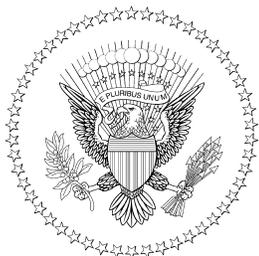


Weekly Compilation of  
**Presidential  
Documents**



Monday, March 24, 2008  
Volume 44—Number 11  
Pages 389–417

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**Editor's Note:** The President was at Camp David, MD, on March 21, 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 21, 2008

**Message on the Observance of Saint Patrick's Day, 2008**

*March 14, 2008*

I send greetings to those celebrating St. Patrick's Day.

On this day, we commemorate the great faith of St. Patrick and celebrate the rich heritage of the Irish people. The Apostle of Ireland was committed to preaching a gospel of peace even in the face of great hardship, and people of all faiths can be inspired by his remarkable example. During St. Patrick's Day, we join together with the many children of Erin who have come to our shores full of hope and purpose, and found success.

Americans are grateful for our country's Irish traditions and the deep friendship that exists between Ireland and the United States. Irish Americans have valiantly defended our Nation, enriched our culture, and contributed to our prosperity. We are reminded, in celebrating, of our history as a Nation of immigrants and of our responsibility to remain a welcoming society.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a blessed and joyous St. Patrick's Day.

**George W. Bush**

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

**The President's Radio Address**

*March 15, 2008*

Good morning. On Friday, I traveled to New York City to talk about the state of our economy. This is a topic that has been a source of concern for families across America. In the long run, we can be confident that our economy will continue to grow. But in the short run, it is clear that growth has slowed.

Fortunately, we recognized this slowdown early and took action to give our economy a shot in the arm. My administration worked with Congress to pass a bipartisan economic growth package that includes tax relief for families and incentives for business investment. I signed this package into law last month, and its provisions are just starting to kick in. My economic team, along with many outside experts, expects this stimulus package to have a positive effect on our economy in the second quarter. And they expect it to have even a stronger effect in the third quarter, when the full effects of the \$152 billion in tax cuts are felt.

A root cause of the economic slowdown has been the downturn in the housing market. I believe the Government can take sensible, focused action to help responsible homeowners weather this rough patch. But we must do so with clear purpose and great care, because Government actions often have far-reaching and unintended consequences. If we were to pursue some of the sweeping Government solutions that we hear about in Washington, we would make a complicated problem even worse and end up hurting far more homeowners than we help.

For example, one proposal would give bankruptcy courts the authority to reduce mortgage debts by judicial decree. This would make it harder to afford a home in the future because banks would charge higher interest rates to cover this risk.

Some in Washington say the Government should take action to artificially prop up home prices. It's important to understand that this would hurt millions of Americans. For example, many young couples trying to buy their first home have been priced out of the market because of inflated prices. The market now is in the process of correcting itself, and delaying that correction would only prolong the problem.

My administration opposes these proposals. Instead, we are focused on helping

a targeted group of homeowners—those who have made responsible buying decisions and could avoid foreclosure with a little help. We've taken three key steps to help these homeowners.

First, we launched a new program that gives the Federal Housing Administration greater flexibility to offer refinancing for struggling homeowners with otherwise good credit histories. Second, we helped bring together the HOPE NOW Alliance, which is streamlining the process for refinancing and modifying many mortgages. Third, the Federal Government is taking regulatory steps to make the housing market more transparent and fair in the long run.

And now Congress must build on these efforts. Members need to pass legislation to reform Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, modernize the Federal Housing Administration, and allow State housing agencies to issue tax-free bonds to help homeowners refinance their mortgages.

Congress also needs to take other steps to help our economy through this period of uncertainty. Members need to make the tax relief we passed permanent, reduce wasteful spending, and open new markets for American goods, services, and investment.

By taking these steps and avoiding bad policy decisions, we will see our economy strengthen as the year progresses. As we take decisive action, we will keep this in mind: When you are steering a car in a rough patch, one of the worst things you can do is overcorrect. That often results in losing control and can end up with the car in a ditch. Steering through a rough patch requires a steady hand on the wheel and your eyes up on the horizon. And that's exactly what we're going to do.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:20 a.m. on March 14 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 15. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 14 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

### **Remarks Following a Meeting With Economic Advisers on the National Economy**

*March 17, 2008*

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for coming by today to talk about the economic situation. We'll be meeting later on this afternoon with the President's task force on financial markets.

