

**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.