



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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Remarks by the President After Meeting with Members of the Congressional Conference Committee on Energy Legislation

The Cabinet Room

4:48 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: I want to thank members from both political parties for coming down here today to discuss the energy bill that's in conference. I really do appreciate the commitment of all the parties here at the table to work together to get an energy bill on behalf of the American people; a comprehensive energy plan that will address supply and conservation, help us modernize our electricity grid.

President George W. Bush meets with members of the Congressional Conference Committee on Energy Legislation in the Cabinet Room Wednesday, Sept. 17, 2003. White House photo by Tina Hager It's a compelling issue, and there was a good spirit here. Obviously, there's not 100-percent agreement, but there is agreement that we need to get something done. And I want to thank the members. I want to thank the Chairman and the ranking members for taking time to come.

And I'm pleased with the commitment by Senator Domenici and Congressman Tauzin to see if they can't get a bill down here by mid-October -- I believe is what he told me -- Billy -- and to my desk. And we look forward to working with them. I think the American people are -- know we need to have a national energy policy. And it's a chance to get it done, into law.

So thanks for coming. I'll answer a couple of questions. Terry, do you want to start?

Q Mr. President, how is the administration recasting the proposed U.N. resolution on Iraq to meet the objections of some countries?

THE PRESIDENT: We're still talking about it, Terry. I mean, we are -- had some discussions this morning on it. The key is to make sure that the political situation in Iraq evolves in a way that will lead to a free and -- a free society. The Iraqis need to develop a constitution and then have free elections. Then we can -- and then we deal with the sovereignty issue. And so, therefore, we're talking amongst ourselves.

King.

Q Mr. President, Dr. Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld both said yesterday that they have seen no evidence that Iraq had anything to do with September 11th. Yet, on Meet the Press, Sunday, the Vice President said Iraq was a geographic base for the terrorists and he also said, I don't know, or we don't know, when asked if there was any involvement. Your critics say that this is some effort -- deliberate effort to blur the line and confuse people. How would you answer that?

THE PRESIDENT: We've had no evidence that Saddam Hussein was involved with the September 11th. What the Vice President said was, is that he has been involved with al Qaeda. And al Zarqawi, al Qaeda operative, was in Baghdad. He's the guy that ordered the killing of a U.S. diplomat. He's a man who is still running loose, involved with the poisons network, involved with Ansar al-Islam. There's no question that Saddam Hussein had al Qaeda ties.

Karen, Reuters.

Q Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDENT: Step forth and speak.

Q I know that the ANWR drilling provision is very important to you, but are you willing to sacrifice it to get a broader bill?

THE PRESIDENT: One thing I've learned, Karen, is not to negotiate with myself, particularly in front of cameras. The conferees will work as hard as they can to come up with a good bill that can pass both bodies. And we look forward to working with them. I think it's very important for our country to recognize that we need to become less dependent on foreign sources of crude, and, therefore, find ways to do that. We had a good discussion. That's certainly a contentious issue, and you'll find strong opinions around the table about this. The job of the conferees is to work through these issues, and we look forward to helping them.

Yes, final question.

Q Mr. President, how do you respond --

THE PRESIDENT: Identify yourself, please.

Q Pam Fessler, NPR.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, Pam, of course -- how do I respond?

Q How do you respond to criticism that you are asking for \$20 billion in aid to reconstruct Iraq at a time when a lot of domestic work, such as the No Child Left Behind and the Help America Vote Act are not being fully funded?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I will start by responding this way: The No Child Left Behind funding is the largest increase in elementary and secondary school funding in a long time. And the Title I part of the Elementary and Secondary School Act funding is a large increase, as well -- historic increases.

Secondly, that it is vital that we succeed in Iraq, that a free Iraq will make America more secure. A free Iraq will change the dynamics of the Middle East, which will be important for peace. And I appreciate the support of Congress and the understanding of Congress that we will succeed in Iraq. And so the \$20 billion is to help rehabilitate that country, so that the people of that country can live a free and hopeful life.

Listen, thank you all for coming.

END 4:55 P.M. EDT