

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Combatant Commanders

January 24, 2007

It's my pleasure to welcome Secretary Gates, the Joint Chiefs, and the combatant commanders to the White House. First of all, it's an honor to be in the presence of such fine citizens, men who are doing their duty to protect this country. And we have no more solemn duty than to protect America in this war against extremists and radicals.

I'm looking forward to our discussion about the theaters in which you are representing America. I'm looking forward to discussion about the new way forward in Iraq. I thank you for your service.

I also call upon the Senate to move quickly to confirm Lieutenant General Petraeus as the commander of the Multi-National Forces—Iraq, Admiral Fallon as the commander of Central Command, and General Casey as the Army Chief of Staff. It is important to get these three fine individuals in their posts as soon as possible so that we have continuity as we do our duty to protect the American people.

We'll have a good, wide-ranging discussion here, and then Laura and I have the high privilege of welcoming you and your spouses to dinner tonight. Welcome, and thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:06 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center and Fort Leavenworth; and Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Remarks in a Discussion on Health Care in Lee's Summit, Missouri

January 25, 2007

The President. Rich, thank you very much for inviting us here to Saint Luke's. We had a fascinating tour of your facility. It is safe to say that Saint Luke's hospital—the Saint Luke's Health System understands the power of technology to help compassionate doctors

and nurses better do their job. And technology is a—we saw, like, unbelievably interesting medical programs, programs that enable doctors to better analyze disease and deal with disease before it becomes acute, which is important.

The reason why I emphasize the information technology aspects of this hospital is that part of the role of Government is to encourage people to make decisions to help hold the cost of health care down. And when a hospital modernizes, when you go from files to electronics, it helps hold the cost of health care down.

One of the interesting things about medicine is that medicine tends to have lagged behind the rest of our economy when it comes to information technology. And yet under Rich's leadership, this facility and its sister facilities are doing some really interesting reforms we'll talk about a little bit.

I want to thank George Pagels, who is the CEO of this facility. George, thank you. He's a doctor and gave us the tour—met a lot of really fine nurses and docs, by the way. I appreciate Senator Bond joining us. Thanks for coming—and of course, our Secretary of Health and Human Services, who will say something here in a minute.

I want to talk a little bit about a comprehensive strategy to make health care available and affordable. There is no question in my mind that a proper role for the Federal Government is to help the poor and the elderly and the diseased get health care. We'll do that. And to the extent that these important programs need to be reformed and strengthened, we will do that as well. Witness what we did with Medicare. Medicare was old and stagnant; it needed to be reformed. We reformed it through a generous prescription drug benefit that has actually worked; it's helped our seniors. And so we will do our duty at the Federal level, and when we find deficiencies in Federal programs, we will work to correct them, for the good of the citizens and the taxpayers.

The second aspect of our responsibility is to work to make health care available and affordable for all our citizens, and the best way to do that is through private health insurance. Therein lies part of the debate we have in Washington. We believe the private sector