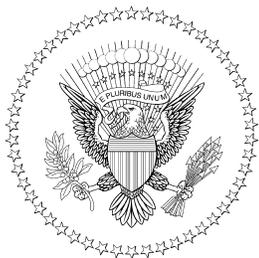


Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, March 27, 2006
Volume 42—Number 12
Pages 495–560

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Editor's Note: The President was in Sewickley Heights, PA, on March 24, 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.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, March 24, 2006

Proclamation 7989—Greek Independence Day: A National Day of Celebration of Greek and American Democracy, 2006

March 17, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On Greek Independence Day, we celebrate the proud heritage of Greek Americans, recognize the longstanding friendship between the United States and Greece, and reaffirm our shared desire to spread freedom to people around the world.

Greece is the birthplace of democratic principles, and the story of modern Greek independence demonstrates the power of liberty. On March 25, 1821, Greek revolutionaries declared their independence from the Ottoman Empire after centuries of imperial rule. This bold action began an 11-year war to secure their freedom and gain recognition as a sovereign country. Americans at the time identified with the Greek struggle and provided support to aid the effort. Leaders such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison encouraged the Greek cause and supported the desire for a representative government that would ensure liberty and justice for all its citizens, and they offered our Constitution as a model for consideration.

A strong cooperation and friendship has developed between Greece and America, and our Nation has benefited from the contributions of Greek immigrants. The hard work of Greek Americans has made our country stronger and influenced our literature, arts, businesses, politics, education, and entertainment. The faith, traditions, and patriotism of Greek Americans have enriched our society.

The United States and Greece are bound together by common values and a deep de-

sire to protect and extend freedom and peace. On this special occasion, we celebrate our friendship and our commitment to advancing democracy, prosperity, and security.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 25, 2006, as Greek Independence Day: A National Day of Celebration of Greek and American Democracy. I call upon all Americans to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this seventeenth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 21, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 22. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

March 18, 2006

Good morning. In recent weeks, Americans have seen horrific images from Iraq: the bombing of a great house of worship in Samarra, sectarian reprisals between Sunnis and Shi'as, and car bombings and kidnappings. Amid continued reports about the tense situation in parts of that country, it may seem difficult at times to understand how we can say that progress is being made. But the reaction to the recent violence by Iraq's leaders is a clear sign of Iraq's commitment to democracy.

I'm encouraged to see that Iraqi political leaders are making good progress toward

forming a unity government, despite the recent violence. Our Ambassador to Iraq, Zal Khalilzad, reports that the violence has created a new sense of urgency among these leaders to form a national unity government as quickly as possible. I urge them to continue their work to put aside their differences, to reach out across political, religious, and sectarian lines, and to form a government that can confront the terrorist threat and earn the trust and confidence of all Iraqis.

I also remain optimistic because, slowly but surely, our strategy is getting results. This month, I'm giving a series of speeches to update the American people on that strategy. I'm discussing the progress we are making, the lessons we have learned from our experience, and how we are fixing what has not worked. This past week, I discussed the security element of our strategy. I spoke about our increasingly successful efforts to train Iraqi security forces to take the lead in the fight against the terrorists. And I described our strengthened efforts to defeat the threat of improvised explosive devices, or IEDs.

On Monday, I will give a speech discussing how we are working with all elements of Iraqi society to remove the terrorists and restore order in Iraqi cities, to rebuild homes and communities, and to achieve the stability that can come only from freedom. I will also share some concrete examples of how this approach is succeeding—evidence of real progress that is too often lost amid the more dramatic reports of violence.

Sunday marks the third anniversary of the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. The decision by the United States and our coalition partners to remove Saddam Hussein from power was a difficult decision, and it was the right decision. America and the world are safer today without Saddam Hussein in power. He is no longer oppressing the Iraqi people, sponsoring terror, and threatening the world. He is now being tried for his crimes, and over 25 million Iraqis now live in freedom. This is an achievement America and our allies can be proud of.

These past 3 years have tested our resolve. We've seen hard days and setbacks. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the terrorists made Iraq the central front in the war on terror,

in an attempt to turn that country into a safe haven where they can plan more attacks against America. The fighting has been tough. The enemy has proved brutal and relentless. We have changed our approach in many areas to reflect the hard realities on the ground. And our troops have shown magnificent courage and made tremendous sacrifices.

These sacrifices by our coalition forces—and the sacrifices of Iraqis—have given Iraq this historic opportunity to form a democratic government and rebuild itself after decades of tyranny. In the past 3 years, Iraqis have gone from living under a brutal tyrant to liberation, sovereignty, free elections, a constitutional referendum, and last December, elections for a fully constitutional government. By their courage, the Iraqi people have spoken and made their intentions clear: They want to live in a democracy and shape their own destiny.

In this fight, the American and Iraqi people share the same enemies because we stand for freedom. The security of our country is directly linked to the liberty of the Iraqi people, and we will settle for nothing less than complete victory. Victory will come when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their own citizens, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for the terrorists to plot new attacks against our Nation.

More fighting and sacrifice will be required to achieve this victory, and for some, the temptation to retreat and abandon our commitments is strong. Yet there is no peace, there's no honor, and there's no security in retreat. So America will not abandon Iraq to the terrorists who want to attack us again. We will finish the mission. By defeating the terrorists in Iraq, we will bring greater security to our own country. And when victory is achieved, our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:38 a.m. on March 17 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 18. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 17 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 Arrival From Camp David, Maryland

March 19, 2006

Progress in Iraq

This morning I had a phone call with our Ambassador to Iraq, and the Ambassador informed me of the progress that the Iraqis are making toward forming a unity government. I encouraged the Iraqi leaders to continue to work hard to get this Government up and running. The Iraqi people voted for democracy last December; 75 percent of the eligible citizens went to the polls to vote. And now the Iraqi leaders are working together to enact a Government that reflects the will of the people. And so I'm encouraged by the progress; the Ambassador was encouraged by it.

Today, as well, marks the third anniversary of the beginning of the liberation of Iraq, and it's a time to reflect. And this morning my reflections were upon the sacrifices of the men and women who wear our uniform. Ours is an amazing nation where thousands have volunteered to serve our country. They volunteered to—many volunteered after 9/11, knowing full well that their time in the military could put them in harm's way. So on this third anniversary of the beginning of the liberation of Iraq, I think all Americans should offer thanks to the men and women who wear the uniform and their families who support them.

We are implementing a strategy that will lead to victory in Iraq. And a victory in Iraq will make this country more secure and will help lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

May God continue to bless our troops in harm's way. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:56 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Remarks Following Discussions With Secretary General Jakob Gijbert “Jaap” de Hoop Scheffer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

March 20, 2006

President Bush. Fine-looking crowd we've attracted here, fine-looking crowd.

Mr. Secretary General, thanks for coming. We've just had a wide-ranging discussion on a variety of issues, which is what you'd expect when allies and friends come together. We discussed Iraq, and I want to thank NATO for its involvement in helping train Iraqi security forces so they can end up protecting the Iraqi people from the—from those who want to kill innocent life in order to affect the outcome of that democracy.

I want to thank you very much for your strong involvement in Afghanistan. A NATO presence in Afghanistan is really important. I learned that firsthand when I went to Afghanistan and talked to the—President Karzai and his Government. They were very supportive of the mission—and thankful for the mission. NATO is effective, and that's one of the things that's really important for our citizens to understand, that our relationship with NATO is an important part of helping us to win the war on terror.

We also talked about Darfur in the Sudan. I'd called the Secretary General earlier this year. I talked to him about a strategy that would enable NATO to take the lead in Darfur. However, some things have to happen prior to that happening. And the first thing is that the African Union must request from the United Nations a U.N. mission to convert the AU mission to a U.N. mission, at which point if that's done, the—NATO can move in with United States help—inside of NATO—to make it clear to the Sudanese Government that we're intent upon providing security for the people there, and intent upon helping work toward a lasting peace agreement.

And so I appreciate your understanding of that. The first time I made the phone call to the Secretary General, he fully understood the challenge, fully understood the need, and it was great to work with a friend in peace to devise a strategy on how to move forward.

So thanks for coming. Looking forward to the meeting later on this year, big NATO summit. And I'm convinced that, like the last summit we had, you'll lead that meeting with the efficiency and professionalism that you're known for.

Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer. Thank you very much, Mr. President. Let me echo what the President has been saying about NATO delivering, about NATO making the difference. In Afghanistan, the fight against terror is an extremely important element there. NATO indeed assists in the African Union in Darfur, and I'm quite sure, as I've told the President, that when the U.N. comes, the NATO allies will be ready to do more in enabling the United Nations force in Darfur.

NATO assisted after Hurricane Katrina. NATO had a major humanitarian operation in Pakistan. NATO is in the Balkans. All 26 NATO allies participate in one way or the other in the training mission in Iraq. Now I want to see NATO-trained Iraqi officers taking their responsibility in fighting the terrorists in their own country.

In other words, NATO is delivering. And in the runup to the NATO summit in Riga at the end of the year, as the President mentioned, we'll make sure—and NATO will make sure that this will be an important event.

In NATO's outreach, let me mention the Middle East, North Africa, Israel, Jordan, the nations of the gulf—NATO's contacts with other nations who share our values—we have Australia, Japan, South Korea—in other words, we'll see to it that the military agenda of NATO and the political agenda of NATO will be very seriously addressed in Riga. And I'm very glad for the support, the permanent support, and the friendship of our most important ally, the United States, and its leader, President Bush.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you. Yes, good. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:16 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan.

Remarks to the City Club of Cleveland and a Question-and-Answer Session in Cleveland, Ohio *March 20, 2006*

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Sanjiv, thanks for the introduction. He called me on the phone and said, "Listen, we believe in free speech, so you're going to come and give us a speech for free." [Laughter] Thanks for the invitation; thanks for the warm welcome. It's good to be here at the City Club of Cleveland.

For almost a century, you have provided an important forum for debate and discussion on the issues of the day. And I have come to discuss a vital issue of the day, which is the safety and security of every American and our need to achieve victory in the war on terror.

I want to thank the mayor for joining us. Mr. Mayor, appreciate you being here. It must make you feel pretty good to get the "Most Livable City" award. [Laughter] I want to thank all the members of the City Club for graciously inviting me to come. I want to thank the students who are here. Thanks for your interest in your government. I look forward to giving you a speech and then answering questions, if you have any.

The central front on the war on terror is Iraq, and in the past few weeks, we've seen horrific images coming out of that country. We've seen a great house of worship—the Golden Mosque of Samarra—in ruins after a brutal terrorist attack. We have seen reprisal attacks by armed militia on Sunni mosques. We have seen car bombs take the lives of shoppers in a crowded market in Sadr City. We've seen the bodies of scores of Iraqi men brutally executed or beaten to death.

The enemies of a free Iraq attacked the Golden Mosque for a reason: They know they lack the military strength to challenge Iraqi and coalition forces in a direct battle, so they're trying to provoke a civil war. By attacking one of Shi'a Islam's holiest sites, they hoped to incite violence that would drive Iraqis apart and stop their progress on the path to a free society.

The timing of the attack in Samarra is no accident. It comes at a moment when Iraq's elected leaders are working to form a unity

government. Last December, 4 short months ago, more than 11 million people expressed their opinion. They said loud and clear at the ballot box that they desire a future of freedom and unity. And now it is time for the leaders to put aside their differences; reach out across political, religious, and sectarian lines; and form a unity government that will earn the trust and the confidence of all Iraqis. My administration, led by Ambassador Zal Khalilzad, is helping and will continue to help the Iraqis achieve this goal.

The situation on the ground remains tense. And in the face of continued reports about killings and reprisals, I understand how some Americans have had their confidence shaken. Others look at the violence they see each night on their television screens, and they wonder how I can remain so optimistic about the prospects of success in Iraq. They wonder what I see that they don't. So today I'd like to share a concrete example of progress in Iraq that most Americans do not see every day in their newspapers and on their television screens. I'm going to tell you the story of a northern Iraqi city called Tall 'Afar, which was once a key base of operations for Al Qaida and is today a free city that gives reason for hope for a free Iraq.

Tall 'Afar is a city of more than 200,000 residents, roughly the population of Akron, Ohio. In many ways, Tall 'Afar is a microcosm of Iraq. It has dozens of tribes of different ethnicity and religion. Most of the city residents are Sunnis of Turkmen origin. Tall 'Afar sits just 35 miles from the Syrian border. It was a strategic location for Al Qaida and their leader, Zarqawi.

Now, it's important to remember what Al Qaida has told us, their stated objectives. Their goal is to drive us out of Iraq so they can take the country over. Their goal is to overthrow moderate Muslim governments throughout the region. Their goal is to use Iraq as a base from which to launch attacks against America. To achieve this goal, they're recruiting terrorists from the Middle East to come into Iraq to infiltrate its cities and to sow violence and destruction so that no legitimate government can exercise control. And Tall 'Afar was a key way station for their operations in Iraq.

After we removed Saddam Hussein in April 2003, the terrorists began moving into the city. They sought to divide Tall 'Afar's many ethnic and religious groups and forged an alliance of convenience with those who benefitted from Saddam's regime and others with their own grievances. They skillfully used propaganda to foment hostility toward the coalition and the new Iraqi Government. They exploited a weak economy to recruit young men to their cause. And by September 2004, the terrorists and insurgents had basically seized control of Tall 'Afar.

We recognized the situation was unacceptable, so we launched a military operation against them. After 3 days of heavy fighting, the terrorists and the insurgents fled the city. Our strategy at the time was to stay after the terrorists and keep them on the run. So coalition forces kept moving, kept pursuing the enemy and routing out the terrorists in other parts of Iraq.

Unfortunately, in 2004, the local security forces there in Tall 'Afar weren't able to maintain order, and so the terrorists and the insurgents eventually moved back into the town. Because the terrorists threatened to murder the families of Tall 'Afar's police, its members rarely ventured out from the headquarters in an old Ottoman fortress. The terrorists also took over local mosques, forcing local imams out and insisting that the terrorist message of hatred and intolerance and violence be spread from the mosques. The same happened in Tall 'Afar's schools, where the terrorists eliminated real education and instead indoctrinated young men in their hateful ideology. By November of 2004, 2 months after our operation to clear the city, the terrorists had returned to continue their brutal campaign of intimidation.

The return of Al Qaida meant the innocent civilians in Tall 'Afar were in a difficult position. Just put yourself in the shoes of the citizens of Tall 'Afar as all this was happening. On the one side, you hear the coalition and Iraqi forces saying they're coming to protect you, but they'd already come in once and they had not stopped the terrorists from coming back. You worry that when the coalition goes after the terrorists, you or your family may be caught in the crossfire and your city might be destroyed. You don't trust

the police. You badly want to believe the coalition forces really can help you out, but three decades of Saddam's brutal rule have taught you a lesson: Don't stick your neck out for anybody.

On the other side, you see the terrorists and the insurgents. You know they mean business. They control the only hospital in town. You see that the mayor and other political figures are collaborating with the terrorists. You see how the people who worked as interpreters for the coalition forces are beheaded. You see a popular city councilman gunned down in front of his horrified wife and children. You see a respected Sheikh and an Imam kidnapped and murdered. You see the terrorists deliberately firing mortars into playgrounds and soccer fields filled with children. You see communities becoming armed enclaves. If you are in a part of Tall 'Afar that was not considered friendly, you see that the terrorists cut off your basic services like electricity and water. You and your family feel besieged, and you see no way out.

The savagery of the terrorists and insurgents who controlled Tall 'Afar is really hard for Americans to imagine. They enforced their rule through fear and intimidation—and women and children were not spared. In one grim incident, the terrorists kidnapped a young boy from the hospital and killed him, and then they boobytrapped his body and placed him along a road where his family would see him. And when the boy's father came to retrieve his son's body, he was blown up. These weren't random acts of violence; these were deliberate and highly organized attempts to maintain control through intimidation. In Tall 'Afar, the terrorists had schools for kidnapping and beheading and laying IEDs. And they sent a clear message to the citizens of the city: Anyone who dares oppose their reign of terror will be murdered.

As they enforced their rule by targeting civilians, they also preyed upon adolescents craving affirmation. Our troops found one Iraqi teenager who was taken from his family by the terrorists. The terrorists routinely abused him and violated his dignity. The terrorists offered him a chance to prove his manhood by holding the legs of captives as they were beheaded. When our forces inter-

viewed this boy, he told them that his greatest aspiration was to be promoted to the killer who would behead the bound captives. Al Qaida's idea of manhood may be fanatical and perverse, but it served two clear purposes: It helped provide recruits willing to commit any atrocity, and it enforced the rule of fear.

The result of this barbarity was a city where normal life had virtually ceased. Colonel H.R. McMaster of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment described it this way: "When you come into a place in the grip of Al Qaida, you see a ghost town. There are no children playing in the streets. Shops are closed and boarded. All construction is stopped. People stay inside, prisoners in their own homes." This is the brutal reality that Al Qaida wishes to impose on all the people of Iraq.

The ability of Al Qaida and its associates to retake Tall 'Afar was an example of something we saw elsewhere in Iraq. We recognized the problem, and we changed our strategy. Instead of coming in and removing the terrorists and then moving on, the Iraqi Government and the coalition adopted a new approach called clear, hold, and build. This new approach was made possible because of the significant gains made in training large numbers of highly capable Iraqi security forces. Under this new approach, Iraq and coalition—Iraqi and coalition forces would clear a city of the terrorists, leave well-trained Iraqi units behind to hold the city, and work with local leaders to build the economic and political infrastructure Iraqis need to live in freedom.

One of the first tests of this new approach was Tall 'Afar. In May 2005, Colonel McMaster's unit was given responsibility for the western part of Nineveh Province where Tall 'Afar is located, and 2 months later, Iraq's national Government announced that a major offensive to clear the city of the terrorists and insurgents would soon be launched. Iraqi and coalition forces first met with tribal leaders and local residents to listen to their grievances. One of the biggest complaints was the police force, which rarely ventured out of its headquarters. When it did venture, it was mostly to carry out sectarian reprisals. And so the national Government sent out new leaders to head the force. The

new leaders set about getting rid of the bad elements and building a professional police force that all sides could have confidence in. We recognized it was important to listen to the representatives of Tall 'Afar's many ethnic and religious groups. It's an important part of helping to remove one of the leading sources of mistrust.

Next, Iraqi and Army coalition forces spent weeks preparing for what they knew would be a tough military offensive. They built an 8-foot high, 12-mile long dirt wall that ringed the city. This wall was designed to cut off any escape for terrorists trying to evade security checkpoints. Iraqi and coalition forces also built temporary housing outside the city so that Tall 'Afar's people would have places to go when the fighting started. Before the assault on the city, Iraqi and coalition forces initiated a series of operations in surrounding towns to eliminate safe havens and make it harder for fleeing terrorists to hide. These steps took time, but as life returned to the outlying towns, these operations helped persuade the population of Tall 'Afar that Iraqi and coalition forces were on their side against a common enemy, the extremists who had taken control of their city and their lives.

Only after all these steps did Iraqi and coalition authorities launch Operation Restoring Rights to clear the city of the terrorists. Iraqi forces took the lead. The primary force was 10 Iraqi battalions, backed by 3 coalition battalions. Many Iraqi units conducted their own antiterrorist operations and controlled their own battle space, hunting for the enemy fighters and securing neighborhoods block by block. Throughout the operation, Iraqi and coalition forces were careful to hold their fire to let civilians pass safely out of the city. By focusing on securing the safety of Tall 'Afar's population, the Iraqi and coalition forces begin to win the trust of the city's residents—which is critical to defeating the terrorists who were hiding among them.

After about 2 weeks of intense activity, coalition and Iraqi forces had killed about 150 terrorists and captured 850 more. The operation uncovered weapons caches loaded with small arms ammunition and ski masks, RPG rockets, grenade and machine gun ammunition, and fuses and batteries for making IEDs. In one cache, we found an axe in-

scribed with the names of the victims the terrorists had beheaded. And the operation accomplished all this while protecting innocent civilians and inflicting minimal damage on the city.

After the main combat operations were over, Iraqi forces moved in to hold the city. Iraqis' Government deployed more than 1,000 Iraqi Army soldiers and emergency police to keep order, and they were supported by a newly restored police force that would eventually grow to about 1,700 officers. As part of the new strategy, we embedded coalition forces with the Iraqi police and with the army units patrolling Tall 'Afar to work with their Iraqi counterparts and to help them become more capable and more professional. In the weeks and months that followed, the Iraqi police built stations throughout Tall 'Afar, and city residents began stepping forward to offer testimony against captured terrorists and inform soldiers about where the remaining terrorists were hiding.

Inside the old Ottoman fortress, a joint coordination center manned by Iraqi Army and Iraqi police and coalition forces answers the many phone calls that now come into a new tip line. As a result of the tips, when someone tries to plant an IED in Tall 'Afar, it's often reported and disabled before it can do any harm. The Iraqi forces patrolling the cities are effective because they know the people; they know the language; and they know the culture. And by turning control of these cities over to capable Iraqi troops and police, we give Iraqis confidence that they can determine their own destiny, and that frees up coalition forces to hunt the high-value targets like Zarqawi.

The recent elections show us how Iraqis respond when they know they're safe. Tall 'Afar is the largest city in western Nineveh Province. In the elections held in January 2005, of about 190,000 registered voters, only 32,000 people went to the polls. Only Fallujah had a lower participation rate. By the time of the October referendum on the Constitution and the December elections, Iraqi and coalition forces had secured Tall 'Afar and surrounding areas. The number of registered voters rose to about 204,000, and more than 175,000 turned out to vote in each election, more than 85 percent of the eligible

voters in western Nineveh Province. These citizens turned out because they were determined to have a say in their nation's future, and they cast their ballots at polling stations that were guarded and secured by fellow Iraqis.

One young teacher described the change this way: "What you see here is hope—the hope that Iraq will become safer and fairer. I feel very confident when I see so many people voting."

The confidence that has been restored to the people of Tall 'Afar is crucial to their efforts to rebuild their city. Immediately following the military operations, we helped the Iraqis set up humanitarian relief for the civilian population. We also set up a fund to reimburse innocent Iraqi families for damage done to their homes and businesses in the fight against the terrorists. The Iraqi Government pledged \$50 million to help reconstruct Tall 'Afar by paving roads and rebuilding hospitals and schools and by improving infrastructure from the electric grid to sewer and water systems. With their city now more secure, the people of Tall 'Afar are beginning to rebuild a better future for themselves and their children.

See, if you're a resident of Tall 'Afar today, this is what you're going to see: You see that the terrorist who once exercised brutal control over every aspect of your city has been killed or captured or driven out or put on the run. You see your children going to school and playing safely in the streets. You see the electricity and water service restored throughout the city. You see a police force that better reflects the ethnic and religious diversity of the communities they patrol. You see markets opening, and you hear the sound of construction equipment as buildings go up and homes are remade. In short, you see a city that is coming back to life.

The success of Tall 'Afar also shows how the three elements of our strategy in Iraq—political, security, and economic—depend on and reinforce one another. By working with local leaders to address community grievances, Iraqi and coalition forces helped build the political support needed to make the military operation a success. The military success against the terrorists helped give the citizens of Tall 'Afar security, and this al-

lowed them to vote in the elections and begin to rebuild their city. And the economic rebuilding that is beginning to take place is giving Tall 'Afar residents a real stake in the success of a free Iraq. And as all this happens, the terrorists, those who offer nothing but destruction and death, are becoming marginalized.

The strategy that worked so well in Tall 'Afar did not emerge overnight; it came only after much trial and error. It took time to understand and adjust to the brutality of the enemy in Iraq. Yet the strategy is working. And we know it's working because the people of Tall 'Afar are showing their gratitude for the good work that Americans have given on their behalf. A recent television report followed a guy named Captain Jesse Sellars on patrol and described him as a "pied piper," with crowds of Iraqi children happily chanting his name as he greets locals with the words "*Salaam alaikum*," which means "Peace be with you."

When the newswoman asks the local merchant what would have happened a few months earlier if he'd been seen talking with an American, his answer was clear: "They'd have cut off my head. They would have beheaded me." Like thousands of others in Tall 'Afar, this man knows the true meaning of liberation.

Recently, Senator Joe Biden said that America cannot want peace for Iraqis more than they want it for themselves. I agree with that. And the story of Tall 'Afar shows that when Iraqis can count on a basic level of safety and security, they can live together peacefully. We saw this in Tall 'Afar after the bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. Unlike other parts of Iraq, in Tall 'Afar, the reaction was subdued, with few reports of sectarian violence. Actually, on the Friday after the attack, more than 1,000 demonstrators gathered in Tall 'Afar to protest the attack peacefully.

The terrorists have not given up in Tall 'Afar, and they may yet succeed in exploding bombs or provoking acts of sectarian violence. The people of the city still have many challenges to overcome, including old-age resentments that still create suspicion, an economy that needs to create jobs and opportunity for its young, and determined enemies

who will continue trying to foment a civil war to move back in. But the people of Tall 'Afar have shown why spreading liberty and democracy is at the heart of our strategy to defeat the terrorists. The people of Tall 'Afar have shown that Iraqis do want peace and freedom, and no one should underestimate them.

