

more people owning their own small businesses, and the administration understands that. You see, we fully understand that when a person owns something, he or she has a vital stake in the future of this country.

A compassionate society is one in which people respect one another, respect their religious views, respect their opinions. It's a society in which people take responsibility for the decisions they make. The culture of this country is changing from one that has said, "If it feels good, just go ahead and do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands we are responsible for the decisions we make in life. If you are lucky enough to be a mom or a dad, you are responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're worried about the quality of the education in the community in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it. If you are a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders and your employees. And in this new responsibility society, each of us is responsible for loving our neighbor just like we would like to be loved ourselves.

The culture of service and responsibility is strong here in America. I really believe it's the great strength of our country. Two years ago, I started what's called the USA Freedom Corps to encourage people to love their neighbor, to do something to help somebody in need. And the response has been really strong, and I am grateful. Our faith-based programs and charities all across America are vibrant—integral part of our society. Policemen and firefighters and people who wear our Nation's uniform are reminding us what it means to sacrifice for something greater than ourself. Once again, the children of America believe in heroes because they see them every day.

In these challenging times, the world has seen the resolve and courage of America. I've been privileged to see the compassion and the character of the American people. All the tests of the last 3 years have come to the right nation. We're a strong country, and we use that strength to defend the peace. We're an optimistic country, confident in ourselves and in ideals bigger than ourselves. Abroad, we seek to lift up whole nations by spreading

freedom. At home, we seek to lift up lives by spreading opportunity to every corner of America. This is the history—this is the work that history has set before us. We welcome it and know that for our country, the best days lie ahead.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:10 p.m. at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Debbie Stapleton, master of ceremonies and second cousin of the President, and her husband, Craig; Rick Lazio, chief executive officer, Financial Services Forum; Lt. Gov. M. Jodi Rell of Connecticut; his relatives Jonathan J. Bush and his wife, Jody, and Prescott Bush, Jr., and his wife, Beth; and Hebert J. Shepardson, State chairman, Charles L. Glazer, national committeeman, and Jo McKenzie, national committeewoman, Connecticut State Central Committee, Republican Party.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Economists and an Exchange With Reporters

January 30, 2004

The President. Thank you all for coming. I just had a very interesting discussion with some of our Nation's finest economists about the state of our economy and how we can work together to make sure that the economy continues to grow. Today we received news that indicates that the economy is strong and getting stronger. Fourth quarter growth in 2003 was at 4 percent.

We also discussed ways for Congress to make sure we sustain growth. We need to make sure the tax cuts are permanent. If Congress doesn't make the tax cuts permanent, they will have raised taxes on the working people of this country at the exact wrong time. We need to make sure we continue to be a nation which trades freely. We need to make sure that we have less regulation. We need to do things that are wise to control the cost of medicine without nationalizing health care.

We had a really good discussion. I want to thank you all for coming. These economists are optimistic about our future, and so am I. And the American people can know that we continue to work hard to make sure

this economy is vibrant and robust and strong so our fellow citizens can find good jobs.

I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press], have you got one today, perhaps?

Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction

Q. Yes, sir, I do. Thanks, Mr. President. Senator McCain, David Kay, among many others, say it's time for an independent investigation into weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and intelligence. Why resist this kind of inquiry now, when your own weapons inspector says it's needed?

The President. I want the American people to know that I too want to know the facts. I want to be able to compare what the Iraqi Survey Group has found with what we thought prior to going into Iraq.

One thing is for certain, one thing we do know from Mr. Kay's testimony as well as from the years of intelligence that we had gathered, is that Saddam Hussein was a danger. He was a growing danger. And given the circumstances of September the 11th, this country went to the United Nations and said, "Saddam Hussein is a danger. Let us work together to get him to disarm." He was defiant. He ignored the request of the international community, and this country led a coalition to remove him. We dealt with the danger, and as a result, the world is a better place and a more peaceful place, and the Iraqi people are free. And a free Iraq is in this Nation's national interest. A free Iraq will bring a much-needed change in a part of the world that has fostered terror.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Q. Are you dead set against it?

