

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, March 21, 2005
Volume 41—Number 11
Pages 427–481

Contents

Addresses and Remarks

- See also* Appointments and Nominations; Meetings With Foreign Leaders
- Florida
 - Discussion on strengthening Social Security in Pensacola—458
 - Remarks on strengthening Social Security in Orlando—469
- Louisiana, discussion on strengthening Social Security in Shreveport—427
- National Medals of Science and Technology, presentation—435
- National Republican Congressional Committee dinner—440
- Radio address—434
- Saint Patrick's Day shamrock presentation ceremony—457

Appointments and Nominations

- State Department, Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy, statement—436
- U.S. Trade Representative, remarks—456

Communications to Federal Agencies

- Delegation of Reporting Function Related to the Sudan Peace Act, memorandum—437

Executive Orders

- Amendments to Executive Order 12293—The Foreign Service of the United States—437

Interviews With the News Media

- Exchange with reporters in the Oval Office—438
- News conference, March 16—443

Letters and Messages

- Nowruz, message—456

Meetings With Foreign Leaders

- Ireland, Prime Minister Ahern—457
- Jordan, King Abdullah II—438
- Lebanon, Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Sfeir—455

Editor's Note: The President was at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, on March 18, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

(Continued on the inside of the back cover.)

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains statements, messages, and other Presidential materials released by the White House during the preceding week.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is published pursuant to the authority contained in the Federal Register Act (49 Stat. 500, as amended; 44 U.S.C. Ch. 15), under regulations prescribed by the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register, approved by the President (37 FR 23607; 1 CFR Part 10).

Distribution is made only by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* will be furnished by mail to domestic subscribers for \$80.00 per year (\$137.00 for mailing first class) and to foreign subscribers for \$93.75 per year, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The charge for a single copy is \$3.00 (\$3.75 for foreign mailing).

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is also available on the Internet on the GPO Access service at <http://www.gpo.gov/nara/nara003.html>.

There are no restrictions on the republication of material appearing in the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*.

Contents—Continued

Proclamations

National Poison Prevention Week—478

Statements by the President

See also Appointments and Nominations
Congress

House of Representatives

Action on funding for the war on
terror—455

Passage of fiscal year 2006 budget
legislation—458

Statements by the President—Continued

Senate action to allow for environmentally
responsible energy exploration in a small
part of the Arctic National Wildlife
Refuge—456

Terri Schiavo case—458

Supplementary Materials

Acts approved by the President—481

Checklist of White House press releases—481

Digest of other White House
announcements—478

Nominations submitted to the Senate—480

US GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
SUPERINTENDENT OF DOCUMENTS
Washington DC 20402

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Penalty for private use, \$300

PRESORTED STANDARD
POSTAGE & FEES PAID
GPO
PERMIT NO. G-26

Week Ending Friday, March 18, 2005

**Remarks in a Discussion on
Strengthening Social Security in
Shreveport, Louisiana**

March 11, 2005

The President. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Gosh, it's good to be in a part of the world that I'm real familiar with. [Laughter] Pretty close to home. Sounds like to me some Texans snuck across the border. I'm delighted to be here at Centenary College—Bill Anderson, the chairman, and Ken Schaub, the president. I want to thank the students. I thank the students who are here to listen. This is going to be an educational experience for you. I've got a lot of educating to do to convince people not only do we have a problem, but we need to come together and come up with a solution to Social Security.

But before I get there, I do want to recognize some people, and I've got a few comments about international politics, the world in which we live. First, I'm sorry Laura isn't with me. [Applause] Yes, I know it. She's great, isn't she? She's doing just fine. She's going to be happy to know I saw our mutual friend Ernie "The Big Cat" Ladd who is here today. Cat, I'll tell her I saw you, and you're looking good. She's looking good, too, by the way. [Laughter] She is a great First Lady and a great mom, and I love her dearly.

I'm real proud of the job Congressman Jim McCrery is doing. He's one of the smartest, most capable Members of the House of Representatives. He said, "You make sure you get down to the district." And I said, "Well, if I put you on Air Force One, will you come with me?" He said, "How fast can I get on the plane?" [Laughter]

Senator David Vitter is with us. David, proud you're here. There are two other Members of the United States Congress with us today. Congressman Rodney Alexander—proud you're here, Rodney. Rodney is from this part of the world and reflects the values

of north Louisiana in the United States Congress. And Bobby Jindal—Bobby, congratulations. Thank you guys for coming. Proud you're here. Looking forward to working with you on solving big problems for our Nation.

I want to thank Mayor Keith Hightower from the city of Shreveport for being here. Mr. Mayor, I'm honored you're here. I appreciate you coming. Mayor George DeMent of Bossier City—thank you, George. Proud you two guys are here. Just fill the potholes. [Laughter] You didn't ask for any advice. [Laughter] I want to thank all the other State and local officials who have joined us.

Today I met a fine young lady named Lindsey Allen at the airport. [Applause] A couple of her relatives showed up. [Laughter] Probably wondering why I would mention her. I'll tell you why I mention her. She is a volunteer for Hospice of Shreveport/Bossier. She is a—she takes time out of her life to provide comfort for people who are sick. And the reason I mention this is I want particularly the college kids here to understand that if you want to serve your Nation, a great way to do so is to take time out of your busy life and love somebody who hurts. If you want to serve your Nation, mentor a child. If you want to serve your Nation, feed the hungry, provide shelter to the homeless, become a soldier in the army of compassion, and you can help change America. And I want to thank Lindsey Allen. Where are you, Lindsey? There she is. Thanks for coming, Lindsey, and thanks for being a volunteer.

The world is changing and the world is becoming more peaceful because more societies are listening to the people that live within their borders and are becoming democracies. Think about what's happened in a quick period of time. We defended ourselves. We upheld doctrine. We liberated millions from the clutches of the Taliban, and last fall, millions went to the polls to vote for a President. And that's important. It's important because free societies are peaceful societies.

Palestinians voted. And I believe someday, I believe it's within reach, that there will be a Palestinian democracy living side by side with Israel in peace.

And then the people in Iraq defied the murder of terrorists and said, "You will not intimidate us because we want to be free," and by the millions, they went to the polls to vote for their leaders. And I'm not surprised. I'm not surprised. I was pleased but not surprised because I understand that freedom is not America's gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world. And no tyrant and no dictator can extinguish the desire for people to live in freedom.

So during the next 4 years of my administration, I will use our considerable influence and work with our friends and allies to help others around the world realize their chance to be free because I understand freedom and democracy will make this world a peaceful place for generations to come.

I also want to say something about my trip to Europe. I had a great trip to Europe. I talked to our friends and allies there. I became—got a common agreement with the French, for example, to make it abundantly clear to Syria that the Syrian troops and Syrian intelligence officers must leave Lebanon so Lebanon's democracy can grow and flourish. As well we worked together on the issue of Iran, to make sure that we speak with one voice to the Iranian regime, that they should abandon any ambitions for nuclear weapons for the sake of peace in the world. I am pleased that we are speaking with one voice with our European friends. I look forward to working with our European friends to make it abundantly clear to the Iranian regime that the free world will not tolerate them having a nuclear weapon.

A couple other points I want to make before we get to the issue at hand. I do want to talk right quick about the economy and one way to make sure this economy continues to grow. Last week we got news that we added 262,000 new jobs last month. That means more Americans are working today than ever before in our Nation's history, and that's positive news.

Our economic plans are working, but there's more to do. And I gave a speech in

Ohio earlier this week, and I made it clear to Congress: Stop debating about energy and get me an energy plan that encourages conservation, environmentally sensitive exploration for natural gas and hydrocarbons here in the United States. Let's encourage renewable sources of energy. Let's use taxpayers' money to explore ways to have clean coal technology. What I'm saying to you is, is that we need to get moving on becoming less dependent on foreign sources of oil.

And I want to thank McCrery and Vitter and Bobby and Rodney for their work on this important issue. It's my belief, if we keep talking about the issue of energy independence, we'll get us a bill. And we'll get us a bill that makes sense for all Americans.

Now I want to talk about Social Security. It's a big issue. It's a big issue because it affects everybody's life. First, let me start off by telling you, FDR did a good thing. Franklin Roosevelt did a good thing when he set up the Social Security system. You know why I say that? I say that because it's helped a lot of retirees. It has worked. It has worked, and therefore, one of the things that I want to tell the people here in this audience and all across Louisiana and in east Texas and whoever else is listening: If you're getting a check, nothing will change; if you have retired, not one thing is going to change when it comes to Social Security. The United States Government will keep its commitment. I don't care what the advertisements say. I don't care what the political pamphlets say. I don't care what the politicians say. Nobody is going to take away your check.

But the math has changed since Franklin Roosevelt was the President. When they set up the system, there was a lot of workers paying into the system for every retiree. As a matter of fact, in 1950, there were 16 workers for each beneficiary. That meant the system could work. It's a pay-as-you-go system, by the way. People pay in, and the money goes out to pay for the benefits. Some people say, "What about the Social Security trust," as if the Government collects your money and holds it in your account and then, when you retire, gives it back to you. That's not how it works. The Government collects your money, and they spend it. [Laughter] And they spend it on retirement benefits, but they

were spending it—or we spent it on other things too.

Since the 1950s, a couple of things have happened. People are having fewer babies, and the baby boomers are getting ready to retire. I happen to be one. As a matter of fact, I turn 62 in 2008. That's a good enough time for me to retire—[laughter]—just about right timing. And there's a lot of me—people like me. There are a lot of baby boomers. I'm just the beginning of the baby boomer year. There's a whole lot of people getting ready to retire, and we are living longer than the previous generation and the previous generation. So you're beginning to get—when I said the math is changing, I hope you're beginning to get a picture of what I'm talking about, more retirees, living longer, plus we've been promised more benefits than the previous generation; a lot of people getting paid more benefits, living longer years, and fewer people paying into the system.

And that means we've got a problem. Today, there is—3 to 1 paying into the system. In 20 years, there will be two workers for every retiree. Means when you're working, you're having to pay a lot more for me than previous generations. And so what ends up happening is, in 2018, as you can see on that chart, the system goes into the red—in other words, more money going out than coming in. And it goes worse every year. In 2027, it's going to cost \$200 billion for the Government to fund the promises to the baby boomers like me. That's 200 billion above the payroll taxes we're collecting. And every year it gets worse.

So if you're a younger person sitting out there, you ought to start to say, "My goodness, the system doesn't look very good for me." It's fine for seniors. It's fine for those who are near retirement. It is not in good shape for the people who are going to have to pay for the baby boomers who are fixing to retire. And so I've seen the problem. And I think it's a significant enough problem to put it square in the agenda. My job as the President is to confront problems and not pass them on to future Presidents and future Congresses.

And that's why I've come to Shreveport, Louisiana, to explain it as plainly as I can, in plain Texan, that we have a problem. And

the problem is, how is the younger generation going to pay for all of the promises that the Government can't keep? Major tax increases, significant benefit cuts, that's what's going to have to happen unless we act now. People say, "Well, 2018 is a long way down the road." Well, it's not. It is right around the corner. It is close by. It means it is time for people from both political parties to set aside our partisanship and come to the table.

And so in my State of the Union Address, I stood up and said, "All options are on the table." I said, "If you've got a good idea, bring them forward. I'm interested in listening to them." I said, "If you've got an idea as to how to permanently fix Social Security"—we don't need a bandaid approach; we need to fix it once and for all so we can say to the American people, "We have done our duty"—"bring forward your ideas."

Tim Penny here is on the stage. He is a former Democrat Congressman. You're going to hear him talk. He has had some good ideas. I'm interested in any idea, and I put out some of my own as to how to permanently fix it and how to make sure the system is as good as it can be for youngsters. And one of them is to allow young workers to put aside some of your own money in a personal savings account.

And let me tell you why I think that's important. First of all, that unto itself is not going to fix Social Security. We need to do more than that. But it is a way to say to younger workers that you're going to be able to come closer to the benefits that have been promised to you, because by putting money aside, you will be able—in a private account, private markets, investing in the private markets, you'll be able to get a better rate of return on your own money than the Government could get on your own money. And as that rate of return compounds, as you save, your account grows bigger and bigger and bigger. If you're a worker making \$35,000 over your lifetime, and this plan says you can take 4 percent of your payroll taxes and set it aside in a personal savings account, that by the time you retire, having invested in conservative stocks and bonds, you will have a capital base of \$250,000 in your personal account. That's how interest works. It compounds. It grows.

Now, people say, “What does that mean, a personal savings account? Can I take the money and go right down to the road where I was staying in this part of the world and put it in the slots?” [Laughter] You can’t do that. In other words, there is a set of investment vehicles, conservatively designed, to get a better rate of return than what your money’s getting in the Social Security system, but you get to choose a mix of stocks and bonds.

We’ve done this before, by the way. Federal employees get to do this. Federal employees get to take some of their own money and put it in an employee Thrift Savings Plan that grows, that compounds with interest. It’s happening. People know what I’m talking about. This isn’t a new concept. The only thing new is that it will be a part of the Social Security program.

Now, once you retire, you can’t take all your money out at once. You hold that money in an account, and you get the interest from your—from the corpus of your account, to complement the Social Security check, however big that is, that the Government pays you. So in other words, it’s a part of the Social Security system, retirement system.

And let me tell you some of the benefits of this. First of all, you own it; it’s yours. The Government can’t take it away from you. You know what brings joy into my heart? When I hear that more minority families own a home now than ever before in our Nation’s history. I love the fact that more people are owning something. There are more businessowners. Small businesses are flourishing across America. When people—when a person owns something, they have a vital stake in the future of the country. When somebody opens up an account that says, “Here’s your stocks and bonds, and here’s how they’ve been growing over the last quarter,” people will say, “Well, I think I better pay attention to what the Government is doing to make sure that they put policies in place that will make the economy grow.”

Secondly, you can pass this account on to whomever you choose. It’s yours. Social Security system right now, as you’ll hear, isn’t fair for people who pass away prior to age 62. The money just goes away. But under this plan, you’ll have an asset base, something

you own, something you can leave to whomever you choose.

Thirdly, I like the idea of families being able to pass wealth from one generation to the next. And I think it ought to be in families all across the—all kinds of families ought to be able to do this. You know, there’s this kind of sense about, “Well, this may not work because some people aren’t capable of investing,” as if the investor class was only a certain type of person. That’s not what I agree with. I agree—I think that everybody is plenty capable. I think that everybody ought to be given the opportunity to save their own money and put it aside as a part of the Social Security trust.

Finally, it makes sense to encourage savings in America. The more savings we have, the more capital there is for growth in the economy. One of the things we’re going to have to be careful about is not saving enough money. The capitalist system works by encouraging savings, so there is capital to invest, so that small businesses can flourish, so that the entrepreneurial spirit stays strong. And so this is an idea that I think Congress needs to consider, and I put it on the table. And I expect people to come to that table in good faith to discuss not only my idea but their ideas.

Now, I’m having a good time traveling around our country. I like to get out of Washington frequently. [Laughter] I’ve been to this—last couple of days I’ve been to Tennessee and Alabama and Kentucky and now Louisiana. I’m heading home for dinner. [Laughter] Next week I’m going down to Florida—check on the brother. [Laughter] After that I’m going to go out of Crawford, and I’m going to head out west to Arizona and New Mexico and Colorado. The reason I’m telling you this is I want everybody involved in the process to know that I believe the American people are going to determine the fate of this issue, and I intend to take my message out week after week after week so the people can hear it.

Tim Penny is with us, the great State of Minnesota. Served in the United States Congress and is, you’re about to hear, an articulate advocate of making sure the Social Security system is reformed and modernized.

Tim, welcome.

[At this point, former Representative Timothy J. Penny, senior fellow and co-director, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute Policy Forum, Waseca, MN, made brief remarks.]

The President. Well, I appreciate that. I think—as I told you, the guy is articulate, and he’s sensible. It’s a commonsense approach. Thanks for coming, Tim.

All right. Gwen Comer. Welcome.

Gwendolyn Comer. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Good to see you.

Ms. Comer. Thank you. Good to see you.

The President. Now, they tell me—you’re not—you didn’t sneak across the border, did you?

Ms. Comer. Yes, I sneaked across. No one was looking. [Laughter]

The President. You’re from close to Jefferson, Texas.

Ms. Comer. Yes. Gray is about 20 miles east of Jefferson.

The President. One of the great parts of my home State is east Texas, by the way.

Ms. Comer. Yes.

The President. Tell us about yourself.

[Ms. Comer, retiree, Gray, TX, made further remarks.]

The President. See, it’s interesting. Listen real carefully to what she said. She said her husband worked for 40 years, passed away, and his money just—their savings, the money he worked hard to earn on their behalf is gone. Now, she’s going to get Social Security as a result of her job. But that money just isn’t around. And had he had the chance to put money aside in a personal account, that personal account would have been passed on to her as part of their family’s asset base.

Ms. Comer. That’s right.

The President. Is there any doubt in your mind that you’re not going to get your check?

Ms. Comer. No, indeed.

The President. That’s important for people to hear. I understand a lot of people around the country, a lot of people in Louisiana, a lot of people in Texas rely on that Social Security check.

Ms. Comer. That’s right.

The President. And it frightens people to hear political people like me talking about the issue, because they’re thinking, “Well,

really what he’s saying is he’s giving me a warning, the Government is not going to give me my check.” I campaigned on this issue in 2000 and 2004. In 2000, they said, “If George W. gets elected, you’re not going to get your check.” That’s what some of the ads were. I did get elected, and people got their check. I want you to remind your neighbors of that.

You got any grandkids?

Ms. Comer. Yes, sir.

The President. How many grandkids?

Ms. Comer. My husband and I were blessed with four children. We have 12 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren. So we’re blessed.

The President. Sure are. See, this is a generational issue. I’m here to put more and more people on who’ve retired, saying, “Now that you’ve comforted me, you better take care of my grandchildren.”

Ms. Comer. That’s right.

The President. That’s an important issue. And I want the seniors here to understand that this issue is really about your grandchildren, and we want your advice on how best to make sure that the system works for your grandchildren. There’s a lot of grandparents who, when they hear the math, realize that the numbers are going to be pretty significant when it comes time to either raising taxes or doing whatever is needed to make the promises and that now is the time for Government to take care of the next generation. Social Security has worked for this generation. It really has. And the fundamental question is, can we make it work for the next generation coming up? That’s the task at hand. That’s the debate. That’s the issue.

Good job. You ready? Ms. Helen Lyons, sitting right here next to the President of the United States.

Helen Lyons. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Welcome.

Ms. Lyons. Thank you. This is a great honor. These moments will never be forgotten, nor will time erase.

My name is Helen Lyons. I am 78 years old, a widow. We were blessed, my husband and I, with three sons. They were educated in Oakland, California, and all three of them

are ministers. This is my oldest son, Bishop Brandon.

The President. Are you still listening to your mother?

Bishop Larry Brandon. Yes, indeed. I better.

The President. Me too. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Lyons. I was born in Texas.

The President. There you go.

[*Ms. Lyons, retiree, Shreveport, LA, made further remarks.*]

Ms. Lyons. I am living with my son and wife and their two children. And I have two grandchildren here today.

The President. That's great. You know, let me stop you right there. A responsible society is one in which people take, first and foremost, responsibility for their family, and I want to thank you for taking responsibility for your mom after she took responsibility for you all these years.

Ms. Lyons. Thank you. Thank you. Mr. President, you've already answered my Social Security question that I had for you.

The President. Bring it up again. I can't answer it enough. [*Laughter*]

Ms. Lyons. All right. Will our benefits, as senior citizens, be affected?

The President. She asked a question a lot of people are asking, and I know that. I know a lot of people are asking whether or not they're going to get their check. And we're sitting behind stage, and Helen Lyons looks at me, and she's kind of wondering, "What is this guy all about? I've agreed to get on the stage with him, but have they got a plan to make sure that I don't get—what I need to live on?" That's—a lot of folks are asking that question.

Now, I'm going to say it here again, and I'm going to say it all around the country, because this is the—as Tim said, the truth: You're going to get your check; the Government will honor this commitment. What I can't tell you we're going to be able to honor is our commitment to your son and your grandchildren. I can tell you we'll honor our commitment to you. But I cannot make that promise until Congress comes together with the administration to make the promise to the children and grandchildren of this good

woman. But thank you for asking me that question again.

Ms. Lyons. Thank you, Mr. President. I am deeply concerned about my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

The President. Yes, I don't blame you, particularly after you listen to the facts.

Why don't you introduce your son? Was he a good boy growing up?

Ms. Lyons. Mr. President, he was. [*Laughter*]

The President. That's good.

Ms. Lyons. This is my son, Bishop Larry Brandon. He's pastor of the Praise Temple Full Gospel Baptist Church of Shreveport, Louisiana.

The President. That's good. Very well done. Bishop.

[*Bishop Brandon made brief remarks.*]

The President. Yes, let's stop there for a minute, because this is an important part of helping introduce people to financial literacy. I mean, there's programs all over the country. People say, "Well, there's—certain people can't invest. They just don't know about it," or "It's risky if we let certain people invest." But the way to tackle the issue is not to deny people the great aspect of ownership but to reach out to faith organizations, community-based organizations, and help people become financially literate. We shouldn't run away from ownership. We ought to provide the means to encourage ownership, and I want to thank you for that.