I wish I could tell you that the progress made in Tall 'Afar is the same in every single part of Iraq. It's not. Though most of the country has remained relatively peaceful, in some parts of Iraq, the enemy is carrying out savage acts of violence, particularly in Baghdad and the surrounding areas of Baghdad. But the progress made in bringing more Iraqi security forces on line is helping to bring peace and stability to Iraqi cities. The example of Tall 'Afar gives me confidence in our strategy, because in this city, we see the outlines of the Iraq that we and the Iraqi people have been fighting for: a free and secure people who are getting back on their feet; who are participating in government and civic life; and who have become allies in the fight against the terrorists.

I believe that as Iraqis continue to see the benefits of liberty, they will gain confidence in their future, and they will work to ensure that common purpose trumps narrow sectarianism. And by standing with them in their hour of need, we're going to help the Iraqis build a strong democracy that will be an inspiration throughout the Middle East, a democracy that will be a partner in the global war against the terrorists.

The kind of progress that we and the Iraqi people are making in places like Tall 'Afar is not easy to capture in a short clip on the evening news. Footage of children playing or shops opening and people resuming their normal lives will never be as dramatic as the footage of an IED explosion or the destruction of a mosque or soldiers and civilians being killed or injured. The enemy understands this, and it explains their continued acts of violence in Iraq. Yet the progress we and the Iraqi people are making is also real. And those in a position to know best are the Iraqis themselves.

One of the most eloquent is the mayor of Tall 'Afar, a courageous Iraqi man named Najim. Mayor Najim arrived in the city in

the midst of the Al Qaida occupation, and he knows exactly what our troops have helped accomplish. He calls our men and women in uniform "lionhearts." And in a letter to the troopers of the 3d Armored Cavalry Regiment, he spoke of a friendship sealed in blood and sacrifice, as Mayor Najim had this to say to the families of our fallen: "To the families of those who have given their holy blood for our land, we all bow to you in reverence and to the souls of your loved ones. Their sacrifice was not in vain. They are not dead but alive, and their souls are hovering around us every second of every minute. They will not be forgotten for giving their precious lives. They have sacrificed that which is most valuable. We see them in the smile of every child and in every flower growing in this land. Let America, their families, and the world be proud of their sacrifice for humanity and life." America is proud of that sacrifice, and we're proud to have allies like Mayor Najim on our side in the fight for freedom.

Yesterday we marked the third anniversary of the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. At the time, there is much to—this time, there's much discussion in our country about the removal of Saddam Hussein from power and our remaining mission in Iraq. The decision to remove Saddam Hussein was a difficult decision. The decision to remove Saddam Hussein was the right decision.

Before we acted, his regime was defying U.N. resolutions calling for it to disarm; it was violating cease-fire agreements, was firing on British and American pilots which were enforcing no-fly zones. Saddam Hussein was a leader who brutalized his people, had pursued and used weapons of mass destruction, and sponsored terrorism. Today, Saddam Hussein is no longer oppressing his people or threatening the world. He's being tried for his crimes by the free citizens of a free Iraq, and America and our allies are safer for it.

The last 3 years have tested our resolve. The fighting has been tough. The enemy we face has proved to be brutal and relentless. We're adapting our approach to reflect the hard realities on the ground. And the sacrifice being made by our young men and

women who wear our uniform has been heartening and inspiring.

The terrorists who are setting off bombs in mosques and markets in Iraq share the same hateful ideology as the terrorists who attacked us on September the 11th, 2001, those who blew up the commuters in London and Madrid, and those who murdered tourists in Bali or workers in Riyadh or guests at a wedding in Amman, Jordan. In the war on terror, we face a global enemy, and if we were not fighting this enemy in Iraq, they would not be idle. They would be plotting and trying to kill Americans across the world and within our own borders. Against this enemy, there can be no compromise. So we will fight them in Iraq. We'll fight them across the world, and we will stay in the fight until the fight is won.

In the long run, the best way to defeat this enemy and to ensure the security of our own citizens is to spread the hope of freedom across the broader Middle East. We've seen freedom conquer evil and secure the peace before. In World War II, free nations came together to fight the ideology of fascism, and freedom prevailed. And today, Germany and Japan are democracies, and they are allies in securing the peace. In the cold war, freedom defeated the ideology of communism and led to a democratic movement that freed the nations of Central and Eastern Europe from Soviet domination. And today, these nations are strong allies in the war on terror.

In the Middle East, freedom is once again contending with an ideology that seeks to sow anger and hatred and despair. And like fascism and communism before, the hateful ideologies that use terror will be defeated. Freedom will prevail in Iraq; freedom will prevail in the Middle East. And as the hope of freedom spreads to nations that have not known it, these countries will become allies in the cause of peace.

The security of our country is directly linked to the liberty of the Iraqi people, and we will settle for nothing less than victory. Victory will come when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their citizens on their own, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plot new attacks against our

Nation. There will be more days of sacrifice and tough fighting before the victory is achieved. Yet by helping the Iraqis defeat the terrorists in their land, we bring greater security to our own.

As we make progress toward victory, Iraqis will continue to take more responsibility for their own security and fewer U.S. forces will be needed to complete the mission. But it's important for the Iraqis to hear this: The United States will not abandon Iraq. We will not leave that country to the terrorists who attacked America and want to attack us again. We will leave Iraq, but when we do, it will be from a position of strength, not weakness. Americans have never retreated in the face of thugs and assassins, and we will not begin now.

Thanks for listening. And I'll be glad to answer some questions, if you have any.

Yes, ma'am.

War on Terror

Q. Thank you for coming to Cleveland, Mr. President, and to the City Club. My question is that author and former Nixon administration official Kevin Phillips, in his latest book, "American Theocracy," discusses what has been called radical Christianity and its growing involvement into government and politics. He makes the point that members of your administration have reached out to prophetic Christians who see the war in Iraq and the rise of terrorism as signs of the apocalypse. Do you believe this, that the war in Iraq and the rise of terrorism are signs of the apocalypse? And if not, why not?

The President. The answer is—I haven't really thought of it that way. [Laughter] Here's how I think of it. First I've heard of that, by the way. I guess I'm more of a practical fellow. I vowed after September the 11th, that I would do everything I could to protect the American people. And my attitude, of course, was affected by the attacks. I knew we were at a war. I knew that the enemy, obviously, had to be sophisticated and lethal to fly hijacked airplanes into facilities that would be killing thousands of people, innocent people doing nothing, just sitting there going to work.

I also knew this about this war on terror, that the farther we got away from September

the 11th, the more likely it is people would seek comfort and not think about this global war on terror as a global war on terror. And that's good, by the way. It's hard to take risk if you're a small-business owner, for example, if you're worried that the next attack is going to come tomorrow. I understand that. But I also understand my most important job, the most important job of any President today—and I predict down the road—is to protect America.

And so I told the American people that we would find the terrorists and bring them to justice, and that we needed to defeat them overseas so we didn't have to face them here at home. I also understood that the war on terror requires some clear doctrine. And one of the doctrines that I laid out was, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist." And the first time that doctrine was really challenged was in Afghanistan. I guess the Taliban didn't believe us—or me. And so we acted. Twenty-five million people are now free, and Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for the terrorists.

And the other doctrine that's really important, and it's a change of attitude—it's going to require a change of attitude for a while—is that, when you see a threat, you got to deal with it before it hurts you. Foreign policy used to be dictated by the fact we had two oceans protecting us. If we saw a threat, you could deal with it if you needed to, you think—or not. But we'd be safe.

My most important job is to protect you, is to protect the American people. Therefore, when we see threats, given the lesson of September the 11th, we got to deal with them. That does not mean militarily, necessarily. Obviously, the first option for a President has got to be the full use of diplomacy. That's what you're watching in Iran right now. I see a threat in Iran. I see it there—I'm kind of getting off subject here, not because I don't want to answer your question, but kind of—I guess that's what happens in Washington, we get a little long-winded. *[Laughter]*

But now that I'm on Iran, the threat to Iran, of course—*[laughter]*—the threat from Iran is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally, Israel. That's a threat, a serious threat. It's a threat to world peace; it's a threat, in essence, to a strong alliance.

I made it clear and I'll be making it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally, Israel, and—*[applause]*.

At any rate, our objective is to solve this issue diplomatically. And so our message must be a united message, a message from not only the United States but also Great Britain and France and Germany as well as Russia, hopefully, and China, in order to say, loud and clear, to the Iranians, "This is unacceptable behavior. Your desire to have a nuclear weapon is unacceptable."

And so to answer your question, I take a practical view of doing the job you want me to do—which is, how do we defeat an enemy that still wants to hurt us; and how do we deal with threats before they fully materialize; what do we do to protect us from harm? That's my job. And that job came home on September the 11th, for me—loud and clear. And I think about my job of protecting you every day. Every single day of the Presidency, I'm concerned about the safety of the American people.

Yes, sir.

Intelligence/War on Terror

Q. Mr. President, at the beginning of your talk today, you mentioned that you understand why Americans have had their confidence shaken by the events in Iraq. And I'd like to ask you about events that occurred 3 years ago that might also explain why confidence has been shaken. Before we went to war in Iraq, we said there were three main reasons for going to war in Iraq: weapons of mass destruction, the claim that Iraq was sponsoring terrorists who had attacked us on 9/11, and that Iraq had purchased nuclear materials from Niger. All three of those turned out to be false. My question is, how do we restore confidence that Americans may have in their leaders and to be sure that the information they are getting now is correct?

The President. That's a great question. First, just—if I might correct a misperception, I don't think we ever said—at least I know I didn't say that there was a direct connection between September the 11th and Saddam Hussein. We did say that he was a state sponsor of terror—by the way, not declared a state sponsor of terror by me

but declared by other administrations. We also did say that Zargawi, the man who is now wreaking havoc and killing innocent life, was in Iraq. And so the “state sponsor of terror” was a declaration by a previous administration. But I don’t want to be argumentative, but I was very careful never to say that Saddam Hussein ordered the attacks on America.

Like you, I asked that very same question, where did we go wrong on intelligence? The truth of the matter is, the whole world thought that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. It wasn’t just my administration; it was the previous administration. It wasn’t just the previous administration. You might remember, sir, there was a Security Council vote of 15 to nothing that said to Saddam Hussein, “Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences.” The basic premise was, “You’ve got weapons.” That’s what we thought.

When he didn’t disclose and when he didn’t disarm and when he deceived inspectors, it sent a very disconcerting message to me, whose job it is to protect the American people and to take threats before they fully materialize. My view is, he was given the choice of whether or not he would face reprisal. It was his decision to make. And so he chose to not disclose, not disarm, as far as everybody was concerned.

Your question, however, the part that’s really important is, how do we regain credibility when it comes to intelligence? Obviously, the Iranian issue is a classic case, where we’ve got to make sure that when we speak, there’s credibility. And so, in other words, when the United States rallies a coalition—or any other country that had felt that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, is trying to rally a coalition in dealing with one of these nontransparent societies, what do we need to do to regain the trust of not only the American people but the world community?

And so what I did was I called together the Silberman-Robb Commission—Laurence Silberman and former Senator Chuck Robb—to take a full look at what went right and what went wrong on the intelligence, and how do we structure an intelligence network that makes sure there’s full debate among

the analysts? How do we make sure that there’s a full compilation of data points that can help decisionmakers like myself feel comfortable in the decision we make?

The war on terror requires the collection and analysis of good intelligence. This is a different kind of war; we’re dealing with an enemy which hides in caves and plots and plans, an enemy which doesn’t move in flotillas or battalions. And so therefore, the intelligence gathering is not only important to make a diplomatic case; it’s really important to be able to find an enemy before they hurt us.

And so there was a reform process they went through, a full analysis of what—of how the operations worked, and out of that came the NDI, John Negroponte and Mike Hayden. And their job is to better collate and make sure that the intelligence gathering is seamless across a variety of gatherers and people that analyze. But the credibility of our country is essential—agree with you.

Yes, sure.

Spread of Democracy/U.S. Armed Forces

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Welcome to Cleveland. It’s an honor to have you here. I represent the Cleveland Hungarian Revolution 50th Anniversary—[inaudible].

The President. That’s good. I was there, by the way.

Q. Thank you all. [Laughter]

The President. At least for the celebration in Capitol with Tom Lantos. But go ahead.

Q. Mr. President, in the interest of free speech, if you’ll indulge me, I have to give you a little context of my question. On this third anniversary of your—I consider—courageous initiative to bring freedom and basic human dignity to the Iraqi people, the image of the statue of the tyrant Saddam falling in Baghdad was very reminiscent of another statue, another tyrant, Josef Stalin, who fell in Budapest 50 years ago at the hands of many young Hungarian freedom fighters who were seeking to overthrow the tyranny of Soviet communism. Mr. President, just like our brave fighting men and women today and many Iraqi people, those young Hungarian patriots paid a very heavy price for a few days of freedom. But they lit the torch that eventually set the captive nations on the

path to achieving liberty. And so, Mr. President, our Cleveland Hungarian community is planning a major event in Cleveland in October—[laughter].

The President. The guy seized the moment, you know. He's a—

Q. Right.

The President. I'm not sure what I'm doing in October. Put me down as a maybe. [Laughter] Sorry to interrupt.

Q. Just like you came for the Children's Games in 2004, we hope to have you here for that as well. Mr. President, just want to let you know, to win the war on terror, we feel that what was started in 1776 and continued in 1956 must be remembered in 2006.

The President. Thank you. How much more you got?

Q. I'm at the question now. Thanks for your indulgence.

The President. Okay, good. [Laughter]

Q. My basic question is, how can we help you, from the grassroots level, how can we help you promote the cause of freedom and liberty for all peoples throughout the world?

The President. I appreciate that. My main job is to make sure I make the case as plainly as I can why it's worth it. And I fully understand—I understand people being disheartened when they turn on their TV screen and see the loss of innocent life. We're compassionate people. Nobody likes beheadings and it—nobody—when innocent children get car bombed. So it's my job, sir, to make it clear about the connection between Iraq and the war on terror. It's my job to remind people that progress is being made, in spite of the violence they see. It's my job to make it clear to the people the stakes.

I've spent time talking about what happens if we were to lose our nerve and Iraq would fall to Al Qaida. And the stakes are high. Look, I understand some don't view that we're in a war against the terrorists. I know that. And therefore, there's a sense that this—9/11 might have been an isolated incident. I just don't agree. And here's what I—here's the basis from which I make decisions. You heard one—is that 9/11 affected the way I think. I know these are like totalitarian fascists: They have an ideology; they have a desire to spread that ideology; and they're willing to use tactics to achieve their strategy.

And one of the tactics, I said early on in the speech—the stated objectives of Al Qaida. This isn't my imagination of their strategy; this is what they have told us. And I presume you want the Commander in Chief to take the words of the enemy seriously. And they have told us they believe that we're soft and that with time, we'll leave, and they'll fill the vacuum. And they want to plan and plot and hurt Americans. That's what they have said. And I think it's really important we take their words very seriously.

And so I will continue making the case, sir, but the best way you can help is to support our troops. You find a family who's got a child in the United States military; tell them you appreciate them. Ask them if you can help them. You see somebody wearing a uniform, you walk up and say, "Thanks for serving the country."

Ours is a remarkable country where hundreds—[applause]—where we've got thousands of people signing up, volunteering for the United States military, many of them after September the 11th, knowing full well what they were signing up for. And what's amazing about our military is that retention rates are high; people are still signing up. They want to defend the country. And for that, I am grateful.

But my job, sir, is to lay out the strategy and to connect the notion of liberty with peace. And that's hard for some. Sometimes there's a little bit of a—kind of a point of view that says, "Well, maybe certain people can't be free; maybe certain people can't self-govern." I strongly believe that liberty is universal. I believe in the natural rights of men and women. That was part of our founding. And if you believe in that, if you believe in the universality of freedom, then I believe those of us who are free have an obligation to help others become free.

Yes, ma'am. I'm tied up in October, but you know—[laughter].

Iraq/Spread of Democracy

Q. I'm a Marine mom.

The President. Okay, good. Thank you. Tell your—[applause].

Q. My son signed up after 9/11, and I didn't raise a terrorist. But let's face it; there's a continuum and a lack of clarity about who's

violent and who's a terrorist. And we really do want to use the word "enemy" in a meaningful way. I think your speech has been very brave and very important and very clarifying. And in the interest of clarifying the purpose of our country to fight preventive war, which we know does involve violence, it's very important for us to understand what you're saying about your model community in Iraq. And my question is that you are killing the bad guys, and that's very important—that's the entire story of the battle. And we want to know who the bad guys are. Do you feel that Iraq is like a honeycomb, and that we can draw the Al Qaida there so we can stand and fight them there? I'm really asking for clarification.

The President. Sure. I think in Iraq there are three types of folks that are trying to stop democracy. First of all, I think it's very important for people to understand, one reason they're so violent and desperate is because they're trying to stop a society based upon liberty. And you got to ask why. And the reason why is because it's the exact opposite of what they believe.

There are three types. One is Al Qaida, and Al Qaida is headed into there. Al Qaida understands the danger of democracy spreading. And so Zarqawi, this fellow named Zarqawi, is in charge of Al Qaida inside of Iraq, which recruits foreign fighters. And they headed into Iraq because they wanted to fight us. They wanted to stop democracy.

Secondly, there are Saddamists. These were the folks that really enjoyed a life of privilege. These are people that were top of the heap. They were—they represented a minority in the country, but they got all the deal—they got all the goods. And they don't like it—when Saddam was removed. And so they are trying to regroup.

And the third group are rejectionists. These are essentially Sunnis as well, who really weren't sure as—about whether or not it meant—what it meant to have minority rights, whether or not they'd be protected. You can understand. They didn't—during Saddam, there was no such thing as minority rights. And so as a new society emerged, they were doubtful. And it is those folks that I believe will become marginalized as democracy advances. We're seeing the Sunnis

change their mind about things. They barely voted in the first January 2005 elections; they participated overwhelmingly in the December 2005 elections. In just an 11-month period of time, there was a change of attitude to participate in the democratic process.

And the fundamental question that I know people ask is whether or not democracy, one, can take hold in Iraq, and two, will it change people's attitude about the future? And I believe it will. History has proven that democracies can change societies. The classic case I like to cite is Japan. Prime Minister Koizumi is one of my best buddies in the international arena, and when we sit down, we talk the peace. I find it interesting that he is a peacemaker with me on a variety of issues, and yet my dad fought the Japanese. And I'm sure many of your relatives did as well.

Sixty years ago, Japan was the sworn enemy of the United States. Today, they're an ally in peace. And what took place? Well, what took place was a Japanese-style democracy. I can't say I promise you this, but I suspect that if somebody were standing up at the City Club of Cleveland talking about, "Don't worry; someday, Japan is going to be peaceful with the United States, and the 43d President is going to be designing how keep the peace"—they'd say, "Get him off the stage." [Laughter] "What's he thinking? They're the sworn enemy." And now they're our ally. So I have faith in the capacity of democracies to help change societies.

And again, I repeat to you, the debate—one of the debates is whether or not certain folks can self-govern. There's kind of a—"Maybe there are some in the world that aren't capable," say the skeptics. I strongly disagree with that. I believe there's—hold on a second—I believe there's a great desire for people to be free. I believe that. And history has proven that democracies don't war with each other. Again, I kind of glossed over this, but particularly for the students here, look at what happened in Europe over a 100-year period, from the early 1900s to today. Europe was at war twice, that cost Americans thousands of lives. Today, they don't war, because the systems of government changed. Democracies are at peace. Europe is whole, free, and at peace.

And that's an important history lesson for those of us—what I'm saying to you, ma'am, is that there is a battle for Iraq now, but it's just a part of the war on terror. It's a theater in the war on terror. Afghanistan was a theater. And we're in a global battle which requires strong alliances, good cooperation, and a constant reminder of the nature of this war. So today I met with the Secretary General of NATO. And the first subject that came up was the war on terror and how much I appreciated NATO's contribution to helping Afghanistan succeed. But it is—the enemy in this case is disgruntled folks inside of Iraq coupled with an Al Qaida presence there that wants to harm Americans again.

I don't know—is your son still in the military?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. Thanks. You tell him the Commander in Chief is proud of him. You tell him to listen to his mother too.

Yes. First, and then second; sir, you're next.

National Economy/Education

Q. On behalf of the students here from various high school student leadership programs, we thank you for speaking with us here at the City Club of Cleveland.

The President. Thanks—I hope it's a convenient excuse to skip school, but—[laughter].

Q. Mr. President, with the war in Iraq costing \$19,600 per U.S. household, how do you expect a generation of young people such as ourselves to afford college at a time like this, when we're paying for a war in Iraq?

The President. Yes. [Applause] Well—hold on for a minute. Hold on. We can do more than one thing at one time. And when you grow your economy, like we're growing our economy, there is an opportunity to not only protect ourselves but also to provide more Pell grants than any administration in our Nation's history and increase the student loan program. So if you take a look, I think you'll find that we're robust in helping—at the Federal level, helping people go to college. And it's essential you go to college. It's essential that there be a group of youngsters coming up that are well-educated so that we can maintain our economic leadership posi-

tion in the world. We've got a robust program to do just that.

But it's also essential that we keep policies in place that keep the economy growing. This economy of ours is strong, and it's—it is, in my judgment, growing stronger. But it is possible to put policy in place that would weaken it, such as raising taxes. I think we got to keep taxes low to keep the economy moving. It's possible to put policy—[applause]—it's possible to put policy in place that would hurt this economy, like protectionist policy. It's possible to—if we keep suing our people trying to risk capital, it's conceivable, we won't be the leader. That's why we need good tort reform. We got to make sure that—[applause].

My point to you is, economic growth enables us to do more than one thing. And that's what we'll continue to do.

Yes, sir. Right. No, no, hold on for a minute. Hold on for a minute.

India/Pakistan

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Yes, sir.

Q. Every chief needs Indian on their side. [Laughter]

The President. How long were you working on that for? [Laughter]

Q. I applaud your vision and foresight to sign a long-term treaty with India. But, sir, I am confused that, on one side, you're helping democratic countries to flourish and establish democracy in the world market, whereas how do we deal with country who has known to harbor terrorism, like Pakistan?

The President. I thought you might be heading there. [Laughter] I, obviously, had a trip recently to India and Pakistan and Afghanistan and was able to say in India and in Pakistan both, "It is a positive development for America to be a friend of Pakistan. It's a positive development for India for America to be a friend of Pakistan, and it's a positive development for Pakistan for America to be a friend of India. It's an important accomplishment in order to help keep the peace."

I don't view our relationships with Pakistan and India as a zero-sum relationship. As a matter of fact, I view our relationships with

both countries as different sets of issues and the need to nurture both relationships to achieve common objectives. And we're in a position to be able to do so now.

President Musharraf is a friend to the United States. President Musharraf understands that he must help rout out Al Qaida, which is hiding in parts of his country. President Musharraf was reminded of that the four times Al Qaida tried to kill him. He is a—and so I was able to have a very good discussion with the President about our mutual concerns in the war on terror. And it's important that that dialog go on. It's a very important part of our—me doing my most important job, which is to protect you.

He also said in a press conference that he understands that democracy is important. So one of the conversations that I had with him in private—I feel comfortable saying this in public because he himself brought it up—was the need for democracy to advance in Pakistan. History has showed us that democracies don't war.

What's interesting about the relationship between Pakistan and India—and I'll get to India in a minute. I want to say something on India, so thanks for bringing it up—is that when we first—when I first got into office, I remember asking Colin Powell to go get in between India and Pakistan. There was a lot of noise—you might remember, I think it was '01 or '02, where there was deep concerns about—I think '01—deep concerns about a potential nuclear conflict. And so there was shuttle diplomacy, back and forth between India and Pakistan, including not only our—Colin but also Jack Straw, the Foreign Minister of Great Britain. And you never know how dangerous one of these situations can become until it's too late, but nevertheless, we took it very seriously.

And today, you don't see the need for the United States shuffling or Britain shuffling diplomats back and forth, to walk back—walk the two countries back from a potential conflict which would be incredibly damaging for the world. That's positive. In other words, it's—and I give Prime Minister—President Musharraf credit, and I give the Indian Prime Ministers—both Vajpayee and the current Prime Minister—credit for—Prime Minister Singh—for envisioning what is pos-

sible, how is it possible to develop a relationship that's a peaceful relationship with our neighbor.

And, sir, I think it's very important for the United States to stay engaged with Pakistan and encourage them. We're trying to negotiate an investment treaty with them, with the hopes of being able to eventually develop more trade with Pakistan, in the belief that trade helps nations develop stability and prosperity is achieved through trade.

India—the visit there was a very important visit. And I want to describe to you right quick, so be careful on the questions. You're going to have to—you'll leave your hand up for a while. I agreed with the Indian Government that India ought to be encouraged to develop a nuclear power industry. And that's a controversial decision on my part, because it basically flies in the face of old cold war attitudes as well as arm control thinking.

Let me just share the logic with you. First of all, in that we live in a global economy, there is a demand for fossil fuels—an increase in the demand for fossil fuels in one part of the world affects the price of gasoline in our world. We're connected. Whether people like it or not, there is an interconnectedness today that affects our economy. Somebody's decision overseas affects whether or not people are going to be able to work here in America. So I think it makes sense for the United States, as we ourselves become less addicted to oil and fossil fuels, which I'm serious about, encourage others to do so as well. And one good way to do so and to protect the environment at the same time is to encourage the use of safe nuclear power. It's in our interests, our economic interests that we work an agreement with India to encourage their expansion of civilian nuclear power.