First of all, you know, the Secretary has given me an update. One thing is for certain: We're under—we're in challenging times. But another thing is for certain, that we've taken strong and decisive action. The Federal Reserve has moved quickly to bring order to the financial markets. Secretary Paulson has been—is supportive of that action, as am I. And I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary, for working over the weekend. You've shown the country and the world that the United States is on top of the situation.

Secondly, you've reaffirmed the fact that our financial institutions are strong and that our capital markets are functioning efficiently and effectively. We obviously will continue to monitor the situation and, when need be, will act decisively, in a way that continues to bring order to the financial markets.

In the long run, our economy is going to be fine. Right now we're dealing with a difficult situation. And, Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you very much for your steady and strong and consistent leadership.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:40 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

### **Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland**

*March 17, 2008*

**President Bush.** *Taoiseach*, welcome, and happy Saint Patrick's Day. It's always a joy to welcome the *Taoiseach* here to the Oval Office. And it's a reminder of the unbelievably powerful influence the Irish have had on the development and prosperity of the United States of America. We're a richer country because of Irish Americans. And, Mr.

Prime Minister, Ireland is a great friend and ally, and I want to thank you for your friendship over these years.

We discussed a variety of issues. In particular, we talked about Northern Ireland. And the *Taoiseach* gets a lot of credit for showing a steady hand during a difficult period. And yet, as a result of perseverance and hard work, Northern Ireland is a different place than it was last year. And we congratulate the leaders there. And I just want the folks to know, what I told the *Taoiseach* is true, that the United States will continue to stay engaged and will be very supportive of helping the process move forward.

And there's more work to be done, we fully understand, in Northern Ireland. But also, there's a really interesting chance for people from our country to see the investment opportunities available in Northern Ireland. And this May, there's a Northern Ireland investment conference, which the United States will strongly support. And *Taoiseach*, like I told you, we'll send a strong delegation to look at the opportunities available there.

So thanks for coming. Thanks for your friendship. And once again, happy Saint Patrick's Day.

**Prime Minister Ahern.** Thank you very much, President. And I want to thank the President. It's the eighth year that he's afforded us an opportunity of representing the Irish people here. And as always, we've had a very fruitful discussion on a range of issues, and obviously important to me is the ongoing process in Northern Ireland. And the President and his people have been really helpful as we move now to the remaining issue, the evolution of policing, which we've discussed.

And the investment conference, which is just around the corner—it's a—I've said it several times before: The investment conference is a—really a one-off chance, an opportunity for Northern Ireland to bring some of the big investors of the world to see the opportunities that are there, the opportunities that they had not had a chance of being able to get any benefit from for the last 30 or 40 years. And now they have that. And I think it will show Northern Ireland is a place with well-educated people, hard-working people, people who are good at business if given a half a chance.

And it is hugely important to us that in the organization of this that the President has helped both the British Government and the Irish Government to get this together. We've gone through that today, and I think the—*[inaudible]*—of the President to make sure that there's a high-powered delegation to United States is hugely helpful. I want to thank the President for that.

And I also want to thank him for the assistance that he's given to us on a range of issues that we've had an opportunity of talking about.

**President Bush.** Thank you, Bertie. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

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

March 17, 2008

*Taoiseach*, thanks. Small island; huge impact on the United States of America. *[Laughter]* Laura and I are glad you're here. We welcome you back to the White House on this Saint Patrick's Day. I can't think of a better way to celebrate it than with the *Taoiseach*. Thanks for the bowl of shamrocks. As you said, this is the eighth time I had the honor of receiving this from you. And I want to thank you for your friendship—your personal friendship—and all you've done to strengthen the deep and lasting bond between our two nations.