The President. Caren.

Q. Ruling it out?

The President. I want to know the facts. Caren.

Q. Are you against the idea of a new—

The President. Is this a followup to Scott's question?

Q. Yes.

The President. Let me repeat, I just—let me repeat what I just said.

Q. Okay.

The President. I want to know the facts. And I want to know exactly—I want to compare what the ISG finds with what we thought going in.

Keil [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003

Q. Mr. President, are you concerned at all that the new ballooning cost of Medicare bill will get you in trouble, political trouble, with members of your own party who voted for it only on the assurance that it wouldn't go above \$400 billion?

The President. Well, I, 2 weeks ago, received an estimate about Medicare. I asked two questions to the estimators. One, does the Medicare reform do what we want it to do still, which is to provide modern medicine for our seniors and to introduce competition, which will eventually hold down costs of Medicare. And secondly, the new estimate of Medicare costs fulfilled my promise to reduce the deficit in half over a 5-year period of time.

And the budget we'll submit on Monday does fulfill that promise, that we'll reduce the deficit in half. Now, it's going to require Congress to be wise with the taxpayers' money. The Medicare reform we did is a good reform, fulfills a long-standing promise to our seniors. Congress is now going to have to work with us to make sure that we set priorities and are fiscally wise with the taxpayers' money. I'm confident they can do that if they're willing to make tough choices. And so the budget we submit will show that we can cut the deficit in half over a 5-year period.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:34 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to David Kay, former CIA Special Advisor for Strategy Regarding Iraqi Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs, and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

**Remarks Following Discussions With
North Atlantic Treaty Organization
Secretary General Jaap de Hoop
Scheffer**

January 30, 2004

President Bush. Mr. Secretary General, welcome. We are proud that you're here. The Secretary General and I have had a good discussion about NATO, my administration's commitment to a strong and vibrant NATO, our mutual desire to make the world more peaceful through freedom. I appreciate your willingness to discuss important theaters like Afghanistan and Iraq, the need for us to make sure our militaries are transformed and modern. I know that we will have a good working relationship, and I know you'll do a great job on behalf of all of us who treasure the NATO—the NATO Alliance.

So welcome, sir.

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Also, from my side, may I say that I entirely share your opinion, as we discussed in our conversation. But NATO is about values. NATO is defending values which might be normal for us, but our—in other parts of the world, less normal.

And that's why we are in Afghanistan fighting terrorism. And NATO is going to take a larger role in Afghanistan. That's what we discussed. We have, of course, touched upon Iraq, the political developments in Iraq, the upcoming 1st of May for the transfer of sovereignty in Iraq, and a possible greater NATO role after that. We discussed the Balkans. We have discussed NATO-Russian relationship.

In other words, the full range of subjects NATO is dealing with, defending these values as an organization which is undergoing a fundamental transformation process, taking in, in a short time, new member states, seven new member states—it's a matter of weeks—transforming into an organization which can defend those values wherever there is a necessity in the world—be it in the Balkans, where NATO has been very successful be it in Afghanistan; be it in Iraq, where NATO is now supporting the Polish-led multinational division and where NATO might take on a greater role when the sovereign

Iraqi Government would ask NATO to do that.

So I very much enjoyed, Mr. President, my conversation with you. And I'm sure that with your support, with the support of the United States, and all the other NATO Alliance, we are going to make this a success.

Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**Digest of Other
White House Announcements**

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

January 24

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the evening, at the Capitol Hilton Hotel, the President and Mrs. Bush attended the Alfalfa Club Dinner.

January 26

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Little Rock, AR, where, upon arrival, he greeted USA Freedom Corps volunteer Mary Lynn Roberson. Then, at the Baptist Health Medical Center, he participated in a roundtable discussion on medical liability reform.

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

In the evening, the President hosted an annual meeting and dinner with the Joint Chiefs of Staff and combat commanders.

The President announced his intention to nominate Pamela M. Iovino to be Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Congressional Affairs.

The President announced his intention to appoint Dionel E. Aviles and Susan C. Schwab as members of the Board of Visitors of the U.S. Air Force Academy.