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President Discusses Nation's Critical Infrastructure

Oak Park High School
Kansas City, Missouri

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President's Remarks

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Please be seated. Thanks for that great Missouri welcome. I'm honored to be back here, to talk about how we're doing and what we're doing to make sure that America is safe and secure, and America's a promising place for everybody who lives here.

I'm traveling in pretty good company today. I've asked -- I had asked two of my -- governors friends to join me in Washington, D.C., to serve our nation. And thankfully, they both agreed. First, the former Governor of New Jersey, now the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, a fine lady, a person doing an excellent job on behalf of all America, Christie Todd Whitman. (Applause.)

And the former Governor of Pennsylvania, a man who right after the attacks on our country agreed to leave his job and come and serve as the advisor on homeland security, the first such advisor; a guy who has worked endless hours to make sure America is as safe as can possibly be, and that's my friend, Tom Ridge. (Applause.)

I want to thank members of the United States Congress who are here today, some of whom flew down on Air Force One. I'm not suggesting they like a free flight. (Laughter.) But it's good to have them on the plane. Senator Kit Bond, from the state of Missouri -- where are you, Kit? (Applause.) Congressman from this area, Sam Graves. Sam, thank you for being here. (Applause.) Sounds like Sam has got a lot of his cousins here. (Laughter.) Kenny Hulshof, as well, from the state of Missouri. Kenny, thank you for being here. I appreciate it. (Applause.)

The next fellow's not from this area, although he claims he was born in Kansas City. He's a Congressman from California, Chairman of the Rules Committee, David Dreier. Thank you for coming, David. (Applause.) Former Congressman Jim Talent has joined us today. I'm glad you're here, Jim. Thank you for coming. (Applause.) And the Mayor of Kansas City, Madam Mayor Kay Barnes is here. Thank you for coming. (Applause.) I'm honored you're here.

I also want to thank the school officials. Mr. Principal, thank you for opening up this beautiful high school. I appreciate you giving us a chance to come by and share some thoughts with my fellow citizens.

You know, I don't know what went through the minds of the enemy when they hit us. I can't imagine what they were thinking, what kind of thought process did they have? I guess they thought America was so materialistic and so self-absorbed and so selfish, that all we would do after the attack was maybe file a lawsuit or two. They didn't understand, we love freedom. (Applause.) And if somebody tries to take our freedoms away, or if somebody tries to frighten us because of our freedoms, we'll respond.

And I'm proud to report this mighty nation has responded. We are fierce, and we're tough when it comes to defending our values. (Applause.)

I see a lot of you have brought your children; I want to thank you for that. And I want you, as moms and dads, and as grandparents, to make sure you tell your children that we fight not to seek revenge, but we do so because we seek justice; and that the overriding ambition of this country is to achieve long-lasting peace.

It's important our fellow citizens of all ages understand the goal and vision of a strong and tough America is a more peaceful world; that we long for chance for our own children and children all across the globe to grow up in societies which tolerate people based on -- and don't prejudice -- based upon people's religious beliefs; that we honor -- we honor freedom of religion, we respect other people's opinions, we honor the notion of being able to speak freely with political discourse. That's what we honor.

It's important that when our children read about military movements or arrests that it's all done with a clear understanding that this is a peaceful nation, that we long for a freer day for everybody around the globe.

Our country is -- I like to use the word, tough, because we are. We are, we're a tough country. We've got a great military, and for those of you who have got relatives in the military, I want to thank you on behalf of a grateful nation, and thank them on behalf of a grateful nation, as well. (Applause.)

But we're also a patient nation. The American people understand that this is a new type of war. After all, we were attacked. We lost thousands of innocent citizens. Old wars used to be battle lines and tanks moving here and equipment moving there, and logistics. New wars are wars fought against shadowy enemies, people who hide in caves and then are willing to send youngsters to their death. And that kind of war's going to require patience and resolve. It's going to require us gathering the best intelligence we possibly can. It requires our great nation to assemble a vast coalition of freedom-loving people to join us as we're seeking these killers one, by one. It requires us cutting off their money.

One of the things that the terrorists and the enemy can't stand is to have their money dried up. They operate on money, as well as they do on hate, and we're working with the financial institutions all over the world.

