Good morning, distinguished journalists. I want to thank President Bush for the new meeting. It has been, as always, very constructive. This meeting has given my team and myself the opportunity to reiterate our commitment with democracy.

We have three main objectives in our administration: to consolidate democratic security; to create more and more confidence in Colombia for people to invest in our country; and to fulfill very important social goals, to fulfill social goals before the deadline of the social millennium goals.

Many people ask me, why you call your policy on security democratic security? Because it is security with human rights; because it is security for all Colombians; because it is security for trade union leaders, for those member of the opposition, for those who agree in their ideas with my Government, security for all Colombians.

During my 5-year term, we have healthy elections, and Colombians have enjoyed effectiveness of our freedoms because of our policy on security. Before my administration, many Colombians had the idea that the only way for my country to reach peace, it was by private criminal organizations. Today, because of the efficacy of our administration, the vast majority of Colombians are convinced that we will defeat terrorists by institutional ways, that the only way Colombia has for the future is the way of our democratic institutions.

It is very important that the United State considers the necessity to advancing Plan Colombia. We haven't won yet in eradicating illicit drugs, but we are winning. And it is very important, the free trade agreement. I will explain in Capitol Hill, and I will explain to the American citizens the same I explain to President Bush this morning: The more our country can export, the better for my country to have high-quality jobs with affiliation to the social security system.

We are doing our best to defeat terrorists in a open country. Everyone in the world can go to Colombia, can oversight what our country is doing. And what our country does today is in favor of democracy.

I want to thank President Bush, his team, the people of Congress, and the American citizens for the help all of you have given our country. This integration is very important to promote democracy, to promote freedoms—freedom, to promote social justice. This is—these are our commitments.

Thank you, President Bush.

President Bush. *Gracias, amigo.*

President Uribe. *Muchas gracias.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:51 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lina Maria Moreno de Uribe, wife of President Uribe. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to the Associated General Contractors of America and a Question-and-Answer Session

May 2, 2007

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Please be seated. Steve, unlike you, I have trouble finding the front end of a front-end loader. [*Laughter*] Thanks for having me. I'm proud to be here with the AGC. It's the oldest and largest construction trade association in our country. I understand I'm not the first Bush to have ever addressed the AGC convention; a person I now refer to as 41 addressed you. [*Laughter*] And I appreciated your hospitality to him then, and I appreciate your hospitality to me today.

I want to talk about—a little bit about our economy, and I want to talk a lot about our security. And I thank you for giving me a chance to come by. What I thought I would do is try to keep my remarks relatively brief and then maybe give you all some time to ask some questions.

First, I want to thank Steve. Steve is a Virginia Tech grad, and our hearts are still heavy as a result of that terrible incident there on the campus. And yet, the amazing thing about that campus—and a lot of other places around the country—is we've got a great resiliency; people bounce back from tragedy. So, Steve, you can tell the Virginia Tech community, we're still thinking about them and appreciate very much the great kind of strength of spirit there—at least I saw that there in Blacksburg, Virginia.

I want to thank two Members of the Senate who have joined us. First, John Warner,

from Virginia. Senator, thank you for coming; ranking member of the House Military Committee he is a—Armed Services Committee—he's a strong supporter of the troops. And I appreciate Senator Joe Lieberman. John is a Republican; Senator Lieberman is an independent. Joe Lieberman is one of these—I would call him a unique soul who followed his conscience, stood for what he believed in, in the face of a political firestorm. And he proved that if you stand on conviction, the people will follow. And I look forward to working with these two really fine public servants to make the decisions necessary to protect the United States. And I'm honored you all are here, and thank you for coming.

I like to be in the room of builders and doers and problemsolvers and entrepreneurs. And I thank you for what you do every day. Your job is to improve infrastructure and provide work for people. Our job is to provide an environment so that you can build infrastructure and provide work for people. Our job is not to try to create wealth in government. Our job is to create an environment that encourages small businesses and entrepreneurials—and entrepreneurs.

I believe this administration has done that, particularly since we cut taxes. You know, most small businesses and self-employed people, people in your line of work, or many of them, are not corporations. They're sole proprietorships or subchapter S corporations or limited partnerships that pay tax at the individual income-tax level.

And therefore, when you cut taxes, we not only—individual rates, we're not only cutting them on the people who work for you or work with you; we're cutting them on you. And my attitude is the more money you have in your treasuries, the more likely it is you'll be able to expand. The more incentive you have to buy a piece of equipment, the more likely it is you'll buy one, which means that somebody is going to have to build it for you.

The best way to enhance progrowth economic policies is to cut the taxes on the American people, and that's exactly what we did. These taxes are set to expire. In my judgment, if Congress really wants to create a progrowth attitude for a long time coming, they ought to make the tax relief we passed permanent. They ought not to let them expire.

My attitude is this about the budget: The best way to balance the budget is to keep taxes low, encourage growth, which enhances tax revenues, and be wise about how we spend money. I worry about the attitude, "Don't worry; we're just going to raise the taxes on some to balance the budget." No, they'll raise the tax on some and figure out new ways to spend the money. And we're proving that progrowth economic policies with fiscal discipline can work, and our budgets are shrinking. The best way to keep them shrinking is keep the economy growing and be wise about—and setting priorities with your money.

There's other things we can do in Washington. We've got to make sure health care is affordable and available, without inviting the Federal Government to run the health care system. Got to do something about these junk lawsuits that I'm sure you're concerned about. We've got to continue to invest in the Nation's infrastructure.