Secondly, unlike Iran, for example, India is willing to join the IAEA. They want to be a part of the global agreements around nuclear power. Thirdly, India has got a record a nonproliferation. They've had 30 years of not proliferating. Fourthly, India is a democracy and a transparent society. You find out a lot about India because there's a free press. There is openness. People run for office and are held to account. There's committee hearings. It's an open process.

I feel very comfortable recommending to the United States Congress that it's—that they ought to agree with the agreement that Prime Minister Singh and I have reached. It's important—it's important—it's also an important relationship. For too long, America and India were not partners in peace. We didn't deal with each other because of the cold war. And now is the time to set the cold war behind us. It's over, folks. It no longer is. And let's think about the next 30 years.

And so my hope is someday, somebody will be asking a question, "Aren't you glad old George W. thought about entering into a strategic relationship with India?" And I believe it's in our country's interest that we have such a relationship and, at the same time, maintain close relations with Pakistan. And it's possible to do so. And we are doing so.

Yes, sir.

How long do you usually ask questions here for? [*Laughter*]

Terrorist Surveillance Program

Q. Mr. President—

The President. The guy is supposed to smile over there. Yes.

Q. Another theater in the war on terror is domestic. And there's a controversy around warrantless wiretaps domestically.

The President. Yes.

Q. Could you explain why living within the legislation that allowed your administration to get a warrant from a secret court within 72 hours after putting in a wiretap wouldn't be just as effective?

The President. No, I appreciate the question. He's talking about the terrorist surveillance program that was—created quite a kerfuffle in the press, and I owe an explanation to you. Because our people—first of all, after September the 11th, I spoke to a variety of folks on the frontline of protecting us, and I said, "Is there anything more we could be doing, given the current laws?" And General Mike Hayden of the NSA said, "There is." The FISA law—he's referring to the FISA law, I believe—is—was designed for a previous period and is slow and cumbersome in being able to do what Mike Hayden thinks is necessarily—called hot pursuit.

And so he designed a program that will enable us to listen from a known Al Qaida

or suspected Al Qaida person and/or affiliate, from making any phone call outside the United States in, or inside the United States out—with the idea of being able to pick up, quickly, information for which to be able to respond in this environment that we're in. I was concerned about the legality of the program, and so I asked lawyers—which you got plenty of them in Washington—[*laughter*—] to determine whether or not I could do this legally. And they came back and said yes. That's part of the debate which you're beginning to see.

I fully understood that Congress needed to be briefed. And so I had Hayden and others brief Members of the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, House Members and Senators, about the program. The program is under constant review. I sign a reauthorization every—I'm not exactly sure—45 days, say. It's something like that. In other words, it's constantly being reviewed. There's an IG that is very active at the NSA to make sure that the program stays within the bounds that it was designed.

I fully understand people's concerns about it, but ours is a town, by the way, in Washington, where when you don't connect the dots, you're held up to Congress, and when you do connect the dots, you're held up to Congress. I believe what I'm doing is constitutional, and I know it's necessary. And so we're going to keep doing it.

Domestic Policy

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Your comments today about Iraq have been, for me, very enlightening. And I greatly appreciate the level of clarity that you've provided. But my question is about domestic policy. Today, in our neighborhoods, there are terrorists. Children cannot play in some of our neighborhoods. Today, we've got—when you see post-Katrina, our country was startled at some of the images around poverty in some of our cities. Can you be as clear about your domestic policy, to address those kinds of things?

The President. Absolutely. Thanks. Let me start with education, which I view as a vital part of providing hope and eradicating poverty. I was disturbed, when I was the Governor of Texas, disturbed about a system

that just moved kids through. There was kind of a process-oriented world, that said, “Okay, if you’re 10, you’re supposed to be here; you’re 12, you’re supposed to be here,” and on through. It was like—without any sense of accountability. If you believe education is one of the cornerstones to a hopeful world, then it seems like to me, it makes sense that we’ve got to have a system that measures so we know whether or not people are getting educated.

So when I got to Washington, I proposed what’s called No Child Left Behind, which passed with both Republican and Democrat votes. And the whole spirit of No Child Left Behind is this: It says in return for increased Federal money, for particularly Title I students, we expect you to measure grades three through eight. We want to see strong accountability because we believe every child can learn, and we expect every school to teach. That’s the whole spirit of the No Child Left Behind Act.

If you—it turns out that if you can solve problems early, if you can find out whether or not a curriculum is working or not early on in a child’s career, we can correct the problems. And so part of the No Child Left Behind Act is, when you measure and find somebody not up to—measuring to par, not meeting standards, there’s extra money called special service money available in the No Child Left Behind Act to make sure that there’s early tutoring, to make sure that children are not just simply shuffled through, to make sure an accountability system is used properly—which is to diagnose and solve problems.

The No Child Left Behind Act is beginning to work. You know why? Because we measure. There was an achievement gap in America; that’s bad for the country. It’s an achievement gap between the difference between some Anglo children and some African American children, particularly inner city. That’s beginning to close.

We need to apply the same rigor of No Child Left Behind, particularly in middle [school] * age, for math and science, to make sure that we’re able to compete for the jobs of the 21st century.

* White House correction.

And so step one, in my judgment, to address exactly what you described as true—kind of this enlightenment that, uh-oh, there are parts of our society in which people are, in fact, being completely left behind—is to make sure the education system is rigorously based upon accountability. And when we find the status quo is unacceptable, have the political courage to change, demand high standards and change.

And the cornerstone of demanding change in a system that tends to protect itself is measurement. And I realize there are people in my party who want to undo No Child Left Behind. And I’m sure there are in the other party. But my judgment is, you can’t achieve educational excellence unless you measure and correct problems.

Now, there’s another aspect to providing a hopeful society, and that is to encourage ownership. One of the interesting things about Katrina, as you well know, is many of the people displaced did not own their own homes, that they were renters. One of the goals that I set for my administration through a variety of pretty simple programs—like helping with downpayment and education programs, recognizing that interest rates drive most of the housing purchases—was to encourage minority homeownership. It’s now at an alltime high.

I believe that the idea of empowering our faith-based institutions—Government can help, but Government sometimes can’t find—well, it just doesn’t pass—it’s just not a loving organization. And so I believe strongly—I believe strongly in empowering faith-based and community-based programs all throughout America to help achieve certain objectives. Mentoring, for example, mentoring of children in prisoners—whose mother or dad may be in prison is an initiative I started. Drug rehabilitation, giving those who are eligible for drug money a voucher, money themselves, a scrip so they can redeem it at a program that they choose, not that the Government assigns them to—in other words, there’s a variety of social service programs aimed at lifting people up.

And so I—look, many Americans kind of were—didn’t really realize what’s taking place in parts of the country that you’ve described. And Katrina was a wake-up call for

many Americans. And now there's an opportunity, in my judgment, to take—well, for people to take notice and put in policy—put policies in place that help those who need help, like community health centers, or—for health care—or expand educational opportunities through rigorous accountability systems, and, I repeat, demanding change where change is due—needed, and promoting ownership.

Thanks. Good question.

Support for the President

Q. —is no shrinking violet. First of all, I want to commend you on your presentation today. And I tell you I'm 100 percent behind your fight against terrorism. Also—

The President. Why don't you just leave it at that?

Q. Oh, no. Oh, no. [Laughter]

I tell you, one of the reasons I'm qualified to say that; you probably heard of Ernie Shavers, the boxer. I trained Ernie Shavers. He fought Muhammad Ali, and Muhammad Ali say he hit him so hard, he woke up his ancestors in Africa. [Laughter] So I know a little bit about boxing and things. But I know in boxing—and I taught over 3,300 children over 13 years. Two of them fought for world championships, including Ernie Shavers. I taught them that the best defense is a good offense. That's what you're doing over there now. And I commend you.

My mom and daddy had moved from Alabama to Ohio in the mid-40s. They were the parents of five sons. We all served in the military. I served 8 years, and we all served honorably. So I am a marine. I've also been a Boy Scout and a firefighter. To lead in, the young person spoke about domestic policy. This Wednesday coming, I'll be making my sixth trip to the New Orleans/Mississippi area as a contractor. I'm president of the Ohio Minority Contracting Association. I want to publicly thank Senator Voinovich right now for directing me to Senator Trent Lott, who has directed me to Haley Barbour, the Governor down there, who opened up opportunities.

We got people doing debris removal, putting on roofs. And I got a \$600,000 proposal to feed 22,000 workers down there who have been underfed. You've been down there. I

have too. People are working 14 and 16 hours a day. And I've never been so proud to be an American, to see the outpouring of people out there helping one another, particularly the faith-based community. So I thank you, appreciate you, and look forward to putting this proposal in your hand. Thank you.

The President. Well, let's see, I got an invitation and a proposal. [Laughter]

Yes, sir. Anybody work here in this town? [Laughter]

Q. Sorry about that. Mr. President, I just finished Ambassador Paul Bremer's book, and one of the things I just wanted to say to you and to Ambassador Bremer is, thank you for protecting us.

The President. Thanks. You're next.

Immigration

Q. Okay, my question is—

The President. We have dueling microphones here. Keep firing away.

Q. Okay. My question is, since 9/11, one of the key things that we need is immigration reform, including comprehensive immigration reform that is right now in front of Senator Specter's committee in the Judiciary. There are two principles I'm hoping that you would support: One, the good people, the engineers, the Ph.D.s, the doctors, the nurses, the people in the system who have followed the rules, will go to the head of the line in any form of immigration reform. That's title IV of the bill.

Secondly, the illegals who have not followed the rules—I understand the debate, I appreciate your statements about immigration reform, but isn't it better that we know who they are, have them finger-printed and photographed, and allow some form of 245(i) to come back so—

The President. Tell people what that is. Tell people what 245(i) is.

Q. Okay—245(i) is a partial amnesty program that expired back in 2001, in fact, was going to be voted on on 9/11, unfortunately. But those—it was a small segment of the illegal population where they would pay the \$1,000 fine and, for example, coming in illegally, then marrying an American citizen, could somehow legalize their status.

The President. Okay. Let me give you some broad principles on immigration reform as I see them. First of all, we do need to know who's coming into our country and whether they're coming in illegally or not legally—legally or not legally—and whether they're coming in or going out. And part of reforms after September the 11th was a better system of finding out who's coming here.

Secondly, we have a big border between Texas and Mexico that's really hard to enforce. We got to do everything we can to enforce the border, particularly in the South. I mean, it's the place where people are pouring across in order to find work. We have a situation in our own neighborhood where there are ways—disparities are huge, and there are jobs in America that people won't do. That's just a fact. I met an onion grower today at the airport when I arrived, and he said, "You got to help me find people that will pull onions," or pluck them or whatever you do with them, you know. *[Laughter]* There are jobs that just simply aren't getting done because Americans won't do them. And yet, if you're making 50 cents an hour in Mexico, and you can make a lot more in America, and you got mouths to feed, you're going to come and try to find the work. It's a big border, of which—across which people are coming to provide a living for their families.

Step one of any immigration policy is to enforce our border in practical ways. We are spending additional resources to be able to use different detection devices, unmanned UAVs, to help—and expand Border Patrol, by the way, expand the number of agents on the border, to make sure we're getting them the tools necessary to stop people from coming across in the first place.

Secondly, part of the issue we've had in the past is, we've had—for lack of a better word, catch-and-release. The Border Patrol would find people sneaking in; they would then hold them for a period of time; they'd say, "Come back and check in with us 45 days later," and then they wouldn't check in 45 days later. And they would disappear in society to do the work that some Americans will not do.

And so we're changing catch-and-release. We're particularly focusing on those from

Central America who are coming across Mexico's southern border, ending up in our own—it's a long answer, because it's an important question: How do we protect our borders and, at the same time, be a humane society?

Anyway, step one, focus on enforcing border; when we find people, send them home, so that the work of our Border Patrol is productive work.

Secondly, it seems like to me that part of having a border security program is to say to people who are hiring people here illegally, we're going to hold you to account. The problem is, our employers don't know whether they're hiring people illegally because there's a whole forgery industry around people being smuggled into the United States. There's a smuggling industry and a forging industry. And it's hard to ask our employers, the onion guy out there, whether or not he's got—whether or not the documents that he's being shown which look real are real.

And so here's a better proposal than what we're doing today, which is to say, if you're going to come to do a job that an American won't do, you ought to be given a fool-proof card that says you can come for a limited period of time and do work in a job an American won't do. That's border security, because it means that people will be willing to come in legally with a card to do work on a limited basis and then go home. And so the agents won't be chasing people being smuggled in 18-wheelers or across the Arizona desert. They'll be able to focus on drugs and terrorists and guns.

The fundamental question that he is referring to is, what do we do about—there's two questions—one, should we have amnesty? And the answer, in my judgment, is, no; we shouldn't have amnesty. In my judgment, granting amnesty, automatic citizenship—that's what amnesty means—would cause another 11 million people, or however many are here, to come in the hopes of becoming a United States citizen. We shouldn't have amnesty. We ought to have a program that says, you get in line like everybody else gets in line; and that if the Congress feels like there needs to be higher quotas on certain nationalities, raise the quotas. But don't let

people get in front of the line for somebody who has been playing by the rules.

And so—anyway, that’s my ideas on good immigration policy. Obviously, there’s going to be some questions we have to answer: What about the person who’s been here since 1987—’86 was the last attempt at coming up with immigration reform—been here for a long period of time? They’ve raised a family here. And my only advice for the Congress and for people in the debate is, understand what made America. We’re a land of immigrants. This guy is from Hungary, you know. And we got to treat people fairly. We’ve got to have a system of law that is respectful for people.

I mean, the idea of having a program that causes people to get stuck in the back of 18-wheelers, to risk their lives to sneak into America to do work that some people won’t do, is just not American, in my judgment. And so I would hope the debate would be civil and uphold the honor of this country. And remember, we’ve been through these periods before, where the immigration debate can get harsh. And it should not be harsh. And I hope—my call for people is to be rational about the debate and thoughtful about what words can mean during this debate.

Final question, sir. You’re paying me a lot of money, and I got to go back to work. [Laughter]

Iran

Q. My name is Jose Feliciano.

The President. No.

Q. Yes, it is. [Laughter]

The President. Yes—it’s like the time I called a guy and said, “Hey, this is George Bush calling.” He said, “Come on, quit kidding me, man.” [Laughter] *Que Jose? Que quiere decir?*

Q. [Inaudible]. [Laughter]

The President. That’s right.

Q. And, actually, I’m chairman of the Hispanic Roundtable—I was going to ask you that same question. However, I’m going to ask you a simple one now, and this relates to preemptive self-defense. How is it, Mr. President, that Iran today is really different from what Iraq was 3 years ago?

The President. Well, first of all, there were 16 Security Council resolutions. The world had spoken with a clear voice not one time; I think 16—is that right, Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News], 16? I’m asking a member of the press corps. I like to, like, reverse roles sometimes—[laughter]. Really checking to see if they’re paying attention, you know. [Laughter] Halfway through, they kind of start dozing off. [Laughter]

But the world had spoken by a lot against Saddam Hussein. There was a diplomatic process. You might remember that the Congress, I think in ’98, voted a resolution that there should be regime change. My predecessor looked at the same intelligence I looked at and saw a threat. But the difference—one difference was that in Iraq, there was a series of unanimous resolutions that basically held the Iraqi Government to account, which Saddam Hussein ignored. It was, like, resolution after resolution after resolution.

The Iranian issue is just beginning to play out. And my hope, of course, is, as I said earlier, that we’re able to solve this issue diplomatically. It’s very important that the United States work with our allies—in this case, the lead group of negotiators has been Germany, France, and Great Britain—so that the Iranians hear a unified voice.

Now, the voice sometimes—I mean, if you’re one—you’re negotiators, probably got some lawyers here who are good negotiators—it’s easier to negotiate one person versus six. I’m not suggesting you’re a lawyer, you know, but I kind of had the feeling you might have been. [Laughter]

And so it’s very important for us to continue to make sure that they hear one voice. Nontransparent societies have got an advantage over those of us who are transparent, where every move is in the press, every opinion is aired out. And so it’s very important for us to work to make sure that they hear the one voice. Now, you might have read in the newspapers where our Ambassador in Iraq, Zal, has reached out to the Iranians to make it clear to them about our concerns about involvement in Iraq—Iranian involvement in Iraq. It’s very important, however

for the Iranians to understand that the discussion is limited to Iraq. We feel like they need to know our position.

Ultimately, Iraq-Iranian relations will be negotiated between the Iraqi Government and the Iranian Government. Ours is just—we're using this as an opportunity to make it clear about our concerns of interference within a process that is—a democratic process that is evolving. Our position is still very clearly that the Iraqis—Iranians should not have a program to build a nuclear weapon, and/or the capacity, the knowledge necessary to build something which could lead to a nuclear weapon. And we're working closely with our allies and friends to continue to make that clear to them.

So the issues are different. The issues are different stages of diplomacy.

Listen, I've enjoyed this. I hope you have as well. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:25 p.m. at the Renaissance Cleveland Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Sanjiv K. Kapur, president, City Club of Cleveland; Mayor Frank G. Jackson of Cleveland, OH; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; Secretary General Jakob Gijssbert "Jaap" de Hoop Scheffer of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization; President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan; former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell; and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Message on the Observance of Nowruz

March 20, 2006

I send greetings to those celebrating Nowruz.

Nowruz is an ancient celebration marking the arrival of the New Year. For millions of people around the world who trace their heritage to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia, Nowruz is a celebration of life and an opportunity to express joy and happiness through visiting family and friends, exchanging gifts, and enjoying the beauty of nature.

Our Nation is blessed by the traditions and contributions of Americans of many different backgrounds. Our diversity has made us stronger and better, and Laura and I send warm regards to all Americans celebrating Nowruz.

Best wishes for peace and prosperity in the New Year.

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

The President's News Conference

March 21, 2006

The President. Good morning. Yesterday I delivered a—the second in a series of speeches on the situation in Iraq. I spoke about the violence that the Iraqi people had faced since last month's bombing of the Golden Mosque in Samarra. I also said that for every act of violence there is encouraging progress in Iraq that's hard to capture on the evening news.

Yesterday I spoke about an important example of the gains we and the Iraqis have made, and that is in the northern city of Tall 'Afar. The city was once under Al Qaida control, and thanks to coalition and Iraqi forces, the terrorists have now been driven out of that city. Iraqi security forces are maintaining law and order. We see the outlines of a free and secure Iraq that we and the Iraqi people have been fighting for. As we mark the third anniversary of the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom, the success we're seeing in Tall 'Afar gives me confidence in the future of Iraq.

Terrorists haven't given up; they're tough-minded; they like to kill. There's going to be more tough fighting ahead. No question that sectarian violence must be confronted by the Iraqi Government and a better-trained police force. Yet we're making progress, and that's important for the American people to understand.

We're making progress because of—we've got a strategy for victory, and we're making progress because the men and women of the United States military are showing magnificent courage, and they're making important

sacrifices that have brought Iraq to an historic moment—the opportunity to build a democracy that reflects its country’s diversity, that serves its people, and is an active partner in the fight against the terrorists.

Now Iraq’s leaders must take advantage of the opportunity. I was encouraged by the announcement Sunday the Iraqi leaders—that the Iraqi leaders made—are making progress toward a council that gives each of the country’s main political factions a voice in making security and economic policies. It’s an indicator that Iraq’s leaders understand the importance of a government of national unity. Our Ambassador to Iraq, Zal Khalilzad, is very much involved in the process and will encourage the Iraqi leaders to put aside their differences, reach out across sectarian lines, and form a unity government.

Here at home, I’m also encouraged by the strength of our economy. Last year, our economy grew at a healthy 3.5 percent. Over the past 2½ years, the economy has added nearly 5 million new jobs—that’s more than Japan and the 25 nations of the European Union combined. The national unemployment rate is 4.8 percent—that’s lower than the average rate of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s. Productivity is strong; inflation is contained. Household net worth is at an alltime high. Real after-tax income is up more than 8 percent per person since the beginning of 2001. The growing economy is a result of the hard work of the American people and good policies here in Washington.

I believe America prospers when people are allowed to keep more of what they earn so they can make their own decisions about how to spend, save, and invest. So I’m going to continue to work with Congress to make the tax relief permanent, continue to work with Congress to restrain Federal spending, continue to work with Congress to achieve the goal of cutting the deficit in half by 2009.

We cannot take our growing economy for granted, and so I look forward to working with the Congress to make sure we invest in basic research and promote math and science education. I’m going to work with Congress to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. I know it came as a surprise to some of you that I would stand up in front of the Congress and say, “We got a problem; we’re

addicted to oil.” But it is a problem. And I look forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats to advance an agenda that will make us less dependent on foreign oil, an agenda that includes hybrid cars, advanced ethanol fuels, and hydrogen cells. I’m going to look forward to working with Congress to make sure health care is affordable and available.

We’re going to work with Congress to make sure we meet our commitments to our fellow citizens who are affected by Katrina. I appreciate the step that the House of Representatives took last week on passing a supplemental appropriations bill that funds gulf coast reconstruction and, of course, supports our men and women in uniform. I look forward to working with the Senate to get that supplemental bill passed and to my desk.

Now, I’ll be glad to take any questions you have, starting with AP person [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]. [*Laughter*]

Progress in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. That would be you, Terry.

Q. Iraq’s Interim Prime Minister said Sunday that violence is killing an average of 50 to 60 people a day, and that “if this is not civil war, then God knows what civil war is.” Do you agree with Mr. Allawi that Iraq has fallen into civil war?

The President. I do not. There are other voices coming out of Iraq, by the way, other than Mr. Allawi—who I know, by the way, and like; he’s a good fellow. President Talabani has spoken. General Casey, the other day, was quite eloquent on the subject—Zal Khalilzad, who I talk to quite frequently. Listen, we all recognize that there is violence, that there’s sectarian violence. But the way I look at the situation is that the Iraqis took a look and decided not to go to civil war.

A couple of indicators are that the army didn’t bust up into sectarian divisions. The army stayed united. And as General Casey pointed out, they did, arguably, a good job in helping to make sure the country stayed united.

Secondly, I was pleased to see religious leaders stand up. Ayatollah Sistani, for example, was very clear in his denunciation of violence and the need for the country to remain united. The political leaders who represent different factions of the Iraqi society have committed themselves to moving forward on a unity government.

No question that the enemy has tried to spread sectarian violence; they use violence as a tool to do that. They're willing to kill innocent people. The reports of bound Sunnis that were executed are horrific. And it's obviously something we're going to have to deal. And more importantly, the Iraqis are going to have to deal with it.

But I see progress. I've heard people say, "Oh, he's just kind of optimistic for the sake of optimism." Well, look, I believe we're going to succeed. And I understand how tough it is—don't get me wrong—I mean, you make it abundantly clear how tough it is. I hear it from our troops; I read the reports every night. But I believe the Iraqis—this is a moment where the Iraqis had a chance to fall apart, and they didn't. And that's a positive development.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Iran

Q. Thank you. You describe Iran as a threat, yet, you're close to opening talks with them about Iraq. What would be the objective in these talks if they are not negotiations? And is there a risk of getting drawn into the nuclear issue?

The President. Thanks for asking that question. A couple of months ago, I gave Zal, our Ambassador in Iraq, permission to explain to the Iraqi—Iranians what we didn't like about their involvement in Iraq. I thought it was important for them to hear firsthand, other than through press accounts. He asked whether or not it made sense for him to be able to talk to a representative in Baghdad. I said, "Absolutely. You make it clear to them that attempts to spread sectarian violence, or to maybe move parts that could be used for IEDs is unacceptable to the United States."

It is very important for the Iranians to understand that any relationship between Iraq and Iran will be negotiated between those

two countries. Iraq is a sovereign government. They have a foreign policy. And when they get their unity government stepped up, they will be in charge of negotiating with the Iranians their foreign policy arrangement. And so this is a way for us to make it clear to them that—about what's right or wrong in their activities inside of Iraq.

Secondly, our negotiations with Iran on the nuclear weapons will be led by the EU-3. And that's important because the Iranians must hear there's a unified voice about—that says that they shall not have a capacity to make a nuclear weapon and/or the knowledge as to how to make a nuclear weapon, for the sake of security of the world.

It's important for our citizens to understand that we have got to deal with this issue diplomatically now. And the reason why is because if the Iranians were to have a nuclear weapon, they could blackmail the world. If the Iranians were to have a nuclear weapon, they could proliferate. This is a country that's walking away from international accords; they're not heading toward the international accords; they're not welcoming the international inspections—or safeguards—safeguard measures that they had agreed to.

And so our policy for the Iranians, in terms of the nuclear program, is to continue to work with the EU-3, as well as Russia and China. Later on this week, there's going to be a P-5—that's a diplomatic sloganeering for the permanent members of the Security Council plus Germany—and working together to make sure that the message remains unified and concerted.