Also proud to be here with John O'Donoghue, the Speaker of the Dail. Welcome. Members of my Cabinet who are here, thank you for coming. Members of the United States Senate and the United States Congress who've joined us, we're glad you're here. And I know the *Taoiseach* is glad you're here too. *[Laughter]* He was asking me, "Are you in session?" I said, "No, they're out of town." He said, "Well, you must be feeling better about that." *[Laughter]* We'll be having lunch with you soon.

How about members of the fire department of New York's Emerald Society? I

thank you for coming. They proudly carry the title “New York’s bravest,” and rightly so.

And finally, I will be introducing soon Ronan Tynan to entertain us a little bit. He is a wonderful representative of your country. He’s a dear friend of the Bush family, and we’re so thankful he is here with us today.

You know, *Taoiseach*, you were awfully diplomatic to talk about the fact that the architect came back to rebuild the White House after 1814. What, of course, you didn’t say was why the White House needed to be rebuilt in the first place. [Laughter] And so I’m proud to welcome the Ambassador from Great Britain, our dear friend. [Laughter] Thanks for coming.

I don’t know if you know this, but America held its first Saint Patrick’s Day celebration in Boston in the year 1737. I don’t think you were there, Congressman, but—[laughter]—shortly thereafter. [Laughter] Nearly 40 years later, in the midst of the Revolution, at least 9 of the 56 signatures on the Declaration of Independence were inked by Irish hands.

We’ve had a long relationship, *Taoiseach*. Our history has been one where the United States and Ireland have made liberty our common cause, and both of our nations are richer for it. Our partnership is based upon principles, and it’s also based upon people. Ireland founded itself—found itself in the grip of poverty and famine in the 19th century, and millions of Irish came here to our soil. They were drawn here by a promise that success would be attainable to all those who were willing to work hard. And that’s certainly what happened.

It’s an interesting poster that somebody brought to my attention that said this: “In the United States, an industrious youth may follow any occupation without being looked down upon, and he may rationally expect to raise himself in the world by his labor.” You know, occasionally, people did look down, but not anymore, because Irish have been unbelievably productive people for the United States of America. They’ve made a huge contribution. They’ve become an essential thread in the American fabric.

And that’s what we celebrate on Saint Patrick’s Day. Our countries are more than just partners; we are family, *Taoiseach*. And

today, more than 35 million Americans claim Irish ancestry. America is richer for every Murphy, Kelly, and O’Sullivan. I should have said McCain, but—[laughter]. Well, I just did. [Laughter] After all this history together, the United States and the Republic of Ireland continue to stand side by side in firm friendship. We were friends in the past; we’re friends today; and, *Taoiseach*, I am confident, after my time in office, the next President will be friends with Ireland. We are cooperating to build prosperous economies and—with vibrant trade and sound investment between our countries.

I want to congratulate the *Taoiseach*. He was very generous in his praise about America’s role, previous administration’s role, hopefully our role in helping Northern Ireland have a peaceful future. But, *Taoiseach*, the truth of the matter is, I said on TV in there that you’ve had a steady hand, and you’ve been supportive. And I do want to applaud those who are here who’ve shown great courage, who’ve been able to put together—put beside—behind them a terrible past and focused on a hopeful future. And it was my huge honor, Martin, to welcome you and Dr. Paisley to the Oval Office. It was an historic moment for me, personally. And it was really, really positive.

But I came away with the impression that obviously the United States needs to help, and we will. But nothing will happen without clear conviction and determination by the folks who live in Northern Ireland. And there’s more work to be done, *Taoiseach*. As you said, the devolution of policing is important, and we support that. But we can also help by sending a clear signal that we’re interested in investment opportunities. And so the Northern Ireland investment conference in May will be held. And I want to repeat what I told the *Taoiseach*, is that we will send a high-level delegation to not only send a signal that we support the efforts of the folks in Northern Ireland, but we expect our folks to be able to find good investment opportunities—for the good of both.

And so, *Taoiseach*, I, like you, marvel at the success that’s taken place since my short time as President and know full well that more progress can and will be made.

You know, there's an old Irish proverb that says: "There is no strength without unity." And so on this Saint Patrick's Day, we can all take pride in the way that the United States and Ireland have come together to enrich each other in the world.