We've got over 60,000 American troops all around the world fighting terror -- a bunch of them in Afghanistan now. Not only are they in Afghanistan to fight terror, they're also there to bring some order into a chaotic society. One of the things I was most proud of is that when we sent our troops, they arrived in Afghanistan, they weren't there to conquer a country; they went in to liberate a country from the clutches of one of the most barbaric regimes in the history of mankind. And thanks to the United States and our coalition, young girls now go to school for the first time in their lives. (Applause.)

This is an unusual kind of war because it sometimes will show up on your TV screens and sometimes it won't. Sometimes there will be moments of high drama and, of course, good reporters will be going -- all kinds of hyperventilating about this action or that action. (Laughter.) And sometimes you won't see a thing.

Interestingly enough, we've rounded up and detained over 2,400 terrorists, and that's good. It's not just us; our friends have, as well. We're making progress. You probably read in the newspaper, the number's now 2,401. (Applause.)

And it's not very dramatic at times when that happens. But you need to know that we're steady and strong on the subject of keeping America free. I'm going to talk about homeland security, but the best way to secure our homeland is to hunt the killers down one by one and bring them to justice, and that is what we're going to do. (Applause.)

It also is a new kind of war, because we're going to be confronted with the notion that the shadowy terrorists could hook up with a nation that has got weapons of mass destruction, the nations that I labeled axis of evil, people who in one case have gassed their own people with a weapons of mass destruction. People aren't afraid to use these weapons; people who hate America because of our freedoms. And I made it clear that we will use all tools at our disposal. But one thing we are going to do is defend the American people, and make sure that these terrorist networks don't hook up with these nations that harbor bad designs on us, and at the same time develop the worst kind of weapons.

We owe it to our children to defend freedom. (Applause.) We owe it to our children to defend what we believe in, and we owe it to the world to speak clearly: Murder of innocent people is always wrong. (Applause.) Societies which mistreat women are always wrong. (Applause.) Religious intolerance is always wrong. (Applause.) And this

country has a duty to speak out loud and clear. And when we see evil, I know it may hurt some people's feelings, it may not be what they call, diplomatically correct, but I'm calling evil for what it is. Evil is evil, and we will fight it with all our might. (Applause.)

I recognize the best way to defend our homeland is to go on the offense, and we're going to. But we've got to do a pretty good job on defense, as well. And that's why I've called for the creation of the Department of Homeland Security, a new Cabinet agency. And I'd like to explain why I did so.

Right now, there are over 100 agencies responsible for a part of homeland security -- 100 different entities at the federal level. I'm a person who believes in accountability. One reason I believe in accountability is because I understand who the American people are going to hold accountable if something happens. (Laughter.) Me. (Laughter.) And therefore, I'm the kind of fellow who likes to pick up the phone, and say, how we doing? How are we doing on implementing the strategy? I don't like the idea of calling 100 different agencies; I like to call one, and say, here is the strategy, and what are you doing about it? And if you're not doing something about it, I expect you to. And if you don't, I'm going to find somebody else that will do something about it. (Applause.)

We've got to have accountability. In order to get good results, it's important to hold people accountable, and align authority and responsibility. And so that's part of my thinking, is to take the functions and put them under one -- in one Cabinet agency. The idea, of course, is not to grow the size of government. I ran on, you know, making sure we didn't grow the size of government. The idea is to make government more effective and more efficient so we can do our job.

Within this Cabinet department, we're going to have four basic functions. One are borders. We've got to do a better job of protecting the borders of the United States. (Applause.) We need to know who's coming in and why they're not going out. (Laughter.) We need to know we need to know what they're here for and how long they say they're going to be here for. And that requires a management plan and focus and technology. And I'll be honest with you, we've got a long way to go to make sure that what they call the INS is working the way we want it to work. But we've got the strategy, we know what we need to do.

Secondly, we've got to support our first responders, the fire police and fire and emergency medical squads not only here in Kansas City, but all across the country. We need to help them with their strategy of responding if need be. (Applause.)

Thirdly, we've got to develop detection capability to be able to detect weapons of mass destruction -- chemical, nuclear, biological weapons -- and if they ever were to be used, figure out what to do about it. We've got to have a strategy to deal with bioterrorism, for example, here in America.

And finally, we must have the capacity to analyze all sources of intelligence so that we can imagine the worst and plan for it; so we can figure out how best to deal with the new threats that face America. And those are the four major categories.

