President Celebrates Independence Day
West Virginia State Capitol Grounds
Charleston, West Virginia

12:57 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. They got the best seat in the house. (Laughter.) Glad you all are here. Thanks for coming. Happy 4th of July. (Applause.) I am thrilled to be back in your great state to celebrate once again Independence Day -- (applause) -- this time in the capital of the Mountain State, the great city of Charleston, West Virginia. (Applause.) I appreciate the good people of this state. You work hard, you look after your neighbors, and you love your country. (Applause.) And you sure know how to make a President feel welcome. Thank you all. (Applause.)

West Virginia is an important state to our nation in many ways, in many ways. You're one of the most beautiful places to visit in America. (Applause.) People ought to come here and see the beauty of West Virginia, to see the Almighty's work. (Applause.) There are hardworking people here making the factories hum and the farms producing products we need. Listen, this country is better off because of the coal found here in West Virginia. (Applause.)

Presidents have been coming to this state for a long time. I did a little research. It turns out that a lot of the land owned around Charleston was owned by George Washington. I call him George W. (Laughter and applause.) And today we remember names like Washington, Adams, Jefferson, and Franklin. We honor their courage and we honor their vision on the 4th of July. We're thankful that this nation they created 228 years ago remains free and independent and the best hope for all mankind. (Applause.)

Today is the day we gather with our friends and family and give thanks to the United States of America;
give thanks to the fact that we are citizens in a free land. (Applause.) I give thanks to Shelley Moore Capito for serving the people of West Virginia so well in the United States Congress. (Applause.)

I was greeted by your Mayor today -- I'm honored the Mayor, Mayor Danny Jones took time to say hello. Mr. Mayor, thanks for having me here, and thanks for serving your community. (Applause.) I know, you want me to tell him to fill the potholes. (Laughter.) I appreciate the President of the Charleston City Council, Councilman Tom Lane for being here, as well. Thank you, Councilman. All those who work hard for the people of Charleston. (Applause.)

We've got a lot of state and local officials. I'm honored you all are here. Thanks for inviting me to this beautiful capitol. I appreciate the planning committee for this independence weekend celebration. You know, it takes a lot of effort to put one of these deals together, and a lot of people have been working hard to do so, starting with Spike Maynard, who is the co-chairman and the Chief Justice of the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. (Applause.) I told the judge I liked being in the presence with somebody who doesn't try to re-write the Constitution. (Applause.)

I appreciate Mr. Sam Hindman, who is the retired publisher of your newspaper. He's a leader in your community. He's been a community leader for a long time. Thanks, Sam, for your hospitality. I want to thank my friend, Bill Raney, President of the West Virginia Coal Association, for being here, as well. (Applause.)

I appreciate the U.S. Air Force Ceremonial Brass Band for entertaining you. I want to thank the West Virginia Air National Guard and the 130th Airlift Wing Honor Guard for being here today, as well. (Applause.) You've got a proud tradition here in West Virginia, and that is, you've got a fantastic Guard. You've got people -- (applause.) I appreciate you, General. And I appreciate the men and women who wear the uniform of the West Virginia Guard. I want to thank their families, their loved ones, for the sacrifice and dedication the Guard members have showed the United States of America. (Applause.)

There's still West Virginians overseas. We ask for God's blessings on their safety today. The day we celebrate our freedom, we thank them for guaranteeing the freedom of the United States. (Applause.)

And highly decorated Four Star General, Doc Foglesong, is with us today. General, thanks for being here. He's a son of West Virginia. (Applause.)

I want to thank all the singers and Scouts. By the way, if you're a Boy Scout or Girl Scout leader, thanks for doing what you're doing. (Applause.) Thanks for -- thanks for taking time out of your life to instill values in our children. (Applause.) Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedules to teach character to the future of our country. (Applause.)

You know, I oftentimes talk about the strength of America is the hearts and souls of our citizens. Listen, one of our strengths is our military will keep us strong. One of our strengths is that we're a great economic power -- will keep us strong. But the true strength lies in the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens, people who have heard the universal call to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself, people who understand -- (applause) -- people who understand that America can be a hopeful place if somebody who hurts is surrounded by somebody who says, I love you, what can I do to help you; how can I help make your life a better place. People who step up and not only teach character to
our young, but feed the hungry, provide shelter for the homeless, take care of the elderly. No, the
strength of this country, make no mistake about it, the strength of this country lies in the hearts and souls
of millions of loving American citizens. (Applause.)

