

We're serving in an amazing time. I say, "We're serving," because we're serving together. It is a time when this Nation of ours is facing unbelievable challenges. There is an enemy that still lurks, that wants to bring harm to the American people. And we've got to do everything in our power to protect the American people; that is our solemn duty. There is a fantastic opportunity, as we defeat this enemy, to lay the foundation for peace for generations to come.

We have a great opportunity as a generation called to act, called to protect America, to seize the moment and defeat this ideology with freedom. You know, I like to tell people about how—"amazed" isn't the right word—but how stark this story I'm about to tell you is to me, what an amazing contrast it is about Japan.

You know, my dad, as an 18-year-old signed up—in the United States Navy, by the way. [Applause] There you go. And there were a lot of 18-year-old and 19-year-old and 20-year-old kids, and some older people, too—[laughter]—to fight against a sworn enemy which had attacked us.

Laura and I just got back from the Far East, and I sat down at the table with the Prime Minister of Japan, talking about how to keep the peace, talking about how to deal with North Korea, talking about how—and thanking him, by the way, for sending troops to Iraq to help this young democracy develop. And it was that contrast between what 41 did and what 43 is doing—that would be my dad and me. [Laughter] To sit down with a dad—which we're going to do here over Christmas—who fought the Japanese, and his son is helping to keep the peace with the Japanese, something had to have happened.

And one of my predecessors, Harry Truman, recognized the power of freedom to transform an enemy into an ally; that's what happened. And so Japan adopted a Japanese-style democracy, and in that democracies don't fight each other; in that democracy is the best way to encourage a peaceful world; it's working.

And what we're seeing today is brave troops and committed citizens who are not only determined to chase down the killers and bring them to justice before they hurt us again, but understand that by spreading

freedom and democracy, we're battling an ideology of darkness with an ideology of hope. And we're laying that foundation for peace for generations to come. The task at hand is one that requires determination and discipline and great faith in the ideals of human freedom and human liberty.

And so coming here today is a chance to not only thank you for being a part of this incredible team of healers but also, being a part of this historic moment. Someday, an American President will be sitting down with a duly elected leader of Iraq, working hard to keep the peace, and future generations of Americans will be saying, "Thank God this generation of America stood strong for what we believe."

And so on behalf of a grateful nation, thanks for doing your duty. Thanks for serving. Thanks for being an important part of this march for freedom, and thanks, most of all, for bringing comfort and aid and solace to those who have been hurt on the battlefield and their families.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a blessed 2006. May God bless your work, and may God continue to bless the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:34 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Adam M. Robinson, USN, commander, National Naval Medical Center; Maj. Gen. Kenneth L. Farmer, Jr., USA, commanding general, North Atlantic Regional Medical Command and Walter Reed Army Medical Center; Brig. Gen. Thomas W. Travis, USAF, commander, 89th Medical Group, and his wife, Sally; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks on Signing the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005

December 21, 2005

Thanks for coming. In a few moments, I will sign the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005. This important bill will help the citizens of the gulf coast continue to put their lives back together and rebuild their communities in the wake of the devastating hurricanes that hit the region earlier this year.

I want to thank the Members of Congress who have joined us here, and those who

haven't joined us here, for passing this important piece of legislation. I want to thank Trent Lott from Mississippi for being here. Trent Lott invited me one time to his home, right there on the gulf coast of Mississippi. It no longer exists. He knows firsthand what it means to live through one of these devastating storms, and I appreciate you, Senator, for being here.

I want to thank Congressmen Jim McCrery of Louisiana and Bill Jefferson of Louisiana. Both these Members have worked very hard for the people of the great State of Louisiana with Congress to put a package together to help the people of Louisiana and Mississippi get back up on their feet.

I want to thank Max Baucus. He's not from the gulf coast area of America. He's from Montana, but he cares. He is ranking member of the Finance Committee, and it's kind for you to be here.

I want to thank members of my Cabinet who have joined us here today, Elaine Chao and Alphonso Jackson, Mike Chertoff.

And finally, I want to thank my friend Don Powell, who is the Federal coordinator for the gulf coast rebuilding effort. His job is to represent the administration there as he interfaces with State and local officials. I want to thank you, Don, for taking on this assignment.

When I spoke to the Nation from Jackson Square in New Orleans, I said our job and our goal for the gulf coast was not just to survive but to thrive, and not just to cope but to overcome. And I meant it. And we're now implementing a comprehensive plan to help the people of the region recover and rebuild. We've helped a lot of people get temporary housing. We're now in the process of helping them to transition to permanent homes. Helping people find housing is going to be one of the really important challenges that we all face together in order to help these areas rebuild.