Bishop Brandon. Thank you. Thank you.

The President. Let's face it. Let's face it square on. There are some neighborhoods in which financial literacy has not been passed on from one generation to the next. And we've got to break that cycle. We've got to do a better job. Mr. Pastor, thank you for taking that on, and I'm glad to know the Government is working with the faith-based community to reach out into all neighborhoods in Shreveport, Louisiana, and elsewhere to help people become more financially literate. Keep going. [*Laughter*]

[*Bishop Brandon made further remarks.*]

The President. Right, right. Let me talk about a couple of things. We're working on the retirement aspect of Social Security, but

one way to make sure that the survivor benefits are whole and intact is to give a person the opportunity to develop an asset base that you can pass on to whomever you want. That is a tangible asset. It's not a promise; it is a tangible asset to pass on to whomever you want. That's one of the major differences between the Social Security system that I envision and the current system. And so there will be a survivor benefit aspect to Social Security, but it will be enhanced by this notion of asset accumulation.

And secondly, his question is a good question, and that is, is it possible to design a system that makes it more fair for people who are impoverished? Can we work with Congress to make this system as progressive as possible? And the answer is, absolutely we want to work with Congress to do that. We want the retirement system to be a solid safety net for all our citizens.

I've talked to Jim McCrery about this. He's got a compassionate heart. He understands the ability to make the system work for all. And so I want to thank you for bringing that up, Pastor. My attitude about this is that if people have got a good idea as to how to make the system work toward—to help make sure people don't end up in poverty at retirement, please bring their ideas forward. All ideas should be on the table to make this system permanently solved, not a 35-year fix or a 75-year fix, which never turns out to be a 75-year fix, by the way.

Let me remind you, when you hear the rhetoric "75-year fix," in 1983—and Tim was in Congress then—they worked on solving the problem of Social Security. They said, "Well, we'll put together a 75-year solution." That's 1983. Well, we're sitting here in 2005. It didn't make it very long. That's because the demographics are changing dramatically, and we've got to address the math to permanently fix it. So I'm not interested in bandaids, 75-year fixes. I want there to be a permanent solution to Social Security.

Sarah Joy Hays, representing the youth of America, as you can see, at least on this stage. [Laughter]

Sarah Joy Hays. That's a lot of pressure. [Laughter]

The President. You can handle it.

Ms. Hays. Thank you.

The President. You attend?

Ms. Hays. Louisiana State University.

The President. LSU—I was honored to give the graduation speech there last year. Tell them thank you.

Ms. Hays. Will do.

The President. Why are you sitting here?

Ms. Hays. Well, I'm a senior in communication studies. I graduate next December. And I currently work part-time at the Gap. And every couple weeks—[laughter].

The President. Probably going to give me some advice on my clothes.

Ms. Hays. We'll save that for later. [Laughter]

The President. Okay.

Ms. Hays. Every couple of weeks, about \$40 is deducted from my paycheck, and that's going into Social Security. But I'm afraid that with the system as it stands right now, that will not provide a safety net for me when I'm ready to retire.

The President. We're happy you're putting in the 40 right now, aren't we? [Laughter]

Ms. Hays. You're welcome. [Laughter]

The President. The question is, will there be something for you?

Ms. Hays. Exactly. And with your new reforms, I think that this is a positive thing for my generation especially, and I think it will also give us incentive to study economy and to know what's going on around us as well as educate us in how to invest our own money wisely.

The President. Yes, it's amazing, you know, there is—a lot of people are learning what it means to invest their own money, 401(k)s. I presume people out here have got a 401(k). That's a defined contribution plan. That is your money. You're watching it grow. You're investing it, and it becomes your—part of your retirement package.

The younger—I don't remember, when we were coming up, talking about 401(k)s. I certainly don't remember worrying about whether or not Social Security would be solvent, either. It was taken for granted. And now, all of the sudden, we showed up on the ledgers saying, "Give us our checks, starting in 4 years." And so what Sarah is saying is she's not so sure her generation can carry

the load, particularly since there's going to be two workers for every me, every retiree.

You know, they asked a 21-year-old—one time a 21-year-old person told me, she said—and I think this came out in a survey—that you're more likely to see a UFO than get the Social Security check. [*Laughter*] Is that the way you're—

Ms. Hays. I think that's probably a safe consensus on how we feel.

The President. Well, it's an interesting concept, when you think about it. Once we assure the seniors they're going to get their checks, and grandparents start asking elected officials, and Sarah Joy starts asking elected officials, "What are you going to do about us?" See, that's where the debate is going to be headed. Because you're going to get your check if you've retired. It's the people coming up that are starting to ask the question. And one of the reasons I asked Sarah Joy to join us, because she's representative of a lot of people. They said, "Oh, don't worry, 21-year-olds don't pay attention to this." I don't think it's true.

Ms. Hays. Neither do I.

The President. That's good. You got any other wisdom?

Ms. Hays. Well, I've been imparted some wisdom by some student government presidents. I've been working on executive staff at LSU for the past couple of years, so I've been blessed to be a part of that system.

The President. So people are talking about this.

Ms. Hays. Yes, sir.

The President. That's important. And they're going to keep talking about it, because I'm going to keep talking about it. I want people to understand, people who are 21 years old, that you're facing a steep hill to climb if the Government doesn't act. And there's a lot of talk in Washington about, you know, "Bush brought this up. Why did he bring it up?" And I told you why I brought it up. But I also believe this. I believe when the people figure out we have a problem and seniors hear that nothing's going to change, woe to the politician who doesn't come to the table; woe to the person who tries to block this for partisan reasons. The people of this country want problemsolvers, not problem creators. They are unhappy with the

status quo. It's time to come together and save the Social Security system for generations to come.

I'm honored you gave me a chance to come to Shreveport, Louisiana. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:45 p.m. in the Gold Dome at the Centenary College of Louisiana. In his remarks, he referred to William G. Anderson, chairman, board of trustees, and Kenneth Schaub, president, Centenary College of Louisiana; Ernie "The Big Cat" Ladd, former professional football player and wrestler; and Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

March 12, 2005

Good morning. Over the last few weeks, I have traveled across our Nation and met with tens of thousands of you to discuss my plans for strengthening Social Security. I share a great responsibility with your Representatives in Congress. We must fix the system permanently so it will be there for our children and grandchildren.

I have been to 15 States, and I'm just getting started. On every visit, I am assuring those of you born before 1950 that Social Security will remain the same for you: No changes. No matter what the scare ads or politicians might tell you, you will get your checks. You grandparents also understand we have got to fix the holes in this vital safety net for future generations. I appreciate the wisdom of our seniors, and I welcome your input on how to strengthen the system.

You younger workers know what is happening to Social Security. The present pay-as-you-go system is going broke. Huge numbers of baby boomers, like me, will be retiring soon, and we are living longer, and our benefits are rising. At the same time, fewer workers will be paying into the system to support a growing number of retirees. Therefore, the Government is making promises it cannot keep.

Still, some folks are playing down the problem and say we can fix it later. The fact is, we have got a serious problem, and we

need to fix it now. If you are in your twenties or if you have children or grandchildren in their twenties, the idea of Social Security collapsing is no small matter, and it should not be a small matter to the Congress.

In 1983, Congress enacted what they thought was a 75-year fix to save Social Security from bankruptcy. This bipartisan solution turned out to be temporary because it did not address the system's fundamental flaws. Two years later, Social Security was headed out of balance again. Now some in Washington are talking about another 75-year fix, which means we will be back to the starting line a few years from now. We do not need a bandaid solution for Social Security. We want to solve this issue now and forever.

Putting off real reform makes fixing the system harder and more expensive. As one Democrat leader observed recently, "Every year we delay adds at least \$600 billion to the cost of saving the system." And the Social Security trustees agree. Postponing reform will leave our children with drastic and unpleasant choices, huge tax increases that will kill jobs, massive new borrowing, or sudden, painful cuts in Social Security benefits or other programs. Our children deserve better, and we can give them better. I have told Congress all ideas are on the table, except raising the payroll tax rate. Some of the options available include indexing benefits to prices rather than wages, changing the benefit formulas, raising the retirement age—ideas Democrats and Republicans have talked about before.

Whatever changes we make, we must provide a better and stronger system for younger workers. And that is why I have proposed allowing younger Americans to place some of your payroll taxes in voluntary personal retirement accounts. You would have a choice of conservative bond and stock funds, with the opportunity to earn a higher rate of return than is possible under the current system. If you earn an average of \$35,000 over your career, you can build up nearly a quarter-million dollars in your account on top of your Social Security check. This would be real savings you own, a nest egg you could pass on to your children.

The American people did not place us in office to pass on problems to future genera-

tions and future Presidents and future Congresses. I will work with both parties to fix Social Security permanently. Social Security has been there for generations of Americans, and together we will strengthen it for generations to come.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 9 a.m. on March 11 at the Peabody Memphis hotel in Memphis, TN, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 12. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 11 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Presenting the National Medals of Science and Technology

March 14, 2005

Thank you all. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. It's an honor to be in the company of so many bright and distinguished Americans. All of you have been blessed with great talent, and you have applied your talent to great purposes. Your work is making our country more competitive, more hopeful, and more prosperous. On behalf of a grateful nation, congratulations for earning the National Medals of Science and Technology.

I want to welcome your families and friends who are here with you. I know your family members are equally proud of your accomplishment. I appreciate Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez joining us; Dr. Jack Marburger, Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy; Phil Bond; Arden Bement; members of the National Science Foundation; members of the board of the National Science and Technology Medals Foundation—they'd be the reason you're here—[laughter]—previous recipients of the National Medals of Science and Technology.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who have joined us: Senator Barbara Mikulski of Maryland is with us; Congressman Roscoe Bartlett of Maryland; Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey of California, who is coming; Judy Biggert, Congresswoman from Illinois; Congressman Rick Larsen of Washington;

and Congresswoman Katherine Harris of Florida.

Over the years, the East Room has hosted some of the White House's most memorable events. Long before any President held an awards ceremony here, it was the home to Thomas Jefferson's secretary, Meriwether Lewis, not a bad place for a guy to camp out. [*Laughter*] He didn't stay here long, because in 1803, President Jefferson gave him a new assignment, a daring mission to explore the West. The President also gave him a letter of unlimited Government credit to cover every possible expense. Disappointed to say, your medal doesn't come with such Presidential decree. [*Laughter*]

Over the centuries, the same passion for discovery that drove Lewis and Clark to the Pacific has also led bold Americans to master the miracle of flight, to conquer dreaded diseases, and explore the frontiers of space. To reward and encourage America's spirit of innovation, Congress created the National Medal of Science and National Medal of Technology. These are the most prestigious honors the President can bestow for achievement in science and technology. Today I am proud to recognize a diverse and deserving group of American citizens, what we call pioneers.

The laureates we honor today have made new and lasting contributions in fields from mathematics to behavioral science to geology to genetics. You've discovered new clues about the behavior of viruses, the workings of the human mind, and the shape of the universe. Many of your breakthroughs are changing entire industries, from airline safety to chemical production to computer software and networking. Your efforts to improve energy development and expand health care technology and reduce auto pollution are bringing the promise of a better future to people all around our globe.

Your experiences vary widely, yet all of you share some common traits. As innovators, you heard a calling to challenge the status quo. You weren't afraid to ask important questions. You applied rigorous standards to your research. I suspect some of you suffered some setbacks, yet you didn't get discouraged. You followed where the evidence led. You revised your methods but not your ambi-

tions. And through a lifetime of hard work, you have produced accomplishments that will endure beyond your years.

For most of you, the journey of this day began when someone engaged your curiosity, a schoolteacher or a parent or a caring adult in your community. As your interest grew, you found a mentor in your field, a generous soul who added to your experience and raised your sights. Many of you have repaid that debt by devoting a part of your career to teaching, and I want to thank you for that. I appreciate the fine example that you have set for aspiring young scientists, like those from Benjamin Banneker High School who are with us or the Intel Science Talent Search folks who have joined us from all around our country. I want to welcome you all here. I appreciate you witnessing this important ceremony.

As you go on to greater accomplishments, I hope our recipients will continue to foster and encourage the scientists and technological leaders of tomorrow. By pursuing your curiosity, all of you have achieved historic results. You bring credit to yourselves, to your families, and to our country. You have our country's gratitude. You have earned our respect.

Once again, thank you for coming to the White House. Congratulations for your awards. The military aide will read the citations, and afterwards, I hope you will join us in a reception—back there. [*Laughter*]

Read the awards, please.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:24 a.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Statement on the Nomination of Karen Hughes To Be Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy

March 14, 2005

Our long-term strategy to keep the peace is to help change the conditions that give rise to extremism and terror by spreading the universal principle of human liberty. This will require an aggressive effort to share and communicate America's fundamental values

while respecting the cultures and traditions of other nations.

Karen Hughes has been one of my most trusted and closest advisers, and she has the experience, expertise, and judgment to lead this critical effort. Her return to public service in this important position signifies my personal commitment to the international diplomacy that is needed in these historic times. I value her counsel and friendship, as does Secretary Rice.

**Executive Order 13374—
Amendments to Executive Order
12293—The Foreign Service of the
United States**

March 14, 2005

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including section 402 of the Foreign Service Act of 1980, as amended (22 U.S.C. 3962), and in order to adjust the basic salary rates for each class of the Senior Foreign Service, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Section 4 of Executive Order 12293 of February 23, 1981, as amended, is amended to read as follows:

“**Sec. 4.** Pursuant to section 402 of the Foreign Service Act (22 U.S.C. 3962), and subject to any restrictions therein, there are established the following salary classes with titles for the Senior Foreign Service, at the following ranges of basic rates of pay:

- (a) Career Minister
Range from 100 percent of the minimum rate of basic pay for senior-level positions under 5 U.S.C. 5376 to 100 percent of the rate payable for level II of the Executive Schedule.
- (b) Minister-Counselor
Range from 100 percent of the minimum rate of basic pay for senior-level positions under 5 U.S.C. 5376 to 107 percent of the rate payable for level III of the Executive Schedule.
- (c) Counselor
Range from 100 percent of the minimum rate of basic pay for senior-level positions under 5 U.S.C. 5376

to 102 percent of the rate payable for level III of the Executive Schedule.”

Sec. 2. Section 2 of Executive Order 12293, as amended, is amended by striking “the Director of the International Communication Agency, the Director of the United States International Development Cooperation Agency” and inserting in lieu thereof “the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development”.

Sec. 3. Executive Order 13325 of January 23, 2004, is revoked.

Sec. 4. This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable by any party at law or in equity against the United States, its departments, agencies, entities, officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

George W. Bush

The White House,
March 14, 2005.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 16, 2005]

NOTE: This Executive order was published in the *Federal Register* on March 17.

**Memorandum on Delegation of
Reporting Function Related to the
Sudan Peace Act**

March 14, 2005

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Delegation of Reporting Function Related to the Sudan Peace Act

By virtue of the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, including section 301 of title 3, United States Code, I hereby delegate to you the reporting function conferred upon the President by section 6(e) of the Sudan Peace Act (Public Law 107–245).

You are authorized and directed to publish this memorandum in the *Federal Register*.

George W. Bush

Remarks Following Discussions With King Abdullah II of Jordan and an Exchange With Reporters

March 15, 2005

President Bush. It's my real pleasure to welcome His Majesty back to the Oval Office. Your Majesty, every time you come, I really enjoy our conversation. His Majesty leads a great country in the midst of a part of the world that is changing, changing for the better. And I want to thank His Majesty for his leadership, his understanding about the need for reform, his strong alliance, his clear vision that the world needs to jointly fight terror. And I really appreciate you coming.

King Abdullah. Thank you.

President Bush. Welcome.

King Abdullah. I'd like to thank the President for welcoming me back to Washington. As always, our discussions have been very fruitful, to try and make the Middle East a better place. We had the chance to discuss the issues of the peace process, how we can move that forward, and obviously our commitment to regional reform. And as always, we've come away with some very good ideas and a decent way of being able to look at the future.

President Bush. We'll answer a couple of questions. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

President's Upcoming Meeting With the Lebanese Maronite Patriarch/Hezbollah

Q. Yes, sir. Thank you. The Lebanese Maronite Patriarch you're meeting with tomorrow supports integrating Hezbollah into the political mainstream.

President Bush. A little louder, excuse me.

Q. The Lebanese Maronite Patriarch you're meeting with tomorrow supports integrating Hezbollah into the political mainstream in his country. Are you willing to consider that kind of role for Hezbollah?

President Bush. Well, first, I look forward to listening to the Patriarch. It's going to be a very interesting discussion. One of the messages I want to say is that my meeting with the Patriarch is in no way embracing any religion for Lebanon; it is a way for me to speak

to people that believe the Lebanese society ought to be free.

We view Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, and I would hope that Hezbollah would prove that they're not by laying down arms and not threatening peace. One of our concerns The Majesty and I discussed is that Hezbollah may try to derail the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. And it's very important that this peace process go forward, for the sake of the Palestinians, for the sake of the Israelis, and for the sake of all the people in the region. But Hezbollah has been declared a terrorist organization by the United States because of terrorist activities in the past.

Peace and Progress in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Yes.

Q. —the Arab peace initiative in Beirut has defined the ground for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, which would be also rearticulated in the coming Algeria summit. What would be the role of the United States in the coming stage to push forward that initiative? And when it comes to reforms, how would the United States help the Arab world, and Jordan in particular, in pushing forward?

President Bush. Well, I appreciate that question. First, let's start with Jordan. One of the things we've done is entered into trade negotiations with Jordan, so that commerce between our countries can flow better. It's much easier to reform when there's prosperity, when people are able to see His Majesty's vision about a prosperous future. And I—the other way to encourage reform is to herald examples of reformers, people who are willing to put mechanisms in place that respond to the voice of the people, and His Majesty has done that.

We look forward to hearing the results of the conference in Algeria. The Foreign Minister briefed us on His Majesty's plans and the Jordanian Government's plans to have accountability measures in place, so as to help measure as to whether or not reforms are going forward.

As for the Palestinian-Israeli issue, the role of the United States will be to continue to urge both parties to make the sacrifices necessary—sacrifice meaning that Israel must

withdraw from the settlements; there must be contiguous territory for a Palestinian state—into which a Palestinian state can grow. The Palestinians, in their part, must continue to work hard to fight any terrorist activities within the territories, and the Arab world must continue to work together to help Palestine build the necessary structures for democracy.

And I believe progress is being made. I said in my State of the Union Address to our country that I believe peace is within hand and that the United States Government will do that which is necessary to help move the process forward.

One of the things we've done is we've recently sent a general, Your Majesty, to the region to help the Palestinians have an effective security force. I believe President Abbas is desirous of developing a state that will live side by side with Israel in peace. And we recognize that the Palestinians need help in consolidating security forces and training security forces to defeat the terrorists who would like to stop the march of freedom.

Let's see—Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Social Security Reform

Q. Sir, a new poll says 55 percent of Americans oppose your proposals on Social Security. Do you worry you're losing ground here? Is it a question of getting your message across, or does the plan need to be changed?

President Bush. Well, first, in that same survey I was heartened to see that over two-thirds of the Americans recognize we have a problem. And therefore, the administration and members of both parties in the legislative branch must come together to permanently solve the problem. My first concern was that Members of Congress would think the public didn't think there was a problem, but they do. And I am mindful that when the public says there's a problem, we've got to work to solve it.

Secondly, I was also heartened to see in that survey that many people believe younger workers ought to be allowed, at their option, to set aside some of their own money in a personal savings account. That principle was embraced by a lot of folks in the survey.

My view about taking on a tough issue is that that's what the American people expect

a President to do. And I look forward to working with Members of the Congress to develop a plan. I've suggested ideas. I've suggested that we stop partisan bickering and come together to work for a solution. And I'm looking forward to finding that solution. That's what the people expect.

So, no, listen, I'm just getting started on this issue, Steve, and I'm enjoying every minute of it. I like to take big issues to the American people. I like to say to the American people, you've sent us here to Washington for a reason, and that is to solve problems, and we've got a problem. The American people say we've got a problem, and they're going to expect people to come to the table, and they're not going to like it when they see people not coming to the table.

Q. May I ask the King a question? May I ask the King a question, please?

President Bush. That's up to His Majesty. He's a generous guy, unlike me. [Laughter]

King Abdullah's View on Middle East Peace

Q. Your Majesty, since the new Palestinian leadership took over, what's your personal vision for the region at this time?

King Abdullah. Well, I'm, again, very supportive of President Abbas. I think he's a man of his word, and I think that you'll see him give 110 percent to deal with the security issues and to push the process forward.

I truly believe that in this man, Prime Minister Sharon has a partner for peace, and I'm very optimistic that between the two leaders that the process will go forward and go forward positively.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:48 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nasrallah Cardinal Sfeir, Maronite Patriarch of Antioch and all the East; Minister of Foreign Affairs Hani Fawzi al-Mulki of Jordan; Lt. Gen. William E. Ward, USA, Senior U.S. Security Coordinator, Department of State; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. King Abdullah referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel.

Remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner

March 15, 2005

Thank you for the warm welcome. It is great to be here with good friends and great allies, the Republican Members of the United States Congress.

