Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at the American Society of Newspaper Editors Convention

April 5, 2001

The President. My fellow Texan—[*laughter*]—by way of other States. [*Laughter*] It's good to see you again, Rich; thank you. I've had a great relationship with Rich in Austin, Texas. He occasionally opined in ways I didn't care for, but I always knew he was honest and open. He had his priorities straight: his country and his family. It's good to see members of his family here. I see you lowered your standards by inviting others from the Austin-American Statesman here to Washington today—[*laughter*]—particularly Herman. [*Laughter*]

At any rate, it's my honor to be here. It turns out every President since Warren Harding has spoken to this group. I found that interesting. Harding came here because he was a newspaperman himself. The rest of us just wanted to pander. [*Laughter*]

Of course, with a lot of attention you get as the President, you often occasionally get criticism, and I understand that. You know, I admit, I take it pretty well; after all, I was in baseball. But I wish some of the stories had come out differently.

And so, in the spirit of constructive criticism, I thought I'd make some suggestions to you as to some of the headlines I'd like to see in the future: "Cheney Cloned"—[*laughter*]—"President Has Nothing To Do at All Now." [*Laughter*] "2 Million Overlooked Ballots Suggest Bush Won California." [*Laughter*] "Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga Stumped By Name of U.S. President." [*Laughter*] "Gephardt Says Bush Tax Plan 'Just Makes Sense'." [*Laughter*] And finally: "Sammy Sosa Returns to the Rangers"—[*laughter*]—"Says: 'I Want To Go Home'." [*Laughter*]

But I'm really not here to tell you your business. It's your job to tell everyone how to run theirs—[*laughter*]—and you do a pretty good job at it. Few American figures are more legendary than the hard-bitten but idealistic news editor. And I'm aware of that. After all, I've sat through what seems like hundreds of editorial boards. But I think of people like Benjamin Franklin or Horace Greeley or Meg Greenfield, who we all dearly miss.

As you know, we've had a serious of votes recently on a proposed budget. And that's what I'd like to talk about today. Sometimes the Washington filter makes it hard for me to get my message directly to people. And since I view you as people—[*laughter*]—I'd like to go directly to you.

The House passed a budget last week. Tomorrow we'll hear the final say on the Senate budget. The House and I agree: We need commonsense policies to safeguard Social Security and accelerate economic growth. And I hope the Senate joins us.

I've written a budget based upon my vision of an active and responsible Government. Now, I recognize Government has got important work to do; yet, active Government must also be focused and effective. Education is my top priority, and frankly, it ought to be your top priority, as well. After all, an industry which depends on the ability of people to read needs to be involved in education. Children who fail to master reading are going to be left behind in America, and we had better do something about it.

I know Rich Oppel has heard me talk a lot about waging a war on illiteracy. It was a focus of mine when I was the Governor of Texas. It will be a focus of mine as President, and that focus also will be the focus of the First Lady, as well.

My budget reflects the commitment to education. It increases—it has an 11 percent increase in the Department of Education. We triple funding for reading programs. We have got a big focus on early childhood development.

In my budget, we double the Medicare budget by the year 2011. We introduced a new prescription drug program. We finish the job of doubling medical research at the National Institutes of Health by 2003. Basic research gets big increases, as well.

My budget pays for ambitious new programs to mobilize faith-based and community groups, which fight poverty and addiction. We expand the Women's, Infants', and Children's nutrition program by $94 million this year—next year—the Federal contribution to drug treatment by 100 million, Head

Start by 125 million, and programs to fight child abuse and neglect by $267 million.

We propose to put 900 million into the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the biggest conservation budget in U.S. history. Over 5 years, we'll devote 4.9 billion to repair and improve our national parks—again, the biggest increase in park upkeep in our Nation's history. We provide housing vouchers to 34,000 additional low income families and assist 130,000 others with the downpayment on their first home. We support 1,200 new and expanded community health centers to double the number of patients served in those important institutions.

It's an ambitious agenda, and it doesn't come cheap. The total budget is 1.96 trillion in the year 2002. You know, when you hear all the litany of things we're spending money on, some people are beginning to wonder whatever happened to all the penny-pinching Republicans.

