

health insurance like the standard tax deduction for dependents. A family with health insurance would get a \$15,000 deduction from incoming payroll taxes, whether they buy coverage on their own or get it from their employer. If you're single, you get a \$7,500 deduction. The whole purpose of the plan is to level the playing field to give those who buy insurance on their own the same tax advantage as those who get insurance through their jobs.

I know I'm not talking to Senators here—*[laughter]*—but I do want to assure you all that I will continue to fulfill my obligation to put people on our benches who will strictly interpret the law and not legislate from the bench.

We've got a full agenda, and we're working well together. Ours is an agenda based upon solid philosophy that we don't need more government, but we need more trust in the American people. Ours is an agenda that says, if you have more of your own money, the country benefits. And ours is an agenda that recognizes our primary responsibility is to stay steady and focused and defeat the enemy of the United States of America and leave behind a more secure America for generations to come.

The greatest honor of being the President is to represent a group of decent, honorable folks. And those are the people of the United States. I cannot tell you what a joy it is to travel our country and to meet quiet, compassionate people who, on a daily basis, love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

Oftentimes, I'm asked to define the strength of the country—and, sure, our military is strong, and we're going to keep it that way; and, yes, our wallets are fat, and hopefully, they get fatter for all of us. But the great strength of the United States of America, the true strength of this country is the fact that there are millions of fellow citizens who, on a daily basis, reach out to somebody in need; they reach out to say, "How can I help you, brother? What can I do to make your life better?" People who say, "If you need a little love in your life, you can count on me." This country is changing one heart and one soul and one body at a time because

we've got millions of our fellow citizens who love our country and love their neighbors.

I'm optimistic about this country. You've got to know something about your President: I am some kind of optimistic about where we're headed. We're a great nation, and we intend to keep it that way. And I thank you for your help.

May God bless you. May God bless your families. And may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:39 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gloria Norwood, wife of former Representative Charles W. Norwood, Jr.; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors

March 16, 2007

A couple of weeks ago I announced that Senator Dole and Secretary Shalala agreed to chair a Commission of our fellow citizens to look into the health care that our veterans and those in the military are receiving.

Today I was pleased to meet the Commission members that have been selected. We've got Purple Heart recipients; got the wife of a severely wounded troop; we've got a doctor; we've got compassionate people who all care about whether or not our Government is fulfilling its responsibility to make sure our health care systems, both at DOD, Defense Department, and at the Veterans Administration, are meeting our obligations.

And I assured the members of this committee that I will support their work and will address the problems that they find. We owe it to those who wear the uniform and their families to make sure that our troops have the best, and that's what this Commission is meant to do. And I thank you for your willingness to serve. You're doing the country a great service, because the Commission report will ensure that service goes beyond my time in office. In other words, it'll really set

the stage for this Presidency and other Presidencies, set a standard that we expect Government to follow.

So thanks for being here. Appreciate your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 a.m. in Room 180 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Bob Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, Cochairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Shamrock Presentation Ceremony With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland

March 16, 2007

Thank you. *Taoiseach*, good morning—or should I say, “top o’ the morning.” [*Laughter*] I’m really pleased that you came back to the White House. I’m looking forward to our discussions. And I cannot thank you enough for your strong leadership in resolving the issues of Northern Ireland, and I stand ready to help.

I gratefully accept the bowl of shamrocks. I am delighted that you have joined us, once again, to celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day. Saint Patrick’s Day is an occasion that unites two distinct groups of Americans, those who are of Irish descent and those who wish they were. [*Laughter*] Whether they’re Irish today or every day, Americans are grateful for our country’s Irish heritage and the enduring friendship that exists between Ireland and the United States is strong.

The ties that bind our two nations stretch all the way back to our country’s founding. Ireland gave us at least nine signers of the Declaration of Independence and many more who risked their lives to defend it. Irish Americans fought valiantly to preserve the Union in our Civil War. They helped turn back the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century. And they’re fighting bravely in today’s war on terror, risking their lives to secure a future of freedom and peace for generations to come.

Many of Ireland’s sons and daughters came to our shores to escape poverty and

famine. Once here, they helped us build and strengthen this great Nation with their gifts of industry and talent and faith. Irish workers built our railroads, our cathedrals, and our cities. Irish writers and musicians have enriched our literature and our culture. Irish priests and nuns established parochial schools that have helped generations of children build lives of prosperity and purpose. And with their many contributions, Irish Americans remind us of our heritage as a nation of immigrants and our duty to remain a welcoming society.

In 1783, President George Washington—I refer to him as the first George W.—[*laughter*]—wrote to recent Irish immigrants in New York that “America is open to receive the oppressed and persecuted of all nations,” and he expressed his wish that the blessings of equal liberty and unrestrained commerce would one day prevail in Ireland.

Well, today, Ireland is a free, independent, and very prosperous nation. Ireland now has one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. And over the past decade, our two nations have enjoyed a strong and growing trade relationship. And as Ireland prospers, a land whose people came to America seeking a better life is now attracting to its own shores immigrants with those very same dreams.

It has been said that the Irish, like the presence of God, are to be found everywhere. On this Saint Patrick’s Day, we’re grateful for the presence of the Irish in our country. And we are blessed by your presence here at the White House, *Taoiseach*. I thank you for coming to help us celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day and honor the friendship between our two nations. In the words of the Irish proverb, “May the Lord keep you in His hand and never close His fist too tight.” [*Laughter*]

Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.