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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

March 23, 1991

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
AT GRIDIRON DINNER

The Capitol Hilton  
Washington, D.C.

7:08 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. Mr. Vice President and members of the Cabinet; members of the congressional leadership; diplomatic corps; special guests. And on this special Gridiron evening, may I single out the members of the Joint Chiefs and the other members of the military that are with us tonight. May I also single out Messrs. Baker and Strauss. (Laughter.) After sitting through their parts in the program, I'll say this: If I'd had a white flag, I'd have waved it. (Laughter.) No, I thought they had some very good material. The ground war only took 100 hours. (Laughter.)

I'm very happy to see Kuwait's Ambassador here -- al-Sabah, the Ambassador from Kuwait. I understand that during his recent travels with Jim Baker, Jim tried out some of tonight's jokes on him. And after hearing them, the Ambassador said, "Don't you think we've suffered enough?" (Laughter.) No, but Jim put it well. We have been friends. And I have total confidence in him. Remember 1980? He's the guy who told me in New Hampshire, "Don't worry, let the guy from California pay for the mike." (Laughter and applause.)

And I understand Eppie Lederer is with us tonight over here at table 12. We all know her as Ann Landers. Apparently, Bob Strauss wrote to her recently, and she asked me to read her response: "Dear Washington Wheeler-Dealer," it says -- (laughter) -- "Yes, take the money from both sides." (Laughter and applause.)

But this has been a very special evening, with emphasis understandably on the Gulf. And it's great to have so many members of the press back from the Gulf in time for this Gridiron. I know many of the reporters out there were roughing it lately. Sam Donaldson, though, said it wasn't so bad staying at the Sheraton Riyadh. In fact, he said the towels were so fluffy that he could barely get his suitcase shut. (Laughter.)

Some air war, wasn't it? I've just learned the three words every Iraqi pilot dreaded the most: Cleared for takeoff. (Laughter.)

What a crowd. I haven't gotten so many laughs since my last speech on domestic policy. (Laughter.) Thank you.

Now the attention is turned back to the homefront. Maybe Wolf Blitzer can go back to his real name. (Laughter.)

I'm glad that politics '92 didn't rear its ugly head too much tonight. Well, it did a little bit. And I understand that there is speculation already about the '92 race. In fact, just the other day, Jim Palmer sent a telegram to George McGovern. It read: "Heard you were considering a comeback. Stop." (Laughter.)

No, but it has been a special evening. I notice that Bernie Shaw was sitting at the table instead of under it. (Laughter and Applause.)

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All kidding aside, though, really it has been, I think, the most enjoyable Gridiron in many many years. Barbara and I enjoy ourselves always. I must say that, with all respect to the two skits and to Ambassador Strauss and to Secretary Baker, I think that the most moving part, the most wonderful part of the evening, was the tribute to the troops. And there was as special line in it, you may have heard in the beginning: "Through the fog of distant war shines the strength of their devotion." And as I've said before, our soldiers and our sailors and our airmen and our Marines and our Coast Guardmen embodied the ideals of honor and bravery and duty and country and were willing to sacrifice for the sake of those simple words. And they liberated a nation abroad and helped transform a nation at home.

So once again, Budge, my congratulations to you, sir. Thank you for a very special, enjoyable Gridiron evening. And may God bless the families of all those soldiers that we lost in action.

Thank you all very, very much. (Applause.)

END

7:20 P.M. EST