I'm here to thank the Members of the Congress for their service to our Nation. I appreciate your courageous decision to enter the arena, to put your name on the ballot, to lay out an agenda, and to campaign for what you believe. I appreciate your hard work, and I appreciate working with you. See, we came to Washington to make a difference, not to mark time.

I am honored to have been introduced by one of the Nation's greatest Speakers ever, Speaker Denny Hastert—solid as a rock, tenacious as a wrestler—[*laughter*]—and capable as all get-out. Mr. Speaker, Laura and I are proud to call you friend.

We got a lot of work to do. We're going to continue to pursue a positive agenda, an optimistic agenda for a stronger America and a safer world. We're going to continue to expand opportunity for all who live here in America. And we're going to continue to advance the cause of freedom and peace. On issue after issue, we will do what Americans have always done to build a better world for our children and our grandchildren.

And I'm honored to be sharing my responsibilities with a fantastic woman, a great mom, a great wife, a fabulous First Lady, Laura Bush.

And I'm proud of my runningmate and Vice President, from the great State of Wyoming, Dick Cheney. Mine is a job that requires making a lot of decisions, which means I must listen to capable, smart people, people who are able to give good advice when times are good and times aren't so good. Vice President Cheney has been that steady adviser, the solid rock. And what a decent man he is. I'm proud to be serving with him for 4 more years.

I appreciate other leaders of the United States Congress—my friend from the great State of Texas, Tom DeLay, and from Missouri, Roy Blunt. I want to thank Congresswoman Deborah Pryce from Ohio and Jack

Kingston from Georgia and John Doolittle from California and John Shadegg from the State of Arizona. I particularly want to pay homage to Congressman Tom Reynolds, who has done a fabulous job as the chairman of the NRCC. And the chairman of the spring dinner, Spencer Bachus from the great State of Alabama. Good job, Spence. It's nice to be up here with Linda too. Like you—yes, you married well. [*Laughter*]

Anyway, I appreciate the Reverend Steve Gaines and his wife, Donna. Patti LaBelle, honored that she is here. I want to thank all the Members of Congress who have joined us tonight. Looking forward to working with you.

Laura and I just had a chance to say hello to Buck Fowler and his daughters. He's the husband of the late Congresswoman Tilly Fowler. We extend our greatest respect for the Fowler family and our prayers for Buck and his family as they yearn and long for Tilly.

In the last 4 years, we've shown that we know how to set an agenda and that we know how to work together to achieve that agenda. Republicans are driving the debate on all key domestic and foreign policy issues of our time. And because we've done a lot of work together, because we have achieved a lot, we are the party of reform and optimism; we are the party of progress and ideas. We have shown a willingness to confront and solve difficult problems. We went to the voters and told them what we would do if elected. And when we got elected, we did what we promised we would do, and that's why we are in the majority in the United States Congress.

Consider what we did together. Our economy faced a recession and war. We worked together to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of America with the largest tax relief in a generation. Our economic policies are working. This country has created more than 3 million new jobs since May of 2003, and today, more Americans are working than ever before in our Nation's history.

Our party stands for educating every child, so we passed the No Child Left Behind Act. It's one of the most important Federal education reforms in our Nation's history. We believe in high standards. We believe in stopping this process of just moving kids through

schools without them learning the basics of reading and math. And because we worked together, an achievement gap in America is closing so that no child is left behind in this country.

We believe in ownership. We want more people to own a home or a business. We've worked together to expand ownership for all Americans, not just a handful of Americans. Today, because we acted, the homeownership rate in America is at an alltime high. Small businesses are growing and expanding. And for the first time, Americans can own their own health savings accounts, so they can have a health care plan of their own when they change jobs and so that they're in charge of their health care decisions.

After our Nation was attacked, we worked together to create the Department of Homeland Security. Because we acted to safeguard the ports and borders and better protect the American people, this country is safer than ever before. We went after an enemy that attacked America, and I want to thank the United States Congress for providing our service men and women with the resources they need to win this war against the terrorists.

In each case, we were successful because we stayed true to our principles. We pushed forward with our ideas. And now, in the start of a new term, we must continue to provide bold leadership that the Americans have come to expect.

In the 2004 elections, we ran on large issues. We campaigned on a platform of big ideas. We discussed those ideas at every campaign stop, and the American people responded. And now it is our turn to respond and do what they expect. We campaigned and said that we will be wise with the taxpayers' money. I have submitted a budget. Congress is now working on that budget to make sure that when we spend money, we do it wisely or not spend it at all. To keep the economy growing and creating new jobs, we must make tax relief permanent.

We campaigned on legal reform. The scales of justice are not balanced in America. We must free our entrepreneurs and small businesses from those junk and frivolous lawsuits that run up the cost of doing business and make it hard for people to find work.

I appreciate the hard work of the Speaker and the leadership in getting a class-action reform piece of legislation to my desk. I was proud to sign it. We need to take action now on asbestos legal reform, and we need to make sure that health care is available and affordable and do something about the junk lawsuits that are running good doctors out of practice. We need medical liability reform now.

Our party has a clear agenda, to make health care more affordable and give families greater coverage and more control over their health decisions. We must move forward with improved information technology to prevent medical error and to reduce costs. We must expand health savings accounts. We must allow small businesses to pool together so they can buy insurance at the same discounts that big companies are able to do. In all we do, we will make sure health care decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by officials in Washington, DC.

We will continue our education reforms to make sure our high schools function well. We want to make sure a high school diploma means something. And also, we understand that in order to make sure this economy continues to grow, our employees in America must be skilled with the jobs of the 21st century. That is why we are such strong backers of the community college system here in America.

This party understands that to keep our economy growing, we need reliable supplies of affordable energy. We need to pass legislation this year that makes this country more secure and less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

I'm looking forward to working with the Congress on all these matters, and I'm also looking forward to working with Congress to save Social Security. I told the people when I ran for office that if given a second term, I would make Social Security a top legislative priority. And that's exactly what I have done since I was sworn in for the second term. I have been to 15 States so far on this issue, and I'm just warming up. On every visit, I'm assuring seniors and those nearing retirement that their Social Security benefits will not change. No matter what the propaganda

says, no matter what the partisans say, our seniors will get their checks.

I'm also making the case to the American people that the Social Security system is insolvent and heading toward bankruptcy. I say "insolvent"—it isn't today, but it will be soon. You see, baby boomers like me are getting ready to retire—[laughter]—and there's a lot of us. In my case, the retirement age is in 2008, which is a convenient year. [Laughter] And we're living longer, and we have been promised greater benefits than the previous generation. And yet the problem is, there are fewer workers paying into the system. More people living longer, getting greater benefits, with fewer people paying into the system is math that will not work for the younger generations of Americans. In other words, for younger workers, the current system has made promises it cannot keep.

And every year we wait to address this problem will make any solution more painful and more drastic. In other words, we will leave our children and grandchildren with a greater burden. And this isn't fair, and this isn't right, and that's not how leaders lead. Now is the time to confront the Social Security issue.

Social Security has worked well for many of our seniors. Our job is to make sure it works well for the next generation. And as we fix Social Security permanently, we must also make it a better deal for younger workers. I have proposed allowing workers to set aside a part of their payroll taxes in personal retirement accounts. These accounts would be voluntary. The money would go into a conservative mix of stocks and bond funds that would allow the younger worker to earn a higher rate of return on anything the current system could provide. That money would provide a nest egg to supplement their traditional Social Security checks, a nest egg they would call their own, a nest egg the Government could not take away, and a nest egg they could pass on to their children.

With the exception of raising the payroll tax rate, all options are on the table for strengthening Social Security. I am willing to listen to any good idea. The Social Security debate has only just begun, but I'll tell you what I believe and what I hear: Those on the side of reform are going to win. The

American people want solutions and not empty partisan bickering. The American people expect people to come to the table and negotiate in good faith. The American people want this problem solved now and permanently, and our party will lead on this vital issue for generations to come.

On these and other issues, we're empowering individuals as we reform important institutions of our Government. And we do so because we believe in the American people. We empower people through our policies because we trust the judgment of the people we represent. And we can be confident in our policies, and we can be confident in our progress because we share the values and ideals of the American people. We've given the people of this country a clear choice, and we have performed. We did that in the 2002 elections; we did that in the 2004 elections. The American people have responded to a party which sets a clear agenda, a party which doesn't want to mark time, a party which understands that we must confront problems now and not pass them on to future Presidents and future Congresses.

In those elections, the American people have made it clear they want a President and Congress that understand the role of courts in our democracy. As I campaigned across this country last year, the judges was an issue that I raised at every single stop. Everywhere I went, I heard the same message: The American people want judges who faithfully interpret the law, not legislate from the bench. I will continue to find men and women—I will continue to nominate men and women who will strictly interpret the Constitution. And my judicial nominees deserve an up-or-down vote on the floor of the United States Senate.

I want to thank the leadership of the Congress and Members of Congress for clearly understanding the power of freedom in the world in which we live. We will stay on the hunt for those who want to hurt our country. We will support our troops around the world as they hunt down the terrorists so they can never inflict harm on us. But we also understand that the way to defeat terror in the long run, the way to defeat hopelessness and despair is to spread freedom and democracy. We understand that freedom is not America's

gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world.

And freedom is on the march. Think about what happened in Afghanistan. Millions went to the polls after we helped liberate that country from the Taliban. And the first voter, the first person to stand up and say, "I want a democracy," was a young woman. It didn't take long for freedom to manifest itself in that war-torn country. When people are given a chance—just given a chance—they will exercise their right as free men and women. See, freedom exists deep in the soul of every man and woman on the face of the Earth.

You know, in Iraq, the terrorists used bombs and beheadings and torture to try to prevent people from exercising their God-given right, but they couldn't stop the march of freedom. Millions went to the polls in defiance of the terrorists. Millions said, "We want to be free." And the United States of America will stand with our allies and friends to help freedom movements, whether it be in Lebanon or Iraq or all around the world, because freedom will lead to the peace we all long for.

In this new term, I look forward to working with you, Speaker, and the leaders and the Members of Congress. And as we do, as we work with you, we'll stick with our ideals. We'll make our case to the American people as plainly as we can possibly make it, and we're going to get the job done. That's why we're here. We're in Washington, DC, to serve the people of this country, to reform institutions that need to be reformed, to stand by principles. We are the party of Lincoln. We are the party for Lincoln at home, and we are the party for Lincoln abroad. We believe every citizen should live in a free society.

By expanding freedom at home, we will provide our citizens, all our citizens, the path of greater opportunity and more control over their own lives. And by expanding liberty abroad, we'll provide our citizens with security—the security they need to build a prosperous and peaceful future for their children.

We're living in historic times. It's an incredibly exciting time to be serving our great Nation. I'm so honored to hold the position

I hold, and I'm so honored to be able to work with such decent men and women of the United States Congress.

I want to thank all of you who have come tonight for supporting the Republican Party in the United States Congress. You're making a wise investment about the future of this country, an investment made upon principle, an investment based upon freedom, an investment that will help us stay a prosperous nation, and an investment that will allow each and every American to rise to his or her own God-given talents.

I love my country. I love working with the Congress. Thank you for coming tonight, and may God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:22 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Linda Bachus, wife of Representative Spencer Bachus; Rev. Steve Gaines, senior pastor, Gardendale's First Baptist Church, Gardendale, AL; and entertainer Patti LaBelle.

The President's News Conference

March 16, 2005

The President. Thank you for giving me a chance to come by and say hello. I'm preparing for my trip out of town for Easter—the Easter week, and I thought I'd share some thoughts with you and answer some questions.

I am looking forward to continuing my dialog with the people on Social Security. It's important for the American people to understand that I believe the Social Security system has worked well, that Franklin Roosevelt did a positive thing when he created the Social Security system, but that I am deeply concerned about the Social Security system for younger Americans. And I believe we're making progress on convincing the American people of two things: One, nothing will change for seniors, those who have retired or near retirement; and secondly, that we must work together to make sure the system works for a younger generation of Americans. That's progress.

As I said—I think I told you all earlier that one of my missions in the Social Security debate was to set that issue before the people so that people fully understand why I was

addressing it, in other words, why—I fully understand some in Washington are saying, “Why would the President bring this up. It’s a difficult issue. It may cause us to have to make a tough vote.” I’m making that case to the people and will continue to do so in Florida on Friday, and then we’ll head out west from Crawford and then back to Crawford for my meetings with Prime Minister Martin and President Fox.

I urge the Members to go out and, when they go home, to talk to their constituents not only about the problem but about solutions. I urge Members to start talking about how we’re going to permanently fix Social Security. The Members, I hope, would not talk about a bandaid solution, but I think it’s important for them to talk about a permanent fix, something that will last forever. I think the voters will appreciate people who come up with constructive suggestions, not statements merely in opposition of some ideas.

And so this is part of what I wanted to share with you, is that I’m actually enjoying myself on these trips. I hope you’re enjoying traveling with me. I like to get out of Washington. I like to discuss big issues. I like to remind people that my job is to confront problems, and I will continue to talk about Social Security for the next period of time.

Iraq had a meeting today of its Transitional National Assembly. It’s a bright moment in what is a process toward the writing of a constitution, the ratification of the constitution, and elections. And I want to congratulate the Iraqis for their Assembly. And it’s—we’ve always said this is a process, and today was a step in that process. And it’s a hopeful moment, I thought.

I am looking forward to seeing you down there in Crawford, those of you lucky enough to be able to travel with me. I wish you all a happy Easter. And I’ll be glad to answer some questions.

Coalition in Iraq/Transition in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq once had 38 countries contributing troops, and now that number has fallen to 24. And yesterday, Italy said that it was going to start pulling out some forces in September. How can you keep the coalition from crumbling? And is it time to think about a

timetable for pulling out some U.S. troops, given that the Iraqi Parliament was seated today, and you’re making progress in training some forces?

The President. Well, actually I called Silvio Berlusconi on another matter, which may or may not come up during this press conference. It’s—actually, I’ll give you a hint. I called him about the World Bank, and—[laughter]—and discussed my nominee, and—but he brought up the issue of Italian troops in Iraq and said, first of all, he wanted me to know that there was no change in his policy, that, in fact, any withdrawals would be done in consultation with allies and would be done depending upon the ability of Iraqis to defend themselves. And I said, “Are you sure I can say this to the press corps that will be wanting to know what took place in our conversation?” He said, “Absolutely.”

So I think what you’re going to find is that countries will be willing—or anxious to get out when Iraqis have got the capacity to defend themselves. And that’s the position of the United States. Our troops will come home when Iraq is capable of defending herself, and that’s generally what I find to be the case, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press], when I’ve talked to other allies on this issue.

And we’re making progress. I’ve—I talk to General Casey quite frequently, and he keeps us abreast of the progress being made. One of the things—one of the issues in terms of Iraqi troops being able to defend their country is the ability to stand up chains of command. I think I’ve shared this with you before, and it’s still an issue that they’re working on. There’s officer training schools, plus the ability for a command to go from a civilian government through a military chain of command, down to the lower ranks of troops. And there’s positive signs that have taken place in the development of the Iraqi security force, and there’s still work to be done. Our allies understand that.

But I say “anxious to come home,” and every—nobody—I mean, people want their troops home, but they don’t want their troops home if it affects the mission. We’ve gone—we’ve made a lot of progress. It’s amazing how much progress has been made, thanks

in large part to the courage of the Iraqi people. And when I talk to people, most understand we need to complete the mission. And completing the mission means making sure the Iraqis can defend themselves.

Q. So you don't think it's crumbling, the coalition?

The President. No, quite to the contrary, I think the coalition is—has been buoyed by the courage of the Iraqi people. I think they've been pleased and heartened by the fact that the Iraqis went to the polls and voted and they're now putting together a Government, and they see progress is being made. And I share that sense of enthusiasm about what's taking place in Iraq.

Yes, Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Iran

Q. Yes, sir. The Iranians have dismissed the European incentive as insignificant. Should more incentives be offered? How long do they have until you take your case to the Security Council?

The President. Well, I—first of all, I want to thank our European friends for taking the lead on this issue, telling the Iranians that they should permanently abandon any enrichment or reprocessing, to make sure that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon.

Let me review the bidding on this, if I might, just kind of the history, right quick. Iran has concealed its—a nuclear program. That became discovered, not because of their compliance with the IAEA or NPT but because a dissident group pointed it out to the world, and—which raised suspicions about the intentions of the program. You can understand why. It's a nontransparent regime. They're run by a handful of people. And so suspicions were raised, and as a result of those suspicions, we came together with friends and allies to seek a guarantee that they wouldn't use any nuclear program to make weapons. A lot of people understand that if they did have a weapon, it would create incredible instability. It wouldn't be good for world peace.

And so the best way to do that—and this is where we are in the talks—was to say to the Iranians that they must permanently abandon enrichment and reprocessing. And

the EU-3 meant it. And now we're waiting for an Iranian response.

Q. So how long do you—how long do you wait? When do you go to the Security Council?

The President. The understanding is we go to the Security Council if they reject the offer, and I hope they don't. I hope they realize the world is clear about making sure that they don't end up with a nuclear weapon.

David [David Gregory, NBC News].

Social Security Reform

Q. Mr. President, you say you're making progress in the Social Security debate. Yet private accounts, as the centerpiece of that plan, something you first campaigned on 5 years ago and laid before the American people, remains, according to every measure we have, poll after poll, unpopular with a majority of Americans. So the question is, do you feel that this is a point in the debate where it's incumbent upon you, and nobody else, to lay out a plan to the American people for how you actually keep Social Security solvent for the long term?

The President. First of all, Dave, let me, if I might correct you, be so bold as to correct you. I have not laid out a plan yet, intentionally. I have laid out principles. I've talked about putting all options on the table, because I fully understand the administration must work with the Congress to permanently solve Social Security. So one aspect of the debate is, will we be willing to work together to permanently solve the issue?

Personal accounts do not solve the issue. But personal accounts will make sure that individual workers get a better deal with whatever emerges as a Social Security solution.

And the reason why is because a personal account would enable a worker to, voluntarily, by the way—this is a voluntary program; you can choose to join or choose not to join. The Government is not making you do that. It's your option, and you can decide whether or not you want to put some of your own money aside in a conservative mix in stocks and bonds to earn a better rate of return than that which you would earn—your money would earn inside the Social Security system. And over time, that compounds. It

grows, and you would end up with a nest egg you could call your own.

And so I think it's an interesting idea and one that people ought to discuss to make sure the system works better for an individual worker. But it's very important for people to understand that the permanent solution will require Congress and the administration working together on a variety of different possibilities.

Q. But sir, but Democrats have made it pretty clear that they're not interested in that. They want you to lay it out, and so, what I'm asking is, don't—

The President. I'm sure they do. The first bill on the Hill always is dead on arrival. I'm interested in coming up with a permanent solution. I'm not interested in playing political games. [*Laughter*] I'm interested in working with members of both political parties.

Q. Will you say if you're specifically supportive of an income test for the slowing of future benefits? Could that get some kind of bipartisan consensus going?

The President. David, there's some interesting ideas out there. One of the interesting ideas was by this fellow—by a Democrat economist, name of Pozen. He came to visit the White House. He didn't see me, but came and tossed some interesting ideas out, talking about making sure the system was progressive. We're open for ideas. And I—look, I can understand why people say, “Make—force the President to either negotiate with himself or lay out his own bill.” I want to work with members of both political parties. And I stood up in front of the Congress and said, “Bring your ideas forward.” And I'm looking forward to people bringing ideas forward. That's how the process works, and I'm confident we'll get something done.

See, the American people want something done. They don't like partisan politics. They don't like people saying, “I'm not going to accept so-and-so's idea because it happens to come from a particular political party.” What they want is people coming together to solve this problem.

John [John Roberts, CBS News].

Energy Prices/Energy Policy

Q. Mr. President, the price of oil is at record levels, well above the \$28 price point that you would prefer. The price of gasoline is projected to go above \$2.50 this spring. How concerned are you that this could start to affect the American economy? Is there more you could do to talk with oil-producing nations to get the price at the wellhead down? And is there more you could do, since part of the problem is refining capacity, to encourage oil companies who haven't built a new refinery in 20 years to start increasing their capacity domestically?

The President. No, I am concerned about the price of energy. I'm concerned about what it means to the average American family when they see the price of gasoline going up. I'm concerned what it means to small businesses. I'm worried about the price of natural gas, particularly given the sense that—because a lot of utilities now rely upon natural gas to provide electricity for their consumers. And I have been worried about this since 2001, when I first showed up in Washington, DC.

I'm concerned about the relationship between the demand for oil—our growing economy's demand for oil, but more particularly, the demand for oil from—or energy, in general, from countries like China, fast-growing countries that are consuming a lot of raw materials and natural resources. And it is of concern, John. And that's why I went to the Congress and asked them to join in a comprehensive energy plan, which they have yet to do. I would hope that when Members go back to their districts and hear the complaints of people about the rising price of gasoline or complaints from small-business owners about the cost of energy, that they will come back and, in the spirit of—in a proper spirit, get a bill to my desk that encourages conservation and continue to find alternative sources of energy. The—and by the way, the modernization of the electricity grid is an important part of the energy bill.