My last time as President to have a Saint Patrick's Day with you, *Taoiseach*. Perhaps when we join the ex-leaders club, we'll sit back and put our feet up—[*laughter*—and talk about the good old times. In the meantime, I know you're going to sprint to the finish, as am I, for the good of our countries.

Thank you for coming. God bless the people of Ireland and the United States. And now I welcome Ronan Tynan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the Dail Eireann John O'Donoghue of Ireland; FDNY Emerald Society Pipes and Drums, who performed prior to the remarks; the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the U.S. Sir Nigel E. Sheinwald; and First Minister Ian R.K. Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Northern Ireland. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.

### Remarks at the Jacksonville Port Authority in Jacksonville, Florida

March 18, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you for the warm welcome. It's nice to be back in J-ville. It's an interesting place to come, isn't it? I've been in your stadium. I've been in your church. I've never been on the docks. But if you're interested in trying to figure out one of the reasons why this is one of America's most vibrant cities, you got to come to the docks.

And I want to explain why these docks are important to not only the citizens of Jacksonville but also why what happens here is important to the overall economy in the United States.

Before I do, I do want to thank *Senor Morales*. Thank you for your leading here as the chairman of the Jacksonville Port Authority. Thanks for being the kind of American we love, somebody who comes from abroad, recognizes the great blessings of the United

States of America, and contributes mightily to our success.

I appreciate the executive director, Rick Ferrin. I've just had an interesting tour of this facility by Magnus Lindeback, Captain Magnus Lindeback. [*Applause*] Magnus, it sounds like some of them have heard of you around here. [*Laughter*] I'm going to talk about Magnus a little later on. He's a fellow who came to America with a dream and now employs a lot of good, hard-working folks because of goods that are shipped from here to other parts of the world and for goods that are shipped from other parts of the world to here. See, everybody here is working as a result of trade—trade that happens and occurs right here on these docks.

The Governor of the great State of Florida, Charlie Crist, has joined us. Mr. Governor, proud you're here. Thanks for taking time. Two Members from the United States Congress have come—this must be a special occasion—[*laughter*—Ander Crenshaw, Congressman from this district, doing a find job, and Congresswoman Corrine Brown. Madam Congresswoman, we're proud you're here.

Daniel Davis, president of the Jacksonville City Council, appreciate you coming. A lot of other State and local officials, port authority employees, Coastal Maritime employees, thanks for greeting me here. Appreciate you coming.

One thing is for certain: This is a challenging time for our economy. You know that; I know that; a lot of Americans understand that. In the short run, the strains on the economy have been caused by the turmoil in the housing market, which has required focused and decisive action. And that's exactly what the Federal Government's doing.

There are problems, but the key is to recognize problems and to act early, which we have done. For example, we brought together what's called the HOPE NOW Alliance. It's a private sector group that is helping large numbers of homeowners refinance their mortgages. We want to help people stay in their homes. And millions of people are going to be affected by this program. And it makes sense to help some person who is creditworthy find the capacity and understand where to refinance. The more people

live in their homes, the better off America is. But no question, there's been an oversupply of housing, and it's going to take time to work through this oversupply.

We also worked with Congress—and I want to thank the Members of Congress—to pass a bipartisan economic growth package. That's Washington-speak for, you're fixing to receive some money. By the way, it's your money to begin with. [*Laughter*] But in the second week of May, there is a substantial amount of money being returned to people in the hopes of encouraging increased consumption. There's also incentives in this piece of legislation passed by both Republicans and Democrats that will encourage small and large businesses to invest. And when businesses invest, as Magnus will tell you, it makes it easier to give people work. Investment equals jobs.

And so in the second week of May, checks will be coming. And the experts tell me this is going to help with the economic vitality of the country. After all, it's over \$150 billion that is going to be distributed. The plan was voted on; I signed it into law, but it hadn't been put completely into effect yet.

Our financial markets have also been subjected to stress. And the Federal Reserve and the Treasury acted swiftly to promote stability in our financial markets at a crucial time. It was action that was necessary, and I appreciate the leadership of Chairman Bernanke and Secretary Paulson. And they'll continue to closely monitor the markets in the financial sector. And the point I want to make to you is, if there needs to be further action, we'll take it, in a way that does not damage the long-term health of our economy.

