

Republican State Committee; Mike Long, chairman, Conservative Party of New York State; Joseph Mondello, chairman, Nassau County Republican Party; and Patricia L. Acampora, New York State assemblywoman.

Remarks Following a Wreath-Laying Ceremony for Victims of the March 11 Madrid Terrorist Attack

March 12, 2004

Mr. Ambassador, thank you for having Laura and me here during this solemn occasion. The United States of America sends our prayers and sympathies to the Spanish people, who mourn the loss of life, who today weep for their loved ones, who wonder about their future now that there's been such tragedy.

The bombings in Spain are a grim reminder that there are evil people in the world who are willing to kill innocent life. I appreciate so very much your Government's strong stand against terrorism and terrorist organizations like ETA. The United States of America stands firmly with you as we work to make the world more peaceful and more free.

Killers try to shake our will. They try to shake our confidence in the future. Spanish people will stand firm against this type of killing, and they'll have a friend with the American people. So Mr. Ambassador, we ask for God's blessings for the people of your great country.

Thank you very much for having Laura and me here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:08 p.m. at the Embassy of Spain. In his remarks, he referred to Francisco Javier Ruperez Rubio, Spain's Ambassador to the U.S.; and Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA).

Interview of the President and the First Lady by Television of Spain (TVE)

March 12, 2004

Reaction to March 11 Terrorist Attack in Madrid

Q. First of all, I would like to thank you very much on behalf of the Spanish people

for being able to send a message. And I'd like to ask your feelings about this horrifying thing that happened yesterday in Madrid. First question: What are your feelings?

The President. Well, I can remember when our citizens lost life. I remember the horror, the outrage, the anger, and the incredible sadness. So I guess my—I feel the same way today. My first reaction is, my heart breaks for those who are mourning the loss of their loved one. It must be a sense of emptiness and a sense of real—their hearts are broken. And we send our prayers to those who are so sad—

The First Lady. Grieving, who are grieving today. We all are thinking about them. And I want all the people who lost somebody yesterday in Spain to know that the American people are sending our love and our condolences. And we know what it feels like, and we know how tough it is.

Q. That would be the second question. The message for the people of Spain is that of solidarity and love?

The President. Of course. I think the people of Spain are going to rally around those who have lost life. It's amazing what happens when something like this happens to a society. There's an outpouring of love and concern. There's an outpouring of love here in America from people that the families in Spain will never know. There's just a lot of people who care deeply about the fact of the lost life. Neighbors will help neighbors.

I think you're going to find as well that the people of Spain—or we'll find as well—the people of Spain will refuse to be intimidated, that they're not going to allow killers, coldblooded killers, to intimidate the country. And these people kill because they hate freedom and they hate what Spain stands for. Spain is a great culture and a great people, with great traditions of democracy. And the killers hate freedom, and they're trying to intimidate. And the Spanish people will not be intimidated.

Q. As you know, the royal family is working hard, as is the Spanish Government, trying to heal, if it's possible. Any message for the many women, many families who now feel really lost?

The First Lady. I want to encourage women and men, and mothers and fathers

particularly, to put their arms around their children. These are very frightening times for adults, so we can imagine how frightening they are for children. And it's a time for adults, mothers and dads and grandparents, to protect their children and reassure their children, put their arms around them and let them know they're going to be okay and the country is going to be okay and things will work out, as we grieve for these people who lost the person they love best in the bombings.

Cooperation With Spanish Government

Q. Mr. President, you've been dealing with this situation for 4 years. I'm sure it's been very hard. What could you say to the Spanish Government now dealing with a hard thing?

The President. My first reaction is that the people of Spain are lucky to have Jose Maria Aznar as the President during these times. He is a man who understands the war on terror, clearly knows the stakes, and knows that we must never give an inch to the terrorists. He will be able to be a strong voice, a compassionate voice and a strong voice during these times.

The Government must stay strong. But the Spanish Government has been fighting terrorist organizations for a while. Jose Maria has been strong against terrorist organizations like ETA. He knows what the stakes are. We don't know who did this yet. I wouldn't rule anybody out. You'll hear all kinds of rumors, and it will take a while to find out the facts. And the United States Government will help the Spanish Government find out the facts, if they so desire.

People will find there's going to be a lot of speculation here, and that's all it's going to be. People will claim credit or not claim credit. People will say, "We didn't do it," or "We did do it," to create a sense of confusion. But the facts will become known after a while. It takes a while. It took us a while to find out exactly who ordered the attacks on America. And once the facts are known and once we find out who did it, America will join the Spanish Government to hunt the terrorists down and bring them to justice.