I, frankly, don't think we need a lot of incentives for energy companies in the energy bill. The incentive is price. That's plenty of incentive for people to go out and find additional resources. I hope Congress passes

ANWR. There's a way to get some additional reserves here at home on the books.

In terms of world supply, I think, if you look at all the statistics, demand is outracing supply, and supplies are getting tight. And that's why you're seeing the price reflected. And hopefully, there will be more conservation around the world, better conservation around the world as well as additional supplies of energy.

One thing is for certain: We've got to use our technology to, over time, evolve away from reliance upon oil and gas and, at the same time, use our technologies to make sure we can use our plentiful resources like coal in an environmentally friendly way. I went to Columbus, Ohio, the other day and talked to the person responsible for the FutureGen plant, which is a innovative use of technology for there to be emissions-free coal-burning plants. That would not only be helpful for the United States, it would be helpful for the world, developing nations to be able to use this technology.

This is going to be a subject, by the way—was a subject of interest in my trip to Europe. In the councils of the EU, we talked about how we can work together on technological developments to change habits and change supply of the energy mix for the world. And this will be a topic of—at the G-8 as well.

Yes.

Q. Mr. President, could I follow up? Everybody else has had a chance to follow up.

The President. I know, I'm trying to break the habit. [Laughter] Sorry, it's not you, Roberts. Don't take it personally. [Laughter]

Q. I never do, sir.

The President. That's good. Neither do I.

Return of Detainees to Countries of Origin

Q. Mr. President, can you explain why you've approved of and expanded the practice of what's called rendition, of transferring individuals out of U.S. custody to countries where human rights groups and your own State Department say torture is common for people in custody?

The President. The post-9/11 world, the United States must make sure we protect our people and our friends from attack. That was

the charge we have been given. And one way to do so is to arrest people and send them back to their country of origin with the promise that they won't be tortured. That's the promise we receive. This country does not believe in torture. We do believe in protecting ourselves. We don't believe in torture. And—

Q. As Commander in Chief—

The President. Sorry, let—this is going to make Roberts feel terrible.

Q. That's all right.

The President. No, no, you shouldn't make—

Q. It doesn't bother me at all. [Laughter]

The President. Elisabeth [Elisabeth Bumiller, New York Times].

Q. As Commander in Chief, what is it that Uzbekistan can do in interrogating an individual that the United States can't?

The President. No, we seek assurances that nobody will be tortured when we render a person back to their home country.

Elisabeth.

Candidate for World Bank President

Q. Paul Wolfowitz, who was the—a chief architect of one of the most unpopular wars in our history—

The President. [Laughter] That's an interesting start. [Laughter]

Q. —is your choice to be the President of the World Bank. What kind of signal does that send to the rest of the world?

The President. Well, first of all, I think people—I appreciate the world leaders taking my phone calls as I explained to them why I think Paul will be a strong president of the World Bank. I've said he was a man of good experiences. He helped manage a large organization. The World Bank is a large organization. The Pentagon is a large organization; he's been involved in the management of that organization. He's a skilled diplomat, worked at the State Department in high positions. He was the Ambassador to Indonesia, where he did a very good job representing our country. And Paul is committed to development. He's a compassionate, decent man who will do a fine job in the World Bank. And that's why I called leaders of countries, and that's why I put him up.

I was pleased to see that Jim Wolfensohn, earlier today, made a very strong comment about Paul's candidacy. Jim Wolfensohn has done a fine job in leading the World Bank. He's represented the World Bank with a lot of class and a lot of dignity, and I think his comments are very important comments for—for people to get to know Paul better before the—before the vote is taken.

Jim [Jim VandeHei, Washington Post].

Representative Tom DeLay

Q. Sir, Tom DeLay, the House Majority Leader, has been admonished three times by the House Ethics Committee, is currently embroiled in several controversies involving a lobbyist who happened to be a pretty big fundraiser for your two campaigns. Do you have the full confidence in Tom DeLay, his tactics, and his leadership role in the Republican Party?

The President. I have confidence in Tom DeLay's leadership, and I have confidence in Tom DeLay. And I am—we've worked closely with Tom DeLay and the leaders in the House to get a lot done during the last 4 years, and I'm looking forward to working with him to get a lot done during the next 4 years. We've got a big agenda. We've got to get an energy bill out of the House. We've got to get more legal reform out of the House. We've got to get a Social Security reform package out of the House, got to get a budget out of the House. There's a lot going on. And Speaker Hastert and Leader DeLay and Whip Blunt are close allies and people with whom we're working to get a lot done.

Congressional Hearings on Steroid Use/ Major League Baseball

Q. Mr. President, you have spoken out about the need for owners, coaches, and players in all sports to stop steroid use. And you've also voiced reservations about Government getting too involved in that. And as you know, Congress is issuing subpoenas to Major League Baseball players during spring training. Do you think that that's an abuse of power, or is it appropriate, in your view?

The President. Well, Congress generally has an independent mind of its own. I spoke out and was pleased to see that baseball re-

sponded, and they've got a testing policy in place for the first time ever, a firm testing policy in place. And it's very important that baseball then follow through and implement the testing and, obviously, deal with those who get caught cheating in the system.

And the hearings will go forward, I guess. I guess that's the current status. But I'm wise enough not to second-guess the intentions of the United States Congress.

I do appreciate the public concern about the use of steroids in sports, whether it be baseball or anywhere else, because I understand that when a professional athlete uses steroids, it sends terrible signals to youngsters. There's—we've had some stories in my own State. One of the newspapers there pointed out that they thought there was steroid use in high schools as a result of—in order to make sure these kids, at least in the kid's mind, could be a better athlete. It's a bad signal. It's not right.

And so I appreciate the fact that baseball is addressing this, and I appreciate the fact that the Congress is paying attention to the issue. This first started, of course, with Senator McCain, who basically said, "Get your house in order." And baseball responded, and my hope is the system will work.

Q. You have no problem with the subpoenas?

The President. No.

Carl [Carl Cameron, Fox News]

Judicial Nominations/Senate Rules Changes

Q. Mr. President, your judicial nominees continue to run into problems on Capitol Hill. Republicans are discussing the possibility of ending the current Democratic filibuster practice against it. And Democrats yesterday, led by Minority Leader Harry Reid, went to the steps of the Capitol to say that if that goes forward, they will halt your agenda straight out. What does that say about your judicial nominees, the tone on Capitol Hill? And which is more important, judges or your agenda?

The President. Both. I believe that I have a obligation to put forth good, honorable people to serve on the bench and have done so. And I expect them to get up-or-down vote on the floor of the Senate. This isn't a new

position for me, or the—I've been saying this for the last several years. And they ought to get a vote. They're getting voted out of committee, but they're not getting a vote on the floor. And I don't think it's fair to the candidates, and I don't think it's fair to the administration for this policy to go forward. And so—and hopefully, the Senate will be able to conduct business and also give my nominees a vote, an up-or-down vote on the floor of the Senate.

Yes, sir. John [John McKinnon, Wall Street Journal].

Social Security Reform

Q. Sir, on Social Security, what is the timeline that you want to see for action by Congress on a bill? When do you start to get worried about not getting something done this year? And also, if I can add, would you be willing to drop personal accounts in order to get a bill?

The President. Personal accounts are very important for the individuals. It's a—you know, it's interesting—David quoted some poll. There's all kinds of polls. For every poll you quote, I'll quote another one. It's kind of the way Washington works these days. They poll everything. The one I read the other day said people like the idea of personal accounts.

I think people like the idea of being able to take some of their own money—in other words, the Government says, “You can decide,” as opposed to, “We'll decide for you”—you get to decide if this is in your interest. And you get to decide whether you want to set some of your own money aside in an account that will earn a better rate of return than that which will be earned in the Social Security system. That's an important part of making sure the system works for the individual.

I repeat, personal accounts do not permanently fix the solution. They make the solution more attractive for the individual worker. And that's important for people to understand, John, and that's why it's very important for Congress to discuss this issue.

In terms of timetables, as quickly as possible—whatever that means. No, I am going to—one of the things that I think is very important for people to understand is that I be-

lieve that we have a duty to work on big problems in Washington, DC, and so I'm going to continue working on this. And it's, I guess—I'm not going to go away on the issue, because the issue is not going to go away. The longer we wait, the more difficult it is to solve the problem.

And listen, I fully understand it's a difficult issue. Otherwise, it would have been solved a long time ago. And I understand some Members don't—view this as a tough vote. In other words, “Why did you bring it up? It's a tough vote.” And—but that's just not the way I think, John. I think we have a duty. I truly do. This is—now is the time to get this solved. I remember 1983, this “We've got a 75-year solution.” It wasn't a 75-year solution that they came up with. It was a—I liked the spirit of people coming together from both parties to sit down and see if they couldn't solve the immediate problem, but it wasn't a 75-year solution because we're talking about it now. And at 2018, the situation starts to get worse because more money is coming into the system—I mean, more money is going out of the system than coming in.

You know, one thing about Social Security—I'm sorry to blow on here, but now that you asked—a lot of people in America think there is a trust: Your money goes in; the Government holds it; and then the Government gives you your money back when you retire. That's just not the way it works. And it's important for the American citizens to understand it's a pay-as-you-go system. And right now, we're paying for a lot of programs other than Social Security with the payroll tax coming in, thereby leaving a pile of IOUs. And part of why I think a personal account is an attractive option for a younger worker is that there will be real assets in the system at this point in time.

I also will continue reminding people, when it comes to personal accounts, that the system oftentimes doesn't work for a widow. You know, if a wage-earner dies prior to 62, there are no spousal benefits available until 62. If the spouse—both spouses work, the spouse that survives will get the higher of his or her Social Security benefits or the death benefits but not both. In other words, somebody's contribution to the system just

goes away. And a personal account will enable somebody to leave behind an asset base to whomever he or she chooses. And that's an important concept for people to understand.

Peter [Peter Baker, Washington Post].

Death Penalty

Q. Mr. President, your administration recently called on the Texas courts to review some death cases—some death penalty cases down there.

The President. Yes.

Q. And during your State of the Union, you talked about the importance of DNA evidence, and you talked about the possibility that maybe there were inequities in the system and the lawyers that represent death row inmates. I'm wondering if this represents a change in your feelings about the death penalty since you were Governor of Texas. And if there are the possibilities—the possibilities exist of problems, why not call on—for a moratorium?

The President. No, I still support the death penalty, and I think it's a deterrent to crime. But I want to make sure, obviously, that those subject to the death penalty are truly guilty. And that's why I talked about what I talked about and why I made the decisions I made. I think, regardless of your position on the issue, one of the things we've got to make sure is that we use, in this case, technology, DNA technologies, to make sure that we're absolutely certain about the innocence or guilt of a person accused.

Yes.

Saint Patrick's Day/Northern Ireland Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, are you trying to send a message to the IRA by not inviting Gerry Adams and the other Northern Ireland politicians tomorrow?

The President. I talked to Bertie Ahern about this and—at the EU, and he just asked who was coming to the events, which—I said, “You are, for certain.” And we wanted to make sure that we honored those in civil society in Ireland who are contributing positively to the peace process. And that's what we'll be doing on this particular trip.

It's very important that people understand that the parties must renounce violence. There's a—the Good Friday agreement laid out the way forward for peace in Northern Ireland, and this administration and our Government strongly supports those steps. But tomorrow's message will be, we want to thank those in civil society who are working hard to achieve a peaceful resolution.

Q. By inviting the widow—the sisters, rather, of this man who was killed—

The President. That's part of the statement, a very strong part of the statement, and I'm looking forward to meeting these very brave souls. They've committed themselves to a peaceful solution. And hopefully, their loved one will not have died in vain. I mean, out of this—hopefully, some good will come out of the evil perpetuated on this family.

Yes, sir.

Hezbollah/Lebanon

Q. Mr. President, yesterday you said that Hezbollah could prove it is not a terrorist organization by laying down arms and supporting peace. How willing and flexible, and under what conditions are you able to, as you promote democracy in the Middle East, encourage parties like Hezbollah to discontinue the use of terrorism as a tactic?

The President. Yes, I think—let me make sure that you put my answer into full context. I first said that Hezbollah is on the terrorist list for a reason, because they have killed Americans in the past, and they—they're a violent organization. And the question was about Lebanon, and let me take a step back, if I might, on this question, because it's important for the American people to understand our policy.

Our policy is this: We want there to be a thriving democracy in Lebanon. We believe that there will be a thriving democracy, but only if—but only if—Syria withdraws not only her troops completely out of Lebanon but also her secret service organizations, intelligence organizations—not secret service—intelligence organizations. I am concerned and the world should be concerned that the intelligence organizations are embedded in a lot of Government functions in Lebanon, and there needs to be a complete

withdrawal of those services in order for there to be a free election. And we will—this Government will work with elected leaders of a free, truly free Lebanon, and looking forward to it.

I like the idea of people running for office. There's a positive effect when you run for office. Maybe some will run for office and say, "Vote for me; I look forward to blowing up America." I don't know; I don't know if that will be their platform or not. But it's—I don't think so. I think people who generally run for office say, "Vote for me; I'm looking forward to fixing your potholes or making sure you've got bread on the table." And so—but Hezbollah is on the terrorist list for a reason and will remain on the terrorist list for a reason. Our position has not changed on Hezbollah.

Judy [Judy Keen, USA Today].

Same-Sex Marriage

Q. President Bush, a court ruling in California this week has revived debate over same-sex marriage. You support a constitutional amendment to ban such marriages. But it's not something you talk about nearly as often as Social Security and many other issues. Will you put some muscle behind that effort this year? Or is it something you'd prefer not to deal with?

The President. No, I haven't changed my position. And as a matter of fact, the court rulings are verifying why I took the position I took, and that is, I don't believe judges ought to be deciding this issue. I believe this is an issue of particular importance to the American people and should be decided by the people. And I think the best way to do so is through the constitutional process. I haven't changed my mind at all. As a matter of fact, court rulings such as this strengthen my position, it seems like to me. People now understand why I laid out the position I did.

Q. What can you do to promote action on that amendment?

The President. Well, I—the courts are going to promote a lot of the action by their very rulings. People will understand that—the logic behind the decision I made. And no matter what your position is on the issue, this is an issue that should be decided by the people, not by judges. And the more the

judges start deciding the issue, I'm confident the more the people will want to be involved in the issue. This is a very important issue for the country and one that obviously needs to be conducted with a great deal of sensitivity and concern about other people's feelings. But this is—it's an issue I feel strongly about.

Yes, Stretch [Bill Sammon, Washington Times].

Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, you faced a lot of skepticism in the runup to the Iraq war and then a lot of criticism for miscalculating some of the challenges of postwar Iraq. Now that the Iraq elections seem to be triggering signs of democratization throughout the broader Middle East, do you feel any sense of vindication?

The President. First of all, I fully understand that as long as I'm the President, I will face criticism. It's like part of the job. Frankly, you wouldn't be doing your job if you didn't occasionally lay out the gentle criticism. I welcome constructive ideas as to how we might do our job better, so that doesn't bother me. And therefore, since it doesn't bother me and I expect it, I don't then leak—seek vindication.

Look, history—shall I give you my talk on history and Presidencies? Okay, thank you. I don't—what's interesting is George Washington is now getting a 2d or 3d or 5th or 10th look in history. I read the Ellis book, which is a really interesting book, and—"His Excellency," it's called. David McCullough is writing a book on George Washington as well. People are constantly evaluating somebody's standing in history, a President's standing in history, based upon events that took place during the Presidency, based upon things that happened after the Presidency, based upon—like in my case, hopefully, the march of freedom continues way after my Presidency. And so I just don't worry about vindication or standing.

The other thing, it turns out, in this job you've got a lot on your plate on a regular basis. You don't have much time to sit around and kind of wander lonely in the Oval Office, kind of asking different portraits, "How do you think my standing will be?" [Laughter]

I've got a lot to do. And I like to make decisions, and I make a lot of them.

But no, you know, look, the people who deserve the credit in Iraq are the Iraqi citizens that defied the terrorists. Imagine what it would be like to try to go vote thinking that there could be a suicide bomber standing next to you in line, or somebody would lob a shell or a mortar at you. The courage of the Iraqi citizens was just overwhelming, I thought. It's easy for us to vote. The question is what it would be like to vote if you were fearful for your life. In parts of the country, people were getting messages that said, "If you vote, we'll find somebody you love and take care of them." And yet they defied—defied these terrorists. It was a powerful moment in the history of freedom. People in the world got to see what it means to—for a group of people that have been downtrodden to rise up and say, "I want to be free."

Now, there's a lot of work to be done, and I'm sure there will be some opinions about what takes place during the next 9 months, as the constitution is written, and whether or not the elections move forward as smoothly as some think they should. Obviously, there's concern now I read about, that—occasionally reading, I want you to know, in the second term—that—your stories, that is—that they haven't formed a Government yet. But I take a different look. First of all, obviously, there will be a Government formed, but I think it is interesting and—to watch the process of people negotiating and worrying about this and worrying about that and people seeking out positions as to their stands on issues that will be relevant to the future of Iraq. It's a wholesome process. And it's being done in a transparent way. I mean, you've got the press corps all over them, watching every move, which is a positive example for others in the region.

And that's important. It's important for people in that region to see what is possible in a free society. And I firmly believe that the examples of Iraq and Afghanistan—I believe there will be a Palestinian state. I believe we'll be able to convince Syria to fully withdraw, or else she'll be isolated—fully withdraw from Lebanon, or else she'll be isolated. I believe those examples will serve as

examples for others over time. And that will lead to more peace, and that's what we want.

Yes, Carl [Carl Cannon, National Journal].

Under Secretary of State-Designate Karen Hughes

Q. Mr. President, do you also think it will lead to America's reputation being restored? Earlier this week you brought Karen Hughes back at Ambassador rank to address the question of antipathy to America around the world—

The President. Yes.

Q. —particularly the Muslim world. What does that entail?

The President. Well, it entails a couple of things, Carl. It entails people understanding why we do things we do. You know, for example, there was—I think we had the image of wanting to fight Muslims—the United States stood squarely against a religion as opposed to a society which welcomes all religions. And in fact, we're fighting a handful of people, relative to the Muslim population, that wanted to—I used to say "hijack the religion."

People need to understand we're a compassionate nation, and we care deeply about suffering, regardless of where people live. And the—you know, President Clinton and President Bush 41 did a fine job of helping the world see the great compassion of America when they went on their trips in the areas ravaged by the tsunamis.

It is very important for us to have a message that counteracts some of the messages coming out of some of the Arab media—some of it coming out partly because of our strong and unwavering friendship with Israel. You know, Israel is an easy target for some of the media in the Middle East, and if you're a friend of Israel, you become a target. And since we're not going to abandon our alliance with Israel, there's a—there was some churning in the press, and there was some unhelpful things being said. And so part of that is to make sure people understand the truth. And that is, in this particular issue, you bet we're going to stand by Israel. But we also believe the Palestinians have the capability of self-governance in a truly democratic state that will live side by side with the Israelis in peace.

And so Karen is going—one, I want to thank her for coming back from Austin. It's very hard, if you're a Texan, to abandon Austin for anywhere else, and—or Texas for anywhere else. Secondly, I applaud Secretary Rice's decision to include Karen in the process. I thought that was very wise of her to call upon Karen's talents. And Dina Powell from my office, an Egyptian American, is also going over, leaving the White House compound to work with Karen, because she believes deeply in the American experience, in American values and wants to share those values with people around the world.

And you know, I think when people also see, Carl, that we do what we say we're going to do, for example, that we helped feed the hungry and that we believe all folks should be free and that women should have an equal say in society—I think when people see we actually mean that—and then when it comes to fruition, it will help people around the world better understand our good hearts and good nature.

Yes, Ken [Ken Herman, Cox News]

Federal Government News Videos

Q. Mr. President, earlier this year, you told us you wanted your administration to cease and desist on payments to journalists to promote your agenda. You cited the need for ethical concerns and the need for a bright line between the press and the Government. Your administration continues to make the use of video news releases, which is prepackaged news stories sent to television stations, fully aware that some—or many of these stations will air them without any disclaimer that they are produced by the Government. The Comptroller General of the United States this week said that raises ethical questions. Does it raise ethical questions about the use of Government money to produce stories about the Government that wind up being aired with no disclosure that they were produced by the Government?

The President. There is a Justice Department opinion that says these pieces are within the law, so long as they're based upon facts, not advocacy. And I expect our agencies to adhere to that ruling, to that Justice Department opinion. This has been a long-standing practice of the Federal Govern-

ment, to use these types of videos. The Agricultural Department, as I understand it, has been using these videos for a long period of time. The Defense Department, other Departments have been doing so. It's important that they be based upon the guidelines set out by the Justice Department.

Now, I also—I think it would be helpful if local stations then disclosed to their viewers that that's—that this was based upon a factual report, and they chose to use it. But evidently, in some cases, that's not the case. So, anyway.

Q. The administration could guarantee that's happening by including that language in the prepackaged report.

The President. Yes, I don't—oh, you mean a disclosure, "I'm George W. Bush, and I"—

Q. Well, some way to make sure it couldn't air without the disclosure that you believe is so vital.

The President. You know, Ken, there's a procedure that we're going to follow, and the local stations ought to, if there's a deep concern about that, ought to tell their viewers what they're watching.

