

Remarks at the Chicago Mercantile Exchange in Chicago

March 6, 2001

Well, thank you all. Thank you very much. Scott, thank you very much. I thought I had seen just about everything in life, until I came here. [Laughter] It is an honor to be in entrepreneurial heaven. What an exciting place. Thanks for having me. I appreciate the hospitality, and I appreciate you giving me a chance to come and talk a little tax policy with you.

I've had quite a day here in Chicago. I got a Chicago political lesson for lunch. [Laughter] I dined with the mayor. It's the second political lesson I've had in recent weeks. [Laughter] The first lesson I got was in early November—[laughter]—if you know what I mean. [Laughter] I told the people of Illinois every time I came here, I said, "I wish the mayor were on my side, because he's good." But more importantly, he's a really good mayor. He's a good mayor of a big city. We've had our time for politics; now it's time to do what's right for our country and for the cities.

The mayor and I share something in common. We're both problem solvers. We try to have a clear-eyed view and a commonsense approach to solving problems. And so we're going to have a good relationship. And I'm so honored the mayor was gracious in dining with me.

I'm also honored to be here with the Speaker of the House—just happens to be from the State of Illinois. I like to describe the Speaker as a trustworthy man. He's the kind of fellow who says when he gives you his word, he means it. Sometimes that doesn't happen all the time in the political process. Sometimes they'll look you in the eye and not mean it. [Laughter] The Speaker means it when he tells you something. I look forward to working with you, Mr. Speaker.

I'm honored to be traveling with your United States Senator Fitzgerald. We flew down on Air Force One today. He's a good young leader. Congressman Lipinski is with us. We're going to fly back from here to Washington. He and I will have a little quality time together. [Laughter] I'm looking forward to it, because he's a quality person. I

appreciate the Lieutenant Governor coming, as well, and thank you very much for your hospitality.

There's a lot of people here reminding me that they're from Texas, and I appreciate my fellow Texans who are here—a lot of Chicago folks thanking me for the Sammy Sosa trade. [Laughter] I'm reminded about the truth when I come to a place like this—the entrepreneurial spirit is what America is all about. That's what this country is about.

The job of Government is not to try to create wealth. That's not the role of our Government. The role of Government is to create an environment in which the entrepreneur can realize his or her dreams, which the small business person can start a company and make it grow. So my job is not only to deal with problems; my job is to understand the philosophy that has made the country great—and never forget it, never forget it—and that is that we're going to have dreamers in America.

We're facing a problem, and the problem is our economy's slowing down. You all know that as well as anybody does. This kind of great boom is beginning to sputter a little bit. And the question you need to be asking the President is, "What do you intend to do about it, Mr. President?" And here it is.

One, have sound budgeting in the Federal Government. It's to say to the spenders in Washington, DC, "Here are the priorities for our country." A priority is educating children. And let me—as an aside, as I continue to praise the mayor—he has done a good job of setting high standards, strong accountability in the schools of Chicago. So a priority of mine is public education. I believe every child—every child—ought to be educated and not one child left behind.

A priority is to make sure we keep the peace by having a strong military. We need to pay the men and women who wear the uniform more money, to keep morale high. A priority is Social Security, to make sure the moms and dads of the World War II generation get the promises made. But it's also to be bold enough to reform the system, to let younger workers take some of your own payroll taxes and manage it for your own account. That's a priority of mine. Medicare and health care is a priority. And we double

the Medicare budget over 10 years. We pay down \$2 trillion of debt. But guess what? There's still money left over. If you don't spend like they spent the last couple of years, if you're wise and set priorities, there's still money. And the fundamental question is, do we grow the Government, or do we trust people with their own money? That's the fundamental question facing the United States Congress.

I had the honor of speaking to the Congress. I reminded them that when the Government has a surplus, somebody is getting overcharged. And I'm here asking for a refund, I said. I want to reduce those taxes.

I think it is particularly appropriate to not only cut taxes to make sure there's fiscal discipline in Washington, but it's necessary to make sure this economy doesn't continue to sputter. When you give people some of their own money back, or don't take it in the first place, they will have money in their pockets to spend.

There's some debt, all right, at the national level, and there's plenty of debt on the consumers of America. I bet you've got friends, and maybe yourself, understand what it means to have credit card debt. And when you couple that with high energy bills, there are some people beginning to feel pinched.

It makes sense to take some of your money and pass it back to the people who pay the bills. And that's exactly what my tax relief plan does. It drops all rates. It dropped all rates on all payers. Sometimes in Washington, you hear the talk, we'll have targeted tax cuts. That means the elected officials get to decide who's targeted in and who's targeted out. That's not fair, and that's not the right way to do it. If you're going to have tax relief, everybody who pays taxes ought to get tax relief.