In the long run, Americans ought to have confidence in our economy. I mean, there are some anchors that promote long-term—that should promote long-term confidence. Let me give you a few. First of all, the unemployment rate is relatively low. We've got a low unemployment rate here in Florida, low in most parts of the country. We're an innovative society with a flexible economy. But there's a lot of research and development being spent here in America. There are new technologies being developed. Productivity is on the rise. We have a strong agricultural

sector. The small-business sector is vibrant. And people are investing in the United States. And so I understand there's short-term difficulty, but I want people to understand that in the long term, we're going to be just fine. People will still be able to work.

You know, one of the interesting signs of strength is that we're the world's leading exporter of goods and services. I'm not saying we're second place or third place; we're the world's leading exporter. And that's positive, particularly if you're somebody whose job depends upon trade.

Now, we're in the middle of a debate here about trade, whether it's good or not. Well, anybody wondering about the stakes in the trade debate ought to come right here to Jacksonville, Florida, to the docks to see whether or not trade makes sense. According to the most recent data, you move more than 8 million tons of cargo each year. This cargo doesn't move itself. Somebody has to move it from port to port.

I'm sitting in—standing in front of people that are all part of the process, good, hard-working Americans that are putting food on the table for their families because of trade. You handle most—more than—more automobiles than any American port. I don't know if the people of Jacksonville understand that, but think about that. More automobiles are handled at this port than anywhere in the United States of America. You help support more than 45,000 jobs. This port serves as a vital commercial and strategic link to our neighborhood, to our neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Opening trade has been one of the high priorities of my Presidency. See, I believe trade leads to good jobs. I believe trade is in our interests. When I took office, America had free trade agreements in force with three countries. Today, we have agreements in force with 14 countries. And there are three more agreements pending this year: Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. All three of these agreements are important, and the one with Colombia is especially urgent. And I want to spend a little time talking about the free trade agreement with Colombia and what it means for our national security and what it means for your job security.

We have worked closely with leaders in Congress to seek a path to bring the Colombia agreement up for approval. And we've got a good model to go on. Last year, we worked out a bipartisan approach on a bill implementing a good free trade agreement with Peru, and it was a good bill. And it was one of those bills where people, when they stepped back from politics, realized it made good sense and overwhelmingly approved it. Both Republicans and Democrats voted for that, two of whom happen to be sitting right here.

The Colombia agreement is almost identical to the agreement with Peru, except that the Colombia agreement has even greater economic potential because Colombia has a larger GDP and even greater national security importance because of Colombia's strategic location. The lesson is clear: If Congress can find a way to vote on and improve the Peru agreement, there's no reason it can't do the same for Colombia.

Now, why is it important? Before I get to the importance, I do want to tell you the time is urgent. There must be a vote on Colombia this year. And this agreement is too important to be delayed any longer. So I am reiterating my call on leaders in Congress to act with urgency. I ask members of both parties to ensure that politics do not get in the way of a vital priority for our Nation and, frankly, a vote that will help people who are working here on the docks. You can think in terms of national security interests, but if that doesn't interest you, think about terms of helping folks just like this make a living.

Let me talk a little bit about the national security implications from this vote. In Colombia, President Uribe is waging an active battle against terrorists who are seeking to overthrow his nation's democracy. This terrorist network is known as FARC. It pursues Marxist objectives through bombing, hostage-taking, and assassination. Much of its funding is derived from drug trafficking. Attacks by the FARC have killed or injured more than 1,000 civilians since 2003. These are brutal people, and they're ruthless people. And they'll use all kinds of means to achieve their objectives. FARC terrorists have held three American citizens hostage in jungle camps for more than 5 years, making

them the longest held American hostages anywhere in the world.

The challenge posed by these terrorists is compounded by the hostility and aggression of some of Colombia's neighbors. The regime in Caracas has railed against America, has forged an alliance with Communist Cuba, has met with FARC leaders in Venezuela, has deployed troops to the Colombian border. In the process, regime leaders have squandered their oil wealth and left their people to face food shortages.