Iran

Q. Mr. President, do you think there should be regime change in Iran? And if so, what are you prepared to do to see that happen?

The President. Richard [Richard Wolffe, Newsweek], I believe that the Iranian people ought to be allowed to freely discuss opinions, read a free press, have free votes, be able to choose amongst political parties. I believe Iran should adopt democracy. That's what I believe.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Yes, ma'am.

Religious Displays

Q. Thank you, sir. Do you believe that nativity scenes and the Ten Commandments should continue to be displayed on Federal property or in schools?

The President. We had a display of the Ten Commandments on the statehouse grounds in Texas, and I supported that display.

Social Security Reform

Q. Mr. President, back to Social Security, if I may.

The President. Yes—

Q. You said right at the top today that you urged Members of Congress to go out and talk about the problem with their constituents.

The President. About solutions to the problem.

Q. But also to talk about solutions, and it's that part of it I want to ask about. Aren't you asking them to do something that you really haven't been willing to do yet?

The President. No, I'm interested in—first of all, I have laid out, in the State of the Union Address—I haven't looked at all previous State of the Union Addresses, but I think I'm the first President ever to say, "All options are on the table," and named a series of options. I think. Now, maybe if somebody could go back and find out—if you've got some idle time on your hand, you might want to go read previous State of the Union Addresses and see if that's true.

I don't believe Members should go write a bill, but I do believe a Member should start discussing ideas with constituencies about how to solve the problem, as opposed to blocking ideas—to say, "Here are some ideas," and come back and present them. That's what's happening, by the way. There's a lot of Members are talking about different concepts. I've called a lot of them into the White House compound; I've listened to them. There's a variety of ideas, and that's positive. I view that as a positive sign that Members of Congress, one, take the problem seriously—I thought it was helpful yesterday when the United States Senate said that Social Security is a serious problem that requires a permanent solution.

And now it's time for people, when they get back from Easter, having talked to different constituency groups, to come back and sit down and start sharing ideas about how to move the process forward. And my pledge is that I will not take somebody's idea and use it as a political weapon against them. That's what's changed in this debate. In other words, the Social Security—they used to call it the third rail of American politics, because when you talked about it, you got singed, at

the minimum. And it's now time to talk about it in a serious way, to come up with a permanent solution.

Yes, Jackson [David Jackson, Dallas Morning News].

Q. Mr. President, you talked earlier about going—

The President. I can't call on Herman and not on Jackson. [Laughter]

Iran

Q. Thank you. You talked about going to the Security Council if Iran turns down this EU-3 deal. Iran says they're not making nuclear weapons. Are we looking at a potential military confrontation with Iran?

The President. You know that we've got a lot of diplomacy, you know. I mean, there's a lot of diplomacy in this issue. And that's why I was so pleased to be able to participate with our friends France and Great Britain and Germany to say to the Iranians, "We speak with common voice, and we share suspicions because of your past behavior. And the best way to ensure that you do not develop a nuclear weapon is for you to have no enrichment of plutonium—have no highly enriched uranium program or plutonium program that could lead to a weapon." That's what we've said.

And we've just started the process. We just had the discussion. How long ago was I in Europe? Maybe 10 days or so, 2 weeks? About 2 weeks? I mean, it takes a while for things to happen in the world, David. I mean, I know there's a certain impatience with a never-ending news cycle. But things don't happen on—necessarily overnight the way some would like them, you know. They just—solve this issue, and we go to the next issue. There's a certain patience required in order to achieve a diplomatic objective. And our diplomatic objective is to continue working with our friends to make it clear to Iran we speak with a single voice.

Listen, whoever thought about modernizing this room deserves a lot of credit. [Laughter] Like, there's very little oxygen in here anymore. [Laughter] And so, for the sake of a health press corps and a healthy President, I'm going to end the press conference. But I want to thank you for giving me a chance to come by and visit. I wish

you all—genuinely wish you all a happy Easter holiday with you and your family.

Thank you.

Q. Can I get that follow-up now?

The President. What?

Q. Can I get that follow-up now? [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:15 a.m. in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Paul Martin of Canada; President Vicente Fox of Mexico; Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy; Robert C. Pozen, chairman, MFS Investment Management; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland; Paula, Catherine, Donna, Claire, and Gemma McCartney, and Bridgeen Hagans, sisters and fiancée of Robert McCartney, who was murdered in Belfast, Ireland, on January 30; and authors Joseph J. Ellis and David McCullough. A reporter referred to Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams.

Remarks Following Discussions With Nasrallah Cardinal Sfeir, Lebanese Maronite Patriarch

March 16, 2005

President Bush. Your Eminence, welcome. It is my honor to welcome you and your distinguished delegation to the Oval Office. We're—thank you for your conversation.

His Eminence and I discussed, of course, Lebanon and our deep desire for Lebanon to be a truly free country—free where people can worship the way they choose to, free where people can speak their mind, free where political parties can flourish, a country based upon free elections. And I assured His Eminence that United States policy is to work with friends and allies to insist that Syria completely leave Lebanon, Syria take all her troops out of Lebanon, Syria take her intelligence services out of Lebanon, so that the election process will be free and fair.

His Eminence is a man of God. He brings great prestige of the church to the Oval Office. And I'm proud you're here, Your Eminence, and thank you for your time.

Now His Eminence would like to say a few words.

Cardinal Sfeir. Thank you very much, Mr. President. We come to the White House in response to the invitation of His Excellency, President George W. Bush, and we thank him for his cordial and warm reception. I would also like to express my deep gratitude for his sincere interest in Lebanon, the freedom of its people, and in peace in Lebanon and the world.

This was a good opportunity to exchange views on the situation in Lebanon and the questions of freedom and democracy in our region. We profited from this occasion to convey to President Bush the views and aspirations of all the Lebanese.

The Lebanese, above conviction, are alarmed by the continued migration of Christian and Muslim youths due to the lack of job opportunities and the suffocating political conditions at home. We look forward to see these conditions reversed because the future of Lebanon requires the talents and energy of all her children.

It is important to recall that Lebanon was the first democracy—democratic country in the region. Maybe it was not a perfect democracy, but Lebanon remains the role and the point of departure for the spread of democracy in the region. This why His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, stated that Lebanon is an ideal for freedom and democracy for the East and West, and this is what we have repeated here.

We are hopeful that the Lebanese, with the support of their friends around the world, will be able to build a better future in a free, independent, pluralistic, and sovereign Lebanon.

Thank you.

President Bush. Your Eminence, thank you, sir. Proud you're here, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Funding for the War on Terror

March 16, 2005

I applaud the House of Representatives for its strong bipartisan support for our troops and for our strategy to win the war

on terror. The people of Iraq and Afghanistan are building new democracies and defying the terrorists, and America is standing with them. Both countries are assuming greater responsibility for their own security, which will help our troops return home as quickly as possible with the honor they have earned.

I thank the House for its quick action and look forward to working with the Senate so that all of my top priorities are included in the final legislation.

Statement on Senate Action To Allow for Environmentally Responsible Energy Exploration in a Small Part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

March 16, 2005

I applaud today's vote in the Senate to allow for environmentally responsible energy exploration in a small part of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. A reliable domestic supply of energy is important to America's security and prosperity. This project will keep our economy growing by creating jobs and ensuring that businesses can expand. And it will make America less dependent on foreign sources of energy, eventually by up to a million barrels of oil a day.

I also call on the Congress to pass a comprehensive national energy plan that will diversify supply, increase conservation and efficiency, and upgrade our energy infrastructure.

Message on the Observance of Nowruz

March 16, 2005

I send greetings to those celebrating Nowruz.

Nowruz marks the arrival of a new year and the celebration of life. It has long been an opportunity to spend time with family and friends and enjoy the beauty of nature.

Many Americans who trace their heritage to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Central Asia observe this special occasion to preserve their rich heritage and ensure that their values and tradi-

tions are passed on to future generations. This festival also reminds all Americans of the diversity that has made our Nation stronger and better.

Laura and I send our best wishes for peace and prosperity in the New Year.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Remarks Announcing the Nomination of Representative Rob Portman To Be United States Trade Representative

March 17, 2005

Good morning. I'm pleased to announce my nomination of Congressman Rob Portman to be our next United States Trade Representative. For more than a decade, Rob Portman has been a superb Representative of the Second District of Ohio. He's earned the trust of his constituents and the admiration of his colleagues. He brings a record of achievement to this new assignment.

As a Member of the House leadership, Rob has shown he can bring together people of differing views to get things done. He's been a tireless advocate for America's manufacturers and entrepreneurs. He's a former international trade lawyer who has shown a deep dedication to free and fair trade, and now he will bring that commitment to his new role as U.S. Trade Representative.

As an Ohioan, Rob knows firsthand that millions of American jobs depend on exports, including one in every five factory jobs. Our country is home to about 5 percent of the world's population, and that means 95 percent of our potential customers are abroad. To keep our economy growing and creating jobs, we need to continue opening foreign markets to American products. Rob knows that America's farmers and workers can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere in the world, so long as the rules are fair.

Under the outstanding leadership of Ambassador Bob Zoellick, the U.S. Trade Representative's office helped bring China and Taiwan into the World Trade Organization

and worked with Congress to secure Trade Promotion Authority. Bob and his team have completed free trade agreements with 12 nations on 5 continents, that will open a combined market of 124 million consumers for America's farmers, manufacturers, and small-business owners. I appreciate his fine service, and I will continue to count on his wisdom and good judgment in his new post as Deputy Secretary of State.

When he is confirmed by the Senate, Rob Portman will build on Ambassador Zoellick's achievements. I've asked him to take on a bold agenda. We need to continue to open markets abroad by pursuing bilateral free trade agreements with partners around the world. We need to finish our work to establish a Free Trade Area of the Americas, which will become the largest free trade zone in the world. We need to complete the Doha Round negotiations within the World Trade Organization, to reduce global barriers to trade. We must continue to vigorously enforce the trade laws on the books so that American businesses and workers are competing on a level playing field.

Rob is the right man to carry out this agenda. I've known him for many years. He is a good friend, a decent man, and a skilled negotiator. He understands that trade creates jobs, raises living standards, and lowers prices for families here at home. Rob also understands that as the world trades more freely, it becomes more free and prosperity abounds.

Rob Portman will be a fine leader for the dedicated men and women who work in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. I'm grateful he's agreed to serve. I'm grateful to his wife, Jane, and their three children, Jed, Will, and Sally. I urge the Senate to promptly confirm this outstanding nominee as America's Trade Representative, and I look forward to welcoming Rob into my Cabinet.

Congratulations.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:36 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Representative Portman. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Shamrock Presentation Ceremony With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland

March 17, 2005

Taoiseach, thank you very much, and welcome back to the White House. It's—Laura and I are delighted to continue the tradition of accepting the crystal bowl overflowing with shamrocks. It's a wonderful gift symbolizing Ireland's world-renowned hospitality.

Today is a joyous celebration of the deep friendship between the Irish and the American peoples. The histories and bloodlines of our two countries are deeply intertwined. And that is why, in cities and towns across our Nation, millions of Americans celebrate this feast day of the Apostle of Ireland.

Saint Patrick used the three leaves of the shamrock to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity. The shamrock has also come to represent the unity that people can achieve when they commit themselves to peace and freedom.

In America, we have a phrase for that—it's called *e pluribus unum*, out of many, one. You'll find that on the Great Seal of the United States, which, by the way, was largely designed by Charles Thompson, a native of Derry.

The hearts of the Irish burn for freedom, and they brought that love for liberty with them to America. The Irish fought in our Nation's War of Independence, and over the past two centuries, they devoted their blood and sweat to defending and building America. When terrorists struck our Nation, the Irish were well-represented among the firefighters and police officers who sacrificed their lives to save others at the World Trade Center. In a great Irish tradition, marines preparing to retake the city of Fallujah prepared for battle to the strains of Lieutenant Colonel Paul Sweeney's bagpipes echoing across the Iraqi plains.

The Irish have a way of turning adversity into opportunity. About a million came to our shores seeking refuge from the great potato famine. Once they came, they built, and they toiled, and they produced. They constructed railroads and great cathedrals. They even helped build the U.S. Capitol. They added

to our literature with a genius, with their words. And, of course, a few even entered politics. [Laughter]

The Irish talent for statesmanship has been evident on both sides of the Atlantic. And today we're proud to welcome a friend of peace and a friend of freedom, my good friend Bertie Ahern.

Mr. Prime Minister, I want to thank you for your tireless work in the struggle against terrorism on Saint Patrick's Island. I appreciate your leadership. I appreciate your strength of character. I appreciate your vision. It takes courage to work the path—to walk the path of peace. And your leadership, Mr. Prime Minister, is appreciated not only in your nation but in ours as well. As you work for peace, our Government and the American people will stand with you.

Today, America and Ireland are united in many ways. The economies of our two countries are closely tied. We're working together to bring freedom and justice to Afghanistan and the Balkans and other countries that have not known it. We share a common commitment to the values preached by Saint Patrick: Liberty under God and the dignity of all human persons.

Taoiseach, we pay tribute to the role the Irish have played in defending and renewing the ideals that Americans cherish. May our friendship remain steadfast, and may the citizens of both our nations enjoy a happy and blessed Saint Patrick's Day. Welcome back.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.

Statement on House of Representatives Passage of Fiscal Year 2006 Budget Legislation

March 17, 2005

I applaud the House for passing a budget that protects America, promotes economic growth, supports our priorities, and keeps us on track to cut the deficit in half by 2009. It closely follows my budget proposal and reflects our shared commitment to be wise with

the people's money and restrain spending in Washington, DC.

Statement on the Terri Schiavo Case

March 17, 2005

The case of Terri Schiavo raises complex issues. Yet in instances like this one, where there are serious questions and substantial doubts, our society, our laws, and our courts should have a presumption in favor of life. Those who live at the mercy of others deserve our special care and concern. It should be our goal as a nation to build a culture of life, where all Americans are valued, welcomed, and protected—and that culture of life must extend to individuals with disabilities.

Remarks in a Discussion on Strengthening Social Security in Pensacola, Florida

March 18, 2005

The President. Thank you, Governor. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. I am glad to be back under better circumstances. It was my honor to come and represent our Government during what was a terrible tragedy, and that was Hurricane Ivan. I want to thank the mayors of the communities here. I want to thank the base commanders. I want to thank people responsible for helping people get their lives back in order.

I still saw a lot of blue roofs flying in. So I know there's still a lot of work to do. But I—it was such an honor to work with Jeb and Congressman Miller and members of the delegation and the mayors to try to do our duty to get resources to people who need help. And so I want to congratulate the stalwart citizens of this part of the world. I was struck by the devastation. I was pleased by the sense of spirit when we came down here, a spirit that has been manifested in what is obviously an ongoing recovery. But we're still paying attention to you. And again, I want to thank you for your courage.

Before I talk about a big issue, I've got some other things to say. They used to say, "Well, you know, he's got his daddy's eyes

but his mother's mouth,"—[laughter]—which means I'm about to talk a lot. No—[laughter]—I do want to thank our panelists, including my mother. What a great honor that Mom is here. We're going on from here to Orlando. I'm going on to Crawford, and Mom is headed over to work with Jeb on raising money for literacy. And it's—I'm sorry Laura is not with me.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. Yes, I know. I used to oftentimes—all the time—say she was the country's greatest First Lady. Wait a minute. At least make it a tie. [Laughter] I love her dearly. She's a fabulous mom, great wife, and she really is a spectacular First Lady. She sends her best and love to Mom and to the great Governor of the great State of Florida, Jeb, and to you all. She's—I'm sorry she couldn't be here.

Speaking about brothers and great Governors, he's doing a fabulous job for Florida. He's straightforward. He's plainspoken. He does what he says he's going to do. And I think that's important, and it's a good lesson for people who are paying attention to public servants, people who are wondering whether or not it makes sense to run for office. He came into office with his integrity, and he's going to leave with his integrity.

I appreciate Gerald McKenzie and David Sam from Pensacola Junior College. We call them community colleges in Florida and Texas. I can't tell you how important the community college system is to make sure that workers, both old and young, gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. I am a big supporter of community colleges, as is Jeb, because we understand the community college system is available, it is affordable, and it is flexible. If there needs to be a curriculum change to help people, help employers find workers, help hospitals find nurses, community colleges are able to do so.

I want to thank the Members of Congress for making sure that my community college initiative is funded, not for only the sake of community colleges but, more importantly, for the sake of people who need a skill set to fill the jobs of the 21st century. So I want to thank the Pensacola Junior College folks for being so generous in the hospitality.

I'm traveling with some pretty good company. Besides Mother and Jeb, Senator Mel Martinez is with us today. Senator, thank you. I mentioned him once; I get to mention him twice, since this is his district—Congressman Jeff Miller, doing a fine job. Thanks for being here. And then we've got some folks down from the central part of the State, starting with Congressman Tom Feeney. Congressman, I'm proud you're coming. Thanks for being here. Congressman Adam Putnam—last time I was with Adam was in the middle of an orange grove after one of the other hurricanes hit. As you can see, that orange grove did something to the color of his hair. [Laughter]

And finally, we're here with Congressman Ric Keller. Appreciate you coming, Congressman. You don't know this, but you're about to find out that he is marrying Dee Dee Michel tomorrow. Congratulations, and good luck on the wedding. I'm a little surprised you're here with us. [Laughter] But we won't tell Dee Dee. We'll tell her you're planning for the wedding.

I want to thank—oh, Congressman Dave Weldon is with us. Dave thanks for coming, a great man, Dr. Dave Weldon. Appreciate you coming, Dave.

I am proud to be here with the Pensacola mayor, John Fogg. Mr. Mayor, thank you, sir; all the State and local officials—I'm working my way through a list here.

There's one other fellow I wanted to introduce you to. His name is Bob Woodard. Bob, stand up for a minute, please. You don't know, Bob—some of you don't—but he was at the base of Air Force One when I landed, because every time I come to a community, I like to herald a soldier in the army of compassion, a volunteer, somebody who has taken time out of his or her life to make somebody else's life better. He is doing something which I think is an important contribution to the future of our country. He is a mentor. He is one of those souls who says—puts his arm around somebody who hurts, somebody who needs love, somebody who needs comfort and says, "I love you," and "What can I do to help you?" I want to thank you for your contribution to the country.

I want to remind you, if you want to serve America, feed the hungry, find shelter for the homeless, find somebody whose heart is broken and help heal it with the love that God has given you. Thank you for what you do.

Before we get to Social Security, I want to say a couple of other points. I want to thank the members of the United States military and those who support the military for not only making this country more secure in the short term but helping make this country secure for generations to come. You see, the more free the world becomes, the more peaceful the world becomes for our children and our grandchildren. And we took some tough decisions in order to protect this country. And by doing so, we have laid the foundation for freedom.

You know, I hope it heartens those who have served and the families of those who have served to have seen the millions of people vote in Afghanistan. Think about what has happened—think about what’s happened in that society in a brief period of time. Young girls couldn’t go to school under the Taliban because these people were so backward and so barbaric that their view of the—vision of the world was dim and dark. We acted in our own self-interest, admittedly. We said, “If you harbor a terrorist, you’re equally as guilty as the terrorist.” When the President says something, he better mean it. I meant it. Our military responded. The Taliban is out, but as importantly, the people of Afghanistan are free.

I just talked to Condoleezza Rice on the phone. She just came back from a—she was in Afghanistan, I think, yesterday. She said, “You’re not going to believe it, Mr. President. You’re not going to believe how hopeful this free society is. You’re not going to believe the optimism that these people have, all because they’re free.” A free Afghanistan is in the interest of the United States of America.

A free Lebanon is in the interest of the United States of America. It’s a good sign when millions feel comfortable going to the street without Government reprisal to express their opinion. In order for there to be a free Lebanon, Syria must remove all the troops and all the intelligence services in

order to let these people vote in free society—in freedom, without fear.

I believe there will be a Palestinian state based upon democratic institutions, and I know it’s in Israel’s interest and in the Palestinians’ interest for there to be two states, two democracies, living side by side in peace.

And then, of course, one of the most amazing events—at least as far as I was concerned, from my perspective—is when over 8 million Iraqis, in complete defiance of people who were trying to prevent them from going to the polls by creating incredible fear—they said, “You’re not going to stop us. We long to be free.” And they went to the polls sending a clear signal, not only the terrorists in Iraq but to freedom-lovers around the world, that freedom is a powerful force, and when unleashed, it will continue its march.

Over the next 4 years, this administration will work to free people—will work with our friends and allies to promote freedom, because I understand free societies will be peaceful societies, and the more free the world is, the more peaceful the world will become. And people will look back at this moment of history and say, this generation, those of us given the honor of service will have done our duty to spread freedom and peace around the world. Freedom is on the march, and I want to thank the military folks and their families for helping make it happen.

Our economy is recovering; it’s doing well. I’m proud of the fact that the great State of Florida has got a 4.3 percent unemployment rate. It says something about your Governor. No, he’s right—he just waved me off, kind of like trying to hit a carrier. [*Laughter*] He’s right. Not because of him, not because of me, because of the entrepreneurs of Florida, people who are willing to take risk, be wise about spending capital, and employing people.