If you're a nontransparent society, you've got a negotiating advantage over six parties, because all you have to do is kind of try to find a—the weakest link in the negotiating team. And so our job is to make sure that this international will remains strong and united, so that we can solve this issue diplomatically.

Helen [Helen Thomas, Hearst Newspapers]. After that brilliant performance at the Gridiron, I am—

War on Terror

Q. You're going to be sorry. [Laughter]

The President. Well, then, let me take it back. [Laughter]

Q. I'd like to ask you, Mr. President, your decision to invade Iraq has caused the deaths of thousands of Americans and Iraqis, wounds of Americans and Iraqis for a lifetime. Every reason given, publicly at least, has turned out not to be true. My question is, why did you really want to go to war? From the moment you stepped into the White House, from your Cabinet officers, intelligence people, and so forth—what was your real reason? You have said it wasn't oil, quest for oil—it hasn't been Israel, or anything else. What was it?

The President. I think your premise—in all due respect to your question and to you as a lifelong journalist—is that—I didn't want war. To assume I wanted war is just flat wrong, Helen, in all due respect—

Q. Everything—

The President. Hold on for a second, please.

Q. —everything I've heard—

The President. Excuse me, excuse me. No President wants war. Everything you may have heard is that, but it's just simply not true. My attitude about the defense of this country changed on September the 11th. We—when we got attacked, I vowed then and there to use every asset at my disposal to protect the American people.

Our foreign policy changed on that day, Helen. You know, we used to think we were secure because of oceans and previous diplomacy. But we realized on September the 11th, 2001, that killers could destroy innocent life. And I'm never going to forget it. And I'm never going to forget the vow I made to the American people that we will do everything in our power to protect our people.

Part of that meant to make sure that we didn't allow people to provide safe haven to an enemy. And that's why I went into Iraq—hold on for a second—

Q. They didn't do anything to you or to our country.

The President. Look—excuse me for a second, please. Excuse me for a second. They did. The Taliban provided safe haven for Al Qaida. That's where Al Qaida trained—

Q. I'm talking about Iraq—

The President. Helen, excuse me. That's where—Afghanistan provided safe haven for Al Qaida. That's where they trained. That's

where they plotted. That's where they planned the attacks that killed thousands of innocent Americans.

I also saw a threat in Iraq. I was hoping to solve this problem diplomatically. That's why I went to the Security Council; that's why it was important to pass 1441, which was unanimously passed. And the world said, "Disarm, disclose, or face serious consequences"—

Q. —go to war—

The President. —and therefore, we worked with the world, we worked to make sure that Saddam Hussein heard the message of the world. And when he chose to deny inspectors, when he chose not to disclose, then I had the difficult decision to make to remove him. And we did, and the world is safer for it.

Q. Thank you, sir. Secretary Rumsfeld—

Q. Thank you. [*Laughter*].

The President. You're welcome. [*Laughter*] I didn't really regret it. I kind of semi-regretted it. [*Laughter*]

Q. —have a debate.

The President. That's right. Anyway, your performance at the Gridiron was just brilliant—unlike Holland's, was a little weak, but—[*laughter*].

Sorry.

Progress in Iraq

Q. Secretary Rumsfeld has said that if civil war should break out in Iraq, he's hopeful that Iraqi forces can handle it. If they can't, sir, are you willing to sacrifice American lives to keep Iraqis from killing one another?

The President. I think the first step is to make sure a civil war doesn't break out. And that's why we're working with the leaders there in Baghdad to form a unity government. Obviously, if there is difficulty on the streets, the first line of defense for that difficulty will be the Iraqi forces, which have proved themselves in the face of potential sectarian violence—right after the bombing of the mosque in Samarra. The forces are—part of our strategy for victory is to get the forces the skills and the tools and the training necessary to defend their own country, whether it be against Zarqawi and the killers, or whether it be those who are trying to

spread sectarian violence. And they have proven themselves.

And so our position is, one, get a unity government formed, and secondly, prepare the Iraqi troops, and support Iraqi troops, if need be, to prevent sectarian violence from breaking out.

Yes, sir.

War on Terror

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to ask you for your reaction on the latest insurgent attack in Baghdad, 17 police officers killed and a bunch of insurgents freed. I spent a fair amount of time in front of that hotel in Cleveland yesterday, talking to people about the war and saying you were there to talk optimistically. And one woman who said she voted for you, said, "You know what, he's losing me. We've been there too long; he's losing me." What do you say to her?

The President. I say that I'm talking realistically to people. We have a plan for victory, and it's important we achieve that plan. Democracy—first of all, this is a global war on terror, and Iraq is a part of the war on terror. Mr. Zarqawi and Al Qaida, the very same people that attacked the United States, have made it clear that they want to drive us out of Iraq so they can plan, plot, and attack America again. That's what they have said; that's their objective. I think it is very important to have a President who is realistic and listens to what the enemy says.

Secondly, I am confident, or I believe—I'm optimistic we'll succeed. If not, I'd pull our troops out. If I didn't believe we had a plan for victory, I wouldn't leave our people in harm's way. And that's important for the woman to understand.

Thirdly, in spite of the bad news on television—and there is bad news. You brought it up; you said, how do I react to a bombing that took place yesterday—is precisely what the enemy understands is possible to do. I'm not suggesting you shouldn't talk about it. I'm certainly not being—please don't take that as criticism. But it also is a realistic assessment of the enemies capability to affect the debate, and they know that. They're capable of blowing up innocent life so it ends up on your TV show. And therefore, it affects the woman in Cleveland you were talking to. And

I can understand how Americans are worried about whether or not we can win.

I think most Americans understand we need to win, but they're concerned about whether or not we can win. So one of the reasons I go around the country, to Cleveland, is to explain why I think we can win. And so I would say, yes, I'm optimistic about being able to achieve a victory, but I'm also realistic. I fully understand the consequences of this war. I understand people's lives are being lost. But I also understand the consequences of not achieving our objective by leaving too early. Iraq would become a place of instability, a place from which the enemy can plot, plan, and attack.

I believe that they want to hurt us again. And therefore, I know we need to stay on the offense against this enemy. They've declared Iraq to be the central front, and therefore, we've got to make sure we win that. And I believe we will.

Please.

White House Staff

Q. Good morning, sir. Mindful of the frustrations that many Americans are expressing to you, do you believe you need to make any adjustments in how you run the White House? Many of your senior staffers have been with you from the beginning. There are some in Washington who say—

The President. Wait a minute, is this a personal attack launching over here? [*Laughter*]

Q. Some say they are tired and even tone-deaf, even within your party who say that maybe you need some changes. Would you benefit from any changes to your staff?

The President. I've got a staff of people that have, first of all, placed their country above their self-interests. These are good, hard-working, decent people. And we've dealt with a lot; we've dealt with a lot. We've dealt with war; we've dealt with recession; we've dealt with scandal; we've dealt with Katrina. I mean, they had a lot on their plate. And I appreciate their performance and their hard work, and they've got my confidence.

And I understand—Washington is a great town for advice. I get a lot of it—sometimes in private, from my friends, and sometimes in public. There are those who like to stand

up and say to the President, “Here’s what you ought to be doing.” And I understand that. This isn’t the first time during these 5½ years that people have felt comfortable about standing up, telling me what to do. And that’s okay. I take it all in and appreciate the spirit in which it’s delivered, most of the time. But—no, look, I’m satisfied with the people I’ve surrounded myself with. We’ve been a remarkably stable administration. And I think that’s good for the country.

Obviously, there’s some times when government bureaucracies haven’t responded the way we wanted them to. And like citizens, I don’t like that at all. I mean, I think, for example, of the trailers sitting down in Arkansas. Like many citizens, they’re wondering why they’re down there. How come we got 11,000? So I’ve asked Chertoff to find out, what are you going to do with them? The taxpayers aren’t interested in 11,000 trailers just sitting there; do something with them.

And so I share that sense of frustration when a big government is unable to—sends wrong signals to taxpayers. But our people are good, hard-working people.

Elisabeth [Elisabeth Bumiller, New York Times].

Second Term Agenda

Q. Can I just follow up on that?

The President. Sure.

Q. But aside from staff, Mr. President, are you listening to suggestions you bring somebody else into the White House, a wise man, a graybeard, some old-time Washington hand who can steady Congress if they’re upset about things, Republicans in Congress?

The President. I’m listening to all suggestions. I really am. I mean, I’m listening to Congress. We’re bringing Congress down here all the time. And it’s interesting to hear their observations. They—they’re, obviously, expressing concerns. It’s an election year, after all. And it seems like history tends to repeat itself when you’re in the White House. I can remember ’02 before the elections, there was a certain nervousness. There was a lot of people in Congress who weren’t sure I was going to make it in ’04, and whether or not I’d drag the ticket down. So there’s

a certain unease as you head into an election year; I understand that.

My message to them is, please continue to give me advice and suggestions. And I take their advice seriously. But also remember we’ve got a positive agenda. We’ve got something to do. It’s important for Congress to have confidence in our ability to get things done. We’re supporting our troops over the last 12 months. We’ve got two Supreme Court judges confirmed. We’ve got the PATRIOT Act reauthorized over the objections of the Democrat leadership in the Senate. We got some tort reform passed. We passed a budget that cut nonsecurity discretionary spending. There’s a series of—we got an energy bill passed. We worked to get a lot of positive things done. And now we’ve got an agenda—continue to keep this economy growing and keep this Nation competitive.

I meant what I said in my speech, we shouldn’t fear this future. In other words, we shouldn’t allow isolationism and protectionism to overwhelm us. We ought to be confident about our ability to shape the future.

And that’s why this Competitiveness Initiative is important. That’s why this energy plan that gets us less addicted to oil is important. We got some interesting ideas on health care that we need to continue to press, to make sure consumers are actually a part of the decisionmaking process when it comes to health care decisions. We’ve got an aggressive agenda that, by working together, will get passed. But I do, I listen.

Yes, Jim [Jim Gerstenzang, Los Angeles Times].

War on Terror/Polls

Q. —new guy? No new guy?

The President. Well, I’m not going to announce it right now. Look, they’ve got some ideas that I like and some I don’t like. Put it that way.

Q. You’ve said during your Presidency that you don’t pay that much attention to the polls, but—

The President. Correct.

Q. —there is a handful that have come back, and they all say the exact same thing:

A growing number of Americans are questioning the trustworthiness of you and this White House. Does that concern you?

The President. I believe that my job is to go out and explain to people what's on my mind. That's why I'm having this press conference, see. I'm telling you what's on my mind. And what's on my mind is winning the war on terror. And I understand war creates concerns, Jim. Nobody likes war. It creates a sense of uncertainty in the country. The person you talked to in Cleveland is uncertain about our ability to go forward. She's uncertain about whether or not we can succeed, and I understand that. War creates trauma, particularly when you're fighting an enemy that doesn't fight soldier to soldier. They fight by using IEDs to kill innocent people. That's what they use. That's the tool they use. And it creates a sense of concern amongst our people, and that makes sense, and I know that.

And one of the reasons why it's important for me to continue to speak out and explain why we have a strategy for victory, why we can succeed—and I'm going to say it again—if I didn't believe we could succeed, I wouldn't be there. I wouldn't put those kids there. I meet with too many families who's lost a loved one to not be able to look them in the eye and say, we're doing the right thing. And we are doing the right thing. A democracy in Iraq is going to affect the neighborhood. A democracy in Iraq is going to inspire reformers in a part of the world that is desperate for reformation.

Our foreign policy up to now was to kind of tolerate what appeared to be calm. And underneath the surface was this swelling sense of anxiety and resentment, out of which came this totalitarian movement that is willing to spread its propaganda through death and destruction, to spread its philosophy. Now, some in this country don't—I can understand—don't view the enemy that way. I guess they kind of view it as an isolated group of people that occasionally kill. I just don't see it that way. I see them bound by a philosophy with plans and tactics to impose their will on other countries.

The enemy has said that it's just a matter of time before the United States loses its nerve and withdraws from Iraq. That's what

they have said. And their objective for driving us out of Iraq is to have a place from which to launch their campaign to overthrow modern governments—moderate governments—in the Middle East, as well as to continue attacking places like the United States. Now, maybe some discount those words as kind of meaningless propaganda. I don't, Jim. I take them really seriously. And I think everybody in government should take them seriously and respond accordingly. And so it's—I've got to continue to speak as clearly as I possibly can about the consequences of success and the consequences of failure, and why I believe we can succeed.

Defense Secretary Rumsfeld/Progress in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, Kathleen Koch, CNN.

The President. Yes.

Q. You said you listen to Members of Congress, and there have been growing calls from some of those Members for the resignation of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld; also from his own former subordinates like U.S. Army Major General Paul Eaton, who described him in a recent editorial as “incompetent and tactically inept.” Do you feel that personally you've ever gotten bad advice in the conduct of the war in Iraq? And do you believe Rumsfeld should resign?

The President. No, I don't believe he should resign. I think he's done a fine job of not only conducting two battles, Afghanistan and Iraq, but also transforming our military, which has been a very difficult job inside the Pentagon.

Listen, every war plan looks good on paper until you meet the enemy—not just the war plan we executed in Iraq but the war plans that have been executed throughout the history of warfare. In other words, the enemy changes tactics, and we've got to change tactics too.

And no question that we've had to adjust our tactics on the ground. And perhaps the clearest example is in the training of Iraqi security forces. When we got into Iraq, we felt like we needed to train a security force that was capable for defending the country from an outside threat. And then it became apparent that the insurgents and Zarqawi were able to spread their poison and their

violence in a ruthless way, and therefore, we had to make sure that the Iraqi forces were able to deal with the internal threat. And we adjusted our tactics and started spending a lot more time getting the Iraqis up and running, and then embedding our troops with the Iraqis.

And it has been a success. But no question about it, we missed some time as we adjusted our tactics. We had to change our reconstruction strategy. We were—we thought it made sense, initially, when we went in there to build big, grand projects, which turned out to be targets for the insurgents to blow up. And a better strategy was to be spending reconstruction money at the local level, so that local leaders committed to a peaceful and unified Iraq would benefit. In other words, people would see tangible benefits from an emerging democracy, and the leaders would be viewed as people helping to improve their lives.

And so this is a war in which we've changed tactics. It's a war in which we've adjusted and learned lessons in the process of the war.

Yes, sir.

Social Security Reform

Q. Just after the 2004 election, you seemed to—you claimed a really enviable balance of political capital and a strong mandate. Would you make that claim today? Do you still have that?

The President. I'd say I'm spending that capital on the war.

Q. Well, is that costing you elsewhere, then?

The President. I don't think so. I just named 12—I just named an agenda that over the last 12 months was—would be, I suspect, if looked at objectively, would say, well, they got a lot done. And I'd be glad to repeat them if you like, which is—[laughter].

Q. —Social Security—

The President. Wait a minute. Please no hand gestures. [Laughter]

Social Security—it didn't get done. You notice it wasn't on the list. [Laughter] Let me talk about that, if you don't mind. First of all, Social Security is a really difficult issue for some Members of Congress to deal with because it is fraught with all kind of political

peril. As a matter of fact, it's been difficult for a lot of Congresses to deal with. The one time in recent memory that it was dealt with was when there was a near crisis—in other words, when the system was about to fall into the abyss, and people came together and solved it. But they thought it was a fairly long-term fix; it turned out to be a lot shorter fix than they thought.

So I'm disappointed Congress didn't want to go forward with it, but I'm not surprised. Therefore, I tried a new tactic. Last year, the tactic was to believe that once the people saw there was a problem, they would then demand a solution. And we made progress on describing the problem. I think the American people are now beginning to get the picture that if we don't do something, Social Security and Medicare will bust. If we don't do something, future Congresses—not this Congress, but future Congresses—are going to be confronted with some serious decisions about raising taxes enormously or cutting benefits drastically—or other programs drastically.

And so that issue sunk in. Just that—there wasn't that connection with action inside, in the body of the respective chambers—although, there were some noble efforts made by some Members of Congress to get something started.

So the new tactics to get people involved in this process is to try to take the politics out of it and bring members of both parties, both chambers together. There's quiet consultations going on to get this commission—committee together of members that could get something put in place that would have a bipartisan appeal to it. Bipartisanship is hard to achieve in Washington these days. I readily concede that. Yet, this issue is one that's going to require a bipartisan approach. It's simply not going to be an issue where one party, without the cooperation of the other party, kind of tries to move a bill. At least, that's how I view it.

But I'm committed to moving the issue. I think it's important. And I'm not deterred by the fact that nothing happened. As a matter of fact, I take great pride in the fact that I was willing to bring up the issue while others might not have. That's the job of the President. The job of the President is not

to worry about the short-term attitudes. The job of the President is to confront big issues, and to bring them to the front, and to say to people, "Let's work together to get it solved." And I'm going to continue working on it.

Carl [Carl Cameron, FOX News].

**Terrorist Surveillance Program/
Responsible Debate**

Q. Thank you, sir. On the subject of the terrorist surveillance program—

The President. Yes.

Q. —not to change the tone from all this emphasis on bipartisanship, but there have been now three sponsors to a measure to censure you for the implementation of that program. The primary sponsor, Russ Feingold, has suggested that impeachment is not out of the question. And on Sunday, the number two Democrat in the Senate refused to rule that out, pending an investigation. What, sir, do you think the impact of the discussion of impeachment and censure does to you and this office and to the Nation during a time of war, and in the context of the election?

The President. I think during these difficult times—and they are difficult when we're at war—the American people expect there to be a honest and open debate without needless partisanship. And that's how I view it. I did notice that nobody from the Democrat Party has actually stood up and called for getting rid of the terrorist surveillance program. You know, if that's what they believe, if people in the party believe that, then they ought to stand up and say it. They ought to stand up and say the tools we're using to protect the American people shouldn't be used. They ought to take their message to the people and say, "Vote for me; I promise we're not going to have a terrorist surveillance program." That's what they ought to be doing. That's part of what is an open and honest debate.

I did notice that, at one point in time, they didn't think the PATRIOT Act ought to be reauthorized—"they" being at least the Minority Leader in the Senate. He openly said, as I understand—I don't want to misquote him—something along the lines that, "We killed the PATRIOT Act." And if that's what

the party believes, they ought to go around the country saying, "We shouldn't give the people on the frontline of protecting us the tools necessary to do so." That's a debate I think the country ought to have.

Yes, sir.

Progress in Iraq

Q. You mentioned earlier that you were encouraged by some of the discussions going on over a unity government, over the last few days. Do you now have in mind a target date for forming the unity government and—

The President. As soon as possible. Next question.

Public Opinion/Progress in Iraq

Q. How much of a factor do you think that will be, if it's achieved, in turning around, or at least improving the situation in the public opinion?

The President. Here in America?

Q. Right.

The President. That's a trick question, because you want to get me to talk about polls when I don't pay attention to polls.

Q. That was one—

The President. At least that's—after 5½ years, I was able to rout you out. [Laughter]

First of all, I have no idea whether or not a—how Americans are going to react to a unity government. There will be a unity government formed; then there could be an attack the next day, and so it's hard for me to predict. I do know a unity government, though, is necessary for us to achieve our objective. I do know that the Iraqi people—11 million of them—voted in an election in December, which was, like, 4 months ago. And the message I received from—that is, I hope, the same message that those who have been in charge with forming a unity government receive, and that is the people have spoken, and they want democracy. That's what they said. Otherwise, they wouldn't have participated. They expect there to be a democracy in place that listens to their demands.

And so I'm—most importantly, I believe a unity government will begin to affect the attitudes of the Iraqis. And that's important

for them to get confidence not only in a government but in a security force that will provide them security. It's—confidence amongst the Iraqis is what is going to be a vital part of achieving a victory, which will then enable the American people to understand that victory is possible. In other words, the American people will—their opinions, I suspect, will be affected by what they see on their TV screens. The unity government will affect, first and foremost, the Iraqi people, and that's a very important part of achieving success.

We do have a plan for victory, and victory is clearly stated, and that is that Iraq is not a—becomes a safe haven. And that's important for the American people, that Iraq not be a safe haven for terrorists. Their stated objective is to turn Iraq into a safe haven from which they can launch attacks.

Secondly, part of the plan for victory is for there to be security forces capable of defending and providing security to the Iraqi citizens. And thirdly, that democracy, the government take root to the extent that it can't be overturned by those who want to stop democracy from taking hold in Iraq. These are clear objectives, and they're achievable objectives.

Okay. Mark [Mark Silva, Chicago Tribune].

Deficit Spending

Q. Mr. President, in the upcoming elections, I think many Republicans would tell you one of the big things they're worried about is the national debt, which was \$5.7 trillion when you took office and is now nearly \$8.2 trillion, and Congress has just voted to raise it to \$8.9 trillion. That would be a 58-percent increase. You've yet to veto a single bill, sir—I assume that means you're satisfied with this.

The President. No, I'm not satisfied with the rise of mandatory spending. As you know, the President doesn't have the—doesn't veto mandatory spending increases. And mandatory spending increases are those increases in the budget caused by increases in spending on Medicare and Social Security. And that's why—back to this man's question right here—it's important for—"this man" being Jim—[laughter]—sorry, Jim, I've got a lot on

my mind these days. That's why it's important for us to modernize and strengthen Social Security and Medicare, in order to be able to deal with the increases in mandatory spending.

Secondly, in terms of discretionary spending, that part of the budget over which Congress has got some control and over which the President can make suggestions, we have suggested that the Congress fully fund the troops in harm's way. And they have, and for that the American people should be grateful.

Secondly, we suggested that Congress fund the reconstruction efforts for Katrina. They have spent now a little more than \$100 billion, and I think that's money well-spent, a commitment that needed to be kept.

Thirdly, we have said that other than security discretionary spending, that we ought to, last year, actually reduce the amount of discretionary spending and were able to do so. Ever since I've been the President, we have slowed the rate of growth of nonsecurity discretionary spending and actually cut discretionary spending—nonsecurity discretionary spending.

Last year, I submitted a budget to the United States Congress. I would hope they would meet the targets of the budget that I submitted, in order to continue to make a commitment to the American people. But in terms of the debt, mandatory spending increases is driving a lot of that debt. And that's why it's important to get the reforms done.

National Economy/Line-Item Veto Legislation

Q. Thank you, sir. For the first time in years, interest rates are rising in the U.S., Europe, and Japan at the same time. Is this a concern for you? And how much strain are higher interest rates placing on consumers and companies?

The President. First of all, interest rates are set by an independent organization, which—

Q. —still, are you concerned about that?

The President. Well, I'm not quite through with my answer yet.

Q. I'm sorry.

The President. I'm kind of stalling for time here. [Laughter] Interest rates are set by the independent organization. I can only

tell you that the economy of the United States looks very strong. And the reason I say that is that projections for first-quarter growth of this year look pretty decent. That's just projections, that's a guess by some economists, and until the actual numbers come out, we won't know. But no question that the job market is strong. When you have 4.8 percent unemployment—4.8 percent nationwide unemployment, that indicates a strong job market, and that's very important.

One of the measures as to whether or not this economy will remain strong is productivity. And our productivity of the American worker and productivity of the American business sector is rising. And that's positive, because productivity increases eventually yield—eventually yield higher standards of living. Homeownership is at an alltime high. And there has been all kinds of speculation about whether or not homeownership would—home building would remain strong, and it appears to be steady. And that's important.

In other words—and so to answer your question, I feel—without getting into kind of the—kind of microeconomics, from my perch and my perspective, the economy appears to be strong and getting stronger. And the fundamental question that those of us in Washington have to answer is, what do we do to keep it that way? How do we make sure, one, we don't put bad policies in place that will hurt economic growth? A bad policy is to raise taxes—which some want to do. There are people in the United States Congress, primarily on the Democrat side, that would be anxious to let some of the tax relief expire. Some of them actually want to raise taxes now. I think raising taxes would be wrong. As a matter of fact, that's why—and I think it's important for us to have certainty in the Tax Code. That's why I'd like to see the tax relief made permanent.

You know, it's a myth in Washington—for Washington people to go around the country saying, "Well, we'll balance the budget; just let us raise taxes." That's not how Washington works. Washington works—raise in taxes, and they figure out new ways to spend. There is a huge appetite for spending here. One way to help cure that appetite is to give me the line-item veto. You mentioned

vetoing of bills—one reason why I haven't vetoed any appropriation bills is because they met the benchmarks we've set. They have—on the discretionary spending, we've said, "Here is the budget," we've agreed to a number, and they met those numbers.

Now, sometimes I didn't—I like the size of the pie, sometimes I didn't particularly like the slices within the pie. And so one way to deal with the slices in the pie is to give the President the line-item veto. And I was heartened the other day when members of both parties came down in the Cabinet Room to talk about passage of a line-item veto. I was particularly pleased that my opponent in the 2004 campaign, Senator Kerry, graciously came down and lent his support to a line-item veto and also made very constructive suggestions about how to get one out of the United States Congress.

Let's see here. They've told me what to say. David [David Jackson, Dallas Morning News].

Spread of Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, you've spoken about Iraq as being a beacon for democracy throughout the Middle East. Yet we've had troubles in Iraq, and we've seen aggressiveness from Syria and Iran. Are you concerned that the Iraq experience is going to embolden authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and make it tougher to forge democracy there?