Recently when Colombian forces killed one of the FARC's most senior leaders, they discovered computer files that suggest even closer ties between Venezuela's regime and FARC terrorists than we previously knew. Colombia officials are investigating the ties, but this much should be clear: The United States strongly supports, strongly stands with Colombia in its fight against the terrorists and drug lords.

President Uribe has remained focused on strengthening Colombia's democracy. Over the past 6 years, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, and murders of labor activists have all dropped by more than 75 percent. Police are on the streets. Tens of thousands of paramilitary fighters have been demobilized. And Colombia's murder rate has fallen substantially.

At the same time, Colombia's economy has shown strong growth. Poverty and unemployment have declined. Trade and investment have increased substantially. That's what we want. We want less violence in our neighborhood and more prosperity in our neighborhood. We want our neighbors to be prosperous.

President Uribe has been an unshakeable partner for the United States. He's answered to hundreds of requests to extradite criminals to our country. And with the assistance from Plan Colombia, a program first supported by President Bill Clinton and continued under my administration, he's cracked down on drug trafficking. He constantly speaks out against anti-Americanism. By any measure, he has been one of our most reliable and effective allies. And this trade agreement is the way to signal our strong support for President Uribe. It's the way to help this country develop more momentum toward peace.

Despite the record of success, some in Congress claim Colombia needs to do more before a trade agreement—the trade agreement can be approved. But this is unrealistic, and it is unfair. If Members of Congress truly want Colombia to make further progress, then it makes no sense to block the very measure that would make progress more likely.

Our fellow citizens have got to know that across the hemisphere and across the globe, people are waiting to see what the Members of Congress will do. In other words, this isn't just one of these isolated votes that gets no attention outside of Washington. This is a vote that is being observed very carefully by people across the world. Voices from near and far are urging Congress to make the right decision. Members of Congress from both parties travel to Colombia. They have seen firsthand the progress that President Uribe is making. Business leaders from many backgrounds, along with current and former Senators, Congressmen, mayors, diplomats, National Security Council people, Cabinet members from both parties—I emphasize, from both parties—support this agreement.

In other words, it's just not me talking. There's a lot of people who understand the importance of this agreement. Our allies have made their position clear. I want the Members of Congress to hear what the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, said. He said: "If the U.S. turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator can hope to achieve." Those are wise words and words worth listening to. Congress needs to listen to the voices, and they need to pass this important piece of legislation.

The national security benefits are only part of the cause for this agreement. Both our economies stand to gain as well. Today, virtually all exports from Colombia enter our country duty free. And yet many U.S. exports going to Colombia face heavy tariffs. Goods coming from Colombia, duty free; our goods going to Colombia get taxed. That doesn't seem fair to me. I know the folks here understand that if you reduce tariffs, it's more likely we'll send more goods. Doesn't it make sense for Congress to say to Colombia, treat

America the way we treat you, which is precisely what this trade deal does?

A banana grown in Colombia enters the United States duty free. An apple grown in Pennsylvania or an orange grown in Florida is subject to a 15-percent tariff when it's exported to Colombia. Doesn't it make sense for the Federal Government to try to eliminate that tariff? I think it does. If you're growing oranges, it does. If you're growing apples, it does. And if you're shipping goods and services—or goods from this port to Colombia, it makes sense to make it easier to ship more goods.

That's why I talk about level the playing field. They estimate this will help 9,000 U.S. companies export to Colombia, most of which are small and midsized companies. Level the playing field is going to help hundreds of thousands of employees who work at these companies. And level the playing field will create new opportunities for exporters and dock workers who ship heavy machinery and glass and chemicals and electronics and paper and other products to Colombia from this port—people just like the folks seated right here.

Earlier today I had a chance to tour this company with Magnus Lindeback, Captain Magnus Lindeback. The man is living the American Dream. You talk to Magnus, he's about as proud an American as you can find. He might not have been born here, but he loves it here. And he loves the people that work with him, and he's very proud of the fact that this company has grown from 2 employees to over 250. And he cares about each and every employee.

And here's why the Colombia free trade agreement matters to a—are you small or midsize? I'd call you—oh, midsize. You say small; I say midsize. