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President Says Terrorists Won't Change American Way of Life

Remarks by the President in Photo Opportunity with Members of Congress
The Cabinet Room

4:48 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: It's been my honor to brief key members of the Senate and the House on our trip to the Far East. It was a very successful trip, in that we were able to have an honest dialogue about the need to fight terror.

And the 21 nations -- 20 other nations represented there agreed with our country, and they appreciate our determination to fight and win the war against terror. They understand that an attack on America could have been an attack on them. And the cooperation was very strong and very evident and I am most grateful.

And I am most grateful for the opportunity to share with the members of the House and the Senate this essential -- and I want to, first, thank Chairman Biden and Chairman Hyde and the other members here for standing solidly with the administration to formulate and conduct a foreign policy that's in the best interest of our country.

It is oftentimes said that when it comes to foreign policy, partisanship stops, and that's exactly what has happened here at this table. I've had a lot of discussions with both Chairmen up to now and I will continue having discussions with the leaders of the House and the Senate, because whether you're Republican or Democrat, we all want to win this war.

I'd be glad to answer a couple of questions.

Q Sir, is the White House under attack now? The latest anthrax case?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, there is no question that evildoers are continuing to try to harm America and Americans. Today, at a remote facility, we detected some anthrax. And just like at the Congress, our government is responding very quickly.

We're working hard to find out who is doing this and bring them to justice. We're also working to develop measures necessary to protect American citizens and postal workers. All of us around this table grieve when we hear the fact that a citizen has lost a life. Two postal workers passed away and our hearts are with their families, our prayers are with their loved ones. And the evil ones continue.

Q Is there any way, sir, that whatever contaminated that machine, whether it be a letter or a package, got into the West Wing? Or has all mail been cut off to prevent that from happening?

THE PRESIDENT: Ron, we're making sure that the West Wing, the White House is safe. Let me put it this way, I'm confident when I come to work tomorrow that I'll be safe.

Q Mr. President, have you or the Vice President been tested for anthrax? And what is your sense of this latest development, sir? For the most part, these attacks have been aimed at prominent people and prominent places. Is it your sense that the real purpose here is to sow fear and confusion in the American public?

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I don't have anthrax. It's hard for Americans to imagine how evil the people are who are doing this. We're having to adjust our thinking. We're a kind nation, we're a compassionate nation, we're a nation of strong values and we value life. And we're learning people in this world want to terrorize our country by trying to take life.

They won't succeed. This country is too strong to allow terrorists to affect the lives of our citizens. I understand people are concerned, and they should be. But they need to know our government is doing everything we possibly can to protect the lives of our citizens -- everything. We're waging an aggressive campaign overseas to bring al Qaeda to justice.

Today, I've -- in working with the Postmaster General -- got our OMB to allocate \$175 million for immediate relief, immediate safety at post offices around the country. This is what he requested, he thinks this is what is necessary to assure the post office employees that they will be as safe as possible. And we're going to spend that money.

Our health care workers are working around the clock to help people in need and I will tell you that I think not only are they doing a good job, I think they probably saved a lot of lives by their quick action. And I'm proud of how quickly and how hard they're working.

The object of terrorism is to try to force us to change our way of life, is to force us to retreat, is to force us to be what we're not. And that's -- they're going to fail. They're simply going to fail. I want to assure my fellow Americans that our determination -- I say "our," I'm talking about Republicans and Democrats here in Washington -- has never been stronger to succeed in bringing terrorists to justice, protecting our homeland. Because what we do today will affect our children and grandchildren. This is our calling. This is the time for us to act in a bold way, and we are doing just that.

Q Mr. President, are you now operating on the assumption that the September 11th attacks and the anthrax attacks, anthrax letters, are linked? And if I may shift gears for a second and ask about your meeting with Foreign Minister Peres. Would an Israeli failure to withdraw from the Palestinian areas make it harder to keep Arab states in the international anti-terrorism --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I told Shimon Peres that, first of all, our country and the people of our country are saddened by the fact that a Cabinet Minister was assassinated. It's just unacceptable behavior. I also told him that we continue to call upon Chairman Arafat to do everything he can to bring the killer to justice. It's very important that he arrest the person who did this, or those who did this act, and continue to arrest those who would disrupt and harm Israeli citizens. He must -- he must show the resolve necessary to bring peace to the region.

And, finally, I did express our concern about troops in Palestinian territory, and I would hope the Israelis would move their troops as quickly as possible.

Q Did you get any satisfaction?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, he's a very thoughtful man. He's a friend, a friend of America's, and I listened very carefully.

Your first question was?

Q The link between September 11th and --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we don't have any hard evidence. But there's no question that anybody who would mail anthrax with the attempt to harm American citizens is a terrorist. And there's no question that al Qaeda is a terrorist organization. So it wouldn't put it past me that there -- you know, it wouldn't surprise me that they're involved with it. But I have no direct evidence.

I do know that this country is strong enough to endure, to endure the evil ones. And we're making great progress on the ground in Afghanistan, and we'll bring the al Qaeda to justice and we'll -- we're doing everything we can to find out who mailed these letters.

Stretch.

Q Mr. President, have you been tested for anthrax?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have anthrax.

Q So you've been tested, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't have it.

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