The President. There's no question that if we were to prematurely withdraw and the march to democracy were to fail, the Al Qaida would be emboldened, terrorist groups would be emboldened, the Islamofascists would be emboldened. No question about that.

There are a lot of reformers in the Middle East who would like to see Iraq succeed. And I think that if we were to lose our nerve and leave prematurely, those reformers would be let down. So failure in Iraq—which isn't going to happen—is—would send all kinds of terrible signals to an enemy that wants to hurt us and people who are desperate to change the conditions in the broader Middle East.

The—it's an interesting debate, isn't it, about whether or not this country of ours ought to work to spread liberty. It's—I find

it fascinating that—to listen to the voices from around the world as to whether or not it is a noble purpose to spread liberty around the world. And it is a—I think it's—at least, my position is affected by my belief that there is universality when it comes to liberty. This isn't American liberty; this isn't America's possession. Liberty is universal. People desire to be free. And history has proven that democracies don't war. And so part of the issue is to lay peace, is to give people a chance to live in a peaceful world where mothers can raise their children without fear of violence or women are free to be able to express themselves.

Q. But how about the difficulty—

The President. Excuse me a second, David. Excuse me for a second, please.

The—that we ought to pursue liberty. We ought to not be worried about a foreign policy that encourages others to be free. That's why I said in my second Inauguration Address, “The goal of this country ought to be to end tyranny in the 21st century.” I meant it. For the sake of—I said that for the sake of peace.

Now, what is your followup yell? [*Laughter*]

Q. I was wondering—have the difficulties of the last 3 years made the job of those reformers more difficult?

The President. Well, if the United States were to lose its nerve, it would certainly make the job of reformers more difficult. If people in Iran, for example, who desire to have a Iranian-style democracy, Iranian-style freedom, if they see us lose our nerve, it's likely to undermine their boldness and their desire.

What we're doing is difficult work. And one—the interesting thing that's happening is, is that imagine an enemy that says, “We will kill innocent people,” because we're trying to encourage people to be free. What kind of mindset is it of people who say, “We must stop democracy”? Democracy is based upon this kind of universal belief that people should be free. And yet, there are people willing to kill innocent life to stop it. To me, that ought to be a warning signal to people all around the world that the enemy we face is an enemy that ascribes to a vision that is dark and one that doesn't agree with the universal rights of men and women.

As a matter of fact, when given a chance to govern or to have their parasitical government represent their views, they suppressed women and children. There was no such thing as religious freedom. There was no such thing as being able to express yourself in the public square. There was no such thing as press conferences like this.

They were totalitarian in their view. And that would be—I'm referring to the Taliban, of course. And that's how they would like to run government. They rule by intimidation and fear, by death and destruction.

And the United States of America must take this threat seriously and must not—must never forget the natural rights that formed our country. And for people to say, “Well, the natural rights only exist for one group of people,” I would call them—I would say that they're denying the basic rights to others.

And it is hard work. And it's hard work, David, because we're fighting tradition. We're fighting people that have said, “Well, wait a minute, the only way to have peace is for there to be tyranny.” We're fighting intimidation. We're fighting the fact that people will be thrown in prison if they disagree.

Yes.

Iraq/U.S. Armed Forces

Q. Sir, you said earlier today that you believe there's a plan for success; if you did not, you would pull the troops out. And so my question is, one, is there a point at which having the American forces in Iraq becomes more a part of the problem than a part of the solution? Can you say that you will not keep American troops in there if they're caught in the crossfire in a civil war? And can you say to the American people, assure them that there will come a day when there will be no more American forces in Iraq?

The President. Bob [Bob Deans, Cox Newspapers], the decisions about our troop levels will be made by General Casey and the commanders on the ground. They're the ones who can best judge whether or not the presence of coalition troops create more of a problem than a solution—than be a part of the solution.

Secondly, I've answered the question on civil war. Our job is to make sure the civil

war doesn't happen. But there will be—but if there is sectarian violence, it's the job of the Iraqi forces, with coalition help, to separate those sectarian forces.

Third part of your question?

Q. Will there come a day—and I'm not asking you when, not asking for a timetable—will there come a day when there will be no more American forces in Iraq?

The President. That, of course, is an objective, and that will be decided by future Presidents and future governments of Iraq.

Q. So it won't happen on your watch?

The President. You mean a complete withdrawal? That's a timetable. I can only tell you that I will make decisions on force levels based upon what the commanders on the ground say.

Cannon [Carl Cannon, National Journal].

Same-Sex Marriage

Q. Mr. President—

The President. No, you're not Ken. That Ken. You're Ken [Ken Bazinet, New York Daily News]. Sorry Cannon.

Q. Thank you, sir.

The President. Sorry, you're Ken, according to the chart. You thought I said Cannon—

Q. I thought you said Ken.

The President. Bazinet. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, 2 years ago, Gavin Newsom, the mayor of San Francisco, heard your State of the Union Address, went back to California, and began authorizing the marriage of gay men and lesbians. Thousands of people got married. The California courts later ruled he had overstepped his bounds. But they were—we were left with these pictures of thousands of families getting married, and they had these children, thousands of children. Now, that might have changed the debate, but it didn't. In light of that, my question is, are you still confident that society's interest and the interest of those children in gay families are being met by government saying their parents can't marry?

The President. I believe society's interest are met by saying—defining marriage as between a man and a woman. That's what I believe.

Immigration

Q. Mr. President, on immigration, yesterday you answered a question from a woman and said, the tough question here is what happens to somebody who has been here since 1987. Will you accept a bill that allows those who have been here a long time to remain in the country permanently?

The President. I also said that—let me make sure, Stephen [Stephen Dinan, Washington Times], that you—first of all, I'm impressed that you're actually paying attention to it. The people I saw in the press pool weren't. They were—like, Elisabeth was half-asleep—[laughter]—yes, you were. [Laughter]

Q. No, I wasn't.

The President. Okay. Well, the person next to you was. [Laughter] They were dozing off. I could see them watching their watches, kind of wondering how long he's going to blow on for. Let's get him out of here so we can go get lunch, is what they were thinking. [Laughter] So at least you paid attention. Thanks.

I also went on to say that people who have been here need to get in line, like everybody else who is in line legally. My point is that if we were—first of all, whatever is passed should not say “amnesty.” In my judgment, amnesty would be the wrong course of action. We have a way toward legality, in terms of citizenship. In other words, there's a difference between someone who is here legally working and someone who is a citizen. And that's part of the—I maybe didn't make that distinction perfectly clear.

This is going to be a—this could be a fractious debate, and I hope it's not. Immigration is a very difficult issue for a lot of Members, as you know. It's an emotional issue. And it's one that, if not conducted properly, will send signals that I don't think will befit the Nation's history and traditions.

My view is, is that border security starts with a good, solid strategy along the border itself—in other words, Border Patrol agents, technology, the capacity to pass information quickly so that Border Patrol agents will be more likely to intercept somebody coming across the border illegally. There needs to be enforcement mechanisms that don't discourage the Border Patrol agents. They work

hard; they get somebody coming in from country X; the person says, “Check back in with us in 30 days”—they don’t.

In other words, they end up in society. That has created some despondency—not despondency—it’s got to discourage people who are working hard to do their job down there and realize the fruits of their labor is being undermined by a policy that, on the one hand, releases people, kind of, into society, and on the other, doesn’t have enough beds to hold people so that we can repatriate them back to their countries. Chertoff has announced the fact that we’re getting rid of this catch-and-release program.

Thirdly, there has to be enforcement—employer enforcement of rules and regulations. The problem there, of course, is that people are showing up with forged documents. I mentioned this onion picker that I met yesterday—onion grower—who is worried about having labor to pick his onions. But he’s not—I don’t think he’s in a position to be able to determine whether or not what looks like a valid Social Security card, or whatever they show, is valid or not—which leads to the fact there’s a whole industry that has sprung up around moving laborers to jobs that Americans won’t do.

It’s kind of—when you make something illegal that people want, there’s a way around it, around the rules and regulations. And so you’ve got people, *coyotes* stuffing people in the back of 18-wheelers or smuggling them across 105-degree desert heat. You’ve got forgers and tunnel-diggers. You’ve got a whole industry aimed at using people as a commodity. And it’s wrong, and it needs to be—we need to do something about it. And the best way to do something about it is to say that if you’re—if an American won’t do a job and you can find somebody who will do the job, they ought to be allowed to do it legally, on a temporary basis.

One of the issues I did talk about—the man asked me the question about—don’t let people get ahead of the line. So I made that clear. But one of the issues is going to be to deal with somebody whose family has been here for a while, raised a family. And that will be an interesting—interesting debate. My answer is, that person shouldn’t get automatic citizenship.

Listen, thank you for your time. I’ve got lunch with the President of Liberia right now. I’m looking forward to greeting this—the first woman elected on the continent of Africa. Appreciate the opportunity to visit with you all. Look forward to future occasions.

NOTE: The President’s news conference began at 10:01 a.m. in the James S. Brady Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government; former President Jalal Talabani of the Iraqi Transitional Government; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraqi Shiite leader; and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia

March 21, 2006

President Bush. It has been such an honor to welcome you, Madam President, to the Oval Office. I find that one of the interesting parts of my job is to be able to talk to pioneers, and Madam President, you’re a pioneer. You’re the first woman elected President to any country on the continent of Africa. And that requires courage and vision and the desire to improve the lives of your people. And I congratulate you on that.

You know, I can remember, it wasn’t all that long ago that Laura—that would be Laura Bush—and Condi Rice came back from the Inauguration of this good person. I said, “Okay, tell me, what kind of person am I going to be dealing with,” and they said: “Capable, smart, a person who is a doer, a person committed to a bright future for Liberia.” And we welcome you.

The President and I have had a good discussion. We discussed ways that the United States Government can help this country get on its feet toward a democracy. We talked about education. We talked about security. We talked about—we also talked about the neighborhood. I asked the President her advice on a variety of issues. I told her that part of a friendship is one in which we can

speaking directly with each other about how best to deal with keeping the peace and making sure that health care initiatives are robust and effective. I also shared with her some of my thoughts about the world beyond the continent of Africa. And so I—we really had a good discussion.

And so, Madam President, thank you. I want to thank your delegation. Laura and I look forward to having you for lunch here in a little bit. But all in all, I think it was a very good first visit.

President Johnson Sirleaf. Mr. President, as I mentioned to you, on behalf of the Liberian people, I would like to thank you—thank you, thank your administration, thank the American people, thank the U.S. Congress, for all the support that our country has received in making this important transition from war to peace.

Our people have new hope. They have new promise in the future as a result of the strong position you took that enabled us to get this opportunity for national renewal. We have taken the necessary first steps to restoring dignity to our people, starting to fix our economy, to get our international credibility and reputation back. And we're confident that Liberian people are ready to do what it takes. They're back at work; our country is open for business. We're beginning to put in all the processes that will enable us to manage our resources that God has been so good to us in giving us, for the good of our people.

We want you to know that Liberia is going to do all it can to justify the confidence that you have given to us. Liberia, we think, has the potential to become the U.S. success story in Africa. We'll be working within our own borders; we'll be working with our neighboring states to bring peace, stability, and development to our subregion. We'll be working with our African leaders to ensure that the example we set on this transition will be one that can fuse many of our—many of other countries and other people in Africa.

As the first democratic-elected woman, I represent the expectations and aspirations of women in Liberia, in Africa, and I dare say, the world. And I must be able to deliver for them. My performance must justify.

Again, we just want to thank you for the encouragement and the support that you have given us to enable us to meet these enormous challenges of development.

President Bush. Thank you, Madam President. Thank you. Good job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Iraq and Afghanistan Nongovernmental Organizations

March 21, 2006

I want to thank you all for coming. Laura and I have really enjoyed our visit.

We're talking today to people who have decided to try to help improve the lives of folks in Afghanistan and Iraq. And I just marvel at the fact that Americans from around our country have heard a call to help somebody realize the benefits of freedom. And you know, governments can help, and we will help. And obviously, we've got a brave military trying to secure freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. But one of the real powerful parts of developing civil societies in these two countries is the fact that fellow citizens are willing to interface with citizens in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We've heard stories about Afghan women education programs and Iraqi Fulbright programs and programs to help hospitals and programs to welcome intellectuals—all aimed at helping these societies that were once brutalized by tyrants realize the great benefits and blessings of liberty. And we've got—I'm sure a lot of our citizens don't realize this, but there are thousands of—I would call them social entrepreneurs, who are figuring out ways to help improve the human condition in these two liberated countries.

And I want to thank you all very much. It's heartening to hear your stories, and it makes me—give me—once again gives me great reason to be proud of our country and the people who live here. So thank you all for coming. God bless your work.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:56 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Remarks on the War on Terror and a Question-and-Answer Session in Wheeling, West Virginia

March 22, 2006

The President. Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. First of all, Terry, thanks for the invitation. My purpose is to share with you what's on my mind, and then I look forward to hearing what's on yours.

I regret only one thing, Terry, and that's that Laura didn't come with me. No, I know, most people generally say, "You should have brought her, and you should have stayed at home." [Laughter] They love Laura, and so do I. And she is a fantastic First Lady. She is a great—[applause]. And she is a great source of comfort and strength for me, and I wish she were here.

I want to thank the Chamber and the Board of Directors of the Chamber for allowing me to come. You know, I'm—as Terry said, I'm the Commander in Chief; I'm also the Educator in Chief. And I have a duty to explain how and why I make decisions, and that's part of the reason I'm here.

I want to thank your Governor for being here. Joe Manchin is a—he's a good, decent man. He showed his heart during the mine tragedies. He asked the country—[applause]. He represented the best of West Virginia. He showed great compassion, great concern. He asked the Nation to pray on behalf of the families. We still must continue to pray for those who lost their loved ones. Joe is a problem-solver, see. He said, "We're going to deal with this issue head on." And I appreciate you working closely with the Federal Government to make sure that there are safety regulations that work, that the inspection process works so that the miners here in this important State are able to do their job and their families can be secure in them doing their job.

So, Joe, thank you very much for your leadership. Thanks for bringing Gayle. Like you, I married well too. [Laughter]

I appreciate Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito. Thanks for being here. I appreciate working with you. She's a good one, as we say in Texas. [Laughter] I probably shouldn't bring up Texas too much today,

given the fact—yeah, I know—[laughter]. Never mind. [Laughter] I'm a little worried for my Longhorns, though, I tell you that. I'm fully informed that they're going to play a fine team.

I want to thank the mayor for being here. Mr. Mayor, I'm honored that you were at the airport. I appreciate you coming. Thanks for serving your great community. God bless you, sir.

Members of the statehouse greeted me. I appreciate Senator Mike Oliverio. He's here. Mike, I think, did the country a great service when he worked on behalf of Judge Sam Alito to get him approved by the United States Senate. I appreciate you—I want to thank you for that, Mike. I want to thank—Mike said, "Don't hold it against me; I'm a Democrat." I said, "Mike, what we—first and foremost, we're all Americans."

I thank Chris Wakim. He also was out at the airport. It's a little chilly for you all standing out there without your overcoats on, but it's all right. Thanks for being here, Chris. Thanks to all the members of the statehouse and local officials who've joined us today. Thank you for serving your State and your community.

I want to thank John Anderson and Janis LaFont. They're from the—Valley National Gases employees. They presented me with a check for \$100,000 for the Katrina Relief Fund. They represent—[applause]. I want to thank you all for doing that, and I want to thank the folks you work with for doing that.

It's an amazing country, isn't it, when you think about it, that folks right here in this part of West Virginia care enough about folks in the southern part of our country that they would take some of their hard-earned money and contribute to a relief fund so people can get their lives back together. It means a lot to the people in Louisiana and Mississippi to know that there is love and compassion for their—and concern for their lives, here in West Virginia.

Ours is an incredible nation. And you're going to hear me talk about our military. And if you ask questions about the economy, you'll hear me talk about our economy. But I want to remind everybody that the true strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. That's where America

is its greatest, and I appreciate you representing that.

I met a woman named Kristen Holloway at the airport. Kristen, where are you? There you go. Gosh, you thought you had a better seat, but nevertheless—[laughter]. She came out to say hello. I had a chance to thank her for her being the founder of Operation Troop Appreciation. She has decided to support those who wear our uniform in any way she can. Listen, I understand war is controversial, and I'm going to talk about the war. But America has got to appreciate what it means to wear the uniform today and honor those who have volunteered to keep this country strong.

It doesn't matter whether you agree with my decision or not. But all of us should agree with the fact that we have a remarkable country, when people who know that they're going to be sent into harm's way raise their hand and say, "I volunteer to serve." And no State has presented—had more people volunteering to serve than the great State of West Virginia. Now, they'll say, maybe some States have more people, but they got greater populations. But 75 percent of your National Guard has gone into harm's way, and we appreciate that service. And I want to thank those of you who wear the uniform for your service. I want to thank your loved ones for supporting those who wear the uniform. And I want you to hear loud and clear, the United States of America stands with you and appreciates what you're doing.

The enemy, a group of killers, struck us on September the 11th, 2001. They declared war on the United States of America. And I want to share some lessons about what took place on that day. First of all, I knew that the farther we got away from September the 11th, 2001, the more likely it would be that some would forget the lessons of that day. And that's okay. That's okay, because the job of those of us who have been entrusted to protect you and defend you is really to do so in such a way that you feel comfortable about going about your life, see. And it's fine that people forget the lessons. But one of my jobs is to constantly remind people of the lessons.

The first lesson is, is that oceans can no longer protect us. You know, when I was

coming up in the '50s in Midland, Texas, it seemed like we were pretty safe. In the '60s it seemed like we were safe. In other words, conflicts were happening overseas, but we were in pretty good shape here at home. And all that was shattered on that day, when cold-blooded killers hijacked airplanes, flew them into buildings and into the Pentagon, and killed 3,000 of our citizens. In other words, they declared war, and we have got to take their declaration of war seriously. The most important responsibility of the Commander in Chief and those who wear the uniform and those who are elected to public office is to defend the citizens of this country. That is our most vital and important responsibility. I have never forgotten that, from September the 11th on. It's just been a part of my daily existence.

Secondly, the best way to defend America is to stay on the offense. The best way to protect you is to rally all the strength of national government—intelligence and military, law enforcement, financial strength—to stay on the offense against an enemy that I believe wants to hurt us again. And that means, find them where they hide and keep the pressure on and never relent and understand that you can't negotiate with these folks. There is no compromise; there is no middle ground. And so that's exactly what we're doing.

And there's some unbelievably brave troops and intelligence officers working around the clock to keep an enemy that would like to strike us again, on the move and to bring them to justice. And we're making progress about dismantling Al Qaida. Al Qaida, after all, was the enemy that launched the attacks.

The second part of a lesson that we must never forget is, the enemy, in that they're not a nation-state—in other words, they don't represent a nation-state like armies and navies used to do—need safe haven. They need places to hide so they can plan and plot. And they found safe haven, as you all know, in Afghanistan. And they were supported by a government that supports their point of view, which is a government that absolutely can't stand freedom. That was the Taliban. If you were a young girl growing up under the auspices of the Taliban, you didn't have a chance

to succeed. You couldn't go to school. If you dissented in the public square, you'd be in trouble. If you didn't agree with their dark vision, whether it be religion or politics, you were in trouble. In other words, they can't—they couldn't stand this concept of a free society—and neither can Al Qaida. See, we're dealing with ideologues. They have an ideology.

Now, I understand some say, "Well, maybe they're just isolated, kind of people that are angry and took out their anger with an attack." That's not how I view them. I view them as people that believe in something; they have an ideological base. They subverted a great religion to meet their needs, and they need places to hide. And that's why I said early on in the war that if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist—understanding the nature of the enemy and understanding they need safe haven. In order to protect ourselves, we must deny them safe haven.

By the way, if the President says something, he better mean it, for the sake of peace. In other words, you want your President out there making sure that his words are credible. And so I said to the Taliban, "Get rid of Al Qaida, or face serious consequences." They didn't, and they faced serious consequences, and we liberated Afghanistan. We removed the Taliban from power. We've denied Al Qaida safe haven. And that young country, that young democracy is now beginning to grow; 25 million people are liberated as a result of the United States defending itself. And that's important for us to realize, that not only are we defending ourselves but in this instance, we've given chance to people to realize the beauties of freedom.

There's an interesting debate in the world is whether or not freedom is universal, see, whether or not—let's say, "There's old Bush imposing his values." See, I believe freedom is universal. I believe liberty is a universal thought. It's not an American thought; it is a universal thought. And if you believe that, then you ought to take great comfort and joy in helping others realize the benefits of liberty. The way I put it was, there is an Almighty God. One of the greatest gifts of that Almighty God is the desire for people to be free, is freedom. And therefore, this country

and the world ought to say, "How can we help you remain free? What can we do to help you realize the blessings of liberty?"

Remember, as we debate these issues—and it's important to have a debate in our democracy, and I welcome the debate—but remember, we were founded on the natural rights of men and women. That speaks to the universality of liberty. And we must never forget the origin of our own founding as we look around the world.

Afghanistan—I went there with Laura. We had a good visit with President Karzai. I like him—good man. You can imagine what it's like to try to rebuild a country that had been occupied and then traumatized by the Taliban. They're coming around. They got elections. They had assembly elections. He himself was elected. We expect them to honor the universal principle of freedom. I'm troubled when I hear—deeply troubled when I hear the fact that a person who has converted away from Islam may be held to account. That's not the universal application of the values that I talked about. Look forward to working with the Government of that country to make sure that people are protected in their capacity to worship.

There's still a Taliban element trying to come and hurt people. But the good news is, not only do we have great U.S. troops there, but NATO is now involved. One of my jobs is to continue to make sure that people understand the benefits of a free society emerging in a neighborhood that needs freedom. And so I'm pleased with the progress, but I fully understand there's a lot more work to be done.

Another lesson of September the 11th, and an important lesson that really does relate to the topic I want to discuss, which is Iraq, is that when you see a threat now, you got to take it seriously. That's the lesson of September the 11th—another lesson of September the 11th. When you see a threat emerging, you just can't hope it goes away. If the job of the President is to protect the American people, my job then is to see threats and deal with them before they fully materialize, before they come to hurt us, before they come and strike America again.

And I saw a threat in Iraq. I'll tell you why I saw a threat. And by the way, it just

wasn't me. Members of the United States Congress in both political parties saw a threat. My predecessor saw a threat. I mean, my predecessor saw a threat and got the Congress actually to vote a resolution that said, "We're for regime change." That's prior to my arrival. The world saw a threat. You might remember, I went to the United Nations Security Council; on the 15-to-nothing vote, we passed Resolution 1441 that said to Saddam Hussein, "Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." We saw a threat.

I'll tell you why I saw a threat. I saw a threat because, one, he'd been on the state—he was a state sponsor of terror. In other words, our Government—not when I was President, prior to my Presidency—declared Saddam Hussein to be a state sponsor of terror. Secondly, I know for a fact he had used weapons of mass destruction. Now, I thought he had weapons of mass destruction; Members of Congress thought he had weapons of mass destruction; the world thought he had weapons of mass destruction. That's why those nations voted in the Security Council. I'm finding out what went wrong. In other words, one of the things you better make sure of, is when you're the President, you're getting good intelligence, and, obviously, the intelligence broke down. But he had that capacity to make weapons of mass destruction as well. He had not only murdered his own people, but he had used weapons of mass destruction on his own people.

That's what we knew prior to the decision I made. He also was firing on our aircraft. They were enforcing a no-fly zone, United Nations no-fly zone. The world had spoken, and he had taken shots at British and U.S. pilots. He'd invaded his neighborhood. This guy was a threat. And so the world spoke. And the way I viewed it was that it was Saddam Hussein's choice to disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. And he made the choice, and then I was confronted with a choice. And I made my choice. And the world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power.

The biggest threat America faces is that moment when terror and weapons of mass destruction come together. And if we ever suspect that's happening, we got to take—deal with that threat seriously. Committing

our troops into harm's way is the most difficult decision a President can make. I'm going to meet with some—two families of those who lost a loved one. It's my duty to do so. I'm looking forward to being able to hug them, weep with them. And so for anybody out there in West Virginia who thinks it's easy to commit troops—it's hard. It's the last option of the President, not the first option. The first option is to deal with things diplomatically, is to rally the world to send a clear message that the behavior, in this case, of Saddam Hussein, was intolerable. And we did that.

Now the fundamental question is, can we win in Iraq? And that's what I want to talk about. First of all, you got to understand that I fully understand there is deep concern among the American people about whether or not we can win. And I can understand why people are concerned. And they're concerned because the enemy has got the capacity to affect our thinking. This is an enemy who will kill innocent people in order to achieve an objective. And Americans are decent, honorable people—they care. We care about human life. We care about human dignity. We value life. We value the life of our own citizens, and we value the life of other citizens. And so it's easy for an enemy that is willing to kill innocent people, to affect us.

The enemy has told us their objectives in Iraq. And I think it's important for the Commander in Chief to take the words of the enemy very seriously. They have said that they want to spread their philosophy to other parts of the Middle East. They have said that. They have said they want to attack us again. They believe that democracies are soft, that it's just a matter of time for the United States to lose our will and create a vacuum in Iraq, so they can use their terror techniques and their willingness to kill to develop a safe haven from which to launch attacks. That's what the enemy has said. This is—I hope the citizens of this country understand that we have intercepted documents, and we put them out for people to see. And I take the words very seriously.