We're working to assist the school districts that have taken in students from the affected areas. There's a lot of school districts around our country that said, "We want to help. Let us educate the children of those who evacuated," and now we're helping to rebuild them.

We're also helping rebuild the schools in the affected regions. Last week, we announced our plan to strengthen the levee system in New Orleans. And in the last 24 hours, I extended full Federal coverage of the cost of debris removal for Louisiana and Mississippi. We want to get the debris out of the way. I can't imagine anything more discouraging than to continue to see the piles—and I mean, literally, piles—of debris. And the sooner we can get that debris removed and disposed of, the more hopeful people will become.

Today I'm going to sign the Gulf Opportunity Zone Act of 2005. It's a step forward to fulfill this country's commitment to help rebuild. It's going to help small businesses, is what it's going to do. For small businesses in the affected area, the GO Zone will double expensing for investments in new equipment from \$100,000 to \$200,000.

The bill also provides a 50-percent bonus depreciation, and that means tax relief for small businesses that—and businesses that purchase new equipment and build new structures. In other words, this tax act provides incentives for people to move forward. And as these businesses move forward, they're going to need to employ people. So this is a tax bill that has got employment consequences to it. This is going to help the entrepreneurs of Louisiana and Mississippi and Alabama. Entrepreneurship creates opportunity, which creates jobs.

This is just part of our plan to help the people get back to work. We've got to help workers get the skills they need. I just met with a group of concerned citizens from business and labor and education, all aspects of society. Again, I want to thank you all for being there. We're talking about how to help put together a strategy that takes advantage of the jobs that are going to be created down there to make sure there's a skill set match. We've got a lot of people that want to work, and yet they may not all be electricians or plumbers. And so one of the real challenges and opportunities we have is to match willing worker with jobs which will actually exist. And that's what we're talking about and strategizing about.

And again, I want to thank you all very much. This is the private sector and public

sector working in close coordination. Don Powell is going to help put together a strategy that will be, one, it's easy to understand; and two, that will have moments that we'll be able to measure whether or not we're making progress.

The GO Zone Act does a couple of other things. It increases funding for Hope Scholarships and lifetime learning credits for students attending colleges and graduate students in the—and graduate schools in the Gulf Opportunity Zone. It's going to make continuing education for workers more accessible and help support high school training that these gulf coast residents are going to need to fill the jobs which are actually going to be existing.

By the way, in a year from now, we're going to be talking about, "What are we going to do about all these jobs, and who's going to fill them?" As a matter of fact, there's a job shortage already down there. And again, I repeat to you, this provides a great opportunity to make sure that the folks in Mississippi and Louisiana who—can find work. And those are the folks we want to be first in line, by the way. If you're from New Orleans, Louisiana, we want you to be the first person to get the job. And what I'm telling you is we're going to work to make sure housing is available for you and that there's a training center or training program that will help you meet your—match your desire to work with the jobs which actually exist.

If you're from Mississippi, we want those new jobs to go to Mississippi residents, and we want to help the Mississippi community college, for example, to become a vital training center for the jobs which are going to be needed to help this important part of our country get back up on its feet.

The Senate passed a deficit reduction bill that's going to provide \$2 billion to help States pay for critical medical care for those evacuees who need it. That's important. The defense appropriations bill that the Senate is now considering—and I hope passes—would help repair damaged transportation infrastructure and provide important Federal funding for New Orleans to rebuild the levees and correct any design and construction

flaws of those levees. These bills are important for the future of the gulf coast.

DOD bill is really important, as the good Senator will tell you. This time of year, Americans, we give our thanks for the many blessings we have. We renew our commitment to help those who are in need. We are going to continue to work together to build a better future for the people of the gulf coast. And the bill I'm about to sign is going to make a difference. It's an important piece of legislation. It's part of our strategy to accomplish an important national goal, and that is a revitalized gulf coast and a New Orleans that is a shining example of what America can do when it puts its mind to something.

So again, thank you all for coming. Now, my honor to sign the bill.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. H.R. 4440, approved December 21, was assigned Public Law No. 109-135.

Statement on Senate Action To Extend the PATRIOT Act

December 21, 2005

I appreciate the Senate for working to keep the existing PATRIOT Act in law through next July, despite boasts last week by the Democratic leader that he had blocked the Act. No one should be allowed to block the PATRIOT Act to score political points, and I am grateful the Senate rejected that approach. The terrorists want to attack our country again and inflict even greater damage than they did on September 11, 2001. The PATRIOT Act is a vital tool for America in the war on terror. The Act has torn down the wall between law enforcement and intelligence officials to help us connect the dots and prevent attacks. The work of Congress on the PATRIOT Act is not finished. The Act will expire next summer, but the terrorist threat to America will not expire on that schedule. I look forward to continuing to work with Congress to reauthorize the PATRIOT Act.