So we drop all the rates and simplify the code. We drop the bottom rate from 15 percent to 10 percent and increase the child credit from \$500 to \$1,000 to make the code more fair. The Tax Code's unfair for people at the bottom end of the economic ladder. The harder you struggle, the more—higher marginal rate you pay in America, and that's not right. So we make the code more fair.

But we also drop that top rate, from 39.6 to 33 percent. And we do so for this reason:

Much of the capital that accumulates in the private sector ends up being managed by small-business owners. Small business is the backbone of the country. Many of you all are small-business owners. Ninety-five percent of small-business owners pay the highest marginal rate in our Tax Code. They're unincorporated businesses. They're what we call sole proprietors.

When we cut that top rate from 39.6 percent to 33 percent, we're saying a loud and clear message that the entrepreneurial spirit will be reinvigorated as we head into the 21st century. It's a way to pass capital formation in the small-business sector in America. And it's the right thing to do.

It's the right thing to set priorities. It's the right thing to pay down \$2 trillion of debt over 10 years, and it is the right thing not to grow the Federal Government bigger than it needs to be, and trust people with your own money. I like to tell people in Washington, the surplus isn't the Government's money; the surplus is the people's money, and we need to share it with the people.

I like to move around the country. I like to get out of Washington, because you see a lot of interesting things and you hear a lot of wisdom from people who are just average, everyday people. And I want to tell you what a grandmother told the other day, in Council Bluffs, Iowa. She said, "I have a lot of children and grandchildren go through my house." She said, "and I know if there are cookies left on the table, they will be eaten." She said that in the context of your taxpayers—of tax dollars. That's what she was talking about. And her point is this: If we leave the money up in Washington and don't send it back to the people, it's, sure enough, going to be spent.

Now is the time—now is the time for meaningful, real tax relief. And as we're changing the Tax Code, by the way, we need to eliminate the death tax, too. We need to allow it so that you don't get taxed twice for your assets. And we need to do something about the marriage penalty. It doesn't make sense to tax marriage. And so I'm here to ask for your help.

See, I believe in the power of the people. I truly do. I do. I believe that when you e-mail a Congressman or a Senator, it makes

a difference. It makes a difference. And so that's why I'm traveling the country, and that's why I came here. I'd like for you to contact your Congressman and contact your Senator and tell them to come on the side of the people, when it comes to what to do with your money. We have a fundamental choice, and the right choice is to stand on the side of the people.

And let me conclude by telling you, the tax policy's important, and there will be a lot of tax policy. And of course, good health policy's important, and keeping the peace is important. But there's nothing more important than remembering that the most important job you'll ever have, if you happen to be a mom or a dad, is to love your children with all your heart and all your soul.

I was reminded of that when I walked through and saw the pictures that many of the entrepreneurs here in the Merc had of their children—it's such a refreshing sight to know that priorities are kept all across America.

This is a fabulous nation we live in. It's a nation based upon great values. It's a nation based upon the principle that if you work hard, anybody, regardless of where you're from, can get ahead. But it's going to be made better when all of us understand that there are certain responsibilities in life. I have a responsibility as your President. And when I put my hand on the Bible, I swore to uphold that responsibility, and I will. And you have the responsibility to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. But it all starts with loving your children.

Thank you for letting me come by. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:27 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Scott Gordon, chairman, Chicago Mercantile Exchange; Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL; and Lt. Gov. Corinne Wood of Illinois.

Message on the Observance of Eid al-Adha

March 6, 2001

Warm greetings to Muslims across the United States as you celebrate the Eid al-Adha holiday and join in spirit with the mil-

lions gathered in Mecca to uphold the traditions of one of your most sacred feasts.

America was built on a strong spiritual foundation, and the celebration of faith is central to our lives. As you celebrate the annual Hajj, the fifth pillar of Islam, you honor the great sacrifice and devotion of Abraham as recognized by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By educating others about your religious traditions, you enrich the lives of others in your local communities.

The variety of nations and cultures represented by those who travel to Mecca each year, and the varied ways in which Muslims contribute to American life across the United States, are powerful reminders that ethnic and racial differences need not divide us when we share common values and purposes. By building strong foundations of mutual respect, we can achieve peace and reconciliation in our world.

Laura joins me in sending best wishes for a joyous holiday celebration.

George W. Bush

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Cyprus

March 6, 2001

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Chairman:)

In accordance with Public Law 95-384 (22 U.S.C. 2373(c)), I submit to you this report on progress toward a negotiated settlement of the Cyprus question covering the period December 1, 2000–January 31, 2001. The previous submission covered events during October and November 2000.

The United Nations continued in its efforts to sustain the proximity talks that started in December 1999. The United States remains committed to the United Nations effort to find a just and lasting settlement to the Cyprus problem.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Jesse Helms, chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.