And people say, well, can you give me some examples of why it's necessary. Well, I'll give you a couple. The Customs Department: Their job is to collect tariffs and to worry about people bringing things into our country, and yet they work for the Treasury Department. Well, the Treasury Department's job is to worry about fiscal matters, not the security of the homeland.

Or how about the Coast Guard? The Coast Guard can do a good job of patrolling our borders, and they do. The Coast Guard is a fine outfit. But guess who they report to? The Transportation Department. The Transportation Department is worried about highways and airplanes and railroads. And so I want to make sure that we had a strategy that works and a focus that is intense.

It's important to have these agencies that have got responsibility to defend our homeland under one leader, under one department. In other words, we've aligned functions, and that, in itself, will help change cultures within agencies. And that's an important aspect of making sure we defend our homeland. We've got to make sure agencies that have not been focused on defending the homeland change the culture, so that they do a more

effective job of doing so.

And I'll give you one example of where things have changed in a positive direction -- the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the FBI. And we've been reading a lot about the FBI lately. And I appreciate those who come forward and make suggestions as to how to better protect the homeland. But I wasn't surprised that the FBI wasn't fully prepared for the war against terror, because, after all, the FBI's major job up until September the 11th was to make cases against people who committed crimes already in America -- white-collar crimes, spies. They really weren't focused on preventing attacks.

And so we needed to change the culture. The FBI man running it now, a guy named Robert Mueller, came on one week before September the 11th. That's when he started his job. He's had his hands full. (Laughter.) But he's a good man. He knows what to do. And he discovered that we needed to change the attitude, the focus, the culture within the FBI, so that it's major function now is to think about how best to prevent attack; is to chase down every lead, to run down every hint, to follow every possible -- every possible terrorist activity and find out what they're up to, so that we can keep America safe. And it's happening, it's happening.

Now, that's not to say they're still not going to have an important law enforcement function, they're not going to do what they used to do in the past. They are, of course. But the attitude in America has got to change, because we've got a new problem we're faced with. It's an enemy that -- who is very tough, and smart, and determined. They're not as tough and smart and determined as we are, however. (Applause.)

The other thing we are doing a better job of is having the CIA, which collects information overseas, coordinate with the FBI. That's part of how you restructure agencies in order to better protect America. It used to be they didn't talk very much. There was kind of a -- I guess a structural problem. You just need to know we've changed that. We've changed it.

It started, I guess, many ways with -- every morning I meet with George Tenet, who's the head of the CIA; and then after I named Bob Mueller, right after September 11th, he comes in every day, as well. There's nothing like having face-to-face discussions with agency heads, to determine how we're doing, and whether or not people are talking to each other. And they are, and they are. And that's important. It's important that we link up the two.

And this new capacity at the homeland -- Department of Homeland Security is going to be also important, where we'll have people whose job it is to analyze everything we see, and assess everything we here. And it's to make sure it's all in one area, so we can get a clearer picture of what may or may not be happening to America.

As well, it is important for us to trust the local folks, to do a better job at recognizing in Washington we don't have all the smarts, that we want to work with the mayors, people at the local level. We want to hear from the police and fire. We just came from one of the water treatment plants here in the area, and we're pleased to see how secure the plant is. Christie Todd was telling me how we're going to eventually have grant money for water treatment facilities all around the country, to encourage them to make sure that any -- there's a full assessment of the plant, to address any vulnerability that may exist. This one didn't appear very vulnerable, I want you to know. So I was looking (applause). I was pleased to take a big gulp of water when I arrived here. (Laughter and applause.)

But I want you to know we're making progress. We've got a good strategy, we do. It's going to be an interesting challenge to see if Congress responds.

I had a good meeting today with Speaker Hastert and Representative Gephardt from Missouri, as well as Senator Daschle and Senator Lott and all the leadership from both parties. And in our discussions, I made it clear to them that I don't view this as a political issue. I don't view it as a Republican issue or a Democrat issue. I think loving America is an American issue. (Applause.) It's important to elevate this debate way beyond political parties. And I was pleased with the meeting. I was pleased with the spirit of the meeting.

You know, sometimes there's a not-invented-here attitude in Washington. I don't care who gets the credit for putting this thing in. I just want it done right, and I want it done on behalf of the American people as quickly as possible. (Applause.)