I want to thank Aaron Tippin for being here. I like a good
country-western singer. He's a good one. (Applause.) I
appreciate Barnabus, the group that performed the National
Anthem. Thank you all for taking time on your -- on the 4th of
July to entertain these good folks.

Finally, I was to head to Pastor Thornton's church, the Bible
Center Church here in West Virginia. (Applause.) Pastor Shawn
Thornton and his family came in the capitol to meet me, and I
was grateful, but I assured him that I was looking forward to his
sermon. That's not the reason I missed it. I missed it because the
plane broke down. (Laughter.) But, Pastor, thank you and your
congregation for rolling out the red carpet for what would have
been a presidential visit to your fine church. But more
importantly, Pastor Thornton, thank you for ministering to those
who hurt. One of the great things about this particular church is
that the outreach program, into the lives of those who suffer, into
the lives of those who wonder if there's hope, is strong and
vibrant and real.

I want you to know that on the 4th, we are proud of our founders, but I know that the founders would be
proud of America today. (Applause.) They would take a look at this great country and see a place where
opportunity is common, where all stand equal before the law, where all can hope for a better life. They'd
see a country full of promise and hope, that's what they would see. They would see a nation that is the
world's foremost champion of liberty. They would see a nation which stands strong in the face of violent
men. They would see a reliable friend of any dissident or political prisoner who dreams of justice. That's
what they would see in the great land they created. They would see Americans -- (applause) -- they
would see Americans who care for a neighbor in need and are generous -- and sick -- to those who
struggle here at home and to those who look for hope around the world. They would see a strong,
decent, good-hearted country, and they would see millions of people proud to say, America is my home.
(Applause.) And they would see an America on Independence Day, 2004, that is moving forward with
confidence and strength.

Listen, we’ve been through some tough times in this country. Everybody knows that. We’ve been tested.
But this nation has responded as we always do, with courage, determination, and optimism. Our
economy is healthy and growing, and that’s good news, because more people are finding work every
single day. That’s what we want. (Applause.) We’re all working on our public school system. We want
to raise the standards, so every child can learn to read and write and add and subtract. (Applause.) No,
our forefathers would see a nation of strong values -- faith in God, love of our families. (Applause.)
They would not only find those values strong all across the country, they’d find them very strong in the
state of West Virginia. (Applause.)

I’m thankful you invited me here, especially because you’re
paying special tribute to the men and women who have served
our nation in uniform. I want to thank you for that. America has
always been able to count on the might of our military and on
the character and the courage of those who serve. (Applause.)
We've got a lot of veterans here. I want to thank the veterans for setting such a good example, for setting such a good example for those who have followed you. We're proud of your service; we're grateful for the example you have set for America. (Applause.)

On July the 4th, 1942, in the midst of the second world war, President Franklin Roosevelt gave encouragement to our troops abroad by reminding them of our nation's founding creed. They were fighting, he said, because Americans believe in "the right to liberty under God." (Applause.) The President said, "for all peoples and races and groups and nations everywhere in the world." Today, a new generation of Americans is wearing the uniform. They are serving the same creed. They are showing the same courage, and they make us proud every single day. (Applause.)

The war on terror has placed demands on our military. In Afghanistan and Iraq and elsewhere, our people in uniform have been unrelenting in their performance of duty. They've been skillful and courageous. They've accepted hard missions, long deployments, and the difficulties of being separated from their homes and their families. Some have returned home wounded. Some have died. Each is mourned and missed. And each one will be honored by our country forever. (Applause.)

As in other times, Americans are serving and sacrificing to keep this country safe and to bring freedom to others. After the attacks of September the 11th, 2001, this nation resolved to fight terrorists where they dwell. We resolved to disarm the terrorist enemy. Afghanistan, at the time, as you remember, was a terror state, a training camp for al Qaeda killers. Because we acted, Afghanistan today is a rising democracy and an ally in the war on terror. (Applause.)

Iraq, only last year, was under the control of a dictator who threatened the civilized world, who used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. He tormented and tortured the people of Iraq. Because we acted, Iraq today is a free and sovereign nation. (Applause.) And because we acted, the dictator, the brutal tyrant is sitting in a prison cell, and he will receive the justice he denied so many for so long. (Applause.)

We got a job to do. We have got a job to do, and that is to protect our country. And I've called on good men and women to do so. I'm honored that you're thanking the men and women of uniform today in Charleston, West Virginia.

