

### Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Plan Colombia

September 23, 2002

*To the Congress of the United States:*

Pursuant to section 3204(e), of Public Law 106-246, I am providing a report prepared by my Administration detailing the progress of spending by the executive branch during the first two quarters of Fiscal Year 2002 in support of Plan Colombia.

**George W. Bush**

The White House,  
September 23, 2002.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 24.

### Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

September 24, 2002

**The President.** Thanks for coming. We just had a very productive Cabinet meeting. We realize there's little time left in—before the Senate and the House goes home, but we're optimistic a lot can get done between now and then. Congress must act now to pass a resolution which will hold Saddam Hussein to account for a decade of defiance.

It's time to get a homeland security bill done, one which will allow this President and this administration, and future Presidents—give us the tools necessary to protect the homeland. And we're working as hard as we can with Phil Gramm and Zell Miller to get this bill moving. It's a good bill. It's a bill that both Republicans and Democrats can and should support.

My message, of course, is that, to the Senators up here that are more interested in special interests, you better pay attention to the overall interests of protecting the American people.

We can get budget going. I need a defense bill. The Senate needs to get and the House needs to get their differences reconciled and get a defense bill to my desk before they go home. That's a very important signal to send. And at the same time, since there is no bud-

et in the Senate, they've got to be mindful of overspending, very important for those up there who keep talking about budget—balanced budget and all that—to not overspend. If they're truly that concerned about the deficit, then one way they can help is to be fiscally sound with the people's money.

We talked about the need to get pension reform and an energy bill, terrorism insurance. There's time to get all this done, and we look forward to working with the Members of Congress to get it done.

I'll answer a couple of questions, starting with Fournier [Ron Fournier] of the AP.

#### **British Dossier on Iraq/Al Gore**

**Q.** Thank you, Mr. President. Can I have your reaction to two recent assessments on the situation in Iraq? First, Tony Blair said today that Saddam has tried to acquire significant quantities of uranium and can quickly deploy chemical and biological weapons. But there seems to be little new information in the dossier. Secondly, former Vice President Al Gore—

**The President.** That might explain why.

**Q.** Pardon me, sir?

**The President.** Explain why he didn't put new information—to protect sources. Go ahead.

**Q.** If you could explain why, I'd appreciate it. And secondly, Vice President Al Gore—

**The President.** That's right, I forgot our different roles. [*Laughter*]

**Q.** I couldn't even get on the ballot. [*Laughter*]

**The President.** Did that have something to do with the background check? [*Laughter*]

**Q.** When I have something on that, I'll let you know, sir. [*Laughter*]

The Vice President yesterday said that you've managed to replace the world's sympathy on Iraq with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. And you're using the issue to steer attention away from the inability to get Usama bin Laden.

**The President.** I'm confident that a lot of Democrats here in Washington, DC, understand that Saddam is a true threat to America. And I look forward to working with them to get a strong resolution passed.

Prime Minister Blair, first of all, is a very strong leader, and I admire his willingness

to tell the truth and to lead. Secondly, he has—continues to make the case, like we make the case, that Saddam Hussein is a threat to peace, that for 11 years, he has deceived the world. For 11 years, he's ignored the United Nations, and for 11 years, he has stockpiled weapons. And we shouldn't deceive ourselves about this man. He has poisoned his people before. He has poisoned his neighborhood. He is willing to use weapons of mass destruction. And the Prime Minister continues to make the case, and so will I.

And I again call for the United Nations to pass a strong resolution holding this man to account. And if they're unable to do so, the United States and our friends will act, because we believe in peace. We want to keep the peace. We don't trust this man, and that's what the Blair report showed today.

The reason why it wasn't specific is because—I understand why—he's not going to reveal sources and methods of collection of sensitive information. Those sources and methods may be—will be used later on, I'm confident, as we gather more information about how this man has deceived the world.

Holland [Steve Holland, Reuters]. Yes. Sorry. Excuse me. Go ahead.

**Q.** Sir, do you want to specifically respond, please, to Al Gore, instead of just generally about Democrats? What did you think about his—

**The President.** I just responded. I mean, there's a lot of Democrats in Washington, DC, who understand that Saddam Hussein is a true threat and that we must hold him to account. And I believe you'll see, as we work to get a strong resolution out of the Congress, that a lot of Democrats are willing to take the lead when it comes to keeping the peace.

#### **Situation in the Middle East**

**Q.** Sir, Arab leaders are warning the terrorism coalition and your efforts in Iraq are at risk because of the Arafat siege. Why didn't U.S. support last night's U.N. resolution, and what can you say to get Israel to end the siege?