We also need an immigration system that upholds the rule of law and treats people with respect. We need an immigration system that secures our borders and meets the needs of our economy. As I said in the speech down in Florida the other day, we need an immigration system without amnesty and without animosity. In other words, we need a comprehensive immigration reform. I want to thank you for the stand you have taken in working with Congress on comprehensive immigration reform. I join you.

I will work with both Republicans and Democrats to get a bill to my desk before the summer is out, hopefully. And I thank the leadership in the Senate that's working through this issue. I want to thank Senator Jon Kyl of Arizona for working hard on this, Mel Martinez, Arlen Specter, Lindsey Graham. There's a series of Senators who are working with Ted Kennedy, who is a strong advocate for comprehensive immigration reform. And I appreciate the leadership he's taken, along with Ken Salazar of Colorado. We're making progress. There's a lot more work to be done, and your help is important. And so I want to thank you for coming up with a rational, reasonable, logical plan.

I want to talk to you about the other main issue we have here in America, and that is your security. The most important job we have is to secure the United States of America. That's the most important job of the Federal Government. You expect us to spend enormous amounts of energy protecting you, and that's what we're doing. I vowed to the American people we would not tire when it came to protecting you, and we're not going to. Matter of fact, I spend a lot of time thinking about this issue. I wish I didn't have to spend time thinking about the issue, but I do because there's still an enemy out there that would like to do America harm. And therefore, at this hour, we've got men and women in uniform engaging our enemies around the world. Our strategy is, we've got to keep the pressure on them. We would rather fight them there so we don't have to face them here.

And the most visible and violent front of this global war is Iraq. And it's a tough fight. It has been a difficult year for the American people, and I understand that. It reached—last year was, this battle reached its most difficult point to date. The terrorists and extremists and radicals set off a wave of sectarian violence that engulfed that young democracy's capital. It threatened to destabilize the entire country.

So earlier this year, I laid out a new strategy in Iraq. I named a new commander to carry it out, General David Petraeus. I want to give you some facts about the new strategy and talk about why Iraq relates directly to the safety of the American people.

The most important fact about our new strategy, it is fundamentally different from the previous strategy. The previous strategy wasn't working the way we wanted it to work. It's interesting; they run polls—and I accept that—and it said, you know, "We don't approve of what's happening in Iraq." That was what the poll said last fall and winter, you know. And had they polled me, I'd have said the same thing. [*Laughter*] I didn't approve of what was happening in Iraq, and so we put a new strategy in that was fundamentally different.

First of all, Petraeus, General Petraeus is an expert on counterinsurgency, and his top priority is to help the Iraqi leaders—who, by the way, were elected by nearly 12 million of their citizens—secure their population. And the reason why is, is that this young democracy needed some time to make important political decisions to help reconcile the country. After a thorough review, we concluded the best way to help Iraq's leaders to provide security was to send more troops into the nation's capital, into the country; was to send reinforcements to those troops which were already there. And their job was to go after the extremists and radicals who were inciting sectarian violence. Their job was to help get Baghdad under control. And their job was to continue to train Iraqi forces for the day they can secure the country on their own.

Last week, General Petraeus came to Washington, and he updated me, and he updated the Congress on the early stages of this new strategy—and I repeat, early stages. He reminded us that not all the reinforcements he'd requested have arrived, that it's going to be at least until the end of this summer that he will know whether or not the new strategy has achieved successes. And that means the strategy is in early stages.

My view is the Congress and the country ought to give General Petraeus time to see whether or not this works. And it's interesting, he goes up in front of the Senate and gets confirmed unanimously. And he said, "I need more troops"—during his testimony—"send me more troops, and I will go implement a new plan." They said, okay, fine, we confirm you. And yet there are some doubts in Washington whether or not they ought to send the troops. The troops are going. The strategy is new. And the general said, "Let's give it some time to work to see whether or not it's successful, and I'll be able to report back to the country by the end of this summer."

The most significant element of the new strategy is being carried out in the capital. The whole purpose is to secure the capital. My theory is, and it's a good one, is that if the capital is in chaos, the country can't—it's going to be difficult for the country to survive.

The strategy is also being carried out in what's called surrounding belts. This is the areas that kind of arc around the capital, and

it's a place where there's been a lot of planning and plotting and attacking. Three American brigades, totaling about 12,000 reinforcements, have taken up their positions in the Baghdad area. The fourth brigade, fourth of five, is heading into Baghdad this week. And the fifth is on its way. In other words, you just don't take five brigades and move them in overnight. There's a sequencing that has to take place, and that sequencing is now being completed.

The Iraqis, by the way, have increased their own forces. In other words, this is a joint operation. This is the Americans and coalition forces helping the Iraqis provide security so that the average person can live a peaceful life. That's what they want. And so we've got about a total of 80,000 combat forces now in the Baghdad area—U.S. combined with the Iraqi forces. The position of the forces is shifting. We used to have our forces live in bases outside the city. They would go in at night or during the day and then leave and go back home at night. They did a fine job, as you'd expect our U.S. forces to do or the Iraqi forces would do so. And then when they would leave, killers would move back in.

And so now we've got American troops are now living and working in small neighborhood posts called joint security stations. This is what's fundamentally different from the strategy. Our troops, with the Iraqis, go into a neighborhood, and they stay. They operate side by side with the Iraqi forces.