Our immediate task in battlefronts like Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere is to capture or kill the terrorists. That's our immediate task. We made a decision, you see: We will engage these enemies in these countries and around the world so we do not have to face them here at home. (Applause.)

You can't talk sense to them. You can't negotiate with them. You cannot hope for the best with these people. We must be relentless and determined and do our duty. (Applause.)

There's no such thing as perfect security in a country as big as ours. And the threats to our homeland are very real. We know the terrorists want to strike the United States again. They do because they want to disrupt our way of life. They want to spread fear. So we've done a lot of things to help, and there's some folks here who are working hard on your behalf. See, we reorganized the government to make sure there's better communication between the federal government and the state government and the local governments. And on behalf of a grateful people, I want to say thanks to the firefighters and the police and the emergency teams of Charleston, West Virginia. (Applause.)

There's a lot of people in this country working hard to make sure this homeland of ours is as secure as it can possibly be without disrupting the freedoms of our fellow citizens. They're working hard, and I am
grateful, I am grateful for the hard work they are doing. Yet in the long-term, our security and safety requires more than defending the homeland and defeating the terrorists abroad. We must work to remove the conditions that give rise to terror in parts of the world like the Middle East -- the poverty, the hopelessness and the resentments that the terrorists exploit. Life in the Middle East will be a far more hopeful and, therefore, a more peaceful place when men and women can enjoy the benefits of a free society; when men and women can elect their own leaders; when the people can decide their own futures. (Applause.)

On this 4th of July, we confirm our love of freedom, the freedom for people to speak their minds, the freedom for people to worship as they so choose. (Applause.) Free thought, free expression, that's what we believe. But we also understand that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world. (Applause.) And by serving that ideal, by never forgetting the values and the principles that have made this country so strong after 228 years after our founding, we will bring hope to others and, at the same time, make America more secure. (Applause.)

Because we've taken the fight to the enemy, because we've been strong and determined to do our duty to protect America, and because freedom is rising in places they claim as their own, the terrorists are desperate, and they are furious. They're running out of places to hide. They know their cause is failing. They know that time is against them, and their only chance is to shake the resolve of Iraqis, Americans, anybody else who loves freedom. And that's why their actions have grown more cruel and sadistic. (Applause.)

They cover their faces in videos, in the videos of their crimes. But those hoods cannot hide the face of evil. (Applause.) We've seen their kind before, in overseas death camps and gulags. And as before, America will persevere. We will fear no evil and we will prevail. (Applause.)

The conditions for successes are now coming together. Afghanistan and Iraq now have responsible leaders. President Karzai of Afghanistan is a good, honest man who wants his people to be free. Prime Minister Allawi of Iraq -- he's a good, honest, courageous man, who will stand square in the face of these terrorists trying to stop the march of freedom. We've got an ally in these two leaders, because they understand what we know: Free men and women will be peaceful men and women. Free men and women will be able to realize their deep desires. Listen, moms and dads in Iraq want to be able to raise their children in a society where their children can have a bright future, just like the moms and dads in America do. (Applause.)

These leaders have said, we want your help, and America has responded. And nations of the world have rallied to them, as well. The NATO Alliance and the E.U. and the United Nations are all standing behind the newly-liberated people of Afghanistan and Iraq. And these good people are taking on more of their own responsibility. Listen, they understand their future depends on their ability to deal with the thugs and criminals and foreign terrorists. And so we're helping them train, to do their duty, to do their civic responsibility in a free society.

But what's important for those people is that they can count on America. We have promised to help deliver them from tyranny, to restore their sovereignty, and to set them on the path to democracy. And when America gives its word, America keeps its word. (Applause.)

There was a time not so long ago when America was a young democracy. When the Declaration was signed, not many in this world would have bet on the success of the American cause. We were a little group of colonies on the edge of a continent. Our small and hungry band of soldiers was against the army of a great empire. Many in that empire considered July the 4th, 1776 to be just another day on the
calendar. Yet, America's founders knew that something very important had happened that day, something new and hopeful in the course of human events.

They called the American experiment a "new order of the ages." The time has confirmed their belief. The colonies became a country. The people of America crossed a continent, and the ideals that created America have crossed the globe.

This history we celebrate today is a testament to the power of freedom to lift up a whole nation. And we still believe, on America's 228th birthday, that freedom has the power to change the world.

May God bless you. And may God bless America. Thank you all. (Applause.)

END 1:21 P.M. EDT