Iraq is a part of the global war on terror. In other words, it's a global war. We're dealing with a group of folks that want to spread

an ideology, and they see a problem developing in Iraq, and so they're heading into Iraq to fight us, because they can't stand the thought of democracy, see. Democracy trumps their ideology every time. Freedom and democracy represent hope; their point of view represents despair. Freedom represents life and the chance for people to realize their dreams; their philosophy says, "You do it my way or else." And so they're trying to fight us in Iraq.

And we have a strategy for victory in Iraq. It's a three-pronged strategy, starting with—it's politics; it is a—it's security; and it's economy. On politics, was to get the people to the polls to see if they even cared about democracy; just give them a chance to vote; see what the people thought. And you might remember the elections—it probably seems like an eternity. It was just a year ago that they started voting—a little more than a year, in January of last year. And the first election round came off okay, but the Sunnis didn't participate. They were a little disgruntled with life there. They liked their privileged status, and they were boycotting the elections. Then they wrote a Constitution, which is a good Constitution. It's a progressive Constitution for that part of the world. More people came out to vote than last December. About 75 percent of the eligible voters said, "I want to be free; I want democracy. I don't care what Mr. Zarqawi and his Al Qaida killers are trying to do to me; I'm going to defy them and go to the polls."

And the people have spoken. And now it's time for a government to get stood up. There's time for the elected representatives—or those who represent the voters, the political parties, to come together and form a unity government. That's what the people want; otherwise, they wouldn't have gone to the polls, would they have?

I spoke to our Ambassador today and General Casey, via video conferencing, and we talked about the need to make it clear to the Iraqis, it's time; it's time to get a Government in place that can start leading this nation and listening to the will of the people. It's a little hard. You can imagine what it's like coming out of the—having been ruled by a tyrant. People are—when you spoke out before, no telling what was going to happen to you; it

generally wasn't good. And now people are beginning to realize democracy has taken hold.

By the way, if you look at our own history, it was a little bumpy on our road too. You might remember the Articles of Confederation. They didn't work too well. It took us a while from the moment of our Revolution to get our Constitution written, the one that we now live by.

The second part is to help people with their economy. And we had to change our strategy there. We first went in there and said, "Let's build some big plants." The problem was, the big plants served as big targets for those who are disgruntled, the terrorists who are going into Iraq to use it as a safe haven plus some of their allies, the Saddamists. These were Saddam's inner-circle buddies and stuff like that that had received special privileges. They weren't happy that they were no longer in privileged status. And so they were destroying some of the infrastructure we were building. So we changed our strategy and said, "Look, why don't we go with smaller projects, particularly in the provinces, so people can begin to see the benefits of what it means to have a democracy unfold."

And the third aspect is security. When we got in there, it became apparent to our troops on the ground that we had a lot of training to do. We had to really rebuild an army to make sure that people had the skills necessary to be able to fight off those who want to stop the march of democracy. First, we trained the army for threats from outside the country. But we realized the true threats were inside the country, whether it be the Saddamists, some Sunni rejectionists, or Al Qaida that was in there torturing and killing and maiming in order to get their way.

And we're making progress when it comes to training the troops. More and more Iraqis are taking the fight. Right after the bombing of the Golden Mosque, for example, is an interesting indication as to whether or not the Iraqi troops are getting better.

The enemy can't defeat us militarily, by the way. They can't beat us on the field of battle. But the only thing they can do is, they can either try to stop democracy from moving—they failed on that. Last year, they

failed. Their stated objective was just not to let democracy get going, and they flunked the test. Now they're trying to foment a civil war. See, that's the only way they can win. And they blew up the mosque. And there was some awful violence, some reprisals taking place. And I can understand people saying, "Man, it's all going to—it's not working out." But the security forces did a pretty good job of keeping people apart.

In other words, it was a test. It was a test for the security forces, and it was a test for the Iraqi Government. The way I like to put it is, they looked into the abyss as to whether or not they want a civil war or not, and chose not to.

That's not to say we don't have more work to do, and we do. But it's important for me to continue—look, I'm an optimistic guy. I believe we'll succeed. Let me tell you this—put it to you this way: If I didn't think we'd succeed, I'd pull our troops out. I cannot look mothers and dads in the eye—I can't ask this good marine to go into harm's way if I didn't believe, one, we're going to succeed, and two, it's necessary for the security of the United States.

And it's tough fighting. It's tough fighting, because we got an enemy that's just cold-blooded. They can't beat us militarily, but they can try to shake our will. See, remember, I told you, they have said that it's just a matter of time, just a matter of time before the United States loses its nerve. I believe we're doing the right thing, and we're not going to retreat in the face of thugs and assassins. *[Applause]* Thank you.

It's the Iraqis' fight. Ultimately, the Iraqis are going to have to determine their future. They made their decision politically; they voted. And these troops that we're training are going to have to stand up and defend their democracy. We got work, by the way, in '06 to make sure the police are trained as adequately as the military, the army. It's their choice to make. And I like to put it this way: As they stand up, we'll stand down.

But I want to say something to you about troop levels, and I know that's something that people are talking about in Washington a lot. I'm going to make up my mind based upon the advice of the United States military that's in Iraq. I'll be making up my mind about

the troop levels based upon recommendations of those who are on the ground. I'm going to make up my mind based upon achieving a victory, not based upon polls, focus groups, or election-year politics.

I talked about a city named Tall 'Afar the other day in a speech I gave in Cleveland. Just real quick, it's an important place. It's a place where—close to the Syrian border, where Al Qaida was moving the terrorists from outside the country inside the country, trying to achieve their objective. And right after we removed Saddam Hussein, they started moving in. And I cannot describe to you how awful these people treat the citizens there. I mean, they are—I told a story about a young boy who was maimed, taken to a hospital, was pulled out of the hospital, was killed by the terrorists. His dad went to retrieve him on the side of the road, and they put a bomb underneath him and blew up the family. I mean, Americans cannot understand the nature—how brutal these people are. It's shocking what they will do to try to achieve their objectives.

But it really shouldn't shock us when you think about what they did on September the 11th. It's the same folks, same attitude, same frame of mind. But they're able to lock down cities, particularly those that are worried about their security, and so they basically took control of Tall 'Afar. So our troops went in with Iraqis and cleaned it out. The problem—*[applause]*—oh, not through yet. *[Laughter]* A little early on the clap. *[Laughter]* The problem was, we continued to pursue the enemy, and they moved back in, these killers and murderers moved back in and just created a mess. I mean, they—I said in my speech, they mortared children in a playground. They recruited young kids, abused them, violated them. There's one boy in particular who told our guys, once the city eventually got liberated, his dream was to behead somebody with a—anyway, we started working with the local folks again. This time, though, we had trained more Iraqi Army ready to go.

And the difference in the story between the first time we liberated Tall 'Afar from them and the recent liberation was that the Iraqis were in the lead. And not only were they in the lead, they stayed behind after we

left. So our troops are chasing high-value targets and training—and capable Iraqi forces are providing security. And so the day of terror began to change when they saw capable forces and a new mayor and police forces.

I mean, this is—it's hard to put ourselves in their—the shoes of the folks in this town that had been traumatized. But the strategy of clear, hold, and build began to create a sense of confidence. And what's interesting is, I can say that—I got one data point that I can share with you—the vote in the January '05 election was the second-lowest vote in the—as percentage of voting population, in the country, and the last vote, 85 percent of the eligible voters voted. In other words, people had a sense of security and hope.

A free Iraq is important for the United States of America. It was important to remove a threat; it was important to deal with threats before they fully materialized. But a free Iraq also does some other things: One, it serves as an amazing example—it will serve as an amazing example for people who are desperate for freedom.

You know, this is, I guess, quite a controversial subject, I readily concede, as to whether or not the United States ought to try to promote freedom in the broader Middle East. Our foreign policy before was just, kind of, if the waters looked calm, great. Problem is, beneath the surface was resentment brewing, and people were able to take advantage of that, these totalitarians, like Al Qaida. So I changed our foreign policy. I said, freedom is universal; history has proven democracies do not fight each other; democracies can yield peace we want, so let's advance freedom. And that's what's happening.

It's a big idea, but it's an old idea. It's worked in the past. I strongly believe that by promoting liberty, we're not only protecting ourselves, but we're laying the foundation of peace for a generation to come. And I'll tell you why I believe that, and then I'll answer questions. Thank goodness Laura isn't here; she'd be giving me the hook. [Laughter]

Two examples that I use that are obviously—well, I'm living one example, and that is my relationship with the Prime Minister of Japan. He is one of my best buddies—I don't know if you're supposed to call them

“buddies” in diplomacy or not, but anyway—one of my best buddies in working to keep the peace. I find that a really interesting statement to say to you, knowing my own family's history—18-year-old—my dad, when he was 18, went to fight the Japanese. I think it's really one of the interesting twists of history that I stand here in West Virginia saying to you that Prime Minister Koizumi and I talk about ways to keep the peace, ways to deal with North Korea—he's helping in Iraq—ways to deal with other issues. And 60 years prior to that, when the country called, George H. W. said, “I want to go,” just like, I'm sure, relatives of you all. And Japan was a sworn enemy. And there was a lot of bloodshed in order to—remember, they attacked us too. And yet today, the President says, “We're working to keep the peace.” And what happened? It's an interesting lesson that I hope people remember. Something happened. What happened was, Japan adopted a Japanese-style democracy.

I believe freedom and liberty can change enemies into allies. I believe freedom has the power to transform societies. It's not easy work; it's difficult work. But we've seen history before. I know you've got relatives who were in World War II. On that continent, hundreds of thousands of Americans lost their lives in two world wars during the 1900s. And yet today, Europe is whole, free, and at peace. What happened? Democracies don't war. And so part of my decisionmaking that I'm trying to explain to you today, about war, about what you're seeing on your TV screens, about the anxiety that a lot of our citizens feel, is based upon, one, the need to protect the American people and my deep reservoir of commitment to doing what it takes—to look at the world realistically, to understand we're in a global war against a serious enemy.

But also my thinking is based upon some universal values and my belief that history can repeat itself and that freedom and liberty has a chance to lay a foundation of peace so that maybe 40 years from now, somebody is speaking here in West Virginia saying, “You know, a bunch of folks were given a challenge and a task, and that generation didn't lose faith in the capacity of freedom to change, and today, I'm able to sit down

with the duly elected leaders of democracy in the Middle East, keeping the peace for the next generation to come.”

That’s what I’ve come to talk to you about, and that’s what’s on my mind. And now I’ll be glad to answer any questions you got.

Yes, sir. First man up.

Support for the U.S. Armed Forces

Q. Mr. President, I’m going to make your job a little easier on you. To sum it all up, what you’re trying to say is, when it comes to fighting terrorism, there is no easy button.

The President. Thank you, sir. I’ll be glad to answer any question on any subject, but I always appreciate a good editorial. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Yes, sir. Hold on for a second. We’re going to do it a little more orderly here. Right here. Right there. Yes, there you go. Get moving on the mike, please. [Laughter] Generally what happens if they don’t have a mike, the guy yells the question, and I just answer whatever I want to answer. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, I have a son that’s special forces in Iraq. And I have another son that’s in the Army. He left college to join the Army. He’s out in Hawaii. He’s got the good duty right now. [Laughter] But I thank God that you’re our Commander in Chief. And I wouldn’t want my boys—[applause].

The President. Okay, thanks.

Q. Again, I thank God you’re our Commander in Chief. You’re a man for our times. And I’m a supporter of yours, and I think it’s good that you come out and tell your story. And I think you need to keep doing more of it, and tell the story and the history of all this. And God bless you, and I thank you for your service.

The President. Well, I appreciate you saying that. A couple of points. First, you tell your kids thanks. The good news is, for moms and dads and husbands and wives and children, that in spite of the debate you’re seeing in Washington, that there is a commitment to support our troops when we—when they’re in harm’s way. There may be an argument about tactics and whether or not we should have done it in the first place; I understand that. But the Congress has stood

up, and that’s what Congress should do. And take comfort, please, sir, in knowing that the debates that you’re seeing will not lessen our Government’s support for making sure the people are well-trained, well-paid, well-equipped, well-housed. We owe that. And I’m pleased with the congressional response to supporting troops.

Second, you can e-mail them. It’s an interesting war we have, where moms and dads and wives and husbands are in touch with their loved ones by e-mail. It’s really interesting.

And I want to thank you very much for saying what you said. I am—as I said, I’m Educator in Chief, and I’m going to spend a lot of time answering questions and just explaining—explaining to people as clearly as I can about why I made decisions I made and why it is important for us to succeed.

And again, I understand debate. I understand there’s differences of opinion, and we should welcome that in America. People should never fear a difference of opinion, particularly on big matters. And war is a big matter, war and peace. And it’s healthy for our country for people to be debating, so long as we don’t send the wrong signals to our troops, so long as they don’t think that we’re not behind them, and so long as we don’t send mixed signals to the enemy. The enemy believes that we will weaken and lose our nerve. And I just got to tell you, I’m not weak, and I’m not going to lose my nerve. I strongly believe that we’re doing the right thing.

Do you want to say something, Joe?

Governor Joe Manchin III. Yes.

The President. How about your Governor? Make it easy.

Alternative Sources of Energy

Gov. Manchin. [Inaudible]

The President. Yes, I appreciate it.

Joe talked to me about how do we use the natural resources of the State of West Virginia in such ways to become less dependent on oil. Now, let me talk about that, starting with coal gasification leading to coal liquefaction. I appreciate the subject.

I know it shocked some of you—I know it shocked some of you when I stood up in the State of the Union and said, “We got

a problem; we're addicted to oil." Texas, you know, the whole thing. [Laughter] I'll tell you why I said it. I'll tell you why I said it. One, because when the demand for fossil fuels goes up, for nonrenewable resources goes up in other parts of the world, it affects the gasoline price here at home. When somebody else's economy starts to boom and they start using more fossil fuel, it affects your price too. It's important for people to understand. And there are some new economies emerging that are growing and that need and use—that are using a lot of hydrocarbons.

Secondly, we get oil from parts of the world that don't like us, is the best way to put it, which creates a national security issue. And therefore, it is in our economic interest and national interest that we get off of our addiction to oil. We import about 60-something percent of our oil from overseas. What Joe is talking about is a different use of resources to help us achieve that objective.

First thing is, we got a lot of coal, 250-year supply of coal, which helps us on our electricity. And we're spending a lot of money on clean coal technology. The whole idea is to use taxpayers' money to develop a technology that will enable us to have zero-emission plants, which will help us achieve an environmental objective, as well as an energy independence objective.

Joe is talking about spending research money on the gasification of coal, which then will lead to the liquefaction. In other words, we're able to develop a product that way. And I believe we ought to attack this issue on all fronts, on a variety of fronts. I know we ought to use nuclear power. It is a renewable source of energy that has got zero greenhouse gas effect.

And by the way, I went to a plant that's making solar panels, photovoltaic cells—not bad for a history major. [Laughter] Technologies are coming. And to me, it makes sense to work with Congress to spend money on new technologies aiming for a national objective.

The place where we're really going to effect reliance upon oil is changing our automobile—how automobiles are powered. One is, battery technologies are coming around. One of these days, I am told, that if we continue to stay focused in research, you're going

to be able to have a pretty good-sized vehicle, plug it in, and it'll be able to drive 40 miles before you need to use any gasoline in your engine. Now, that's not going to help some of you rural folks in West Virginia or Texas, but it's going to help urban people who generally tend not to drive more than 40 miles a day. But imagine if we're able to have battery power where you plug your battery into—when the electricity is down, low usage at night, and they drive 40 miles. That will save—that will reduce demand for gasoline, which reduces demand for crude oil.

Secondly, we're going to be able to drive our cars based upon—with a sugar base or a corn base or sawgrass. I said that one day—what the heck is sawgrass? It's just grass. It just grows out there, and you bulk it for them. And the idea is to develop technology so that we're using more ethanol. It's happening in the Midwest, by the way. They've got what they call E-85—that's 85 percent ethanol that's powering automobiles now. A whole new industry is beginning to grow. And the more we use alternative sources of energy, the less dependent we are on oil.

So Joe has been—Joe is always thinking, and he's a practical fellow, which is sometimes not the case in government. [Laughter] But what he's saying is, "Can't we use our resources here, in a way, Mr. President, that helps you achieve a grand national objective, which is getting off Middle Eastern oil?" And the answer is, yes, we can.

Yes, you got a question? Are you in school?

Civilian Nuclear Power Program in India/Iran

Q. Yes.

The President. Good. Did you use me as an excuse to skip school?

Q. Of course. [Laughter] Mr. President, I was wondering, actually, how you felt about America's double standard on nuclear energy, as far as countries like Iran, India, and Israel go?

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. I may ask you to clarify your question of "double standard."

Q. Well, how we don't allow Iran to have nuclear energy, yet we're supporting India.

The President. Yes, no, I got it, good, good, good.

Q. And Israel's nuclear weapons—

The President. I wouldn't—I wouldn't necessarily—well, first of all, let me explain the policy, and then you can draw whatever conclusion you want. First of all, it's in our interests that India use nuclear power to power their economic growth because, as I told you, there is a global connection between demand for fossil fuels elsewhere and price here. And so I went to India and I said—actually, it's a very sophisticated question, by the way—but I said, we ought to encourage you to use nuclear power.

Now, the difficulty with that issue, and that Congress is going to have to deal with, is that India has heretofore been denied technologies from the United States because of previous decisions they made about nuclear weaponry. My attitude is that over 30 years they have proven themselves to be a nonproliferator, that they're a transparent democracy. It's in our interest that they develop nuclear power for—to help their economy grow. They need power, and they need energy to do so, and they're willing to go under the safeguards of the IAEA, which is an international forum to make sure that there are certain safeguards.

Iran—the Iranians are a nontransparent society. They're certainly not a democracy. They are sponsors of terrorism. They have joined the IAEA, and yet we caught them cheating. In other words, they weren't upholding the agreements, and they started to try to enrich uranium in order to develop a weapons program. India is heading to the IAEA; the Iranians are ignoring IAEA.

And so to answer your question about potential conflict of civilian energy power, I have said that I support the Russian proposal that says the Iranians should have a civilian nuclear industry; however, Russia and other suppliers would give them the enriched—the product necessarily to power their industry and collect the spent fuel but not enable the Iranians to learn how to enrich in order to develop a weapons programs. That's I think how—hold on for a second—oop, oop, oop. [Laughter] That's how we addressed the inconsistency on the power side, apparent inconsistency.

However, in that the Iranians are non-transparent, in that they are hostile to the

United States and hostile to allies, we've got to be very careful about not letting them develop a weapon. And so we're now dealing with this issue diplomatically by having the Germans and the French and the British send a clear message to the Iranians, with our strong backing, that you will not have the capacity to make a weapon, the know-how to make a weapon. Iran with a nuclear weapon is a threat, and it's dangerous, and we must not let them have a weapon.

Yes.

Voluntarism

Q. Sir, thank you for being in West Virginia. I'm the recruiting commander of the West Virginia Army National Guard. And there are a lot of National Guardsmen here with you in Wheeling today. West Virginians are a proud and very patriotic people. I'd like for you to share with us what you would say to a young person today who would like to join the National Guard, and maybe give some encouraging words in that respect.

The President. Okay, thanks—kind of doing your job for you. All right. [Laughter] My statement to all Americans is, serve your country one way or another. I—and service can be done by wearing the uniform. Wearing the uniform is a fantastic way to say, "I want to serve my country." A lot of people have chosen that way, and it's a rewarding experience to wear the uniform. If you want to go to college, it's a good way to gain some skills to help you in your education.

There are also other ways to serve. You can mentor a child, and you're serving America. You can help the Katrina victims, and you're serving America. You can be a Boy Scout troop leader, and you're serving America.

What's really interesting about our country—and I said this early on—is the notion of people coming together to serve a concept greater than themselves. It is—I know it's not unique to America, but it certainly helps define our spirit. De Tocqueville, who's a French guy, came in 1832 and recognized—and wrote back—wrote a treatise about what it means to go to a country where people associate voluntarily to serve their communities. And he recognized that this—one of the great strengths of America—this is the

1830s—it is still the strength of America. It is a vital part of our society and our communities, the idea of people volunteering to help a neighbor in need.

And one of my jobs is to honor people who are serving our country that way, and to call other peoples to service as well. As you know, one of the interesting and at times controversial proposals was whether or not Government should open up grant money for competitive bidding for faith-based organizations. I'm a big believer in providing grant money available for faith-based organizations, so long as the money doesn't go used—to be used to proselytize, but is used to help serve a purpose, like if your mother or dad is in prison, that it would help to go find a mentor for that child. Or if you're a drug addict or got hooked on alcohol, that you could redeem the Government help at a faith-based institution.

In other words, we in Government ought to be asking the question, does the program work? And a lot of times, programs based upon faith do work, that it is—there's nothing better than a faith-based program which exists to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. And therefore, one of my jobs is to not only help recruit for the Guard, which—put a plug in there for you—[*ap- plause*]*—there you go—but also to call other—to call people to serve, to help change our society one person at a time. And it's happening. It's a remarkable part of the—I'm confident—of this community, just like it is all around the United States. And thanks for your question.*

Yes, sir. Yes, the guy in the yellow hat. Give it to the guy on the aisle. Well, no, you're not a guy. [*Laughter*] Right behind you, there you go.

Religious Freedom/Afghanistan

Q. President Bush, I'm a professional firefighter here in Wheeling, West Virginia.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. And back during 9/11, I lost over 300 of my brothers in New York. And I was glad that you were our President at that time and took the fight to the terrorists. But as I see, you said earlier about the guy in Afghanistan that is going to convert to Christianity, he may get killed over there for doing that. Do

you have an army of sociologists to go over there and change that country, or are you hoping that in a couple decades that we can change the mindset over there?

The President. I appreciate the question. It's a very legitimate question. We have got influence in Afghanistan, and we are going to use it to remind them that there are universal values. It is deeply troubling that a country we helped liberate would hold a person to account because they chose a particular religion over another. And so we are—we will make—part of the messaging just happened here in Wheeling. I want to thank you for that question.

No, I think it's—we can solve this problem by working closely with the Government that we've got contacts with—and will. We'll deal with this issue diplomatically and remind people that there is something as universal as being able to choose religion.

So thank you for the question. I understand your concerns. I share the same concerns.

I had a little guy back here. Yes, sir.

The Presidency

Q. Do you like living in the White House?

The President. Do I like living in the White House? Yes. That's a good, fair question. Your brother has got one too. Do you want to back to back them?

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Okay. Well, I've been the President for 5½ years. I do like living in the White House—it's an interesting question—for some practical reasons. I've got a 45-second commute to my office. [*Laughter*] The food is pretty good. [*Laughter*] It is a—I've enjoyed every second of the Presidency. That's probably hard—like my buddies come up from Texas; one of the things that Laura and I are most proud of—we're proud of a lot—we're most proud of our girls, but we're also very proud of the fact that we had friends prior to being in politics from Texas that will be our friends after we're in politics.

And they come up from Texas, and they're kind of looking at you like, “Man, are you okay?” Yes—you know. [*Laughter*] And I tell them, I say, you know, I can't tell you what an honor it is to do this job. They often ask, “What's the job description?” I say, making

decisions. And I make a lot. Obviously, I'm trying to share with you—you may not agree with the decision, but at the very minimum, I want you to understand that I make my decisions based upon some principles I hold dear. In order to make decisions, you have to be enthusiastic about your job, you have to be optimistic about the future, and you have to stand for something. You can't be a President trying to search for what you believe in the midst of all the noise in Washington.

Yes, ma'am. Yes. No, right here. There you go.

Progress in Iraq/Media Coverage

Q. Good afternoon, Mr. President. It is an honor to be here today. Thank you for coming. Greetings from Columbus, Ohio.

The President. There you go.

Q. My husband, who is sitting right here with me—

The President. Actually, my grandfather was raised in Columbus, Ohio—not to change subjects, but—

Q. That's okay, you can do whatever you want to do.

The President. Prescott S. Bush. [*Laughter*]

Q. I have a comment, first of all, and then just a real quick question. I want to let you know that every service at our church you are, by name, lifted up in prayer, and you and your staff and all of our leaders. And we believe in you. We are behind you. And we cannot thank you enough for what you've done to shape our country.

This is my husband, who has returned from a 13-month tour in Tikrit.

The President. Oh, yes. Thank you. Welcome back.

Q. His job while serving was as a broadcast journalist. And he has brought back several DVDs full of wonderful footage of reconstruction, of medical things going on. And I ask you this from the bottom of my heart, for a solution to this, because it seems that our major media networks don't want to portray the good. They just want to focus—[*applause*].

The President. Okay, hold on a second.

Q. They just want to focus on another car bomb, or they just want to focus on some

more bloodshed, or they just want to focus on how they don't agree with you and what you're doing, when they don't even probably know how you're doing what you're doing anyway. But what can we do to get that footage on CNN, on FOX, to get it on Headline News, to get it on the local news? Because you can send it to the news people—and I'm sorry, I'm rambling—like I have—

The President. So was I, though, for an hour. [*Laughter*]

Q. —saying can you use this? And it will just end up in a drawer because it's good, it portrays the good. And if people could see that, if the American people could see it, there would never be another negative word about this conflict.