**The President.** What we do support is this, Steve—and our abstention should have sent a message that we hope that all parties

stay on the path to peace. And I laid out what the path to peace—what the path to peace was here at the—in the Rose Garden. First of all, we all have got to fight terror. But as we fight terror, particularly in the Middle East, they've got to build the institution necessary for a Palestinian state to emerge, that we've got to promote the leadership that is willing to condemn terror and, at the same time, work toward the embetterment of the lives of the Palestinian people. There are a lot of suffering people there, and we've got to help end the suffering.

And I thought the actions the Israelis take—the Israelis took were not helpful in terms of the establishment and development of the institutions necessary for a Palestinian state to emerge. We will continue to work with all parties in the region, Israel and everybody else who wants to fight off terror. We'll do that.

In order for there to be peace, we must battle terror. But at the same time, we must have a hopeful response. And the most hopeful response of all for the Palestinian people is for—to work for a state to emerge. And that is possible. I believe strongly it can happen. I believe it's—I believe in peace in the Middle East. And I would urge all governments to work toward that peace.

And we're making progress, and that's what's important for the world to know. We're making progress on the security front. We're making progress on the political reform front. We're making progress to make it clear that if there is to be a peaceful settlement, that the Palestinians must be given the opportunity to bring forth leadership which is willing to work toward peace. And it was not helpful what happened recently.

Dick [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

#### **National Economy**

**Q.** Mr. President, we haven't asked you about the economy in quite some time. Consumer confidence numbers out today—not real good. Later this month, lots of Americans are going to receive their 401(k) statements, many of them probably cringing about what they're going to see in there. Do you feel like the economy is on the right track, that the stock market can mount any

kind of a recovery in coming months? And if you are optimistic, what are your reasons for your optimism?

**The President.** Yes. Well, I'm optimistic because, one, I'm optimistic about America in general. I mean, the American people are resilient; they're strong. We've got the best workers in the world. Inflation is down. Interest rates are low. So when you combine the productivity of the American people with low interest rates and low inflation, those are the ingredients for growth.

But there's more to do. That's why we need a terrorism insurance bill. We need to get our hardhats working again. We need to make the tax cuts permanent so that entrepreneurs and small businesses have got certainty in the Tax Code. We need to make sure Congress doesn't overspend. If Congress overspends, it will send a chilling signal to markets. And so there are things that Congress and the administration can do, working together to make sure people work.

But I'm an optimist. I'm optimistic because this is America; that's what makes me optimistic. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong, and we're really good at a lot of things we do.

But no question that, you know, that things changed, I mean, from the boom days. The market started to decline in March of 2000. That's when it peaked. The sellers outnumbered the buyers starting in March of 2000. And then in the summer of 2000, the economy began to slow down, people began to see a serious slowdown. And then we came into office, and we had three quarters of negative growth. That's called a recession.

And we're dealing with it. We're dealing with a sound—a fiscal policies, starting with letting people have more of their own money. See, the tax cut was actually necessary, a necessary part of economic recovery. And there are some up here in Washington, DC, who would like to raise the taxes on the people. And that's just—that's bad economics; that's bad policy. People up here want to stop the reduction in income taxes for the American people. That's bad policy in the face of an economic slowdown.

So you bet I'm optimistic. But I understand we've got a lot of work to do. And we

will—we will continue to work hard to make sure that people can find work.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. A reporter referred to Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority.

### Remarks Honoring the NCAA Spring Championship Teams

September 24, 2002

**The President.** Thank you all. Welcome. Please be seated. Thank you. This is champions day here at the White House, and I want to welcome all the champs who are here. I particularly love being around those who've set high goals, worked hard to achieve them, and win.

I want to thank the chancellors, presidents, athletic directors, supporters, family members for being here as well. I'm honored to welcome people of high accomplishment to the White House. You're here during extraordinary times. This is a time of challenge for our country. It's really a time to determine the fiber of our Nation, the character of our people. We're being tested. But because we're Americans, because we believe things—hold values deeply in our heart, we will succeed. There's no question in my mind.

And one way we're going to succeed is for all of us, particularly the champs here, to remember there is a responsibility that comes with being a champion. I happen to believe you have a responsibility to set an example for others, that as you succeed on the field of play, you've got to remember there are youngsters looking at you, trying to determine how they should live their life. So as you set high standards for yourself, I hope you remember people are watching and that you can affect people's lives in an incredibly positive way.

There's another way you can serve your community as well, by loving a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself; that a champion on the field can be a champion off the