No, the economy is fine. There are some dark clouds on the horizon that we’ve got to address. We got too many lawsuits. I want to thank Congress for getting a class-action bill to my suit—my desk. We need to get medical liability reform done in the United States Congress in order to keep good doctors practicing medicine.

There's a lot of things we can do and will do. I'm looking forward to getting a final budget to my desk that's wise about how we spend your money, that's also wise about making sure you got money in your pocket. And you're going to need it because, unfortunately, energy prices are going up. And I know you're concerned about it, and I'm concerned about it too. I was concerned about it in 2001, when we put together a strategy, an energy strategy, part of which required action by the United States Congress that would encourage conservation, encourage the use of renewable sources of energy like ethanol and biodiesel, that encouraged research and development to figure out better ways to use energy in the long run—because one of these days, we're going to have to change the nature of the automobile by driving hydrogen-powered automobiles, to become less dependent on sources of energy. In other words, there's a lot of things we need to be doing now.

I know we need to be building LNG, liquified natural gas, terminals. We need to do more on nuclear power. Congress needs to get an energy bill. We've been debating whether or not there ought to be an energy bill to my desk now for 4 years. And that's too much talk, given the fact that consumers are beginning to hurt, too much talk given the fact that the—we're too dependent on foreign sources of energy. I'm concerned about the energy, and Congress needs to be concerned. These Members are concerned. I talked to them on Air Force One about it. I can be a plainspoken fellow if I need to be. [Laughter] And they're good listeners. They're ready to go. But Congress needs to get a bill to my desk so we can start becoming less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Let me talk about Social Security. Jeb is right. We don't need to talk about it. Some people say, "You shouldn't have talked about it." I think the job of a President is to confront problems and not pass them on to future Presidents. And I'm pleased to report Members from the United States Congress that are traveling with me agree that Congress needs to confront problems and not pass them on to future Congresses.

And we got a problem in Social Security. Let me first tell you, Franklin Roosevelt did

a good thing by setting up a safety net for seniors. And I applaud him for that. And a lot of seniors who are now getting their checks understand why I'm applauding him, because the Social Security check you receive is really important for you. And—but things have changed since Franklin Roosevelt was the President.

Before I tell you what's changed, I'm going to say this once—I may say it 5 times before this is over: If you're getting a check, nothing is going to change. I don't care what the propaganda says. I don't care about the political rhetoric. You're going to get your check. For those of you born prior to 1950, you're going to get your check. The Government—nothing will change in the system. We're here to talk about not you—we're here to talk about your children and your grandchildren. That's who we're here to talk about.

And I'll tell you why we've got a problem. First of all, Social Security is a pay-as-you-go system; money comes in, and it goes out. Now, some of you might think that Social Security is a trust. In other words, the Government takes your Government and holds it for you, and then when it comes time to retire, you get your money back. That's not the way it works. The Government takes your payroll taxes and pays out to the people who have now retired, and if they got any money left over, it goes to pay other parts of Government. And all that's left is an IOU from one part of Government to the next. In other words, it's pay-as-you-go.

And that system works well when you got a bunch of workers paying in for a few beneficiaries. That's the way it was when Franklin Roosevelt designed the system. In 1950, there were 16 workers paying into the system for every beneficiary. So obviously, the load per worker is pretty light. What's changed is there is a bulge of people fixing to retire called the baby boomers. Both of us are—

Gov. Jeb Bush. Both of us, yes, sir.

The President. Yes. [Laughter] We are baby boomers. I happen to be turning eligible at—obviously, at age 62 in 2008. It's quite convenient. [Laughter] Did you plan it that way? Well, thank you. And there's a lot of us. There is a bulge in the population. And not only there's a lot of us, we're living longer than during the time when Social Security

was first fixed. And we're living longer than the generation preceding us. So you got a lot of people getting ready to retire who will be living longer, and not only that, we've been promised more benefits than the previous generation. People have run for office saying, "Vote for me; I'm going to make sure the benefits increase." And so you've got a lot of people living longer, getting greater benefits, and yet, we're not having as many children in this society. In other words, you got fewer people paying into the system. The math doesn't work.

It works for those who've retired. Second time I've said it—if you're getting your check, you have nothing to worry about it. It doesn't work for people who are going to have to pay for the baby boomers like me who will be living longer, getting more money. And so the fundamental question is: If you see that problem, what are you going to do about it? And so the first thing I want to tell you is, we have got a problem.

And the extent of the problem can be seen on this chart. In 2018, there's more money going out than coming in. Right now, because the baby boomers haven't started retiring—who will be living longer, receiving more money—there's more money coming in than going out, which is being spent. Pretty soon, there's going to be more money coming out than going in. In the year 2027, there will be \$200 billion beyond the payroll taxes necessary to pay for the promises the Government has made. It increases every year, see. In 2018, it starts going negative—increases, increases, increases—to give you an extent by how much—by 2027, it's 200 billion, greater than 200 billion the next year, greater than the next—you know.

And so it starts to accumulate, which says to me that we have a problem that we need to address now. Because if you wait later, a younger worker is either going to have pay massive payroll taxes in order to make sure the Government pays the benefits; they're going to have to cut my benefits; they're going to have to do—borrow a ton of money. In other words, now is the time to act. We do—have no problem for those of you who are receiving your check. We have a problem for your children and your grandchildren.

And the problem is right there in the cash deficits in a pay-as-you-go system.

And so I've taken it on. I think this is my 16th State. I'm traveling all around the country, which I like to do—it's a convenient excuse to get out of the Nation's Capital—*[laughter]*—and I'm explaining to people: You're going to get your check, and we've got a problem.

And I think there's some logic to the strategy, because, listen to this: If you're a Member of Congress, and all of a sudden the constituents start to say, "We've got a problem, Mr. Congressman or Madam Congressman." The next thing they're going to say is, "What you going to do about it?" And once we can convince the seniors they have nothing to worry about, which they don't, the fundamental question for them becomes—from a lot of younger Americans, "I'm glad you're taking care of my grandparents or my dad or my mom, but what are you going to do for me?" And that's the dynamic that's going to get people coming to the table.

In order to help them come to the table, in my State of the Union Address, I said, "I really want people to bring ideas forward. Please bring your ideas forward. There will be no political retribution if you bring good ideas forward," because I understand this is going to require Republicans and Democrats coming to the table—precisely what the American people want, by the way. They want people to fix it, not to play politics with it.

So all options are on the table. The other day, I was with a former Democrat Congressman named Tim Penny—Tim Penny, who had some interesting ideas. My predecessor, President Clinton, recognized we had a problem; he put some ideas on the table. And so I'm looking forward to people from both parties coming up and saying, "Mr. President, here are some of my ideas." And my answer will be, "Welcome. Thanks for bringing them forward. Let's just see if we can't work together to get something done."

I've got some ideas, and I want to share one of them with you, which I think—I hope you find interesting. And first of all, by the way, as Congress brings ideas, I'm not interested in a temporary fix, and neither should you be. I want you to remember 1983. There

was a—President Ronald Reagan and Leader Dole and Speaker Tip O’Neill realized we had a problem, got Republicans and Democrats together, and came together and said, “We’ll put together a temporary fix.” This is the so-called 75-year option. And I like the spirit of people coming together. I like the idea of people saying, “We’ve got a problem. Why don’t we fix it in a bipartisan way?” The only problem is, the 75-year option wasn’t exactly right, because today is a lot less than 75 years from 1983. And so when you hear the—“Don’t worry. We’ll just fix it for 75 years,” the way the demographics are, the math just won’t let that happen. So now is the time to have a permanent solution.

And as they do the permanent solution, we also have got to work, in my judgment, to make sure individual workers get a better deal from Social Security. And the better deal would be allow—in my judgment, again—to allow younger workers to take part of their own money. See, when you hear “payroll taxes,” that kind of sounds like it’s the Government’s money. It’s not; it’s your money. And I want you to know I understand that—that you ought to take some of your own money and be able to save it in bonds and stocks.

And the reason why I think you ought to be able to do that is because a mix of conservative bonds and stocks will get you a better rate of return on your money than that which you’re going to get inside the Government. And that’s important, because if you’re a young worker, interest compounds—or if you’re an old worker—interest compounds. But the longer you hold money, compounding, the more you’ll end up with. It grows. And the greater rate of return you get on your money, the more you’ll have when it comes time to retire.

So the idea is, as a part of a Social Security system, allow you to take some of your money so you can build a nest egg of your own. I like the idea of people building nest eggs. I think if you own something, you’re likely to have a more vital stake in the future of the country. One of the most heartening statistics, I think, in today’s world is more and more people are owning their own home. More minority families own a home today than ever before. That’s heartening, I think.

I tell people, I love the idea of somebody opening up the door to their house and say, “Welcome to my home. Thank you for coming to my piece of property.”

I think the fact that more and more people are owning their own small business is helpful. I know it’s going to be helpful to have more people owning a piece of their own retirement account and managing it.

Now, a couple of things about personal accounts. One, I’ve told you about the compounding rate of return. Just to give you an example: If a person were allowed to take 4 percent of their payroll taxes, or a third of the payroll taxes, and set it aside in a personal account, starting at age 21, and that person earned \$35,000 over her—his or her lifetime, that by the time she can retire, that money set aside would be worth \$250,000, as a nest egg. In other words, that’s compounding rate of interest will do that. Obviously, if you make 70,000 over your lifetime, it’s double that. Then you have a half-a-million dollars that you can call your own.

So what can you do with that? Well, first, I know some people get nervous about investments. We’re going to talk about investments here. You can’t take your money and put it in the lottery, let me put it to you that way. In other words, a personal account doesn’t give you latitude to—you know, you still got jai alai here? Yes. Okay, you can’t go to a jai alai deal. [Laughter] You’ve got to invest it in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks, just like Federal employees do now.

Any Federal employees understand what I’m talking about, the Thrift Savings Plan? It works. We’re going to talk to somebody who’s got a piece of the Thrift Savings Plan. This is happening. This isn’t—I didn’t sit here and invent this. This is taking place already at the Federal level. People who work for the Federal Government get to take some of their own money and set it aside in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks because the Government realizes you get a better rate of return on your money. If it’s good enough for Federal employees, it seems like to me it ought to be good enough for people who are working, you know, who aren’t working for the Federal Government. [Laughter] That was not a cheap shot at people like me

working at the Federal Government. [Laughter]

Secondly, you'll get the check from the Federal Government in the Social Security system if you're a younger worker. I just can't guarantee how big it's going to be. You know, there's not enough money to pay the promises, I'll just tell you that. I think that's part of the dialog is to make sure everybody understands. It's not a trust, and we're not going to be able to keep the promises unless we're willing to have extraordinarily high taxes on the people coming up, or significant benefit cuts.

And so one way to help you do a better job of coming closer to what the Government has promised is to allow you to earn this money and then use it as a part of a retirement plan. In other words, the Government is going to get you a check, and then you're also going to be able to take money out of your own personal account to help you when you retire. That's important for you to know.

The system is not fair for people, oftentimes. Somebody dies early, been working 30 years, dies at 55 years old; money goes in the system. The spouse doesn't get a dime until he or she turns 62. That doesn't seem fair to me. Does it to you? In a personal account, if you had one of those and your assets were growing and you passed away, you could leave it to whomever you want. There would be some comfort for the spouse. Two people working, a husband and a spouse; husband predeceases the spouse; she continues to work. She's either going to get, at 62 years old, her own Social Security check or survivor benefits, which is ever larger, but not both. That doesn't seem fair, does it? Somebody is working all their life; the money they put inside Social Security is not available for somebody he or she loves. If you have your personal account, it grows. You die, your wife or your husband is going to get your personal account—or your children.

I like the idea of encouraging savings. For those of you who studied macroeconomics—it's a fancy word for how to make sure the economy grows—the more you save, the more capital there is; the more capital there is, the more money is available for small business expansion, so people can work.

So we need to encourage savings. I like the idea. I'm telling you, I like the idea. I'm going to talk a lot about it. I'm going to talk to others about the idea too. It needs to be a part of the dialog. And it's interesting, you know, we're not talking about a big cultural shift here. When I was coming up, I don't remember my mother telling me to be careful about my 401(k) plan. They didn't exist, I don't think. There wasn't a lot of focus on encouraging people to manage their own money. Today, that has changed. There's a lot of young Americans, Americans from all walks of life, Americans from all income levels, Americans from all neighborhoods who understand what it means to have a 401(k), an IRA, a defined contribution plan. And they like it, and they're used to it, and they're comfortable with it.

And so I want Congress to consider making this same kind of culture available for workers through the Social Security system, to strengthen the system, to say to younger workers, "It's a better deal for you," to be able to assure grandparents that when it comes to their grandchildren, the safety net that was available for them will be available for the new generation coming up.

And so now I'm going to talk with some other people about it, starting with my mother. I promised not to tell you her age, but she's eligible for Social Security. [Laughter]

Barbara Bush. How old are you? [Laughter]

The President. Fifty-eight. How about that?

Mrs. Bush. Add 22 years. [Laughter]

The President. Yes.

Mrs. Bush. You're supposed to ask me why I'm here.

The President. Okay. First of all, I now know why I'm getting white hair. [Laughter]

Mrs. Bush. I'm here because when else can I see my two oldest boys? [Laughter]

The President. How about a little better answer than that, will you?

Mrs. Bush. That's reason number one.

The President. Now, wait, it's not, how can I see my two better boys, it's how can I tell my two better boys in person what to do, is what you're really trying to say. [Laughter]

Mrs. Bush. Right, right. If you would listen, I'd tell you more. [*Laughter*] But that's really not why I'm here. I'm here because your father and I have 17 grandchildren, all born after—we're doing our part, incidentally, on the labor—[*laughter*]—but all born after 1950. And we want to know, is someone going to do something about it. That's the whole reason—other than seeing my boys.

The President. Well, I'm glad you're here, Mom. And yes, I hope you can tell—I think you will be able to tell—and I think others like Mom, who are worried about whether or not Government even cares about taking on a tough enough issue to address the issue for grandchildren, whether or not there's a will. You'll see. I think you'll see by the time this is over that there is an interest and a desire, a willingness to take on a tough issue, just like you taught me, not to shirk my duty but to step up and lead and to do—do the hard work.

And it is. Listen, I concede, Mom, that Members of Congress, some would rather not be talking about it. But we're going to talk about it, and I'm going to assure you—I've got your stubbornness—that I'm going to—in a good way—I'm going to keep talking about it until something gets done. I'm going to keep traveling the country saying to people, "We've got a problem. If you're a senior, you're going to get your check," and I'm willing to work with Congress. And I'm going to tell you, I—the people of this country are tired of partisan bickering on big issues. They don't want people—they just want the problem solved.

We've got Lee Abdnor with us. She is—she's from Boulder, Colorado. Is that true still?

Leanne Abdnor. Yes, sir.

The President. Listen, I want you to know, I formed a committee in 2001 of Republicans and Democrats to look at Social Security. And Patrick Moynihan, a former Senator from New York, headed it. Isn't that right?

Ms. Abdnor. That's right.

The President. And Lee's on it. Okay, let her go. She studied this.

[*At this point, Ms. Abdnor, president, For Our Grandchildren, Boulder, CO, made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thanks for coming, Lee. Thanks for serving. It was—

Ms. Abdnor. My pleasure.

The President. Let me ask you. I think it's important for you to understand that those who served on the committee were good thinkers, all walks of life, and represented both political parties, and they came together with some ideas. I think there was a couple of ideas that I think are very interesting. We've sent them up to Congress, of course. One of the interesting points that came out of there—and it's very important for people to understand—is that you can design a system to make sure that low-income Americans—that the system is progressive, which is a good idea. Pozen is the man that you served with, I think.

Ms. Abdnor. Yes, he was one of the ones.

The President. He floated a really interesting idea that I hope Congress takes a look at, which is to make sure that the lower-income Americans are treated in a way so that—that when people retire they're as taken care of as well as can be, that the safety net is truly a safety net. It makes sense. And so you can structure a system so that we're—make sure that we're taking care of the low-income people better.

And my only point is Lee's committee had a lot of really good ideas out there. I like the spirit of how they met. They didn't show up and say, "I'm not going to listen to your idea." They showed up and said, "Bring your ideas forward." And as I said, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who was a fine, fine United States Senator from New York, a Democrat, was able to coax good ideas out. So thanks for the spirit.

Ms. Abdnor. Exactly, and Mr. President, I think one of the things that was most gratifying was that even in private, we never talked about politics, not once in all of those months. All we talked about was policy, what's the best way to go forward, how would certain people be helped, how would certain people be harmed by different ideas or by doing nothing.

The President. Well, I appreciate you.

Andrew Brown is with us.

Andrew Brown. Yes, sir.

The President. Where you from, Andrew?

Mr. Brown. I'm from Bay, Arkansas. It's a small town, about 2,000 people, in north-east Arkansas.

The President. That's 3 times more than Crawford. [Laughter]

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir.

The President. Good. Did you—are you educated?

Mr. Brown. Well, I graduated from the Naval Academy last year, sir. [Applause]

The President. Awesome, yes. [Applause] Figured that would get a nice round of applause here in Pensacola.

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir, and I came down here last summer to begin flight school at Pensacola.

The President. Good, yes. How is it going?

Mr. Brown. It's going really well.

The President. No crashes?

Mr. Brown. No crashes, yet. [Laughter]

The President. That's good. It sounds positive. [Laughter]

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir. And I'm just really enjoying that and looking forward to getting my wings in a couple of months and getting out and doing it for real.

The President. Congratulations. Thanks for serving. Other than making sure the Commander in Chief knows you're about to get your wings, why are you here? [Laughter]

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir. Social Security kind of concerns me a little bit. I don't really foresee that it will be around for my generation.

The President. Let me stop you. This is not the first time I have heard this, "I don't think it's going to be around for my generation." Congress needs to hear this. Go ahead.

Mr. Brown. So I invest my money mostly in a Roth IRA. I think that's a great way to invest money. And I applaud Congress for upping the limits there, letting people do more with their money. And I also invest in the Thrift Savings Plan.

The President. Explain to people what that means, invest in a Thrift Savings Plan. I think some out there listening may not be sure what the Thrift Savings Plan is. It sounds sophisticated. It sounds unmanageable.

[Mr. Brown made further remarks.]

The President. Who decides where the money goes?

Mr. Brown. I decide where the money goes. The percentile breakdown, I decide.

The President. The people who are running the Thrift Savings say, "Here's five different options for you," kind of a different mix and risk and return, I guess.

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir, ranging from international—

The President. Which one of them is not the lottery, I want you to know. [Laughter]

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir. And so I've enjoyed being able to put more money aside and grow tax-free through the Thrift Savings program that wouldn't be covered under the Roth.

The President. And how often do you get a statement?

Mr. Brown. I check all mine online, sir.

The President. Oh, you do? [Laughter] Don't worry about making the Commander in Chief look technologically incompetent. [Laughter] Private. Anyway—[laughter].

Think about this. I just want you to listen to what he said, he checks about it online. He watches his money grow. Some people get monthly statements. They watch their money. There's nothing better in a society than to have people concerned about their assets. That's what ownership does. It's yours. Nobody can take it away.

The other thing is, is that when you hold money over a long period of time, there is a predictable rate of return depending upon the risks you take. And there's ways to design programs so that the closer you get to retirement, if the markets were to happen to go down, you're able to get your money, see? That's what's important for people to understand. And obviously, you feel comfortable doing it.

Mr. Brown. Yes, sir, I'm very pleased with the Thrift Savings Plan.

The President. Good. See, he's a Navy pilot, risktaker, and manages his own money. [Laughter] Thanks for coming, Andrew. I appreciate your concern.

Mr. Brown. Thank you, sir. It's an honor.

The President. Thanks for serving. By the way, somebody one time told me they saw a survey that said people like Andrew, people Andrew's age think it's a lot more likely they'll see a UFO than to get a Social Security check. [Laughter] May be right.

With us is Dr. Ron Guy, age 58 years old.

Dr. Ron Guy. Yes, sir, same age.

The President. Welcome.

Dr. Guy. Thank you, sir.

The President. Leading edge of the baby boomers.

Dr. Guy. Yes, sir.

The President. What do you do?

Dr. Guy. Presently, sir, I do financial strategies, working with a great group of partners at Guernsey and Associates. There are 15 of us that help people plan their life, from wherever they are to age 100. And we look very closely, sir, at Social Security.

The President. What happens if they're 101? You can help them on that too.

Dr. Guy. Okay, we can do that, too, sir.

The President. Okay, good. So give me—this is his field, right? You understand pay-as-you-go; you understand all the terms we're using; you understand Thrift Savings Plans, internal rate of returns—let her go.

[*Dr. Guy made further remarks.*]

The President. Thank you, sir. Appreciate you. Let me—one of the interesting things about investing—when you think of investors, you think of a certain kind of person, and I don't view that—I'm sure you don't either. You work with people from all walks of life. I mean, everybody has got a chance to be an—should have a chance to be an investor. Investing is not limited to a certain class of person. That doesn't make any sense. And yet, I think that's the attitude of some, you know, "We can't let certain people, maybe, invest their own money. Maybe they don't know how to do it."

I'm kind of leading you on here, but give me a sense for how hard it is for people to figure out how to invest their money in a prescribed set of bonds and stocks.