But I don't think this budget's too big for the critics, nor do I think it's too small. As I'm sure you can guess, I think it's just about right. We've prepared a budget with great care. I understand to budget is to choose, so I made choices. We identified priorities: education and health care, research, military pay, conservation, community and faith-based organizations. I gave those priorities the funding they needed, while keeping overall discretionary spending at a responsible rate of 4 percent growth. The result is a budget that keeps our national commitment to Social Security and Medicare, and increases the Federal budget by $100 billion from 2001 to 2002. A $100-billion increase in spending ought to be sufficient.

Let me give you some idea of just how much money 100 billion is. When you adjust for inflation, it is more than all we spent on the Marshall plan—the 5 years' worth of spending on the Marshall plan—100 billion is more than that. It's enough money to run our Government and meet our priorities. The House understood that, and the Senate needs to hear that, as well.

Secondly, the percentage increases in spending of the past few years cannot be sustained. In fiscal 2001, Congress appropriated 8 percent more in discretionary spending than it did in 2000. At 8 percent increase, Federal appropriations will double in 9 years. Eight percent spending increases will burn through the surplus. My budget allows for 4 percent. And that's more than inflation, by the way, and that's more than the average increase in wages in the past few years. And my attitude is, if the taxpayer can get by on a 4 percent increase, so should the Federal Government.

And finally, we need significant tax relief—I mean, significant tax relief—and we need it now. A Democratic Congress passed the Kennedy tax cut, even though there was a deficit, because the country needed it. A Republican Senate and Democrat House passed Ronald Reagan's tax relief, even though there was a deficit, because the country needed it. Our country needs tax relief now, and we have a surplus. I don't think there's any excuse for providing real, meaningful tax relief. We only used about one surplus dollar out of four.

My tax relief plan is smaller than President Kennedy's or President Reagan's, but it's just as urgently needed. I sent Congress a reasonable budget. It gives the Federal Government over 100 billion to spend on important priorities. It pays down debt at a record pace. It leaves room for tax relief. It will help restore economic growth. It's a budget in line with the values of the American people, as you know, from trying to cover it.

The budget process is a long and winding one. An observer of Washington legislative processes once said, "It's never over until it's over, and it's never over." It's especially true of how we pass our budgets. No one vote is decisive. There will be a vote today. There will be one tomorrow. I urge the Senators when they cast the vote tomorrow to remember, there's a lot of people in our country who are beginning to hurt, a lot of folks who are paying higher energy bills, a lot of people have got consumer debt. I urge the Senators to prioritize. But always remember that the surplus is not the Federal Government's money. The surplus is the people's money. And once we meet priorities, we ought to share it with the people. It's not only the right thing to do for our economy; it's the right choice to make, to trust people with their own money.

The debate about the economic approach has been a vigorous one, and it should be. I think it's healthy for our country to debate these issues. People of different parties, and as I have discovered, some of my own party, think we ought to spend more than I think we ought to do and have smaller tax relief.

But so far, it seems like everybody has shown good will and good intentions, and for that, I'm grateful. Since I took office, a little more than 10 weeks ago, I've personally met with a lot of Members of the United States Congress. I was surprised to realize the other day that I've met with more than 278, and I hope a lot more come down to the White House.

You know, I haven't convinced them all, and they haven't convinced me. But we've been able to make our points without making enemies. And it's a good start to changing the tone here in Washington, DC, and that's what's needed, a more civil discourse.

I understand civility doesn't make good copy. I understand it doesn't make good copy to say, so-and-so may not agree, but they respect each other. It's much easier to print the mean word or the pointed attack. And your reporters are just doing their job.

But the truth of the matter is, all of us can work to make America a little more civil, can herald a civil discourse. It's important. Ours is the greatest democracy in the world. Ours is the greatest country in the world. And those of us who are responsible for shaping the dialog must always remember that it's—people are watching. The more civil we can be in Washington, the more civil we can be in our newspapers, the more likely it is democracy will continue to flourish.

Thank you for what you do. I sometimes wish I could shape it a little differently, but I appreciate free press, just like you appreciate free speech. And that's just what I've given you today, a free speech. [*Laughter*]

I'll be glad to answer any questions you have.