The President. Well, I appreciate that. No, it—that's why I come out and speak. I spoke in Cleveland, gave a press conference yesterday—spoke in Cleveland Monday, press conference, here today. I'm going to continue doing what I'm doing to try to make sure people can hear there's—why I make decisions and, as best as I can, explain why I'm optimistic we can succeed.

One of the things that we've got to value is the fact that we do have a media, free media that's able to do what they want to do. And I'm not going to—you're asking me to say something in front of all the cameras here. [*Laughter*] Help over there, will you? [*Laughter*]

I just got to keep talking. And one of the—there's word of mouth; there's blogs; there's Internet; there's all kinds of ways to communicate, which is literally changing the way people are getting their information. And so if you're concerned, I would suggest that you reach out to some of the groups that are supporting the troops, that have got Internet sites, and just keep the word moving. And that's one way to deal with an issue without suppressing a free press. We will never do that in America. I mean, the minute we start trying to suppress our press, we look like the Taliban. The minute we start telling people how to worship, we look like the Taliban. And we're not interested in that in America. We're the opposite. We believe in freedom, and we believe in freedom in all its forms. And obviously, I know you're frustrated with what you're seeing, but there are ways in this

new kind of age, being able to communicate, that you'll be able to spread the message that you want to spread.

Thank you for your concerns, and thank you for your prayer. I want to tell you something interesting about the job of President, and, frankly, I didn't anticipate this part of the Presidency, but it's an amazing part of my job to know that millions of people pray for me. It's a—[*applause*]—it really is. It's—think about that. Strangers stand up and say, in front of a couple thousand people, I'm praying for you. And it helps. And I appreciate it, and I want to thank you for your prayers. It helps do the job, it helps keep perspective.

Yes, sir.

Vision for the Future

Q. I'm a senior at the local high school, Wheeling Park High School, and I just want to know what your views are on what type of America my generation will lead.

The President. Yes, interesting question. First, I hope that your generation will lead—no doubt, your generation will lead. Generations, when called, somehow find the courage to lead. That's step one. Two, I think you'll be dealing in a world in which you will be confronted with making values choices—for example, family, understanding that the family is an important aspect of society. Secondly, the choice of life. For example, you'll be confronted with a very difficult debate between science, on the one hand, and the hopes of science, and life. And it's—that debate is just beginning. In other words, do you destroy life to save life, for example, is one of the very difficult debates that your generation will be confronted with—to what extent does science trump morality, as some see it.

You'll be confronted, hopefully, with a world that has been able to be free enough so that this war that's going on now is—has kind of faded out. This war is not going to stop like that. It's not going to be, like, we'll have the signing ceremony somewhere. But it's a matter of marginalizing those who espouse violence and empowering those who love freedom.

You'll be confronted with a world in which—we're seeing a little bit of it now in America—whether or not we will be bold

and confident in our economic policy to shape the future, or will we be worried about competition and retreat within our borders. It's an interesting debate. My attitude is, as I said in the State of the Union, we cannot become an isolationist nation. But you'll be confronted with making that decision. If we're an isolationist nation, it means we'll just say, "Let them—don't worry about them over there; let them deal with it themselves." If it's an isolationist nation, we won't worry about HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa, which we should worry about. See, I believe to whom much is given, much is required, and that we have an obligation not only to help our folks here at home but also to help save lives elsewhere.

And you'll be confronted with that decision. You'll be confronted with the decision as to whether or not we can confidently compete against nations like India and China on the economic front. And it will be an interesting challenge. We're facing that challenge somewhat now, and in my judgment, this is the beginning of what will be a constant set of decisions that future generations are going to have to make.

You'll be confronted with privacy issues—privacy on the Internet, privacy in electronic medical records that I think ought to happen, in order to make sure we save costs in medicine. But you'll be confronted with making sure that these new technologies that we're going to use to help improve, for example, the information of medicine, that it doesn't encroach into your private business, into your life. That will be a confrontation that you'll have to deal with.

Anyway, you'll be confronted with some stuff. Hopefully, our job is to make sure you're confronted with less issues, like being hooked on oil. One of the issues that we're confronting with now that I hope you'll not have to confront with is jobs going elsewhere because our—because we don't have the math and science skills and engineering skills and physics skills that are taught to our children here. One of the really interesting challenges we have is to make sure not only the education of our children focuses on literacy but there's literacy in math and science and physics and chemistry—where the jobs of the 21st century—the skills necessary for the jobs

of the 21st century. Hopefully, we'll have dealt with that. Otherwise, you're going to be confronted with playing catchup. And that's why it's important for us to get that job done.

You're going to be confronted with, unless we act now, a Social Security system and a Medicare system that's gone broke. I want to talk about that right quick, now I thought about it. [Laughter] No, I think about it a lot because I see what's coming down the road—a lot of baby boomers like me, turning 60 this year. I'll be retirement age in 2 years, in 2008. [Laughter] Kind of convenient, isn't it? [Laughter] And there's a lot of me—people like me, a lot of people like me, a whole lot of baby boomers. That's one of those statistical facts that people got to pay attention to.

And interestingly enough, my generation has been promised more benefits than the previous generation. People are running for office saying, "Vote for me; I'm going to make sure this next generation gets a better deal than the previous generation." And because there was a lot of folks like me being promised greater benefits who are living longer—I don't know how plan—how other 60-year-olds, how long they plan to live—I plan on kind of stretching her out, you know. And there are fewer people paying in the system per beneficiary. And so we got a problem coming. The system is going to go broke. And I addressed the issue last year, and I'm going to address the issue again and again and again, to call Congress to the table.

My strategy last time was to go around the country and explain the problem, on the belief that once the people heard there was a problem, they would then demand their Representatives do something about the problem. It didn't work. There was no legislation last year. So I got another idea, and that is, I'm going—we're going to set up a group of Members of Congress from both parties, both Chambers, recognizing that nothing can get done on this issue unless it's a bipartisan issue—and say, "Now is the time." That's what we're here for. We have been elected to confront problems and deal with them. That's what the people expect. And they're tired, by the way, of all the politics in Washington, DC. They expect people to come to-

gether, to sit down at the table, and to solve this problem so you don't have to deal with it.

All right, last question. Then I got to go back to work. This isn't work. Yes, go ahead. Hold on for a minute. Please. Like—I can't—okay, two questions. Who yelled the loudest? You did? All right, go ahead. Then you're—you're the last guy. You're next to last. You're last.

Trade

Q. Mr. President, thank you again for coming. My question—I believe that one of our greatest resources is our self-sufficiency. And as you drive down the road, you'll see that our community is dying because of the importation of cheap steel. I'd like to know what your plans are to help alleviate this.

The President. Yes. Well, as you know, right before—right after I got elected, I put a 201 in place that—that was our way of providing breathing space so that the firm could adjust. And I fully understand the problems that the steel mills are going through here. The Governor spent a lot of time briefing me on that, on the way in, as did Shelley Moore. And it's—obviously, it's going to require good energy policy. Your plant can exist if it's got decent energy and reliable supplies at reasonable prices. Your plant can exist if you've got reasonable health care costs. And that's why it's important for us to do a variety of measures to help reduce the cost of health care. I just mentioned one on information technology. Another is to get rid of these junk lawsuits that are running up the cost of medicine.

In order for you to be competitive, we've got to make sure that products are treated fairly. As you know, I'm a free trader, but I also believe that people ought to treat the United States the way we treat them. If we're letting products coming in here, they ought to let our products in on the same basis. I believe—[applause]—I'm aware of the issue you brought up, and thank you bringing it up.

Yes, sir. Final guy. Got to head back home. I hope you understand. Otherwise we'd be here all day. Wouldn't mind being here all day, but I got something else to do. [Laughter]

Let her go.

Political Ethics

Q. Mr. President, I want to say it's a privilege and a blessing to be here with you.

The President. Thank you.

Q. And thank you for having integrity since you've been in office, and character.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. I'm statewide field director for the campaign for Hiram Lewis for U.S. Senate. And as you close—I appreciate what you had stated earlier about politicians. And as you close today, I did 2 years of volunteer work for the Republican Party while I worked a full-time job, and it paid off for me in this position now. And I see folks that are increasingly discouraged with the status quo, because the difference—

The President. No campaign speeches.

Q. No, sir, I'm not.

The President. Okay.

Q. My only question is, what would you say to those, whether Democrat or Republican, how could you encourage those that are dissatisfied with the status quo?

The President. Right. No, I appreciate that. Look, it is really important for people to at least trust the decisionmaking process of those of us in public office. You may not agree with the decisions. You may not—and look, I understand a lot of people don't agree, and that's fine, that's fine. But they've got to understand, at least in my case, that I'm making my decisions based upon what I think is right, and that making decisions that are the kind that I make, for example, got to be based upon a set of principles that won't change. People got to understand that.

When there's any doubt about the integrity of the public servant, like in Washington there has been recently, they got to clean up—they got to work to clean it up. There's got to be lobby reform in this case. I mean, the truth of the matter is, a couple of Members of the House of Representatives disgraced the process. A person took money in order to put things in appropriations bills. That's unacceptable in our democracy. And

That's unacceptable in our democracy. And it needs to be dealt with in order to be able to earn the confidence of the people.

I worry about lack of voter participation. I'm concerned that people don't participate at the ballot box. And it is something that we've all got to work on, because democracy is—really depends upon the participation of our citizenry. It's really important for high school students. And one of the challenges you'll face is whether or not our democracy is able to continue to get people to say, "I can make a difference in the ballot box."

And so, to answer your question, integrity is a central part of the process. Integrity in decisionmaking, integrity in how we deal with the people's money, integrity of—and part of a system based upon integrity is one that deals with, like in this case, unethical behavior very quickly, with certainty so that people have got confidence in the system.

I appreciate you working in the process. I want to thank you for your question. I wish I could stay longer to answer your questions. I can't, I got to go back to DC. I'm not necessarily saying I'd rather be in DC than here; I'd rather be here than there. But nevertheless, that's what my life dictates. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:17 p.m. at the Capitol Music Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Terry Sterling, president, Wheeling Area Chamber of Commerce; Gov. Joe Manchin III of West Virginia, and his wife, Gayle; Mayor Nicholas A. Sparachane of Wheeling, WV; Christopher Wakim, representative, West Virginia State House of Representatives; John Anderson, employee, Wheeling, WV, office, and Janis LaFont, employee, White Plains, MD, office, Valley National Gases, Inc.; President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zargawi; U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Kalmay Khalilzad; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Memorandum on Designation of Officers of the National Archives and Records Administration

March 22, 2006

Memorandum for the Archivist of the United States

Subject: Designation of Officers of the National Archives and Records Administration

By the authority vested in me as President under the Constitution and laws of the United States of America and pursuant to the Federal Vacancies Reform Act of 1998, 5 U.S.C. 3345 *et seq.* (the “Act”), I hereby order that:

Section 1. Order of Succession.

During any period when both the Archivist of the United States (Archivist) and the Deputy Archivist of the United States (Deputy Archivist) have died, resigned, or otherwise become unable to perform the functions and duties of the office of Archivist, the following officers of the National Archives and Records Administration, in the order listed, shall perform the functions and duties of the office of Archivist, if they are eligible to act as Archivist under the provisions of the Act, until such time as the Archivist or Deputy Archivist is able to perform the functions and duties of the office of Archivist:

Assistant Archivist for Administration
Assistant Archivist for Records Services,
Washington, D.C.
Assistant Archivist for Regional Records Services
Assistant Archivist for Presidential Libraries
Assistant Archivist for Information Services
Director of the Federal Register
Director, National Personnel Records Center
Director, Jimmy Carter Library

Sec. 2. Exceptions.

- (a) No individual who is serving in an office listed in section 1 in an acting capacity, by virtue of so serving, shall act as Archivist pursuant to this memorandum.
- (b) Notwithstanding the provisions of this memorandum, the President retains discretion, to the extent permitted by the Act or other law, to depart from

this memorandum in designating an acting Archivist.

Sec. 3. Prior Memorandum Superseded.

This memorandum supersedes the Presidential Memorandum of March 19, 2002, entitled, “Designation of Officers of the National Archives and Records Administration.”

George W. Bush

Remarks Following a Meeting on Immigration Reform

March 23, 2006

I’ve just had a very constructive and important dialog with members of the agricultural community, the faith community, the concerned citizen community about immigration. Ours is a nation of law, and ours is a nation of immigrants, and we believe that we can have rational, important immigration policy that’s based upon law and reflects our deep desire to be a compassionate and decent nation.

Our Government must enforce our borders; we’ve got plans in place to do so. But part of enforcing our borders is to have a guest-worker program that encourages people to register their presence so that we know who they are, and says to them, “If you’re doing a job an American won’t do, you’re welcome here, for a period of time, to do that job.”

The immigration debate is a vital debate for our country. It’s important that we have a serious debate, one that discusses the issues. But I urge Members of Congress and I urge people who like to comment on this issue to make sure the rhetoric is in accord with our traditions. I look around the table and I recognize that we’ve got people from different backgrounds, different heritages. We all may have different family histories, but we all sit around this table as Americans.

And therefore, when we conduct this debate, it must be done in a civil way. It must be done in a way that brings dignity to the process. It must be done in a way that doesn’t pit one group of people against another. It must be done in a way that recognizes our history. I think now is the time for the United

States Congress to act to get an immigration plan that is comprehensive and rational and achieves important objectives.

So I want to welcome you all for being here. I want to thank you very much for your involvement in this vital issue. I've assured folks here at the table that I will continue to speak out on the issue. I feel passionately about the need for our country to conduct themselves with dignity and, at the same time, enforce our border and treat people here with respect.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:37 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

**Remarks on Signing a Bill To
Authorize the Extension of
Nondiscriminatory Treatment to the
Products of Ukraine**

March 23, 2006

Thank you. Pleased be seated. Ambassador, good to see you. Please be seated. Welcome. Appreciate you all coming. In a few minutes, I'm going to sign a bill that authorizes permanent normal trade relations between the United States and Ukraine. It's a good bill, and it's going to strengthen our ties with our friend Ukraine. It's going to create new opportunities, economic opportunities, for both our countries.

I really want to thank the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, a man who knows what he's talking about when it comes to the world, and that's Chairman Lugar from Indiana. Thank you for coming, sir. I thank the bill sponsor, Congressman Jim Gerlach, and his wife, Karen, is here today. Thank you for coming, Mr. Congressman. Congressman Tom Lantos is with us. He's the Ranking Member of the House International Relations Committee. Congressman Curt Weldon, a cosponsor of the bill, is with us. Congresswoman Candice Miller from Michigan, a cosponsor, is with us, as well as a cosponsor, Congressman Mike Fitzpatrick. Thank you all for being here.

I welcome you all here. I especially welcome the Ambassador from Ukraine, Amba-

sador Shamshur. Welcome, Mr. Ambassador. Appreciate you coming. This is the third time we've been together in the last 30 days. [Laughter] I'm better for it. [Laughter]

The bill I sign today marks the beginning of a new era in our history with Ukraine. During the cold war, Congress passed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment as a response to widespread communist deprivation of human rights. The law made American trade with communist nations contingent on those countries' respect for the rights of their own people. At the time, the law served an important purpose; it helped to encourage freedom and the protection of fundamental rights and penalized nations that denied liberty to their citizens. Times have changed. The cold war is over, and a free Ukraine is a friend to America and an inspiration to those who love liberty.

The Orange Revolution was a powerful example of democracy for people around the world. The brave citizens who gathered in Kiev's Independence Square demanded the chance to determine their nation's future, and when they got that chance, they chose freedom. In the past 2 years, Ukraine has held free elections, and the people of Ukraine and its President, Viktor Yushchenko, are deeply committed to democratic reform. On Sunday, the Ukrainian people will again have the chance to cast a ballot in parliamentary elections, and they have a chance to continue to shape their own future.

Ukraine is also working to expand its market economy and produce measurable improvements in the lives of the Ukrainian people. America supports these efforts, and this bill is an important step. By eliminating barriers to trade between the United States and Ukraine, the bill will help Ukraine grow in prosperity. As we've seen over the past 50 years, trade has the power to create new wealth for whole nations and new opportunities for people around the world. By expanding trade with Ukraine, this bill will open new markets for American products and help Ukrainians continue to build a free economy that will raise the standard of living for families across their land.

As Ukraine embraces democracy and more open trade, our nations' friendship will grow. President Yushchenko has made reforms to

increase transparency and provide intellectual property protection and strengthen the enforcement of the rule of law.

These reforms have taken great conviction. And earlier this month, our two nations signed a bilateral agreement that will establish the terms of trade between our nations when Ukraine join the World Trade Organization. We support Ukraine's goal of joining the WTO, and we will help resolve the remaining steps required for entry as quickly as possible. As the Ukrainian Government continues to build on a record of progress at home, we will help Ukraine join the institutions that unite free nations and become a part of Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

The growth of economic freedom and ownership in countries like the Ukraine reinforces the habits of liberty and democracy and gives citizens a stake in the success of their nation. Ukrainian people have shown the world they are committed to the ideals of economic freedom and democratic progress and open trade, and that gives them a promising future.

The United States is proud to call Ukraine a friend, and I'm honored to sign this important piece of legislation into law.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:01 a.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Ukraine's Ambassador to the U.S. Oleh Shamshur. H.R. 1053, approved March 23, was assigned Public Law No. 109-205.

Proclamation 7990—Small Business Week, 2006

March 23, 2006

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

The entrepreneurial spirit of America is robust and strong, and small businesses are thriving throughout our great Nation. The opportunity to own a business is an important part of the American dream. During Small Business Week, we celebrate small business owners and employees who are willing to

take risks and work hard in pursuit of a better life for themselves and their families.

Our economy has created almost 5 million jobs since August 2003. Small businesses create most new jobs in our country, and small businesses have been a driving force behind America's tremendous economic growth and job creation. By adopting sound economic policies that help small businesses continue to grow and expand, we will keep our economy moving forward and create more jobs for American workers.

My Administration remains committed to fostering an environment where innovation succeeds and small businesses can flourish. We are working with the Congress to make the tax relief permanent and to pass Association Health Plans to allow small businesses to join together and buy insurance at the same discounts big businesses receive. We are encouraging small business owners and employees to consider health savings accounts, which help small businesses provide health insurance for their workers and give consumers greater flexibility in how they spend their dollars. We also are continuing to work to open new markets for American products and services abroad. Putting a stop to the frivolous lawsuits that drive up the cost of doing business will further help small businesses enhance the quality of life for their employees and their communities.

During Small Business Week, and throughout the year, we applaud the men and women who own and operate small businesses and spur economic growth. Through their entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to excellence, they help ensure that America remains a place where dreams are realized.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 9 through April 15, 2006, as Small Business Week. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs that celebrate the achievements of small business owners and their employees and encourage the development of new small businesses.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-third day of March, in

the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 27, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 28.

Memorandum on the National Flood Insurance Program

March 23, 2006

Memorandum for the Secretary of the Homeland Security

Subject: National Flood Insurance Program

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, including 42 U.S.C. 4016, I have reviewed and hereby approve your request to issue notes to the Secretary of the Treasury in excess of \$18.5 billion, but not to exceed \$20.775 billion, for the National Flood Insurance Program.

George W. Bush

Remarks at a Celebration of Greek Independence Day

March 24, 2006

Thank you. Welcome. Your Eminence, thank you for your kind words. You're a philosopher; you're a wise person; you're an incredibly compassionate soul; and I'm proud to call you friend. Thank you for being here.

Thank you for inviting me to help celebrate the 185th anniversary of Greek Independence. America is a better country because of Greek Americans. It's something about the passion, the verve for life, the willingness to serve. I am blessed by having Greek Americans in my administration, two of the most important of whom have joined us, Your Eminence: John Negroponte, the Director of the National Intelligence, and the Homeland Security Adviser, Frances Fragos Townsend.

Madame Foreign Minister, we are thrilled to have you here. Thank you for coming. Let

me just say this, that it is a wise government who relies upon the judgment and advice of a woman as a Foreign Minister or Secretary of State. [Laughter] And I look forward to sharing our visit with my mother and dad, who are close to the Minister. And I know they're going to be thrilled to know that you're strong and optimistic in serving your great country with class and dignity.

Mr. Ambassador, thank you as well. Appreciate—good to see you, sir. I appreciate Christos Folias, who is the Deputy Minister of Economy for Greece. Welcome, sir. It's good to see you.

I am really pleased that Senator Paul Sarbanes is with us today. He has served with great distinction in the United States Senate. He has decided to move on to other ventures, and the State of Maryland will miss his leadership. Proud you're here, sir.

I want to thank those who wear the Nation's uniform. Your Eminence, as you know, ours is a remarkable country, where people are willing to volunteer to serve our country in times of war. And our Nation is blessed to have men and women who, in the face of danger, say, "I want to help." So thanks for coming. More importantly, thanks for serving. I know you share the same feeling I share, that it is an honor to serve the United States of America.

I want to thank the other Greek Americans, leaders, and folks who are here. Thanks for coming. Thanks for traveling long distances to be here in Washington.

We honor Greek Independence Day because of the values we share. That's why it's a comfortable event. That's why it's an important event, Your Eminence. The ancient Athenians gave birth to democracy. They entrusted their citizens with the power to govern. That's a powerful concept. It wasn't always that way. In some parts of the world, it still isn't that way. But nevertheless, it is a universal concept, started by the Athenians.

We respect the philosophy that grew out of Greece that honored and respected human dignity and human rights and, as you said, Your Eminence, the belief that there

is universality to the concept of liberty. Freedom is not confined to Greece, nor is it confined to America. It is universal in its application, and that's one of the great lessons of Greek Independence Day.

America's Founding Fathers were inspired by the democratic ideals, and it helped form our own Union. Those ideals became implanted in long-lasting documents. But as we watch the world today, we must understand that democracy is difficult at times. It's not easy to take hold. It requires work and diligence and optimism and strength and will. But the Greek lesson, not only in Greece but also here in America, is one that with time and persistence, liberty does take hold because of its universality. It's a lesson we honor on Greek Independence Day.

When the founders of modern Greece claimed their freedom in 1821, they had the strong backing of America. The American people supported that independence: John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, all members of the ex-Presidents Club—*[laughter]*—I'm not there yet, Your Eminence—*[laughter]*—all urged support of the Greek cause.

Young Americans volunteered to serve in the new Greek Army. Many more Americans contributed funds to support the Greek people in their struggle for freedom. America stood side by side with those who struggled for liberty in 1821.

It's reminiscent of what's taking place in the 21st century. Our two nations have continued to work together in freedom's cause. Greece was an ally of the United States in major international conflicts of the 20th century. We're allies in the war on terror. In Afghanistan, Greece is a valuable contributor to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, and we thank your Government for that. Greece provides security at the Kabul International Airport, and we thank your Government for that as well.

Greece has also been generous in the support for the Afghan people, and the Afghan people thank the Greek Government for that as well. Last month in London, for example, Greece pledged funds to support educational programs. The Greek Government decided to support entrepreneurship, with the full knowledge that education and entrepreneur-

ship can lead to a prosperous and thriving economy so that the people can see the benefits of liberty.

Greece is supporting other efforts in the war on terror. Our two nations remain committed to the security and counterterrorism partnership we put in place during the Olympics in Athens in 2004. By the way, people still marvel at how well those Olympics were run. The government stood up and, in spite of all the criticism that was taking place, put on some great games. It's a model for other countries to follow.

Greece and the United States are working together to keep our people safe. We'll continue to work together to spread the blessings of liberty because we understand that when we spread the blessings of liberty, it lays the foundation for peace. And that's what we want.

At home, Greek Americans strengthen our communities. Greek entrepreneurs contribute to our country's prosperity. The Greek culture enriches our entire country. The Greek Orthodox Church reflects America's religious diversity. It's a source of strength and unity and inspiration for many Greek Americans.

I also understand that Greek Independence Day is the Feast of the Annunciation in the Orthodox faith, that they're celebrated together because they both represent good news. On Greek Independence Day, Greeks and Americans honor the anniversary of the Greek call for independence and celebrate the universal good news of freedom and liberty. We believe that freedom is God's gift to all people. And we know that by working together, freedom is on the march.

Your Eminence, thank you for inviting me. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:59 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Archbishop Demetrios, Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in America; Minister of Foreign Affairs Theodora Bakoyianni of Greece; and Greece's Ambassador to the U.S. Alexandros Mallias.

**Remarks at a Reception for
Congressional Candidate Mike
Sodrel in Indianapolis, Indiana**

March 24, 2006

Thank you all for coming. Please be seated. Michael, thanks for having me here. Let me start off by telling you it's great to be back in Indiana, the great city of Indianapolis. I'm here because I strongly believe it's in Indiana's interest to send Mike Sodrel back to the United States Congress.

And I want to thank you all for supporting him. Some of you are from his district; some of you aren't, but all of you are wise enough to know a good candidate when you see one.