[*Dr. Guy made further remarks.*]

The President. Well, good. See, financial literacy. By the way, one of the interesting things we've done is we've encouraged the faith-based community to take on the idea of educating people in financial literacy, so that we can make sure financial literacy is able to permeate all neighborhoods in our society. People will be comfortable with this. This is something that is happening, by the way, already without Government, of course.

Defined contribution plans exist throughout all society right now, Thrift Savings accounts, IRAs, 401(k)s.

The reason I keep emphasizing that is when I talk about a savings plan for individuals, it's happening. And the question is, do we have the wisdom to extend this kind of savings plan to the Social Security system to allow younger workers—this isn't going to—you don't have to worry about me and—we just don't have to worry about it. The system is fixed if you're born before 1950. It's not going to change one iota. The question is, do we listen to younger workers? Do we fit the plan in to meet the current culture, and do we give them a better deal? Do we try to make the system on an individual basis?

I told the—[*inaudible*—]that these accounts do not permanently fix Social Security. We're going to have to do other things. They are part of a Social Security fix that will help the individual worker.

Now, I'm going to talk to Myrtle Campbell. Myrtle, put that mic up there.

Myrtle Campbell. Yes, Mr. President.

The President. Thanks for coming. I came all the way to wish you a happy birthday for your birthday next Sunday—isn't that right?

Mrs. Campbell. Yes. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Myrtle Campbell is here, and she brought somebody with her. Who did you bring with you?

Mrs. Campbell. I brought my granddaughter, Mary Beth Roberts.

The President. Very good. We'll start with you, if that's all right.

Mrs. Campbell. With me?

The President. Yes. Do you receive a Social Security check?

Mrs. Campbell. Yes. And for 82 years, that amounts to a lot of checks, you know. And it has come in real handy, and I would hate to part with it. [*Laughter*]

The President. Yes, you count on it.

Mrs. Campbell. Yes.

The President. I want you to know, Myrtle, I understand a lot of people count on their Social Security check. I mean, it's a really important part of a lot of people's lives. Some people count only on their Social Security check, and therefore, one of the issues in talking about this is to make sure we don't

frighten you. Seriously—we don't want people to feel like the Government is fixing to make sure that the check she counts on is diminished or goes away. And I understand. I fully understand that. And that's why I'm spending a lot of time talking about it, because I understand that sometimes there's another message getting out there.

I can remember in 2000, they said, "If old George W. gets elected, he's going to take away your check." I got elected, so in the 2004 campaign it didn't quite work because people did get their checks.

Keep going. Are you worried about it?

Mrs. Campbell. I'm not worried about it, no. I am concerned, however, for my grandchildren and what's coming up for them and how their livelihood will be, what's due for them.

The President. How many have you got, how many grandchildren?

Mrs. Campbell. I have nine grandchildren, and I have a whole slew of students throughout the United States that I'm concerned about as well.

The President. You're a teacher?

Mrs. Campbell. I'm a Bible teacher.

The President. Great, thanks.

Mrs. Campbell. I'm a volunteer.

The President. Volunteer, very good. That's fantastic.

Mrs. Campbell. I was concerned with children, like your mother. [Laughter]

The President. Yes.

[Mrs. Campbell made further remarks.]

The President. Well, I appreciate you. Thank you for sharing that with us, Myrtle. And I want you to introduce your granddaughter to us.

Mrs. Campbell. Well, this is Mary Beth Roberts. She's the daughter—one of the daughters of my daughter.

The President. One of the daughters of your daughter.

Mrs. Campbell. Wanda Roberts.

The President. That's good. Three daughters?

Mrs. Campbell. Three.

Mary Beth Roberts. They're over there.

Mrs. Campbell. She has five.

The President. You got all the sisters here?

Ms. Roberts. Yes.

The President. Fantastic. Oh yes, I see them over there.

Ms. Roberts. My little brother right there, too.

The President. Brother? Fine-looking lad. [Laughter] Boyfriend?

Ms. Roberts. Right next to him.

The President. Yes, got it. [Laughter] I picked him out. Didn't mean to embarrass you.

Ms. Roberts. It's okay.

The President. Although, Mary Beth, before we came on, said, "Make sure you introduce my boyfriend." [Laughter] Just kidding.

Ms. Roberts. That's all right.

The President. So what do you do?

Ms. Roberts. I am currently a college student at the University of West Florida, majoring in public relations.

The President. Fantastic. Good. Good. How's it going?

Ms. Roberts. I'm sorry?

The President. How's it going?

Ms. Roberts. It's going wonderful. I'm having a great time.

The President. Actually, you took some classes here, right?

Ms. Roberts. I did. I attended Pensacola Junior College and got my general education here.

The President. Good. Good job.

Ms. Roberts. Love it, too.

The President. Major?

Ms. Roberts. Public relations and advertising.

The President. Here's your chance. [Laughter]

Ms. Roberts. Appreciate that.

The President. Yes, no problem. [Laughter] So your grandmother says she's worried about her grandchildren—a safety net for her grandchildren when they retire. Do you share that same concern?

Ms. Roberts. I am extremely concerned. I'm pretty young. I'm 21, and I have a feeling that——

The President. Pretty young? [Laughter]

Ms. Roberts. I'm a baby.

The President. You're really young. Younger and younger every year. [Laughter] Go ahead.

Ms. Roberts. So by the time that I am a senior citizen, I'm sure Social Security will have been long gone, so I'm very concerned.

The President. Yes, it's important for 21-year-old people to pay attention to this issue. If it doesn't get fixed, the bill is going to be huge. That's what you've got to understand if you're 21 years old. You know, they always say, 21-year-olds don't pay attention to politics or issues. I don't know if that's the case.

Ms. Roberts. I pay attention, Mr. President.

The President. That's good. [Laughter] Give me a chance—and by the way, personal accounts are voluntary. In other words, I'm not going to say—the Government isn't going to say, “You have to do this.” I believe in saying to somebody, “If you choose to do this, you can do it. You don't have to do it.” If given that opportunity—I'm maybe a little premature, but if things go right, you may be given that opportunity pretty quickly.

Ms. Roberts. I hope so.

The President. So what would you—do you have any sense for whether or not you would opt to decide to take some of your money aside and put it aside in an account?

Ms. Roberts. I would definitely take that option.

The President. Really? It doesn't frighten you?

Ms. Roberts. Not at all. It actually would be encouraging to know that I will definitely get that when I do retire so I have something to count on.

The President. Yes. A nest egg.

Ms. Roberts. That's right.

The President. The other thing I think is important is to be able to pass—for Mary Beth to be able to pass her money on to whomever she chooses. I think that would be beneficial for society to have more assets accumulate and to be able to have kind of a generational transfer of assets. I think it would be beneficial for people from all walks of life. I really do. I think it's a concept that's an important concept, the idea of passing property on to whomever you choose, the idea of accumulating property.

If she starts, by the way, she's going to do quite well. It sounds like she's going to make quite a good living and set aside money

and put it away, conservative bonds and stocks. And it grows. It compounds.

I want to repeat another point. The money she'll get in her account, the return—rate of return on a conservative mix of bonds and stocks will be greater than her money will be earning in the Federal Government. And that's an important difference, particularly for a 21-year-old investor, over a period of 41 years. That money grows.

And so I'm glad you're interested.

Ms. Roberts. Yes, sir.

The President. My—then my advice to you, everybody else, people watching, is write your Senators and write your Congresspeople. Let them know you're concerned. Let them know you're interested in people coming together to solve this problem to save Social Security for generations to come.

Thanks for coming. Thanks for your interest. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:01 a.m. at Pensacola Junior College. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Gerald McKenzie, member, board of trustees, and David Sam, vice president of academic affairs, Pensacola Junior College; Mayor John R. Fogg of Pensacola, FL; former Representative Timothy J. Penny, senior fellow and co-director, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute Policy Forum; former Senator Bob Dole; and Robert C. Pozen, chairman, MFS Investment Management. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this discussion.

Remarks on Strengthening Social Security in Orlando, Florida

March 18, 2005

The President. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. Thanks for being here. Go ahead and be seated. Now. [Laughter] Thanks for the warm welcome. It's great to be back in central Florida. Thank you all for taking time out of your day to come by and let me discuss with you some important topics.

But before I do, I'm proud to be introduced by one of my favorite seniors—[laughter]—okay, my favorite mother. [Laughter] She is—I told them earlier in Pensacola, if you're trying to figure me out, like the

woman who walked up to me when I was campaigning for Governor of Texas, you should say, “You got your daddy’s eyes but your mother’s mouth.” [Laughter] Which is a compliment. [Laughter]

Earlier today we were with the great Governor of the State of Florida. We’re both proud of him. More importantly, we both love him dearly. He is a great man, and I’m proud of the job he’s doing for Florida. I know you are as well.

I said, “Mother, we’re going to be talking about Social Security.” She said, “Fine. Don’t tell anybody my age.” [Laughter] I said, “I won’t, but can I tell them you were at least born before 1950, so you don’t have anything to worry about when it comes to getting your check?” She said, “Fine.”

Mother and I just came from the Life Project Senior Development Center in Orlando, Florida. I went there to look at some—tell some seniors that I wanted them to know with certainty that nothing will change when it comes to their Social Security check, that they will get the check that the Government has promised. And that’s important for them to hear, because I understand a lot of people rely on a Social Security check. Right there is one. [Laughter] I don’t know if “Amen” was the proper response, but nevertheless. [Laughter] “Yo” is better, yes. [Laughter]

A fellow walked up to me—I’m finding this to be the case in a lot of my travels—he said, “I’m glad I’m going to get my check. What about my grandchildren?” And that’s what I want to talk to the people—to you today about, making sure the seniors’ grandchildren and their great-grandchildren have the same safety net that today’s seniors receive from the Social Security system.

Before I do, first I—Laura sends her best. Up until this very day, I have always said that Laura Bush was the Nation’s greatest First Lady. And then I had to modify my position. [Laughter] Would you go for a tie? [Laughter]

I’m traveling from Washington to Florida with some fine Members of the United States Congress from the great State of Florida. Florida Senator Mel Martinez is with us today. The Congressman from this district, Congressman Tom Feeney, is with us today.

Congressman Ric Keller is with us today. Can I tell them? Yes, I’ll tell them. Keller has got an interesting way about him in this way: He’s getting married tomorrow. Isn’t that great? Yet he’s spending the day with me. [Laughter] So he’s marrying a patient person. [Laughter] But I wish Ric all the best.

Congressman Adam Putnam is with us today. And finally, Congressman Dave Weldon is with us today. I appreciate you coming, Dave.

Mayor Rich Crotty is with us. You might remember the mayor—[applause]—wait a minute, you might remember the mayor, Tyler’s father. [Laughter] I said to Crotty, “Where’s Tyler?” You’re not going to believe this: He’s in Washington, DC, today. [Laughter] One way to avoid a speech is to get out of town. [Laughter]

I appreciate the Y for letting us come by. Jim Ferber, I’m honored that you let us come by and use your facility. I’ll tell you something interesting that takes place here, which I didn’t realize until I got here, was that this is more than just a Y—than the Y that I used to think about. This is an education center. How about this idea for people: The YMCA partners with and houses Northlake Park Elementary School. Pretty interesting concept, isn’t it? It seems like to me it would be a wise use of assets—make sure taxpayers’ money goes well and also provide a great place for kids to not only learn, but to learn how to take care of their bodies.

I don’t know if you know this, but Congressman Weldon is a doctor, and he and I were discussing on Air Force One, what can we do as Government officials to encourage people to make right choices with their body, eat good food, and exercise? I mean, we’ve got to make sure that children understand that it is important to be wise about the food you eat and, at the same time, understand the importance of exercise in order to make sure that they’re healthy when they come up, that they’re—that when they get older—kind of like me—they’re healthy. Now is the time to encourage people to have preventative—choices in life to prevent illness. It seems pretty cool to have the elementary school and the Y educating the mind as well as training the body in the same building. So I congratulate you for your wisdom

and your foresight and wish you all the very best.

I want to thank the teachers who are here. [Applause] Yes. I know I speak for Mother when I say this, and certainly Laura: We appreciate you teaching. It is a noble profession. Sam Houston was my predecessor as the Governor of Texas, by the way, and they asked him—he was a United States Senator from Texas; he was a Congressman from Tennessee; he was the Governor of Texas; he was the President of the Republic of Texas—that was before we became a State. And they said, “Of all those jobs, which one did you like the best?” Without hesitating, he said, “Teacher.” It’s a noble profession. So thanks for teaching. I also want to remind the moms and dads who are here that a child’s first teacher is a mom and a dad, that you have the responsibility to be the first teacher, to make their job easier.

Sam Beard is here—where’s Sam? Oh, Sam, thanks for coming. Sam is a, I think it’s safe to say, a Democrat, which is fine. [Laughter] He is a—but what I think you’ll find interesting is, in 2001, I created a Commission to look at the Social Security issue. And there were eight Democrats and eight Republicans on the Commission. The Commission was headed by former Democrat, United States Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan from New York, one of the really fine, distinguished public servants. We attracted some really bright people like Sam to serve on the Commission. They came together to talk about the Social Security issue, which I’m about to talk about as well. They did so in the spirit of what is—trying to figure out how to solve a problem, not how to promote a political party.

And I want to thank you for serving, Sam. You came up with some great ideas. And I urge the Congress to take the same spirit that the—adopt the same spirit that the Moynihan Commission did, to serve this country without trying to foster a party, but serve the country to come up with problems so that a younger generation of Americans will be able to say, when it’s all said and done, we did our duty to make sure the safety net for Social Security exists for them like it does for today’s seniors. So thank you for being here, Sam. I appreciate you coming.

A couple of other things I want to talk about before we get to Social Security. Today I met Betty Haggard. She is a volunteer. She works for Citizens on Patrol for the Seminole County Sheriff’s Office. I want to thank Betty for the example she sets. The reason I like to bring up people who volunteer is because I want to remind you that a great way to serve our country is to feed the hungry, find shelter for the homeless, mentor a child, teach somebody to read, put your arm around somebody who hurts, help heal a broken heart, and you do that by volunteering. You do that by taking time out of your life, and when you do, you make America a better place.

We’re living in exciting times. I’m—I fully understand that the actions we take abroad and the actions we take at home will set the course of events for a half-century, at least. That’s how I think about public policy. We’re laying the foundation for freedom. That will mean that your children and grandchildren can grow up in a peaceful world. The object of this administration—the objectives of this administration—is to, first and foremost, defend our country. But I understand, in the defense of America—the long-term defense of America will be suited by the spread of freedom.

Free societies are peaceful societies. I believe that deep in everybody’s soul is the desire to live in a free society. It doesn’t matter your religion or where you’re from. And I believe that because the Almighty God’s gift to every man and woman in this world is freedom. This isn’t bestowed by America; this is bestowed by something greater than America. And if you believe that and if you understand that freedom leads to peace, then it’s got to be the central policy of the United States to work with friends and allies to spread freedom. And it’s happening.

I mean, if you think about Afghanistan, for example, particularly for the young here, it wasn’t all that long ago that people in Afghanistan lived under the brutal reign of the Taliban. Now, these people were—had a dark, dim vision of the world, like, if you didn’t agree with them 100 percent when it came to their religion, you’d find yourself being flogged in the public square or executed.

We acted in our self-interest. We upheld a doctrine that said, “If you harbor a terrorist, you’re equally as guilty as the terrorist.” But in so doing, we freed millions of people from the clutches of the Taliban. It didn’t happen long after the Taliban was gone that the people of Afghanistan voted for the first time for President in the country’s history. Millions showed up at the polls. The first voter, by the way, was a young woman. She wasn’t even allowed to express her opinion under the Taliban. She’s voting. And as a result of Afghanistan becoming a liberated, free society, the world is more peaceful.

There was a vote in the Palestinian Territories. President Abbas is showing strength and courage by saying to the terrorists, “We’ll never achieve peace so long as you kill.” I believe there will be a Palestinian state which is a democracy living side by side in peace with Israel, which is a democracy. And we’re beginning to see the signs of hopeful progress. Two free societies living side by side in peace will make it easier for our grandchildren to grow up in a peaceful world. I don’t have any grandchildren yet—your grandchildren. [*Laughter*]

Lebanon—think about Lebanon. It’s a country occupied by Syria. However, as the world began to speak with one voice to Syria, saying, “Get out. Take your troops out; take your intelligence services out,” people poured out in the public square to say, “We want to be free.” There will be a free Lebanon and Syria must listen to the demands of the world and completely withdraw.

And finally, in Iraq—I’m sure some of you have had relatives in Iraq—been a huge sacrifice by our military families and people of America, as a matter of fact, when it came to war. War is always the last resort for a President. Diplomacy must always be tried. We responded to the challenges of the time. But it should have heartened people to see the 8 million plus Iraqis who once lived under the brutal reign of a tyrant go to the polls in defiance of terrorists and cold-blooded killers. That statement was a powerful statement, particularly for young to understand, that when you believe freedom lurks in everybody’s soul, that people love to be free, to realize the bravery and courage of those good folks in the face of terrorists has

set an example for a lot of countries. A free Iraq is in our interests. A free Iraq will make America more secure, the world more free, which will help us achieve the peace we all want. Freedom is on the march, and over the next 4 years, I’ll do all I can to work with friends and allies to keep it on the march.

Just one quick word on what we can do in Congress to make sure that we continue the economic prosperity that’s taking place in a place like Florida—it’s got one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Nation, by the way. I tried to attribute that to Jeb, but then I realized it completely overlooks the entrepreneurial spirit of the Floridian people. The truth of the matter is, this economy is growing because there’s risktakers, dreamers, doers, and hard workers in the State of Florida.

So I’m looking forward to working with Congress to make sure that we continue to create an environment in which we can have economic growth and vitality. There’s a lot of things we can do—pass a reasonable budget, for starters; make sure we’re wise about how we spend your money. Another thing we can do is keep your taxes low. Third thing we need to do is to make sure that Congress gets an energy bill to my desk.

In 2001, I was concerned about dwindling supply in the United States and more dependence upon supply from overseas. And so I put together a group of smart people, and we came together with an energy strategy. And it’s a multifaceted strategy. It says, we’ve got to conserve more; we need to work on ways to encourage conservation; we’ve got to develop alternative sources of energy like ethanol and biodiesel. We need more LNG facilities so we can bring liquified natural gas to our power plants around the United States.

We’ll spend taxpayers’ money on research projects so that we could, for example, be able to burn coal in a zero-emissions plant. We’ve got a plant—such a strategy and such an experimentation going on right now. I think we ought to explore—and we are—ways to see if we can’t use hydrogen to power our automobiles, so that we become not only less dependent on foreign sources of energy but that we’re wiser about environmental air

standards, about protecting environmental air standards.

In other words, there's a lot of things I put in that report. I'm concerned about the price of your gasoline. I'm concerned about rising prices. And Congress needs to stop debating this bill. Congress needs to get it to my desk, so we can start the progress of becoming less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

You don't have to worry about these ones. [Laughter] We're on board—on the same—we're working on—we're working toward the same goal, and that's energy independence.

I want to talk about Social Security. First, Social Security is one of our great institutions. I think Franklin Roosevelt did a good thing when he created Social Security—matter of fact, I know he did—because it's provided a retirement safety net for a lot of folks. And that's important.

The problem is we've got a problem with Social Security. And that's what I want to discuss with you. As a matter of fact, I think this is maybe the 16th State I've been to since I gave my State of the Union, talking about Social Security, the fact that it's one of the great moral successes, the fact that the system has helped seniors enjoy the dignity of a secure retirement.

I'm assuring people I fully understand a lot of seniors rely upon their Social Security check. Don't you? It matters a lot. It matters to seniors all around our country. And that's why I'm spending a lot of time not only addressing the problem—which I'm going to define for you in a minute—but, most importantly, saying to seniors, you have nothing to fear when it comes to this talk about making sure the system works for the next generation. It's really important for people to hear that. It's taken 16 States so far to get the message out. I got three more next week. No matter how many States it takes or how many speeches I give, I want seniors to understand all across America, no matter what the rhetoric is, no matter what the pamphlets say, no matter what the pundits tell you, this Government will make and keep its promise to our seniors who have retired.

If you're approaching retirement and born before 1950, you're going to get your check too. Nothing will change. You've been work-

ing hard, you've been putting money in the system, and you're going to get your Social Security check too. In other words, for those of us born prior to 1950, nothing changes. I'm a fellow who was born prior to 1950; I guess that makes me feel okay.

What really makes me worried about is I understand that we have made promises for younger Americans that we can't keep. And that's what I want to explain to you, that this Government of yours has said to Americans, "That safety net that we've created is fine if you retire, but for a younger generation of Americans, it has a hole in it." And let me tell you why: Because Social Security has changed; the dynamics of our society has changed in ways that the creators of Social Security could never have envisioned.

First of all, the Social Security system is a pay-as-you-go system. That means, you pay; the Government goes ahead and spends. [Laughter] You pay in the system at your payroll tax, and the Government pays out the promised benefits, and if there's any money left over, it goes to pay for other programs. See, some people, I suspect, think that there is a trust, and we take your money, and we hold it for you. And then when it comes time to retire, we pull it out for you. That's not the way it works. It is a pay-as-you-go system. The money comes in the door and immediately goes out the door.