Q. Would it make any difference if it's ETA or Al Qaida or any radical——

The President. Well, it's hard to speculate. We've seen claims already—"No, we didn't do this." Sometimes when somebody says, "No, we didn't do it," it means they did do it. And sometimes these people want to deceive. But we don't know yet. And all I can assure the people of Spain is that, to the extent that the Government wants, we will help find out the facts, and if these terrorists are overseas or plotting from overseas or anywhere in Europe, we will lend our expertise, our intelligence gathering to help the Spanish authorities bring these people to justice. That's what the Spanish people expect. These people need to be brought to justice. And we will help any way we can.

Responsibility for Attack/Spanish Election

Q. Let's talk a bit about the future. As you know, we have elections in a couple of days, the day after tomorrow. And some people say that if it's Al Qaida, that could mean that somebody is trying to punish the Spanish Government for backing the war. What do you think about it?

The President. I think that's a feeble excuse. Killers kill. And I think we shouldn't give them any great credit. All they're trying to do is shake the will of the free world. They hate freedom, and they're willing to try to create—intimidate people to change. And the Spanish Government will never change its love for freedom. It's one of the great things about Spain, is its embrace of liberty.

But people shouldn't speculate right now as to who did it. It's going to take a while. It just is. These were very coordinated bombings, and it's going to take some good forensic work to get the facts.

And so I hope the people of Spain just go about their business—and participate in the elections, of course; after all, Spain is a democracy—and not let the speculation decide how to vote. They ought to vote for who they think is going to be the best government.

Q. But it's almost inevitable. I mean, the whole world is watching who is behind the attacks——

The President. Sure. We want to help—we want to find—we want to help find out. But I don't think you can know immediately.

Again, people will—this happened in our country. And there was all kinds of speculation as to who attacked, who started the attacks. And it took a while to make sure we knew. But over time, our intelligence services got worked up and law enforcement got involved, and I think you'll find the case to be in Spain as well. The facts will become known. And then that makes it easier for the Government to make the decision as to how to proceed.

Q. Thank you very much. As I said, on behalf of the Spanish people, thank you for sending a message and for being close to us.

The President. Yes. Well, we care deeply about our friends, and the people of Spain are friends. May God bless them.

Q. Thank you.

The First Lady. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview began at 1:25 p.m. at the Embassy of Spain. In his remarks, the President referred to Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA). A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks on Efforts To Globally Promote Women's Human Rights

March 12, 2004

Thank you all very much. It takes me 45 seconds to walk to work, and sometimes I get introduced by my wife. *[Laughter]* It's a heck of a job. Thanks, Laura.

Laura is—you know, one of the interesting moments in our family came when she gave a radio address. She used the President's time to give a radio address, to speak to the women of Afghanistan. And it made a big difference in people's lives. And it was from that moment forward that she, personally, has dedicated time to make sure that people who have been enslaved are free, particularly women. And I'm proud of Laura's leadership.

In the last 2½ years, we have seen remarkable and hopeful development in world history. Just think about it: More than 50 million men, women, and children have been liberated from two of the most brutal tyrannies on Earth—50 million people are free. All these people are now learning the blessings of freedom.

And for 25 million women and girls, liberation has a special significance. Some of these girls are attending school for the first time. It's hard for people in America to imagine. A lot of young girls now get to go to school. Some of the women are preparing to vote in free elections for the very first time.

The public whippings by Taliban officials have ended. The systematic use of rape by Saddam's regime to dishonor families has ended. He sits in the prison cell.

The advance of freedom in the greater Middle East has given new rights and new hopes to women. And America will do its part to continue the spread of liberty.

I want to thank a man who is working hard to continue the spread of liberty, and that's the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. I appreciate three members of my Cabinet who are here: Secretary Gale Norton, Secretary Ann Veneman, and Secretary Elaine Chao. I put together, in all due humility, the greatest Cabinet ever. And one of the reasons why is these three ladies have agreed to serve. The President has got to get pretty good advice—I mean really good advice, frankly, from people other than his wife. *[Laughter]* I get great foreign policy advice from Condoleezza Rice, who is with us today.

I want to thank other members of my administration who are here for this very important occasion to end what has been a very important dialog. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz is with us; Andrew Natsios, who runs USAID. Paula Dobriansky of the Department of State—and I want to thank you for going to Afghanistan recently with Joyce Rumsfeld, Secretary Rumsfeld's better half, who also went to Afghanistan recently to spread the word that America will stay the course, that when we say something, we mean it, and that we say we're going to—*[applause]*.

I just named a distinguished American to be a U.S. delegate to the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, my sister, Dorothy. Thank you for being here, Doro. And I took the recommendation of Vice President Cheney for another member of the same delegation. He suggested that America would be well served by his eldest daughter, Liz. And he's right. Good to see you, Liz.