.

I want to thank the principal as well, and thank the superintendent of schools. I want to thank you all. Gosh, it's such a pleasure to come. I'm accompanied by some people who I admire a lot. Our Secretary of Education, Rod Paige has come with us today. Rod, thank you for being here. Our Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao, good to see you again, Elaine.

You probably know this already, I don't need to tell you this, but each State has got two United States Senators. And you're in the State of Virginia, and you've got two Senators that represent your State at the Capitol. And you've got two really fine United States Senators, both of whom have come today to say hello to us, and both of them have come today to show their support for this important project. And here they are: Senator John Warner, Senator George Allen. Thank you all for coming.

And from Miami, Florida, there's a Congresswoman here, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is here, as well. Ileana, thank you for coming.

I want to thank Harold Decker and all those who work for the Red Cross for participating in this important project. I want to thank all of you who helped on the uniform project, as well. You know, I oftentimes talk about the need to be a responsible society. In order to have a responsible society, there's such a thing as corporate responsibility. So it warmed our hearts to know that many of you in corporate America heard the call to help, and thank you so much for coming. I appreciate your efforts.

Today as well, we're joined by a special young lady from Texas. That's where Laura and I are from. She flew up here for a reason, and it's because I wanted to single her out as someone who has done a little extra—not a little extra, a lot extra—for the fund to help Afghan boys and girls. Her name is Olivia Bennett. Olivia, would you please stand up over here? Olivia is from Southlake, Texas, and she's got a unique talent. At the age of 12 years old, she is a really good artist. And you know what Olivia did? She painted a lot of pictures and sold them and thus far has raised \$33,000 for the fund to help Afghan children. But you know what? She's only a third of the way toward her goal. She told me she is going to raise \$100,000. And that is so wonderful. Thank you, Olivia, very much for being here.

I want to thank Haroun Amin for being here, as well, the Afghan Chargé d'Affaires. Thank you so much for coming, sir. And Madam President, fine job. There will be a Madam President one of these days, and if you keep talking the way you talk, you may be her—[laughter]—very good job.

I know you all know that we're fighting a war. We're fighting against people who really don't like freedom, people who want to hurt us. And I want to assure you that we'll do everything we can to make sure they don't. We'll do everything we can. But we're fighting for more than just a war; we're fighting to help people, too. We want the world not only to be peaceful; we want the world to be a better place. We want boys and girls to grow up in a world that is free and where they can go to school.

And we're making some good progress. I want to tell you all that we've helped people get food. And a lot of times on TV, all you

see is about the bombs, but we've prevented mass starvation because we've moved a lot of food into the region. We're helping build roads. We're helping build schools. We're helping make sure boys and girls or others have got health care and health clinics. And we're also doing a lot to help children get a good education.

Laura talked a lot about education, and she's right. If you're educated, you've got a much better chance to have a hopeful future and a happy future, and that's what we want. We want that for every boy and girl, whether they live in America or anywhere else in the world.

And the amazing thing about this—and a lot of Americans have trouble understanding this—that for the first time young girls are going to be going to school in Afghanistan. See, that's hard for us to believe, isn't it? Most of you, after summer, dread going back to school—not all of you, some of you. But there are boys and girls—there's girls in Afghanistan who dream about getting to go to school. And as a result of what our country and many of our friends have done, girls get to go to school, too, starting this week.

And when they go to school, we want to make sure they've got supplies. We want to make sure they've got tablets to write on and crayolas to color with and even jump ropes to jump with. And so one of the things that's happened is we've put a coalition—that means a group of people—together to send textbooks to Afghanistan. We've sent 4 million textbooks thus far, and there's another 6 million to go in Afghanistan, so the boys and girls will have something to read.

And as you heard earlier, we're putting basic school supply kits together, so that 120,000 Afghan children will have some school supplies by June. And they're called school chests, and today I had a chance to see some of your classmates putting the chests together. Matter of fact, I got to load a couple of notebooks myself. Forty notebooks per chest, that's a lot of notebooks. But that's how many children there are in a class.