I'm traveling without the better half of my family. Laura sends her best to the Sodrels; she sends her best to the Governor; she sends her best to the good people of Indiana. I'm a lucky man to be married to Laura Bush, and Mike Sodrel is a lucky man to be married to Keta Sodrel. I'm glad to be here with the Sodrels and the Sodrel family. I like a man in Congress who has his priorities straight, and Michael Sodrel prioritizes his family as a central part of his life.

Governor, I'm proud you're here. I knew Mitch was going to be a fine Governor because, first of all, he's a fine man. He's got a wonderful sense of humor. I like a fellow who doesn't take a—run a poll to tell him what to think. I like somebody who stands up and does what he thinks is right. Give the first lady my best, and the four daughters.

I want to thank Congressman Steve Buyer for being here. Buyer, it's good to see you. Thanks for your service in the United States Congress. And Congressman Michael Pence, thanks for coming, Mike. I appreciate you being here. It's a good sign when other Members of Congress come out to support one of their brothers. So thanks for supporting Mike.

You know what I know about him. He's an effective person. He can get things done. He's a reasonable guy. That's what you want in the United States Congress. In a land of lawyers, it's good to have somebody who is an entrepreneur and started their own business.

I thank the attorney general, Steve Carter, for being here. General, I'm proud you're

here; the secretary of state, Todd Rokita—thank you both for coming, and thanks for serving your State. I thank everybody else for coming, particularly those who have worked hard to raise the money. For those of you who are interested in following up on your contributions, get over to Mike's district and help turn out the vote.

And that's why I want to recognize Murray Clark, who's the chairman of the Indiana Republican Party, and his wife, Janet. Get those grassroots moving at the proper time. And we'll send this guy back to the United States Congress.

And finally, I understand the former mayor of Indianapolis, my longtime friend, Steve Goldsmith, is with us today. Stephen, if you're here, thanks for being here; thanks for your service; and thanks for your friendship. He was on the leading edge of the compassionate conservative agenda, which has made an enormous difference in the lives of people, not only here in Indianapolis but around the country.

Let me give you a Mike Sodrel quote. He said, "The first role of the Federal Government is to provide for the defense of the country." It's important to have people in the United States Congress who understand this is a nation at war. I wish I could tell you otherwise. I wish I could say that an enemy which attacked us on September the 11th, 2001, has quit. That is not the reality of the world in which we live. The reality in the world in which we live is, there's an enemy which hates those of us who embrace freedom and would like to strike us again. And therefore, it's important to have Members of the United States Congress who understand the stakes in the global war on terror. And Mike Sodrel understands the stakes.

My most important job is to lead our Nation and to protect you. And so I have—want to share with you some of the lessons I learned after September the 11th, 2001, lessons that Members of the United States Congress must have in order for us to do our job. Lesson one is that we must defeat the enemy overseas so we do not have to face them here at home.

Ours is an enemy which has embraced an ideology—an ideology of hatred, an ideology that is totalitarian in nature. They decide if

you can worship and how you worship; they decide whether or not your children can go to school; they decide this; they decide that. They stand exactly the opposite of the United States of America. They have expressed their tactics for the world to see. They believe that those of us living in democracies are weak, flaccid. It's just a matter of time, they believe, if they continue to exert pressure, that we will retreat from the world. That's what they want.

It's important to have Members of the United States Congress who understand the stakes and understand the nature of the enemy. They cannot exist without safe haven. And so one of the doctrines and one of the lessons learned after September the 11th is that we must hold people to account for harboring terrorists. If you harbor a terrorist, if you feed a terrorist, if you house a terrorist, you're equally guilty as the terrorists.

Michael Sodrel understands that. He also understands that when the President speaks, he better mean what he says. And I meant what I said when I said that, and that's why I told the Taliban—I said, "Get rid of Al Qaida." They refused. We sent a liberation force into Afghanistan to uphold doctrine, to protect ourselves and, in so doing, liberated 25 million people from the clutches of a barbaric regime.

A lesson of September the 11th is that not only are we facing a brutal enemy that's willing to take innocent life, an enemy which thinks we're soft, an enemy which tries to find safe haven—but a vital lesson of September the 11th that our Nation must not forget is that when we see a threat, we must take it seriously, before it comes to hurt us. You see, before September the 11th, it was assumed by policymakers and people in office that we were safe, that oceans protected us, that we're in good shape when it came to threats. We could see a threat overseas, and we could deal with it if we wanted to, or not.

That changed on September the 11th. From now on, the United States of America, in order to protect our citizens, must deal with threats, must take them seriously to do our most fundamental job, which is to protect the American people. I saw threats in Saddam Hussein. Members of the United States

Congress—both Republicans and Democrats—saw a threat in Saddam Hussein. Members of the United Nations Security Council saw threats in Saddam Hussein. The world spoke. They said, "Disarm, disclose, or face serious consequences." The choice was Saddam Hussein's, and removing Saddam Hussein has made this Nation and the world a safer place.

I need Members of Congress who support a plan for victory in Iraq. We've committed brave men and women, volunteers, people who said, "I volunteer to serve the United States of America." And they're in harm's way, and we must have Members of the United States Congress who will not weaken and who will make sure our troops have all the necessary support to achieve the mission. And Mike Sodrel understands that and is a strong supporter of the United States military.

Our strategy is to help rebuild the country. Our strategy is to encourage democracy. I know it's troubled times. I understand the enemy is capable of affecting how we think about the war in Iraq, because they're willing to take innocent life. And this turbulence on your TV screens affects the conscious of Americans—I know that, and so does the enemy. But amidst all the turmoil, I want you to remember that progress towards democracy is being made. It wasn't all that long ago—4 months ago—that 11 million Iraqis defied the killers, defied the terrorists, and said loud and clear, "We want democracy." Democracy is on the march in Iraq, and our job as a Government is to help them form a unity government, a government around which the country can rally.

The other part of our strategy is to train the Iraqis so they can take the fight to the enemy. The enemy cannot defeat us on the battlefield. They just can't beat us. So what they tried to do is, they're trying to create a civil war; that's why they blew up the mosque. But amidst the turmoil and the pictures and the devastation and the reprisal, I want you to know that the Iraqi forces performed. The Iraqi forces we trained were able to bring some sense of stability throughout the country of Iraq. The mission is to train the Iraqis so they can take the fight.

The mission is to encourage democracy. As Iraqi troops stand up, we'll stand down.

But I'm going to tell you something about me. I'm not going to make up my mind about Iraq based upon polls and focus groups. I will make up my mind about troops based upon the recommendations of the United States military, not politicians in Washington, DC. [*Applause*] Thank you all.

The only way that we can lose is if we lose our will. It's the only way we can lose. The stakes in Iraq are high. Remember, this is a global war on terror. Iraq is a part of the war on terror. And they're high because the enemy has stated they would like to have a safe haven from which to launch attacks against America again.

I fully understand some in the United States don't believe what the enemy has said. I think you better have a President and Members of Congress who take the enemy seriously. You better have people in Washington, DC, who see the world the way it is, not the way we would like it to be. If our most important job is to protect the American people, we must be diligent and steadfast and never ending in our desire to protect you. Mike understands that, and so do I. Ultimately, the way to defeat the enemy, the way to defeat an ideology of darkness, a totalitarian ideology of darkness, is to defeat it with a philosophy of light. And that philosophy is liberty.

As I make my decisions as to how to protect you, I want you to know I'm guided by this principle: I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe the Almighty's great gift to every man and woman—every man and woman—on the face of the Earth is freedom. Freedom is universal. It is non-negotiable. And as freedom takes hold, the world becomes more peaceful. Democracies don't war.

As you explain what we're trying to do in Iraq—and will do in Iraq—to your friends and neighbors, remind them about the history of Europe. America lost hundreds of thousands of soldiers on the continent of Europe in two world wars. And yet today, Europe is whole, free, and at peace. And the reason why is: Democracies don't war.

My dad, as an 18-year-old kid, when the country called, said, "I'm going in to fight

the Japanese." I'm sure there's—you've got some relatives of others who went to war with the Japanese in World War II. They were the sworn enemy. They attacked us. They attacked the United States of America. Less people, by the way, died in the Pearl Harbor attack than died on September the 11th, 2001, on our soil.

And yet today, interestingly enough, I sit at a table with the Prime Minister of Japan working on how to keep the peace. Isn't that interesting? Sixty years ago or so, 18-year-old George H.W. Bush volunteered to fight the Japanese as his sworn enemy. And now his son sits at the table to keep the peace with the Japanese.

What happened? What happened was the Japanese adopted a Japanese-style democracy. If we don't lose our nerve, if we stay the course, someday down the road, an American President will be working with democratically-elected leaders in the broader Middle East at the table, to keep the peace.

I like working with Mike Sodrel because he understands the role of Government is not to create wealth but an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit can flourish, in which people can realize their dreams, in which people can start with nothing in America and, through hard work and imagination, build assets they call their own.

Mike understands that. By the way, that environment was challenged during my Presidency. We've had a recession; we had a stock market collapse; we had an attack on our country; we have been a nation at war; we've had major natural disasters. But because our party, because Members of the Congress here, people like Mike Sodrel, understand that if people have more of their own money to save and spend and invest, we can recover from difficult economic times.

Oh, I remember the tax debates there in Washington, DC. I remember those Democratic critics who spoke loud and clear. I remember one of them saying, "It's reckless, irresponsible plan that will undermine opportunity in our country." You remember those debates, the loud noises they made about cutting taxes.

Well, let me read to you the statistics. Our economy grew last year at 3.5 percent. The unemployment rate across America is 4.8

percent. In the last 2½ years, we've added nearly 5 million new jobs. The unemployment rate in Indiana is 4.7 percent. Productivity is up. Small businesses are flourishing. More people own a home than ever before in our Nation's history. Cutting taxes for the American people was the right thing to do.

We've got a record to stand on. We've got a record of dealing with some serious economic times. There's a debate, of course, in Washington, DC, about tax cutting, and I want the people of the 9th Congressional District and districts all across America to understand the difference in our record. Our party and Members of the United States Congress stood squarely for tax relief for everybody who pays taxes.

And the Democratic Party has a clear record. In 2001, more than 90 percent of the congressional Democrats voted against cutting income tax rates. More than 90 percent of the Democrats voted against the bill that provided tax relief for married couples. More than 90 percent of the Democrats voted for [against]* a bill that would have put the death tax on the road to extinction. More than 90 percent of the Democrats voted against a bill that doubled the child credit. More than 95 percent of the congressional Democrats voted against cutting taxes on capitol gains.

And recently, during the budget debate, Democrats used the occasion to call for \$173 billion in tax hikes and fee increases. The difference is clear: If you want the Government in your pocket, vote Democrat; if you want to keep more of your hard-earned money, vote Republican.

And so the fundamental question confronting us in Washington is, how do we keep this economic recovery going? That's what people ought to be talking about. And we've got some good ideas as to how to keep it going. And the first thing is, make the tax cuts permanent. Oh, I know you've heard the same talk I've heard in Washington, "We've got a problem with the deficit." We do, and we're going to deal with it. But the Democrats have got a good idea, they think, and that's to run up your taxes to make sure the deficit—folks, that's not the way Washington works.

* White House correction.

Here's the way Washington works. They'll increase your taxes, and they'll figure out new ways to spend your money. The best way to make sure that we reduce the deficit is to keep progrowth economic policies in place and be wise about how we spend your money. That's why we need people like Mike Sodrel in the United States Congress.

It's important to set priorities when it comes to our budget. So long as we've got men and women in harm's way, we will make sure they have got that which is necessary to do their job. And I want to thank Mike and the Members of the United States Congress who are here who have prioritized supporting the United States military when it comes into our budget—comes to budget matters.

I don't know if you realize this, but over the past—the last budget cycle, thanks to the good work of Members of the United States Congress, we actually cut nonsecurity discretionary spending. We not only have slowed the growth of nonsecurity discretionary spending every year that I have been the President, last year we cut nonsecurity discretionary spending. And I submitted a budget to the United States Congress to do it again. And the Members in this crowd are supportive of a good, prioritizing, lean budget. And I want to thank you for your support.

The problem we have is that we've got people who want to spend more money in Washington. That's why we need fiscally sound people like Mike Sodrel in the United States Congress. And we also must show some political courage when it comes to the budget. The main reason the budget goes up is because of mandatory spending increases. Those would be your increases in Social Security and Medicare.

And we've got a problem, folks, when it comes to Social Security and Medicare. We've got a whole bunch of us getting ready to retire—that would be baby boomers like me. As a matter of fact—Mitch, you probably don't know this—but I turn 62, which qualifies me for Social Security, in 2008. That's a convenient year to become eligible for retirement. [Laughter]

And there's a lot of us, a lot of us baby boomers. I'm kind of scanning out there, and I see quite a few of us. [Laughter] And we've been promised greater benefits than the previous generation, and we're living longer. I

don't know about you all; I plan on just kind of stretching it out a little bit. [*Laughter*] And there are fewer people paying in the system, and the system is going broke.

I need people in the United States Congress like Michael, who's willing to work with me to reform and modernize these mandatory programs so that a future generation of kids can come up and say, "Thank God for that Congress. Thank God they're willing to do the hard work. Thank God they're willing to take on problems and not pass them on to future Presidents and future generations."

It's a tough issue, but that's why you sent us to Washington, DC, to deal with tough issues. If it were an easy issue, other people would have taken care of it. And I'm looking forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats to modernize both Social Security and Medicare so a young generation will say, "Job well done."

In order to make sure that we're—this economy keeps growing, listen, we can't fear the future. We've got to shape the future. We've got to be confident as a nation. We lead the world today, and I intend to work with Congress to put policies in place so that we can lead the world tomorrow.

And let me share some ideas with you. First of all, in order to lead—be the economic leader of the world, we've got to do something about these frivolous and junk lawsuits that are making it hard to risk capital. You know, it's fine, one thing to be—to have a legitimate lawsuit. It's these frivolous lawsuits and the junk lawsuits—and people are filing lawsuits right and left that are hurting the capacity of this country to realize our full potential. I look forward to working with Congress for meaningful and real tort reform.

I look forward to working with Congress to do something about our energy situation. I know it came as a surprise to you that a fellow from Texas would stand up and say, "We've got a problem; we're addicted to oil." [*Laughter*] But I meant it. It's an economic problem. It's an economic problem because as other economies begin to grow and use more fossil fuels, it affects our price.

It's a national security problem. We're dealing with some countries that don't particularly like us, and they've got a lot of oil.

It gives us a national security problem when people threaten to hold oil off the market for geopolitical reasons.

This country needs to come together, do some smart things—particularly when it comes to research and development—smart things about how we change our driving habits. I want people driving with corn extract, ethanol, grown right here in the State of Indiana, in order to keep these cars moving. One of these days, they're going to walk in with a crop report to the President and say, "The harvest down there in Indiana is great. We've got us a lot of corn, that means we're less dependent on foreign sources of oil."

We've got to make sure that we continue to invest in battery technologies. Right around the corner is a technology that will enable you to plug in your pickup truck and drive the first 40 miles on electricity. That's not going to help you in parts of rural Indiana, but if you're an urban person—in Indianapolis or Houston, Texas, or anywhere else in America—that first 40 miles means a lot when it comes to your driving. Imagine people being able to drive on electricity, not on gasoline, for the first 40 miles. It will make us less dependent on foreign sources of oil. When it comes to electricity, we've got to be wise about how we use our resources.

We'll continue to invest in clean coal technologies so this abundant resource can be used without fear of polluting our air. We need safe nuclear power if we intend to be an energy dependent and an environmentally conscious country. No, in order to help us remain competitive in the world, we've got to be wise about our energy policy, and I look forward to leading the Congress toward a new day when it comes to consuming, particularly Middle Eastern, oil.

In order to make sure that we're a competitive nation, we shouldn't fear the future; we ought to lead it. And the best way to lead it is to make sure our kids are educated for the jobs of the 21st century. I appreciate what these Governors, like Mitch Daniels, are doing—setting high standards and holding the people to account. I think it makes sense if you're spending a lot of money to say to the school districts, "Why don't you show us whether or not a child can read and

write?” It seems like a legitimate question to me.

It doesn't make any sense for the Federal Government to tell you how to teach. We believe in local control of schools. But when you're spending as much money as we do, it seems like we ought to be able to say, "Show us whether or not a child is reading." And if not, correct the problems early, before it's too late. You can't solve a problem unless you diagnose the problem.

And the No Child Left Behind Act believes every child can learn, believes in setting high standards, and says to the local districts, "All we want to know is, can the child learn to read and write and add and subtract? And if not, here's a little extra money to bring them up to speed."

Now, we've got to apply that same rigor and same standards to math and science and at the same time increase Government investment in research and development—and at the same time say to the private sector, "There's certainty when it comes to your budgets." The research and development tax credit should be a permanent part of the Tax Code. In order for the United States of America to be the leader of the world, we must have a job—a set of skills available for youngsters that will be able to fill the jobs of the 21st century, and we must be the leader in research and technology.

Mike Sodrel understands that. Mike Sodrel doesn't fear the future, because he intends to work with President George W. Bush to shape the future. By being the economic leader in the world, our people will realize a better standard of living. By being the economic leader of the world, we will continue to be able to bring prosperity to corners of our country.

You know, one thing Mike told me, he said, "Just remember one thing, when you're talking about my district, is that we've got a lot of farmers there." All right, I'm going to talk to the farmers in Mike's district. You better have somebody elected to the United States Congress who works to make sure there's markets for you to sell your products. If you're good at something, you want to be able to sell your products in new markets. And Indiana's farmers are very good at a lot of things. They're good at growing. They're

good at harvesting, and the United States Government ought to help them sell those products overseas at good prices.

Secondly, if you're a farmer, you better have a Member of the United States Congress who understands the effects of the death tax on the American family farmer. We've got a system today where you farm all your life; you're paying your taxes; and then you pass on—and your heirs get to pay taxes again. And sometimes those inheritance taxes mean you have to liquidate your farm. For the sake of stability in the farm community, we need to get rid of the death tax once and for all.

Most of all, I'm here for Mike Sodrel because he's a good, honest man. He's a decent man. He's a problem-solver. He's a practical fellow. He likes to get things done. He's a patriotic man. He's done a real fine job in the United States Congress, and I look forward to working with him in my last 2 years as President of the United States.

I want to thank you all for coming to support Michael Sodrel. Thanks for your interest. Thanks for your concern about our future. May God bless Indiana. May God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the Murat Centre. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., of Indiana, and his wife, Cheri; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

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 18

In the morning, at Camp David, MD, the President had an intelligence briefing.

March 19

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

March 20

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. He then traveled to Cleveland, OH, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Lois Hagood.

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

The President declared a major disaster in Oregon and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides from December 18, 2005, through and including January 21, 2006.

March 21

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush had lunch and attended a performance with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia.

March 22

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing followed by a National Security Council meeting on Iraq. Later, he traveled to Wheeling, WV, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Kristen Holloway.

In the afternoon, at the Capitol Music Hall, the President met with family members of soldiers killed in Iraq. Later, he returned to Washington, DC.

The White House announced that the President will welcome President Hu Jintao of China to the White House on April 20.

March 23

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President had lunch with Vice President Dick Cheney. Later, in the Oval Office, he participated in a photo opportunity with the 2006 White House News Photographers Association "Eyes of History" winners.

In the evening, in the Blue Room, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a social dinner to honor the 300th anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin. Following the

dinner, in the East Room, they attended a performance.

The President announced his designation of the following individuals as members of a Presidential delegation to Tallinn, Estonia, to attend the funeral of former President Lennart Meri of Estonia on March 26: David A. Sampson (head of delegation); Aldona Zofia Wos; and Daniel Fried.

March 24

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Indianapolis, IN, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Marvin Bardo. Later, he traveled to Pittsburgh, PA, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Edy Hope. He then traveled to Sewickley Heights, PA, where, at a private residence, he attended a Santorum 2006 reception.

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

The White House announced that President Bush will welcome President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria to the White House on March 29.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

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 18

Fact sheet: Operation Iraqi Freedom: Three Years Later

Released March 20

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.J. Res. 47 and S. 1578

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 1287, H.R. 2113, H.R. 2346, H.R. 2413, H.R. 2630, H.R. 2894, H.R. 3256, H.R. 3368, H.R. 3439, H.R. 3548, H.R. 3703, H.R. 3770, H.R. 3825, H.R. 3830, H.R. 3989, H.R. 4053, H.R. 4107, H.R. 4152, H.R. 4295, S. 2089, and S. 2320

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Oregon

Fact sheet: Strategy for Victory: Clear, Hold, and Build

Released March 22

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of President Hu Jintao of the People's Republic of China

Released March 23

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 1053, H.R. 1691, S. 2064, and S. 2275

Released March 24

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit by President Olusegun Obasanjo of the Republic of Nigeria

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 4826, S. 1184, and S. 2363

Approved March 20

H.J. Res. 47 / Public Law 109–182
Increasing the statutory limit on the public debt

S. 1578 / Public Law 109–183
Upper Colorado and San Juan River Basin Endangered Fish Recovery Programs Reauthorization Act of 2005

H.R. 1287 / Public Law 109–184
To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 312 East North Avenue in Flora, Illinois, as the “Robert T. Ferguson Post Office Building”

H.R. 2113 / Public Law 109–185
To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 2000 McDonough Street in Joliet, Illinois, as the “John F. Whiteside Joliet Post Office Building”

H.R. 2346 / Public Law 109–186
To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 105 NW Railroad Avenue in Hammond, Louisiana, as the “John J. Hainkel, Jr. Post Office Building”

H.R. 2413 / Public Law 109–187
To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 1202 1st Street in Humble, Texas, as the “Lillian McKay Post Office Building”

H.R. 2630 / Public Law 109–188
To redesignate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 1927 Sangamon Avenue in Springfield, Illinois, as the “J.M. Dietrich Northeast Annex”

H.R. 2894 / Public Law 109–189
To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 102 South Walters Avenue in Hodgenville, Kentucky, as the “Abraham Lincoln Birthplace Post Office Building”

H.R. 3256 / Public Law 109–190
To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 3038 West Liberty Avenue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as the “Congressman James Grove Fulton Memorial Post Office Building”

**Acts Approved
by the President**

H.R. 3368 / Public Law 109–191

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 6483 Lincoln Street in Gagetown, Michigan, as the “Gagetown Veterans Memorial Post Office”

H.R. 3439 / Public Law 109–192

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 201 North 3rd Street in Smithfield, North Carolina, as the “Ava Gardner Post Office”

H.R. 3548 / Public Law 109–193

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located on Franklin Avenue in Pearl River, New York, as the “Heinz Ahlmeyer, Jr. Post Office Building”

H.R. 3703 / Public Law 109–194

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 8501 Philatelic Drive in Spring Hill, Florida, as the “Staff Sergeant Michael Schafer Post Office Building”

H.R. 3770 / Public Law 109–195

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 205 West Washington Street in Knox, Indiana, as the “Grant W. Green Post Office Building”

H.R. 3825 / Public Law 109–196

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 770 Trumbull Drive in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as the “Clayton J. Smith Memorial Post Office Building”

H.R. 3830 / Public Law 109–197

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 130 East Marion Avenue in Punta Gorda, Florida, as the “U.S. Cleveland Post Office Building”

H.R. 3989 / Public Law 109–198

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 37598 Goodhue Avenue in Dennison, Minnesota, as the “Albert H. Quie Post Office”

H.R. 4053 / Public Law 109–199

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 545 North Rimsdale Avenue in Covina, California, as the “Lillian Kinkella Keil Post Office”

H.R. 4107 / Public Law 109–200

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 1826 Pennsylvania Avenue in Baltimore, Maryland, as the “Maryland State Delegate Lena K. Lee Post Office Building”

H.R. 4152 / Public Law 109–201

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 320 High Street in Clinton, Massachusetts, as the “Raymond J. Salmon Post Office”

H.R. 4295 / Public Law 109–202

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 12760 South Park Avenue in Riverton, Utah, as the “Mont and Mark Stephensen Veterans Memorial Post Office Building”

S. 2089 / Public Law 109–203

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 1271 North King Street in Honolulu, Oahu, Hawaii, as the “Hiram L. Fong Post Office Building”

S. 2320 / Public Law 109–204

To make available funds included in the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program for fiscal year 2006, and for other purposes

Approved March 23

H.R. 1053 / Public Law 109–205

To authorize the extension of nondiscriminatory treatment (normal trade relations treatment) to the products of Ukraine

H.R. 1691 / Public Law 109–206

To designate the Department of Veterans Affairs outpatient clinic in Appleton, Wisconsin, as the “John H. Bradley Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic”

S. 2064 / Public Law 109–207

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 122 South Bill Street in Francesville, Indiana, as the Malcolm Melville “Mac” Lawrence Post Office

S. 2275 / Public Law 109–208

National Flood Insurance Program Enhanced Borrowing Authority Act of 2006

Approved March 24

H.R. 4826 / Public Law 109–209

To extend through December 31, 2006, the authority of the Secretary of the Army to accept and expend funds contributed by non-Federal public entities to expedite the processing of permits

S. 1184 / Public Law 109–210

To waive the passport fees for a relative of a deceased member of the Armed Forces proceeding abroad to visit the grave of such member or to attend a funeral or memorial service for such member

S. 2363 / Public Law 109–211

To extend the educational flexibility program under section 4 of the Education Flexibility Partnership Act of 1999