It may seem kind of easy, but here's the problem. There's a lot of there's a hundred different agencies involved with homeland security. It means there's a lot of people in the Congress and in the Senate who have got jurisdiction over those agencies. In other words, that's what they call "turf." And people like to defend their turf. And so, all of a sudden, when you're saying, well, you know, Mr. Chairman, we're going to have to take this away from you and put it in a single agency, you don't get to fund it anymore, it kind of makes the chairman nervous.

So what I'd like I need the help of the American people to remind the turf fighters not to be nervous, because we're talking about doing what's right for America. (Applause.)

I believe we can get it done, I really do. But I want your help. Need to talk to the members and the senators. Just let them know that you appreciate you appreciate their efforts, their concerns about the homeland, but you hope that they will join the White House and work hard together to do what's right for the American people. I sincerely think this is right; otherwise I wouldn't have proposed it.

You know, I am an optimistic guy. I believe I believe this country I know this country is a fabulous country. But I believe we've got great days ahead of us. I believe that by being strong and tough that we can achieve peace. I believe that. I sincerely, honestly believe it. And not only do I believe we can bring peace for America, I believe we can bring peace to parts of the world that may not seem like there ever is going to be peace.

This country has got a great chance to lead the world toward a more peaceful tomorrow. I know they're watching us pretty carefully -- that is, the other leaders and other countries. If America blinks, they'll probably go to sleep. But we're not blinking. We're not blinking.

America understands that history has really called us to action. Out of the evil is going to come some good. And it's going to be peace. And out of the evil is going to come some good at home, too. I believe that, as well.

You know, people ask me, they say, what can I do to help, Mr. President? What can I do to be a part of this war on terror? And my answer is, if you want to fight evil, love your neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. (Applause.) If you want to do some good, mentor a child. Teach a child to read. (Applause.) Walk across the street and say to a shut-in, what can I do to help you? A simple act like that is all part of doing some good here in America.

And it's happening in this country. It really is. You know why? The great strength of America is the people. The great strength is the American people because not only are we tough, like I said, we're also a compassionate people. We care deeply about neighbors in need.

You see, out of the evil will not only come peace, but out of the evil, I believe that we have a chance to address hopelessness and despair, which exists in some neighborhoods in this great country. It just sure does. And we've got to do it. We've got to do it with better education systems; we've got to welcome faith-based programs into the compassionate delivery of welfare and help. Because, after all, faith-based programs exist because of a universal call to love your neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself.

We've got -- if you're interested in helping, we've got a program called the USA Freedom Corps. You can get right on the Internet and find out what's available. There's some fantastic ways to help. And you can become a soldier in the army of compassion.

We've got one such soldier today. Denny Barnett -- where are you, Denny? Denny is somewhere here. There he is. Denny, thank you for coming. (Applause.) Denny is -- was out at the airport to meet me, and I want to thank him for coming. He drew the short straw. He was going to be with Laura, in Salt Lake City, Utah. Instead he got stuck with me. (Laughter.) But Denny is -- works for the Partnership for Children. He has been a soul who has spent his life, his adult life, helping in his church, working with the Boy Scouts, works for Habitat for Humanity, is a soldier in the army of compassion. It doesn't require a government law or government edict to get Denny to work, he just followed his heart. And as a result, is part of making society a better place.

You see, one person can't do everything in America, but one person can do something. And our society, folks,

changes one heart and one soul and one conscience at a time. That's how we change America. (Applause.) And it's happening in this country. Out of the evil is coming good. Out of the evil, America is taking a good hard look at what's important. Moms and dads, taking an assessment of their -- of what's important in their life, and that is to love your children with all your heart and all your soul.

You know, we live in a fast-paced society, no question about it. But people are beginning to understand that a full life is one in which you serve something greater than yourself in life; that to have a full and complete life, you do more than just worry about yourself -- you help a neighbor in need. You do something to make a country you love stronger.

I guess that example came home most vividly when men and women on Flight 93 realized that their airplane was going to be used as a weapon, called their families, told them they loved them, said a prayer, said, "let's roll," and sacrificed themselves for something greater. (Applause.) What a great example. What a great example for others to see. All of us are sad it happened, but all of us can use the example of serving something greater than yourself to help fight this war against terror.

You know, there is no question in my mind that this great country is going to show the world what we're made out of. This great country will show the world that we fight for what we believe, as we seek justice. And this great country will show the world the true compassion and decency of a great nation.

Thanks for coming. May God bless. (Applause.)

END 3:20 P.M. CDT

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