What's interesting is, is that the plan, General Petraeus's plan, is to help build trust. And when you build trust, you end up getting people buying into a centralized government, a unity government, a country that is united. And not only that, you end up getting cooperation from people. Remember, most people want to live peaceful lives. I hope this make sense to you because I firmly believe that Iraqi moms want their child to grow up in a peaceful world, just like American moms do.

And so we're seeing some gains. The interesting thing about this is that the nature of this strategy is that the most important gains are often the least dramatic. It doesn't generate much attention when violence does not happen. Instead, some important indicators of progress in the security plan are less visible. I would like to share some with you.

The level of cooperation from local residents is important; it's an indication as to whether or not we're making progress. Our ability to take weapons off the street and break up extremist groups; the willingness of Iraqis to join their security forces is an interesting measurement; and finally, it's important to measure the level of sectarian violence. If the objective is to bring security to the capital, one measurement is whether or not sectarian violence is declining. These measures are really not flashy. In other words, they're not headline-grabbing measures. They certainly can't compete with a car bomb or a suicide attack, but they are interesting indications. And as General Petraeus reported, these are heading in the right direction.

For example, General Petraeus reports that American and Iraqi forces received more tips from local residents in the past 4 months than during any other 4-month period on record. People are beginning to have some confidence, and they're beginning to step forth with information, information that will help them live normal lives.

Thanks to these tips the number of weapons caches that are being seized are growing each month. Better intelligence has led American and Iraqi forces in Baghdad and the surrounding belts to conduct operations against Sunni and Shi'a extremists. My attitude is, if murderers run free, it's going to be hard to convince the people of any society that the government is worth supporting. And therefore, the Iraqis and U.S. forces and coalition forces are after murderers, regardless of their religious affiliation.

American and Iraqi forces captured the head of a major car bombing ring recently, the leader of a bombing network with ties to Iran, members of a death squad that terrorized a Baghdad neighborhood, the leader of a secret militia cell that kidnaped and executed American soldiers. These are just some examples of what happens when you start to earn the confidence of the people.

Baghdad residents see actions, they grow more confident. Interestingly enough, General Petraeus reported that in his short time he's been there and in the short time that

this plan is being implemented—remember, it's not fully implemented; three of the brigades are present, are in place; the fourth brigade has just moved into Baghdad, and it will be in place relatively soon; and the fifth is on its way—that in spite of the fact that we haven't fully implemented the plan, the number of sectarian murders in Baghdad has dropped substantially.

Even as the sectarian attacks have declined, the overall level of violence in Baghdad remains high. Illegal armed groups continue their attacks; insurgents remain deadly. In other words, as we report progress, it's very important for us to make sure that the American people understand there's still issues, there's still challenges. Illegal armed groups need to be dealt with, and we are.

The primary reason for the high level of violence is this: Al Qaida has ratcheted up its campaign of high-profile attacks, including deadly suicide bombers carried out by foreign terrorists. In the past 3 weeks, Al Qaida has sent suicide bombers into the Iraqi Parliament. Or they send a suicide attack into an American military base. These attacks may seem like random killing; they're not. They're part of Al Qaida's calculated campaign to reignite sectarian violence in Baghdad, to discourage the Iraqi citizen, and to break support for the war here at home. This is what these murderers are trying to achieve.

I don't need to remind you who Al Qaida is. Al Qaida is the group that plot and planned and trained killers to come and kill people on our soil. The same bunch that is causing havoc in Iraq were the ones who came and murdered our citizens. Now, I've got to tell you, that day deeply affected my decisionmaking. And I vowed that I would do anything that I possibly could, within the law, to protect the American citizens against further attack by these ideologues, by these murderers.

And so when I'm talking about Al Qaida in Iraq, I fully recognize what happens in Iraq matters here at home. Despite their tremendous brutality, they failed to provoke the large-scale sectarian reprisals that Al Qaida wants. The recent attacks are not the revenge killings that some have called a civil war; they are a systematic assault on the entire nation. Al Qaida is public enemy number one in Iraq. And all people of that society ought to come together and recognize the threat, unite against the threat, and reconcile their differences.

For America, the decision we face in Iraq is not whether we ought to take sides in a civil war; it's whether we stay in the fight against the same international terrorist network that attacked us on 9/11. I strongly believe it's in our national interest to stay in the fight.

As you watch the developments in Baghdad, it's important to understand that we will not be able to prevent every Al Qaida attack. When a terrorist is willing to kill himself to kill others, it's really hard to stop him. Yet, over time, the security operation in Baghdad is designed to shrink the areas where Al Qaida can operate; it's designed to bring out more intelligence about their presence and designed to allow American and Iraqi forces to dismantle their network.

We have a strategy to deal with Al Qaida in Iraq. But any time you say to a bunch of coldblooded killers, success depends on no violence, all that does is hand them the opportunity to be successful. And it's hard. I know it's hard for the American people to turn on their TV screens and see the horrific violence. It speaks volumes about the American desire to protect lives of innocent people, America's deep concern about human rights and human dignity. It also speaks volumes about Al Qaida, that they're willing to take innocent life to achieve political objectives.

The terrorists will continue to fight back. In other words, they understand what they're doing. And casualties are likely to stay high. Yet, day by day, block by block, we are steadfast in helping Iraqi leaders counter the terrorists, protect their people, and reclaim the capital. And if I didn't think it was necessary for the security of the country, I wouldn't put our kids in harm's way.