[*At this point, the question-and-answer session began.*]

Appointments to the Judiciary

Q. I was wondering if, in the spirit of civility and conciliation you were talking about, whether you think that when it comes to appointing members to the Federal bench, and especially if there are vacancies to the Supreme Court, that you should try, before appointments are made, to engage in a bipartisan conversation with Democrats in the United States Senate who have already indicated that they might be taking a very hard line if they believe you're sending up nominees that are philosophically extreme? Or do you feel that you are like any other President and should operate on the principle of: You propose, and let them dispose?

The President. The latter. We're going to pick the most qualified people we can find, people that share my philosophy about strict constructionism on the Court. I'll be mindful of confirmation. I don't particularly want a big fight in the Senate. And so we'll be putting out—we'll be gathering intelligence as to whether or not a person can be confirmed or not. I may decide to send somebody up that will create a tough fight. I don't know. I haven't gotten there yet.

But of course, I pick somebody, I want them to get confirmed. And so we'll be mindful of that. Obviously, I've made a lot of other—another decision about whether or not we ought to have screening agencies or screening groups, people to screen our people, and I decided not to do that. We'll get a lot of opinions, and not one opinion is more important than another, as far as my administration is concerned. And so we'll pick the people, and the Senate can hopefully confirm them.

China and the U.S. Navy Aircraft Incident

Q. Do you believe it's appropriate for the Chinese to be questioning our airmen that have been downed? And also, what do you believe the Chinese have put at risk with their actions?

The President. I appreciate you bringing up the subject. I want to make this clear. First, I regret that a Chinese pilot is missing, and I regret one of their airplanes is lost. And our prayers go out to the pilot, his family. Our prayers are also with our own service men and women. And they need to come home.

The message to the Chinese is, we should not let this incident destabilize relations. Our

relationship with China is very important, but they need to realize that it's time for our people to be home. We're working all diplomatic channels to affect our priority. There's discussions going on. And we'll continue to do so. My mission is to bring the people home.

And as to whether or not we'll have good relations, my intention is to make sure we do have good relations. But the Chinese have got to act, and I hope they do so quickly. Yes.

Q. Following up on that, are there any circumstances in which you would offer an apology to the Chinese? And secondly, are you having any second thoughts about your decision to go to China later this year?

The President. I have no further comments on the subject. That won't count as a question. [*Laughter*]

First Amendment Freedoms

Q. Sir, as you know, at the heart of this newspaper organization is its passion for preserving and enhancing the Nation's access to information. Would you take this moment to articulate your own view of first amendment freedoms, and give us a sense of the fundamental message that you will send to your administration as it makes decisions on whether to open or close access to Government information?

The President. Yes. [*Laughter*] There needs to be balance when it comes to freedom of information laws. There's some things that when I discuss in the privacy of the Oval Office or national security matters that just should not be in the national arena.

On the other hand, my administration will cooperate fully with freedom of information requests if it doesn't jeopardize national security, for example. The interesting problem I have, or for me, as the President, is what's personal and what's not personal. Frankly, I haven't been on the job long enough to have been—to have had to make those choices.

I'll give you one area, though, where I'm very cautious, and that's about e-mailing. I used to be an avid e-mailer, and I e-mailed to my daughters or e-mailed to my father, for example. And I don't want those e-mails to be in public—in the public domain. So I don't e-mail any more, out of concern for freedom of information laws but also concern for my privacy.

But we'll cooperate with the press, unless we think it's a matter of national security or something that's entirely private.

China-U.S. Trade Relations

Q. I hope you will respond to this question. It's on the Asia subject, but general.

The President. I might. I'm not sure yet. [*Laughter*]

Q. In my region, we have strong economic interests in Asia as an export market. Would you please comment on the balance that you think should be struck between our strategic interests and our economic interests in Asia, including China?

The President. I believe that China ought to be a trading partner of ours. I think it's in our economic interests to open up the Chinese markets to U.S. products—to U.S. agricultural products. I not only believe it's in our economic interest, I believe it's in our interest to promote U.S. values. And I believe the marketplace promotes the values. When people get a taste of freedom in the marketplace, they tend to demand other freedoms in their societies. And so, I'm an advocate of China's entering into the WTO, and I'm hopeful that the current situation ends quickly and our people come home.

