

**Remarks on Recovery Efforts in the Areas Damaged by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in Gautier, Mississippi**

March 8, 2006

Thank you all for coming. Laura and I are really honored to be back in Mississippi with the Governor and the first lady. And most of all, we're pleased to be with those who are helping to educate the young here on the gulf coast.

We, of course, want to thank those who are helping this important part of the country rebuild. Part of rebuilding the community is to make sure that the schools are able to function well and teach children how to read and write and add and subtract. Laura and I are committed to making sure no child is left behind anywhere in the United States of America.

Particularly want to thank the superintendent, the principal, and the teachers for helping this important part of the country recover from devastating storm.

And now it's my honor to introduce the First Lady, who is going to make an announcement.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:22 p.m. at College Park Elementary School. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi and his wife, Marsha; Wayne V. Rodolfich, superintendent, Pascagoula School District; and Suzanne Ros, principal, College Park Elementary School. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

**Remarks on New Home Construction in Gautier, Mississippi**

March 8, 2006

**The President.** It's good to hear people hammering, isn't it?

**Governor Haley Barbour.** It really is. It's great for us in Mississippi.

**The President.** It is. People are building their lives back. And one of the reasons I've come down here is to remind people that there's still a lot of people hurting. And I talk to the Governor all the time about what

we can do to make sure this part of the world rebuilds. It's great to see rebuilding.

Haley has been real good about talking to us about a variety of issues. I want to thank you for your leadership.

**Gov. Barbour.** Mr. President, thank you. Let me just say publicly, thank you. In the last day, President Bush and the Bush administration has made the fifth extension of the deadline for the Government to cover 100 percent of debris removal and other emergency measures. And this extension is to June 30th, when we ought to be through.

And first, I want to say thank you for that. You know, it's been a huge issue for these little communities, that they don't have any tax base—so thank you for that. That was made public yesterday. I'm glad to announce today that last night HUD approved our plan for our homeowner grant program. We intend to make \$4 billion of community development block grant money from the Federal Government available to Mississippians, like Jerry and Elaine, so that they can rebuild their homes or build new homes, to get themselves out of the flood plain.

Tomorrow, we have been allowed by HUD to post our plan. You can see it on our web site, [mshomehelp—m-s-h-o-m-e-h-e-l-p—.gov](http://mshomehelp-m-s-h-o-m-e-h-e-l-p-gov), and we'll have to have a 2-week comment period, at the end of which we'll start taking applications. But somebody can go onto the web site now, Mr. President, or at noon tomorrow, and find out all the information they need to get, what all the rules are. And I'm pleased to say that the Akins qualify.

**The President.** That's good.

**Gov. Barbour.** They built this house up above the new flood plain, 25 feet above sea level, which is one of the requirements so that we reduce risks. And thank you for doing that.

**The President.** I always felt that it was really important to say to the Governor and to local folks, "Come to Washington with a plan to help people rebuild." I really didn't want the plan to be designed by Washington people; I wanted it to be designed by local folks. And Haley has put together a Mississippi plan. He not only put the plan together; he also came to Washington, DC, and helped get the plan funded—with the help of two fine United States Senators—

**Gov. Barbour.** The best pair of United States Senators in the country.

**The President.** —and Members of the House. And so I want to congratulate you and your team for putting together a good plan. Our job and our purpose is to help people like the Akins rebuild. And we want this part of the country rising up from the devastation. You know, people really didn't lose their spirit down here. But our job is to make sure that that spirit is able to kind of recapture the hope and optimism of the people and let that spirit flourish.

And I want to thank you for being a good leader. I appreciate you all having us. Listen, thanks. After all that work I've done, I'm thirsty. [Laughter]

**Mr. Jerry Akins.** Yes, sir. We have some lemonade, and we have some refreshments.

**The President.** You do? That's good. The other thing that's interesting is that we've got the Allens here from the Allen Brothers Construction Company; these are local folks—

**Gov. Barbour.** The Martins. [Laughter]

**The President.** The Martins. As I said, the Martins. You probably thought I said, the Allens. [Laughter] I said, the Martins. [Laughter]

You know, one of the interesting things is that there is going to be a lot of work, and here are the entrepreneurs with their sons helping to build this man's house. It's neat to be with them. Small businesses, if they seize the opportunity, are going to flourish. And that's what we want. These small construction companies are going to have work to do.

The other thing about the Martins, one of the boys won the Purple Heart in Iraq. There he is right there. It's my honor to congratulate him for serving the country. Thank you. At any rate—

**The First Lady.** Now we're going to present Jerry and Elaine a flag for your new house.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. at a new home construction site.

## Statement on a Proposed United States-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement

March 8, 2006

The United States and Malaysia share strong trade and investment ties and a commitment to generating prosperity through openness, democracy, and freedom. Today we seek to further strengthen the ties between our two countries by launching negotiations on a comprehensive U.S.-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement.

Once completed, a Free Trade Agreement with Malaysia will generate significant commercial, economic, political, and strategic benefits to both countries. It will improve our ties with the Southeast Asia region and strengthen our engagement in Asia. Malaysia is our tenth-largest trading partner, and the United States is Malaysia's second-largest source of imports. A U.S.-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement will advance our commitment to opening markets around the world and expanding opportunities for America's farmers, ranchers, workers, and businesses.

## Remarks Following a Meeting on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

March 9, 2006

We just had a very interesting dialog here. I want to thank members of the faith community, the community-based action community, the corporate community, the foundation community for joining in a dialog about how we can continue to foster the good works of millions of our fellow citizens who deeply care about the future of our country and the plight of their fellow citizen.

One of the things that always strengthens my belief in our future is my understanding of how many acts of kindness take place on a daily basis in the United States—and it doesn't require any government edict or government law. People really care about the future of our country; millions of our citizens weep when they know somebody hurts. But nevertheless, there still needs to be focused efforts on encouraging more giving of money and time.