We're seeing significant progress from our new strategy in Anbar Province as well. That's a largely Sunni area west of Baghdad. It's been a hotbed for Al Qaida and insurgents. According to a captured Al Qaida document—in other words, according to what Al Qaida has said—and by the way, in a war to protect America, it's really important to

take the words of the enemy very seriously—according to this document, the terrorists' goal is to take over Anbar and make it their home base in Iraq. According to the document we captured—that is a document from Al Qaida, the same people that attacked us in America—their objective is to find safe haven in this part of Iraq. They would bring them closer—that would bring them closer to their objective, their stated objective, which is to destroy the young Iraqi democracy, to help them build a radical Islamic empire based upon their dark ideology, and launch new attacks on the United States, at home and abroad. That's what they've said they want to do.

Al Qaida has pursued their objective with a ruthless campaign of violence. They can't persuade people through logic; they have to terrorize people and force people to try to allow them to impose their point of view. And not long ago, it looked like they might prevail in Anbar—looked pretty grim, it really did. Then something began to change because we were steadfast, because our troops and our diplomats are courageous people. Tribal sheiks finally said, enough is enough. The local leaders said, we're tired of it. And they joined the fight against Al Qaida.

The sheiks and their followers knew exactly who the terrorists were, and they began to provide highly specific intelligence to American and Iraqi forces. In asymmetrical warfare, you've got to have good intelligence in order to be able to deal with the enemy. In the old days, you could see platoons moving, you could see ships floating along, aircraft in formation flying to a location. In this war it's different. In this war you have to know specifically where a IED factory may be. You have to know in advance that somebody's getting ready to slide into society and kill innocent in order to achieve an objective. Intelligence is important. And so they began to provide intelligence, all aiming to secure their part of Iraq so they could live in peace.

They began to encourage their young men to volunteer for the security forces. The number of Iraqi Army and police recruits in Anbar has skyrocketed. It's an interesting measurement, isn't it? There's a threat to the security of their people, the local leaders said, why don't you join up to help defend us, and the number of recruits is significant.

Our commanders saw this as an opportunity to step up the pressure on Al Qaida. Our commanders made the recommendation from the field that they could use more troops to help secure Anbar. And so I ordered additional U.S. marines and special operation forces to Anbar; as part of our reinforcement package, 4,000 of the troops are going into Anbar.

Together, American and Iraqi forces are striking powerful blows. We've cleared out terrorist strongholds like Ramadi and Fallujah. We're there with the Iraqis so that they can't take those cities back—"they," the enemy. American and Iraqi forces are operating in places that have been too dangerous to go before, and people are beginning to see something change.

In Ramadi, for example, our forces have seized nearly as many weapons caches in the past 4 months as they did in all of last year. We've captured key Al Qaida leaders. We're on the hunt. We're keeping the pressure on them, in Iraq and everywhere else in the world in which they try to hide. These Al Qaida leaders are revealing important details about how their network operates inside of Iraq.

Al Qaida has responded with sickening brutality. They've bombed fellow Sunnis in prayer at a mosque. They murdered local residents with chlorine truck bombs. They recruited children as young as 12 years old to carry out suicide attacks. But this time, the Sunni tribes in Anbar are refusing to be intimidated.

They are showing that Al Qaida's ideology lacks popular appeal and staying power. Ultimately, what matters is what you believe. The United States and our coalition and most Iraqis believe in liberty. Al Qaida believes in imposing their dark vision on others and are willing to use death and murder to do so.

I appreciate the determination of the Iraqi people. I appreciate their courage. I appreciate the fact that these tribal sheiks have stood up in Anbar, and we will stand with them. Our men and women in uniform took Al Qaida's safe haven away in Afghanistan,

and we're not going to let them reestablish a safe haven in Iraq.

The military gains achieved by our new operations are designed to give Iraq's Government time to make political progress. We fully recognize that the military cannot solve this problem alone, that there has to be political reconciliation and economic process—progress.

You know, the Iraq Government has been in office about a year, and they're beginning to make some progress toward political benchmarks it has set, political benchmarks I support. The legislature has passed a budget that commits $10 billion for reconstruction projects. That's $10 billion of the Iraqi people's money—positive sign. The assembly met. They appropriated money for the good of the Iraqi people. They spent $7.3 billion to train and equip their own security forces. The council of ministers has approved legislation that would provide a framework for equitable sharing of oil resources. We strongly believe—by the way, both Republicans, Democrats, and independents believe strongly—that a good oil bill will help unite the country. That's why it's a benchmark. And they're making—this Government is making progress toward an important piece of legislation that would help the security track progress, as well as the political and economic track.

The Government has formed a committee to organize Provincial elections. That's important. If you want people buying into government, there needs to be Provincial elections, so that when the money is distributed from the central government, there's a representative government there to spend the money. Leaders have taken initial steps toward an agreement on de-Ba'athification policy. That's an important piece of reconciliation that we think ought to go forward. A committee is meeting with all major Iraqi groups to review the Constitution. And there's a key conference tomorrow and Friday in Egypt, where Prime Minister Maliki will work to build greater support from Iraq's neighbors and the international community. It's in the world's interest that this young democracy survive. It's certainly in the interest of the neighborhood that Iraq be a country that can govern itself and sustain itself and defend itself, a Government which rejects radicalism. And it's in the world's interest.