China is a strategic partner—a strategic competitor. But that doesn't mean we can't find areas in which we can partner, and the economy's a place where we can partner. And we've got some differences with China, long-term differences—spreading of weapons of mass destruction is an issue that we need to work with the Chinese on, as well as other nations in that part of the world.

Human rights is an issue, but I believe trade will encourage more freedom, particularly when it comes to individual liberties. The marketplace is—the marketplace unleashes the opportunity for people to make choices, and so I continue to push for trade with China, and——

Airline Travel

Q. All of us here flew in for this conference. Most of us had delays of one type or another. Earlier this week——

The President. Most of you—sorry?

Q. ——had delays at airports. Earlier this week, there was a report issued which was critical of the airline industries and the mounting problems with service and people getting around the country.

I guess my question, coming from northwest Indiana, where the debate is whether to have a third Chicago airport or not, what's your administration going to try and do to solve this ongoing problem?

The President. Well, one thing we need to do is expand the number of runways all around America. And as you know, there's a lot of environmental regulations, some of them meaningful, some of them not, that prohibit the expansion of runways. And step one is to increase accessibility, which will then make it easier to increase competition.

As to your question about whether or not there ought to be a third airport in the Illinois area—I mean Chicago area, I haven't made up my mind yet.

Q. I'm getting the signal from your——

The President. Getting the hook? Thank you for having me.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:17 p.m. in the Grand Ballroom at the the J.W. Marriott hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Richard A. Oppel, president, American Society of Newspaper Editors, who introduced the President; and Ken Herman, reporter, Austin American-Statesman and Cox Newspapers.

Remarks at the U.S. Conference of Mayors National Summit on Investment in the New American City

April 5, 2001

Brent, thank you very much for those kind words. Mayor Morial, it's good to see you, sir. Mayor Menino of the great city of Boston, I'm sure you're thrilled with the Nomo nohitter. [*Laughter*] I am pleased to see my friend, the mayor of Knoxville, Tennessee; we went to college together. Mayor Ashe, it's good to see you, sir. Tom, thank you very much—Tom Cochran, who's worked hard for the mayors association. Mayor Archer of the great city of Detroit is here with us. Pat McCrory, it's good to see the mayor of Charlotte.

I can't forget to say hello to my Mayor, the Mayor of Washington, DC, Mayor Williams. I tell you, he is a—one of my first lunches was with the Mayor, and I'm impressed. And I know the mayors who know him are impressed, as well. So Mayor, thank you. There's a couple of potholes out back that I'd like to talk to you about. [*Laughter*] I say that because I've always said the mayors have one of the toughest jobs in America. After all, you are closest to the people. You have to walk your neighborhoods and listen to the people who you know say, "Well, Mr. Mayor, it's good to see you; how about my road?" [*Laughter*] But Mayor, you're doing a great job.

I've got members of my team who are here. Cabinet Secretary Mel Martinez. Mel, thank you, sir. Ruben Barrales, who is running my Intergovernmental Relations Office. Thank you, Ruben. If Ruben doesn't return your phone call, we've got an issue. [*Laughter*] He'll return them. And finally, John DiIulio, who is running the Faith-Based Office. And John, I appreciate your being here, as well. And Roy Bernardi—where's Roy? Hey, Roy, good to see you. Thanks. Roy is the mayor of Syracuse, and he's coming here to work in the administration.

I respect your work. You all are practical folks who solve problems, and I'm honored that you're here. And thanks for bringing such good weather, too. I think it's the most beautiful day we've had since I've been the President of the United States, and the Rose Garden is a spectacular place to welcome you. And it's my honor to do so.

Our cities are the testing ground for the American Dream. They're places where young people go to begin their careers. They're places where new immigrants arrive to look for work and a better life. They're places where people of every background seek to fulfill the promise of our country.

When we look at our cities, we see our highest aspirations, our incredible diversity, our greatest achievements, and our most pressing challenges. Across America, in cities large and small, a generation of bold and reforming mayors have restored safety to