In 1950, there were 16 workers for every beneficiary—16 workers paying into the system for every beneficiary. You can imagine it works. In a pay-as-you-go system, when you've got a lot of workers per beneficiary, it means you're collecting enough money to be able to take care of the people who've retired. Today, because we're having fewer babies, because there's an increasing number of beneficiaries, there's only 3.3 workers per beneficiary. In other words, fewer workers are carrying a greater load.

In a relatively short period of time, there's going to be two workers per beneficiary. Like, if you're young, you're going to be one of two who are going to have to pay for guys like me. And so you begin to get a sense for the math that has changed: 16 workers in the 1950s; in the 21st century, there's going to be 2 workers per beneficiary. And

the other thing—the other problem to complete the math is that a group of us are getting ready to retire. We're called baby boomers. I think I'm on the leading edge. I was born in 1946; I turn 62 in 2008, which is a convenient year, in my case, for getting to retirement age. [Laughter] And you know what else has changed? Guys like me and Sam and others, we're living longer, much longer than previous generations. And you know what else has changed? Because a lot of people ran for office saying, "Vote for me; I'm going to increase your Social Security benefits," my generation has been promised greater benefits than the previous generation.

So if you take the issue of baby boomers living longer, getting paid more, coupled with fewer people paying into the system, it says we've got a serious problem, and it begins to manifest itself in 2018. That's when more money starts going out of the system than coming in. Now, that may seem like a long time if you've got a 2-year perspective on life, but it's not that long; 2018 is 13 years from now. If you're 5 years old, you'll be voting in 13 quick years. For those of you who have raised children, you understand how fast 13 years goes by.

In 2027, the system will be 200 billion in the red. In other words, in 2018, it starts to go in the red, and it gets worse every year; 2027, it's 200 billion, and it gets worse after that. It keeps getting worse until it gets up to—2033, the annual shortfall is about 300 billion. Finally, 2042, it's bust; it's bankrupt. So in other words, there's a huge hole. Because there's more of me—people like me living longer, getting paid more benefits, fewer workers in the system, the system starts go into the red, and it just accelerates.

And you can understand the problem. If you're a grandparent thinking about your grandchild, you ought to be asking the question of people like me, "How are you going to—how's this younger worker going to pay for it if you don't do anything?" You can imagine what it means.

We had an expert today, one of your panelists, Sam, was there. She said that if nothing happens, in order to make the system somewhat whole, the payroll tax is going to have to go up to 18 percent, I think she told me.

Think about that. Doing nothing has got serious consequences for a younger generation coming up. This is why I like to say this is a generational issue. This is an issue where, once we can assure grandparents that you're fine, you'll be taken care of, the promise will be kept, a lot of grandparents are starting to say, "Whew, I'm feeling good about it. How about my grandchildren? What are we going to do for them?"

I met Don and—Dan and Lois Canterbury. Dan is a retired dentist from Auburndale. He and his wife have got eight grandchildren. Their—the oldest grandchild is Evan. He's not here. He's 17—I hope he's studying—[laughter]—but he's 17. On its current path, Social Security would take part of Evan's check, of course, for his entire working career, but it goes broke 10 years before he retires. I hope that helps put it in perspective of what I'm talking about. It's one thing to put out dates; it's another thing to put this in personal terms.

And Evan is out there working hard; the system is bankrupt; he's put all this money in; and so what are the choices that future public policy people will have? And they're not very good: major benefit cuts, major increases in taxes, cutting out all other kind of programs in order to make sure that the promises are kept. And those options don't sound very good to me, and I know they don't sound very good to you when you start thinking about it.

And so what we need to do is come up with a permanent solution. And that's what I'm going to travel the country talking about. I think most people have begun to understand that we got a problem, which is an important dynamic. See, if Congress didn't think you thought there was a problem, nothing would happen. This is one of these issues where people in Washington truly respond to what people think. If they think nobody really thinks there's a problem, I can assure you, nothing will take place. But I think things are changing in Washington. Matter of fact, I know they are, in terms of whether or not people think there's a problem. Matter of fact, the U.S. Senate approved a resolution the other day, 100 to nothing, saying that we have a problem with Social Security, and we need to come up with a permanent solution.

That is progress. It's a strong commitment from the Senate.

And I want to assure you all that my administration will work with the United States Senate and the House of Representatives to come up with a permanent solution, and we're willing to listen to anybody with a good idea. As a matter of fact, in my State of the Union Address—I haven't looked at all previous State of the Union Addresses, but I suspect you'll find, when it came to Social Security, mine was unique because I said, let's put good ideas on the table. And I mentioned some of them. Former Congressman Tim Penny had a good idea about the possibility of indexing Social Security benefits to prices rather than wages, for younger workers. President Clinton spoke about raising the retirement age for younger workers. Patrick Moynihan, through the committee, talked about ways to change the benefits. There was a Social Security expert named Robert Pozen, who happens to be a Democrat, proposed a progressive mix of wage and price indexing.

These are all important, very interesting ideas that I just strongly urge Members of Congress to bring to the table and consider. It's one thing to be thinking about solutions; it's another to say, "I just—going to dismiss anything out of hand." That's not the way I think, and that's not the way this problem's going to get solved. We ought to welcome ideas. It doesn't matter if it's a Republican idea or a Democrat idea, the idea is to come together and fix this for a generation of Americans to come.

I have said this and I believe—I know we can do this without raising the payroll tax rate. The reason why I believe that it's necessary is because one way to make sure this economy is slow today and slow in the out-years is run up the payroll tax on people. It's a tough tax on a lot of people.

I also know that this can't be a temporary fix. I don't know if you remember 1983. Some of you weren't even born then. Kind of envious. [*Laughter*] They said they fixed—they put the 75-year Social Security fix together. It's called a 75-year fix. First, I want to applaud President Reagan, Speaker O'Neill. I think Leader Dole was involved with that. It was—a lot of people from both

parties came together, said, "We've got a real problem; let's come together to do something about Social Security." And they put together the 75-year fix. But here we are in 2005. Doesn't seem like a 75-year fix when you're here talking about it 22 years later.

And so I urge Congress not to think about 75-year fixes. The math is just not going to allow for a 75-year fix. It may sound like a 75-year fix at first. We need a permanent fix. We need to do it right now and make sure that nobody has to address the issue again.

I think we have an additional responsibility, besides making sure that it's solvent, the system is solvent. We've got to make it better for our children and grandchildren. And so I've laid out a proposal to give our youngsters an opportunity that the current system doesn't provide, and that is a chance to own a piece of their own retirement, own it themselves, and to tap into the power of compounding interest. It's called—I call it a personal savings account. It's a chance to give workers a voluntary option. In other words, you get to choose if you want to. The Government says, you don't have to do this; you can do this if you think it's an interesting idea that you want to look at, to set aside some of your own money in a savings account that you will invest in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks.

This isn't the solution to Social Security; it is a part of the solution to Social Security. It will mean that younger workers, when they retire, get a better deal than under the current system, is what I'm trying to tell you. It's a—if you think about this—let me explain compounding rate of interest to you, that if you let a younger worker invest a third of their payroll taxes, let's say 4 percent, in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks, and that younger worker started saving at about 21 years old and made \$35,000 a year over his or her lifetime, by the time he or she retired, there would be a nest egg of \$250,000. In other words, 4 percent of that person's payroll tax, or a third of the payroll tax, invested and held, and it just grows, compounds.

And what's important is, is that the rate of return in the voluntary account would be greater than that in which the Government—you can get through the Government. In

other words, by putting in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks, you're going to make a better rate of return than your money today. And the difference between what you will earn in a conservative mix and what the Government gets is substantial, particularly when you start saving at 21 years old. And that matters.

And so they've got an opportunity under this system to have an asset that you call your own. The system today, you have no assets. The money goes in, and it goes out. There's IOUs; they're paper. But there's no asset base.

Now, look, we're going to make sure there's careful guidelines about what you can invest in. You can't put it in the lottery. You can't take it to the track. [*Laughter*] You've got to invest it in a conservative mix of bonds and stocks. But we're used to those kinds of things, aren't we, in our society? We got the Thrift Savings Plans that people—Congress are able to use or Federal employees are able to use.

Today I was with a Navy pilot in Pensacola, 21-year-old kid getting his wings, talked about his Thrift Savings Plan. He said, "I like my Thrift Savings Plan." He says, "I watch my money grow." I said, "Oh, yes—you get a quarterly statement?" He said, "No, I get it online all the time."

You see what's interesting about this notion about saving and investing is, the world has changed when it comes to investing. At least it's changed since I was being raised. I was telling Mother in the limousine, I don't remember talking to her about 401(k)s when I was a little guy. I don't remember IRAs, defined contribution plans. This world has changed since I was raised.

And there are a lot of young kids who now understand what it means to invest. They're comfortable with the concept of watching their money grow. They understand that it's possible for Government to allow a younger worker to invest, that—in a conservative mix of instruments. I mean, this is not a foreign concept. People are getting used to that. It seems like to me that if a Thrift Savings Plan is good enough for a Federal worker, it's good enough for a private sector worker. It's good enough for you.

I met Anna Brooks from Sanford, Florida. Her husband was a Methodist minister. He died. Let me talk about one of the benefits of personal accounts when it comes to somebody who has been widowed. If your spouse dies before 62 and you're not working, you get nothing from the system until you turn 62 years old. Think about that. Your husband has been working, putting money in the system; he passes away—or it could be the opposite, wife is working, husband is the beneficiary, and the person passes away, and there's nothing left until that person turns 62 years old. Or how about the case of the—both couples—both folks working, and one predeceases the other, and the spousal benefits are less than the person's retirement benefits when the person living retires. You only get one or the other. You get the higher of the two, not both. Think about that system for a minute. Somebody works all their life; the spouse works all their life; the spouse is only going to get what she has or he has contributed into the system. But the other—the other member of their family's money, it just goes away.

If you have a personal account that grows over time, it's your asset you call your own. You can leave it to whom you want. If you get—if you—the wife or husband whose spouse predeceases them will be able to have that asset. It's yours. You get to decide, not the Government. And the money you've earned over the course of your lifetime becomes real. It's a part of an asset. And that's an important part of why people should take a serious look at personal accounts. There's something beneficial in a society where more and more people have a real asset they call their own, where they get to decide to whom to leave it to.

And so I was talking to Anna. She's got a lot of grandkids. She's interested in making sure that the system for the grandkids—she's got two great-grandkids; she's fixing to have another great-grandchild—so she's interested in the subject, because she understands that if we don't do anything, those kids are going to be saddled with a serious problem. And the idea of her kids or grandkids and great-grandkids being able to have an asset appeals to her, something she wasn't afforded when she was coming up and working.

And so what I'm telling you is personal accounts would replace empty Government promise with real assets. I really like the idea of the fact that in our society today, more people own a home than ever before. More minority families own a home than ever before. That's positive, isn't it? Isn't that great? I like the idea that more and more people own their own small business. People from all walks of life have their own business and they're struggling and working hard, employing people, but it's theirs. Personal accounts in a Social Security system would give millions of Americans their first chance to own something, the chance to pass something on to a son or a daughter, if that's what they choose to do.

Now, ownership is powerful. Ownership was—you know, it means you can—somebody can inherit something from a mom or dad. And that shouldn't be the privilege of just the wealthy. That should be the opportunity of everybody who lives in America.

And so one of the reasons why I think Congress ought to consider personal accounts is because it empowers the individual. It is—conforms with the way people are getting used to investing now, particularly younger Americans, through 401(k)s or defined contribution plans. It will allow people to earn a better rate of return than they will under the current system. It will help complement whatever is left over in the Social Security system. The Government will have promised benefits, but I've told you, we can't pay what we've promised. But the personal account, because of the compounding rate of interest, will help you get closer to that which Government has promised. It will make it a part of a good retirement system for people.

And this idea is an idea that's not a Republican idea or a Democrat idea. There are a lot of people from both political parties who understand the power of this. I happen to think it's a really good people idea. I think it's an idea because it empowers people. I think it's an idea because it says that the United States Government really does trust the people with their own money.

And so I urge Congress, as we take on this issue, to listen carefully to the American people. And I urge you to make sure that Congress hears your voices.

Over the next weeks, I'll continue to talk about how the—to the people about the fact that we have got a serious problem. Oh, it's fine for people like me and people born after—before 1950. People born after 1950, you better be asking your elected representatives, "If we've got a problem, what do you intend to do about it?" I find people are really tired of partisan bickering: "We can't accept this idea because it's a Republican idea." "We can't accept this idea because it's a Democrat idea." People just don't want that when it comes to the Social Security debate. People want there to be good will and a good-faith effort by people of both political parties to sit down at the table, and say, "The people are worried about it. There's a lot of grandparents in America worried about their grandchildren. We have run for office for a reason."

One of the reasons I have put this idea or this issue on the table, because I understand the job of the President is to confront problems, and not just pass them on to another President or another Congress. Now is the time.

And I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come by. Sam, thank you for your good work on this issue. Thank you for your interest on this issue. I want to thank the younger folks who are here for paying attention to an issue which I promise you is going to affect your life. It's either going to affect it in an incredibly positive way, or about 20 years from now, you're going to be saying to yourself, "I wonder how come the Congress didn't listen to old George W. Bush. [Laughter] How come they didn't get together and fix this for generations to come?"

God bless. Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:58 p.m. at the Lake Nona YMCA Family Center. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Mayor Richard T. Crotty of Orange County, FL; James W. Ferber, president and chief executive officer, Central Florida YMCA; Sam Beard, founder and president, Economic Security 2000; President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; former Representative Timothy J. Penny, senior fellow and co-director, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute Policy Forum; Robert C. Pozen, chairman, MFS Investment Management; and former Senator Bob Dole. The transcript released

by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of former First Lady Barbara Bush.

Proclamation 7875—National Poison Prevention Week, 2005

March 18, 2005

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

National Poison Prevention Week reminds us that young children need constant close supervision by responsible adults to keep them safe. This week highlights the dangers of accidental poisonings, steps that can be taken to reduce risks, and what to do in case of an emergency.

Poison control centers receive approximately one million calls each year about children who have ingested dangerous medicines or chemicals they have found around their homes. Since the first National Poison Prevention Week 43 years ago, many deaths and injuries have been prevented through increased public awareness, the use of child-resistant packaging, and a national network of poison control centers. We must build on this progress by taking additional precautions to keep our children safe. All potentially hazardous products, including those encased in child-resistant packaging, should be stored out of the reach of children. Parents can educate themselves about poisons and receive safety information by visiting the Poison Prevention Week Council website at www.poisonprevention.org. In case of an emergency, families should keep the toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222, on hand in order to reach the nearest Poison Control Center. By properly supervising children, taking preventive measures, and knowing what to do in an emergency, we can help protect our young people from the risks of accidental poisonings.

To encourage Americans to learn more about the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take appropriate preventive measures, the Congress, by joint resolution approved September 26, 1961, as amended (75 Stat. 681), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the

third week of March each year as “National Poison Prevention Week.”

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim March 20 through March 26, 2005, as National Poison Prevention Week. I call upon all Americans to observe this week by participating in appropriate ceremonies and activities and by learning how to prevent poisonings among children.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this eighteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand five, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-ninth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 10:03 a.m., March 22, 2005]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on March 23.

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.

March 12

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush attended the Gridiron Club dinner at the Capital Hilton Hotel.

March 14

In the morning, in his private dining room, the President had a breakfast meeting with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Karen Hughes to discuss his nomination of Hughes to be Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy. He then had an intelligence briefing.

Later in the morning, in the State Dining Room, the President participated in a photo opportunity with Intel Science Talent Search finalists.

In the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President met with John Furgess, national commander-in-chief, Veterans of Foreign Wars. Later, also in the Oval Office, he met with Bishop William S. Skylstad, president, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

In the evening, in the Diplomatic Reception Room, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a reception for the diplomatic corps.

The President announced his intention to nominate Dina Habib Powell to be Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The President declared a major disaster in Alaska and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe winter storm on January 7–12.

The President declared an emergency in Maine and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by record and/or near-record snow on January 22–23.

The President declared an emergency in Maine and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by record and/or near-record snow on February 10–11.

March 15

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. He then participated in a roundtable interview with representatives of regional newspapers.

The President announced that he has nominated the following individuals to be members of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission: James H. Bilbray; Philip Coyle; Adm. Harold W. Gehman, Jr., USN (Ret.); James V. Hansen; Gen. James T. Hill, USA (Ret.); Lt. Gen. Claude M. Kicklighter, USA (Ret.); Samuel Knox Skinner; and Brig. Gen. Sue Ellen Turner, USAF (Ret.)

March 16

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

During the day, in the Oval Office, the President met with Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul D. Wolfowitz and Secretary of the Treasury John W. Snow to discuss the President's recommendation of Wolfowitz to serve as President of the World Bank.

The President announced that he has directed World Bank U.S. Executive Director Robert B. Holland to recommend that the World Bank Board of Directors elect Paul D. Wolfowitz as President of the World Bank.

The President announced his intention to designate Kevin J. Martin as Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission.

March 17

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

Later in the morning, in the Oval Office, the President met with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland. Then, in the Diplomatic Reception Room, he participated in a photo opportunity with Northern Ireland political and civic leaders. Later, also in the Diplomatic Reception Room, he met with family members of Robert McCartney, who was murdered in Belfast, Ireland, on January 30.

In the afternoon, at the Capitol, the President and Prime Minister Ahern attended a Saint Patrick's Day luncheon hosted by Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Dennis Hastert.

Later in the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President met with Thomas P. Cadmus, national commander, American Legion.

The President announced his intention to nominate Joseph H. Boardman to be Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration, Department of Transportation.

March 18

In the morning, the President traveled to Pensacola, FL. While en route aboard Air Force One, he met with Senator Mel R. Martinez and Representatives Tom Feeney, Ric Keller, Jeff Miller, Adam H. Putnam, and Dave Weldon of Florida. Later, also aboard Air Force One, he had an intelligence briefing. Upon arrival in Pensacola, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Bob Woodard.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Orlando, FL, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Betty Haggard. Later, he toured the Life Project Senior Development Center.

In the evening, the President traveled to the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX.

The White House announced that the President will welcome Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel to the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, on April 11.

The President announced his intention to nominate Linda M. Springer to be Director of the Office of Personnel Management.

The President announced his intention to appoint John Belle as a member of the Commission of Fine Arts.

The President announced his intention to appoint Herbert F. Ames as a member of the National Capital Planning Commission.

The President announced his intention to appoint A. Norman Crowder III, Robert Gordan, and Leopoldo E. Guzman as members of the Advisory Committee to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

The President announced his intention to designate James E. Nevels as Chair of the Advisory Committee to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board (Access Board): Tricia Mason; Philip G. Pearce; Daniel O. Rios; and John O. Woods, Jr.

The President announced his intention to appoint Charles M. Younger as a member of the Board of Visitors to the U.S. Military Academy.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

The following list does not include promotions of members of the Uniformed Services, nominations to the Service Academies, or nominations of Foreign Service officers.

Submitted March 14

Paul D. Clement,
of Virginia, to be Solicitor General of the United States, vice Theodore Bevery Olson, resigned.

Charles F. Conner,
of Indiana, to be Deputy Secretary of Agriculture, vice James R. Moseley.

Michael D. Griffin,
of Virginia, to be Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, vice Sean O'Keefe, resigned.

Robert Joseph,
of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, vice John Robert Bolton.

Kim Wang,
of California, to be a member of the National Museum and Library Services Board for a term expiring December 6, 2009 (reappointment).

Submitted March 15

James H. Bilbray,
of Nevada, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Philip Coyle,
of California, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Adm. Harold W. Gehman, Jr., USN, Ret.,
of Virginia, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

James V. Hansen,
of Utah, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Gen. James T. Hill, USA, Ret.,
of Florida, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Claude M. Kicklighter,
of Georgia, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Samuel Knox Skinner,
of Illinois, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Brig. Gen. Sue Ellen Turner, USAF, Ret., of Texas, to be a member of the Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission (new position).

Submitted March 17

Joseph H. Boardman, of New York, to be Administrator of the Federal Railroad Administration, vice Allan Rutter, resigned.

John Robert Bolton, of Maryland, to be the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, and the Representative of the United States of America in the Security Council of the United Nations.

John Robert Bolton, of Maryland, to be Representative of the United States of America to the Sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations during his tenure of service as Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations.

Stephen L. Johnson, of Maryland, to be Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, vice Michael O. Leavitt.

John D. Negroponte, of New York, to be Director of National Intelligence (new position).

**Checklist
of White House Press Releases**

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released March 14

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary extending the President's congratulations to Madagascar as the first country to have its Millennium Challenge Account Compact approved by the Millennium Challenge Corporation Board

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Alaska

Statements by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Maine

Announcement of nomination for Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy

Released March 15

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary on the Senate vote to seek a permanent solution for Social Security

Released March 17

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Announcement of nomination for U.S. Trade Representative

Released March 18

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary on the upcoming visit of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel

**Acts Approved
by the President**

NOTE: No acts approved by the President were received by the Office of the Federal Register during the period covered by this issue.