And so Condoleezza Rice—I talked to her last night on her way out of town—is heading over to Egypt. And she's going to represent our country—and she represents it well, by the way—and will do so in Egypt. It's going to be an important international conference, and I'm looking forward to seeing the outcome of that conference.

Iraq's leaders still have got a lot to do, don't get me wrong. Yes, there's progress, but they've got a lot more to do. And the United States expects them to do it—just like I expect them to remain courageous and just like they expect us to keep our word. And so what's interesting is, is that the Iraqis are making a calculation: Will the United States of America keep its word? Because if not, they want to do something different. And I think it's going to be important for us to keep signaling them as they make progress, we appreciate the progress; more to do, no question about it, and we expect them to do it, but they can also count on us to keep our word.

The stakes are high, really high in Iraq. General Petraeus is beginning to carry out the strategy, yet the Democrat leaders in Congress have chosen this time to try to force a precipitous withdrawal. In other words, I was presented a bill last night that said, "There's a timetable. You had to leave—start leaving by July 1st and definitely be leaving by October 1st." That didn't make any sense to me, to impose the will of politicians over the recommendations of our military commanders in the field. So I vetoed the bill.

That phase of the process is now over, and a new phase has begun. Later on this afternoon, leaders from both parties and both chambers are coming down to the White House. And I look forward to meeting with them. I am confident that with goodwill on both sides that we can move beyond political statements and agree on a bill that gives our troops the funds and the flexibility they need to do the job that we have asked them to do.

As we move forward the debate, there are some other things that all of us in Washington should keep in mind. First of all, debate is good. I have no problem with debates.

This issue of Iraq and this war on terror deserves a serious discussion across the United States. We don't agree on every issue, but one of the things I have heard here in Washington is that people understand the consequences of failure in Iraq.

If we were to leave Iraq before the Government can defend itself, there would be a security vacuum. Extremists and radicals love vacuums and chaos. It gives them a chance to use their tactics, tactics of death, to spread their ideology. The more chaotic a region, for example, or the less control there is in a region, the more the state looks like a failed state, these people that attacked us on September the 11th can be emboldened. It will encourage them. It will enable them to achieve objectives. I'm deeply concerned about a vacuum in Iraq encouraging rival extremist factions to compete for power.

I worry about a situation where if radicals took control of a country like Iraq, they would have oil resources to use at their disposal to try to achieve their objectives. You can attack a nation several ways. One, you can get 19 kids to fly airplanes into buildings, or you can gain control of something a country needs and deny that country access to that, in this case, oil, and run the price of oil up, all attempting to inflict serious economic damage.

And by the way, an opportunity for radicals and extremists to gain resources would not only enable them to inflict economic damage, it would enable them to achieve other objectives. They'd have more resources at their disposal. All the radicals and extremists in Iraq don't want to attack America, I'm not saying that, but many do. And therein lies the danger to our country.

Al Qaida terrorists who behead captives and order suicide bombings in Iraq would not simply be satisfied to see us gone. A retreat in Iraq would mean that they would likely follow us here. A retreat in Iraq would say to a lot of people around the world, particularly in the Middle East, America can't keep its word. It would certainly confirm Al Qaida's belief that we're weak and soft as a society. It would embolden them to be able to recruit. It would more likely enable them to find safe haven and sanctuary.

No responsible leader in Washington has an interest in letting this happen. Whether you are a Republican or Democrat, there is no benefit in allowing a widespread humanitarian nightmare to consume Iraq. There would be no benefit in allowing chaos to spill out of Iraq and into the broader Middle East. There would be no benefit in emboldening Iran and endangering our allies in the region. And there would be no benefit in allowing the same terrorist network that attacked America on 9/11 to gain a safe haven from which to attack us again. Even if you think it was a mistake to go into Iraq, it would be a far greater mistake to pull out now.

This is a frustrating war. Nobody likes war. You know, I know full well how many Americans react to what they see on their TV screens. I wish there was an easy way out; that's what people wish. But there is no easy way out. The easy road would be the wrong road, in my opinion. Leaving now would be short term but bring short-term satisfaction at the cost of long-term disaster. The outcome in Iraq will have a direct impact on the security of our people here at home. And no matter how tempting it might be, it would be unforgivable for leaders in Washington to allow politics and impatience to stand in the way of protecting the American people.

Success in this fight is going to be difficult. It will require sacrifice. It's going to require time. But for all the—all we hear about the consequences of failure in Iraq, we also shouldn't forget the consequences of success. I share with people—and I do this quite often—but I find it incredibly ironic that during my time as President, certainly one of my best friends, and soon to be another best friend, are the Prime Ministers of Japan. I had a very close personal relationship with Prime Minister Koizumi. And last weekend at Camp David, Laura and I had a chance to—at the White House, and then eventually at Camp David, we hosted Prime Minister Abe. You know, my dad fought the Japanese. He was an 18-year-old kid, right out of high school, went into the Navy, was a torpedo bomber. Many of your relatives did the same thing. They fought the Japanese with all their soul and all their might in a bloody, bloody conflict. Japan was a sworn enemy of the United States of America. I doubt in 1948

or '49 anybody could have hardly predicted that a President would stand up and say, I have found that these two Prime Ministers of Japan are good to work with to achieve peace.

It's an interesting statement, isn't it, about the possibilities of liberty to change history. And so with Prime Minister Koizumi and Prime Minister Abe, we talked about security. We talked about working closely together to convince the leader of North Korea to give up his nuclear weapons ambitions and programs. We talked about helping the young democracy of Iraq survive in the midst of the Middle East. We fully understand that the long-term way to protect America is to defeat an ideology of hate with an ideology of hope. I learned firsthand the power of liberty to transform an enemy into an ally.

I firmly believe that a democracy can survive in the Middle East, and I believe it is a necessary part of laying a foundation of peace for generations to come.

Good to be with you. Thank you all. [*Applause*] Sit down. Thank you. I'll take some questions. Yes, sir. You get to start since you're the boss. [*Laughter*]

War on Terror in Iraq/Emergency Supplemental Appropriations

Q. Thank you. In May of 2006, my second cousin was on his second tour in Iraq. Corporal Cory Palmer—he's in the Marines—he was on patrol in a Humvee, and they ran over a roadside bomb. He and three others in that Humvee perished. What do I need to do, what do we need to do to help you so that my second cousin, and others like him, have not died or been injured in vain?

The President. Thank you. The horrors of war come home to every—to a lot of families in America. Yesterday I had the honor of meeting with moms and dads and wives, in this case, children, who have lost a loved one. And I've met with a lot of families, sadly enough. Most of the time, I hear that very question. Actually, it's not a question; it's a statement.

Here's what I've heard. One, my loved one died doing what he or she wanted to do. Two, do not allow that loved one to have died in vain. In other words, it is an interesting spirit amongst the—now, listen, I visit with some who say, "Get out; I wish you hadn't have done this in the first place." But by far the vast majority reflect what you asked: What does it take?

First of all, it takes, in order to make sure your loved one didn't die in vain, is to have the will and determination necessary to succeed. One of the reasons I've come to speak to you is because I must continually explain to the American people the stakes in this war, the consequences of failure, and the consequences of success. In order for me to do my part to make sure your second cousin and anybody else who lost a loved one in Iraq didn't die in vain, is to continue to take the case to the American people, why what happens in Iraq matters to them.

Secondly, one way to make sure that your second cousin didn't die in vain is to remind legislators that regardless of their position on the war, that they have got to fund our troops, that they have got to make sure that—without conditions of—that say you've got to withdraw by a certain date.

Now, here's the reason that doesn't make any sense. I'm sure a lot of Americans know intuitively it doesn't make any sense for people on Capitol Hill to say, "You must withdraw." The reason why is, first of all, we ought to rely upon conditions on the ground, and we ought to rely upon our military commanders and our diplomats on the ground to give us advice. It's the best way to conduct a war.

Secondly, imagine what a thinking enemy is doing when they hear timetables. Oh, you've got to be out by a certain date? Well, why don't we just wait. [*Laughter*]

Thirdly, what does it say to the Iraqis? Remember, there are a lot of people who basically wonder whether or not a coalition is going to stand with them as they make difficult choices. And if you're an Iraqi thinking, "Well, I may have some support; I may not. And if not, I better start hedging my bet." The Government isn't quite ready to provide the security necessary for people to be comfortable with a reduced coalition presence.

And therefore—and by the way, in order to make a unified government work, there has to be people willing to commit to that government. There have to be people willing to commit to civil society. Remember, these

people are recovering from a brutal tyrant, and they have to make a—they've got to commit, in their soul that it's worthwhile, that this Government is worthwhile. And they're not willing to make that commitment yet because they're uncertain about their future.

And so a artificial timetable of withdrawal is—really affects the psychology of the Iraqis as well. That's why I vetoed the bill. And I believe we can work together in Congress to get it done. I think that Senators would tell you there's an opportunity. And first of all, they got to fund the troops because the longer they wait in funding the troops, it's going to hurt our military. The military is spending money over in Iraq as we speak, and they need money. And if they don't get the money from the supplemental, they'll start taking it from other accounts, which could affect readiness. And it begins to affect the overall strength of our military.

And that's one reason I keep explaining that to the American people, so that they understand that this—these delays, they make nice politics in some quarters, but it's lousy for our military and the military families.

Anyway, good question, thanks for asking it. Yes, ma'am.

Freedom of the Press/War on Terror Strategy/Iraq Study Group

Q. I'd like to know, like a lot of other people in this room, we have family members who are actively involved in the security of this country in various ways. From them, we've received positive information who we consider credible, who say about the success and the good things that are happening as a result of us being in Iraq. I would like to know why and what can be done about we, the American people, receiving some of that information more from the media, more from the overall media.

The President. If you're trying to goad me into attacking the media, you're crazy. [*Laughter*]

It's interesting, people get their news all different kinds of ways. This is an interesting, different type of war. I mentioned asymmetrical warfare. That means an enemy can use inexpensive weapons to try to defeat expensive defensive armament. A car bomb, a suicide bomber, an IED, these are inexpensive weapons that create—help them achieve strategic objectives.

It's also different in that this is a volunteer army that we have fielded. And therefore, the role of government is to make sure that our families are well supported—our military families are well supported, that the veterans get everything they deserve, and that the health care is perfect as possibly can be. And we're working toward it.

By the way, I was proud of our Secretary of Defense the other day. When he found a inadequate health care, he responded, because he knows—and the Congress shares the same view—is that when we have somebody volunteering to be in combat, they and their families deserve the best that we can possibly provide.