And there's a lot of other things in there as well. There's pencils and rulers, as I mentioned, crayons, jump ropes, a soccer ball so the kids can play soccer, get a little exercise

while you're doing your studies. And so far, I just want you all to know—it's kind of a report here—that 1,000 of these kits have been put together, 1,000 chests have been assembled.

But that's not enough. We need 2,000 more chests. And so I'm asking our fellow Americans to rally for this good cause, to donate and participate in the creation of 2,000 more school supply chests to go to Afghanistan. And if you want to help, contact your local Red Cross chapter.

You know, I'm asked all the time, "What can I do to help in the war against terror?" You can help by helping build one of these school chests. It doesn't matter how you do it, how you raise the money. Just get it done.

And the good news is we're a can-do country. We're a country who responds in a compassionate way. There's no doubt in my mind, Harold, that the American people will respond. And when they do, Laura and I will thank them from the bottom of my heart—our hearts.

But there's a lot to do. And so for those of you out in America who wonder what you can do to help, call the Red Cross office. And they will give you an assignment, and when you fulfill the assignment, you'll know you're making a huge difference, a significant difference in the life of a boy or a girl in Afghanistan.

Our dream is a world that's peaceful, and our dream is a world that is hopeful. And the best way to make sure the world is hopeful is to help people get a good education, and that's what we're here today to honor.

I want to thank you all for helping somebody. I want to thank you all for understanding that when you help somebody, it really helps your own life, that when you help somebody in need, that it makes you a better person. I hope that's a lesson you keep with you for a long time.

Thanks for letting us come by to say hello. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. in the school gym. In his remarks, he referred to Cathy David, principal, and Kamila Benzina, student council president, Samuel W. Tucker Elementary School; Rebecca L. Perry, superintendent of

schools, Alexandria City Public Schools; and Harold Decker, chief executive officer, American Red Cross.

Statement on the Death of John Robson

March 20, 2002

I am deeply saddened by the death of John Robson. John was a man of true character and integrity. Serving four Presidents with dedication and honor, most recently as Chairman of the Export-Import Bank, John set an example of distinguished public service. I extend my deepest sympathies to his wife, Margaret, and to his son, Doug. He will be missed.

Statement on the Observance of Nowruz

March 20, 2002

I send warm greetings to Iranian-Americans and the Iranian people observing Nowruz, the traditional Persian New Year.

This year's observance occurs at a time when our Nation is united in its determination to make the world safe from terrorism. The community of more than one million Iranian-Americans has fully participated in this noble endeavor by condemning the terrorist acts, participating in rescue efforts at Ground Zero, and offering help and support to the victims, who included individuals of Persian heritage.

From arts and education to industry and science, Iranian-Americans have made significant and enduring contributions to the cultural and civic life of our Nation. Your observance of the traditional Persian New Year honors an ancient and storied history and marks a time of renewal. As the season changes, may your observance of Nowruz serve as a special time for you to reflect on your rich heritage and to enjoy the company of family and friends.

Statement on the Observance of Nowruz

March 20, 2002

I send warm greetings to Afghans and Afghan-Americans observing Nowruz.

This year's observance occurs during a period of trial, when the people of Afghanistan and the United States are joined in our determination to make the world safe from terrorism. Afghans have shown extraordinary courage in helping to rid their country of the Taliban and Al Qaida. We will continue to help Afghanistan become a stable, prosperous, and free country. And we will support Afghanistan in its effort to protect itself from becoming a base for international terrorism.

This Nowruz will be particularly special to millions of Afghans. Throughout their history, Afghans have observed Nowruz. But the Taliban had forbidden Afghans from following this treasured part of their heritage. Next week, for the first time in many years, Afghans will be free once more to celebrate this time-honored tradition.

Afghanistan's observance of the traditional New Year honors an ancient and storied history and marks a time of renewal. As the season changes, may the observance of Nowruz serve as a special time for Afghans to enjoy their newfound freedom and the company of family and friends.

Best wishes for a memorable Nowruz.

Statement on Senate Passage of Campaign Finance Reform Legislation

March 20, 2002

Like many Republicans and Democrats in the Congress, I support commonsense reforms to end abuses in our campaign finance system. The reforms passed today, while flawed in some areas, still improve the current system overall, and I will sign them into law.