

You know, there were some—some of the things that are happening in Washington, I expected. And there was one thing that happened was not expected. It's been a heck of a year. [*Laughter*] I will tell you, before I get into the expected and unexpected, I believe 2002 is going to be a fabulous year for America.

I remember meeting with business leaders in Austin, Texas—this is before I began heading north to become sworn in as your President—and there was deep concern about the economy then. A year ago December, people were saying, “This economy is soft, and we're going to be in for a rough ride.” It was not unexpected to see the economic slowdown. And I want to share some thoughts with you about how we can reverse the trend—although I'm optimistic about our economy. There are some numbers coming out that appear that things are getting a little better: The unemployment rate is 5.8 percent. But if you're unemployed, it's 100 percent, and I'm worried about that.

The unexpected, obviously, was September the 11th, when evil people decided to attack America. I say “evil people” because I don't view this as a religious war. I view this as a struggle of good versus evil. And make no mistake about it, good will prevail.

We are making steady progress in the first theater on the war against terror. We have made it clear to people that we weren't going to allow the injustice done to America to stand, and that if anybody harbored these people or fed them or clothed them or tried to provide them help, they were just as guilty as the terrorists were.

These people are like parasites, and they find a host. And for those of you who ranch, you understand what a parasite can do to the host cow, for example; too many parasites weaken the host. What happened was, was that they became parasites in Afghanistan. But we weakened the host; the Taliban no longer is in power.

And as a result, this great nation should be proud of the fact that we led a coalition that liberated women and children, a coalition that brought down a government that was so incredibly repressive it's hard for those of us who live in America to understand. Some of my finest memories thus far of this war against terror was the joy that came on people's faces when they realized that the Taliban would no longer hold them hostage to an outdated, outmoded, dictatorial point of view.

I am so proud of our country. I'm proud of the fact that at the same time that we waged a war against Al Qaida and the Taliban, we fed the people. I read an important headline the other day that—it said it looked like we avoided a terrible disaster by providing food for thousands of people in Afghanistan. While we dropped bombs, we also dropped food and medicine and clothing to make sure that the innocents in Afghanistan could survive the brutal winter in that part of the world. We're a great nation.

We're making steady progress, and I use the word “steady” because sometimes it seems like there is a certain impatience in the airwaves. But I don't believe there's an impatience amongst the American people. As a matter of fact, I think the American people are very patient. They understand this is a difficult assignment, and they understand, like I do, that we've got to be patient in order to be successful.

But we've accomplished a lot in 90 days. That's not a very long period of time. It's been a long period of time for Al Qaida—[*laughter*]*—*but it hasn't been a very long period of time for us.

The reason we've had—we've got a good strategy, and we've got a great military. For those of you who serve in our military or for those of you whose sons or daughters or relatives serve in the military, thank you.

But I do want to remind our fellow citizens that we're now in a dangerous phase of this war in Afghanistan, because those who are willing to send young people to