Thirdly, back to your question. You thought I was kind of doing one of these—[*laughter*]—Washington, DC, dodges. [*Laughter*] I talk to a lot of families who have got a loved one in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere else in this global war on terror, and they are in constant communication with their loved one. That's amazing, isn't it. You've got a kid in Iraq who is e-mailing mom daily, talking about the realities of what he or she sees. Information is moving—you know, nightly news is one way, of course, but it's also moving through the blogosphere and through the Internets. It's amazing how many e-mails I see from people that are writing in what they think and what they hear.

We've all got—those of us who believe that we're doing the right thing must continually speak. Joe Lieberman has been great about continually speaking about the consequences. [*Applause*] Wait a minute—you didn't give me a chance to say something nice about Chairman Warner. [*Laughter*] He, too, has been strong.

It's just a—I can't answer your question beyond that people just need to be—the best messenger, by the way, for us is David Petraeus, because he's actually there in Baghdad, and Ryan Crocker who is actually—he's the Ambassador who is there in Baghdad. And freedom of the press is a valuable freedom here, and it's just something that we've all got to live with and value it for what it is and just continue to speak the

truth as best as we can without trying to gloss over the inherent dangers.

The interesting thing I find is that our—as the president here mentioned, there have been multiple rotations. People have gone back to Iraq. In other words, they've re-upped. And the reenlistment rate is high. People are signing up for the first time as well. And it's just an interesting statement, isn't it, about the character of our military, a character which is—says that we've got people willing to serve a cause greater than themselves.

I saw a marine yesterday—came out of Anbar. His brother, who was in the Army, was lost. And I was comforting his family as best as I possibly can, or could. And he said, "We're making great progress in Anbar; I just wanted to tell you that, President." You know, is he the kind of guy that tells the President what he wants to hear? I don't know. All I can tell you is what he told me. And I told that to David Petraeus, who confirmed it.

But slowly but surely, the truth will be known. Either we'll succeed, or we won't succeed. And the definition of success as I described is sectarian violence down. Success is not, no violence. There are parts of our own country that have got a certain level of violence to it. But success is a level of violence where the people feel comfortable about living their daily lives. And that's what we're trying to achieve.

I'm asked all the time about strategies. I liked what James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton reported back after a serious investigation of Iraq. I liked their ideas. And it's something that we should seriously consider. And their idea was, is that at some point in time, it makes sense to have a U.S. presence configured this way, embedded with Iraqi forces, training Iraqi forces, over-the-horizon presence to provide enough security to know that people will have help if they need it, but put the—more onus on a sovereign government of Iraq, a presence to keep the territorial integrity of Iraq intact, a special ops presence to go after these killers who have got their intentions on America. It's an interesting idea.

By the way, in the report it said, it is—the government may have to put in more troops to be able to get to that position. And that's what we did. We put in more troops to get to a position where we can be in some other place. The question is, who ought to make that decision, the Congress or the commanders? And as you know, my position is clear—I'm a commander guy.

Yes, sir.

Reconstruction Efforts in Iraq/President's Faith

Q. We're General Contractors of America, and what are we doing—I don't hear anything about the reconstruction of Iraq. Could you fill us in on that? Are we doing enough, as general contractors? And we are at your disposal.

And second is a personal question. What do you pray about, and how we can we pray for you?

The President. Thank you. The first question, our reconstruction strategy initially was to do big projects, and then those big projects would be destroyed by the enemy. In other words, they blow them up. And it became very frustrating. And some of the big projects were successful; a lot of them weren't. So therefore we restructured, and we said that the best way to help the Iraq—remember, Iraq has now put out 10 billion of their own money. So, step one, they're a sovereign government, and if we want to do business with Iraq, we can figure out how you can go do it—business with Iraq. They're spending their own money. That's what's important to remember.

That's actually a hopeful sign, that they appropriated money in a constitutionally elected assembly, and hopefully that money is spent in a way that encourages all Iraqis to have some faith that the central government can function rationally. I guess what I'm telling you is, the security situation was such that it made the initial phases of our reconstruction not as effective as we would have liked.

Now we're giving reconstruction money to two different groups—two groups of people, not different—two groups. One, our military commanders. It's called CERP money. They go into a neighborhood in Baghdad that had been ravaged by sectarian violence; they bring order with the Iraqis; they stay in place; they gain the confidence of the people; and

there is some reconstruction money to help provide jobs of cleaning up neighborhoods and rebuilding storefronts.

The other reconstruction money goes to what's called Provincial Reconstruction Teams. These are teams of diplomats living out in the hinterlands, working with local folks to meet objectives of the local folks, so that the people begin to see that there is one, security; two, hope; and three, tangible benefits. And that's how we're using—I'm not exactly sure what a proper role could be for you. The good news is I can find out pretty quick—[*laughter*]—"ly," quickly. [*Laughter*]

The fact that you would ask the question, how can I pray for you, speaks volumes about the United States of America. I have been amazed by the fact that millions of Americans of all faith, all political backgrounds, pray for me and Laura. And it is an unbelievably sustaining. It is comforting. It is humbling to be prayed for. Wisdom and strength and my family, is what I'd like for you to pray for.

Yes, sir.

Spread of Democracy/Freedom Agenda

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Okay, we've got dueling questions. [*Laughter*] You just lost, because he's got the mike. [*Laughter*] It's the possession deal, you know? [*Laughter*]

Q. You talked about the terror of 9/11, and what I wanted to share with you, my wife and I had our first child 2 months after 9/11. We named her Grace because we felt that the world needed some grace at the time. And what I wanted to—[*inaudible*]—is the fact that our appreciation and keeping my family and also the families of America safe for the past 5 years is—[*inaudible*].

The President. Thank you. Thank you. Grace will live—the question is, will Grace live in a peaceful world, today and tomorrow? Today, we will continue to stay on the pressure. And we're sharing intelligence, and we're on the offense. And my attitude is, is that if the United States ever let up, it would embolden, it would send the wrong signal. So we're pressuring. And I'm—I would hope whoever takes my place would have that same sense of urgency. You know, no matter what you may be hearing, it's—people, when they get in that Oval Office and take a look at the realities of the world will, I suspect, subscribe to the—that we just need to be not only vigilant but pressuring.

You know, the interesting debate that we're now confronted with is this ideological debate about whether or not it's worth it to spread freedom. Should we spread freedom? Can the spread of freedom take root in dangerous parts of the world? And is it worth it? Does it make sense?

As you can tell, I'm a strong proponent of spreading freedom. First of all—and I've got confidence that freedom can be spread in parts of the world where it may look difficult at this moment in history to see freedom take root.

I've got confidence for a couple of reasons. One, I believe in the universality of freedom. That means I believe everybody desires to be free. I don't think freedom is uniquely American, nor do I think it's uniquely Methodist. [*Laughter*] I think it is universal.

I told you—I also, obviously, believe in the universality of motherhood. I believe mothers in Iraq want their children to grow up in peace, just like mothers in America do. I also believe people in Iraq want to live in a free society. I wasn't surprised; I was pleased when 12 million people went to the polls. That statement to me was: freedom.

Secondly, can it take hold in parts of the world that some suspect that it can't root? I would remind people of, for example, of—I mentioned Japan. There are other examples in our history. One of the unique aspects of my Presidency is I can predict to you that—with relative certainty that a violent part of the world, the Far East, is stable and headed in the right direction, absent one spot.

In 1950, that would have been a hard prediction to make. Shortly before 1950, I mentioned, thousands of U.S. citizens had died in a war with Japan; Mao Zedong was beginning an ascendancy where the form of government was repressed and that no such thing as a marketplace—was repressive, and there was no such thing as a marketplace. And Korea had just been—the Peninsula of Korea had just been torn asunder, where thousands of U.S. soldiers had died as well.

Today, Japan, as I mentioned, is a strong ally, an important economic partner and security partner. South Korea is a strong ally, important trading partner, and important security partner—albeit their democracy went through a difficult period of time. Democracies don't emerge on a straight line. Neither did ours. Our great democracy enslaved people for 100 years. All men were created equal, except some. We're reconfirming that belief that all men are created equal.

And so it takes a while for freedom to take root. It's hard work for societies to adopt the habits necessary for a free society to emerge. Interesting enough, in China, there's certainly not a free society, but there is a free marketplace emerging. And in 1950, that would have been a difficult prediction to make.

And so I believe liberty can take hold in parts of the world because history has shown it to be. Different time, no question; a different part of the world, no question. But if you have faith in the universality of freedom, and if you've seen history—liberty take hold before, it should give us confidence.

Finally, it's necessary for free societies to emerge—free societies in the image of a country's own history and tradition. And why is it in our interest that that happen? There is a root cause, there is a reason why 19 kids got on an airplane to come and kill us, and that is because societies in that part of the world have bred resentment and lack of hope.

I don't believe you can have a comfortable and secure society if half the people are not treated equally. There's something universal in our demands to be treated with respect. It matters what the form of government is, in terms of whether or not peace will emerge.

And so I believe that the liberty agenda, freedom agenda can take root, and I know it's necessary to make sure Grace can live in peace. I think people will look back at this period of time and make one or two judgments. They'll either say, what happened to them in 2007; how come they couldn't see the impending dangers that the little Graces of America would have to live with; how come they couldn't spot the radicalism that would emerge even more violent than it had been; how come they couldn't see the fact that Iran would become emboldened if the United States of America didn't keep its commitments in Iraq; what was it that prevented them from recognizing that nations in the Middle East would tend to choose up sides and back violent regimes—violent groups in order to protect their own selves; how come they couldn't remember the lesson of September the 11th, which said, what matters overseas matters at home? Or they'll look back and say, they had faith; they had faith in the ability of liberty to transform a region into a region of hope that yielded the peace so little Grace can be amazed that this generation has done its job.

And those are the risks, and that's the task, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:44 a.m. at the Willard Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Steve L. Massie, chief executive officer, Jack L. Massie Contractor, Inc.; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Haytham Kazim Abdallah Al-Shimari, head of the Rusafa Al Qaida-Iraq bomb network; Qais Khazali, member, Khazali network, and Shi'a extremist leader; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan; Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea; and Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates. He also referred to H.R. 1591.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Ali Abdallah Salih of Yemen

May 2, 2007

President Bush. It is my honor to welcome the President of Yemen to the Oval Office. I have gotten to know the President over the past 6 years of my Presidency. I feel comfortable saying, welcome, my friend.

I had the privilege of calling President Salih after the elections of Yemen. I told him—I said it was a remarkable occurrence that his great country had a free and open election. I've had a chance to congratulate him and thank him in person today.

We had a very good discussion about the neighborhood in which the President lives. And we spent a lot of time talking about our mutual desire to bring radicals and murderers to justice. And I thanked the President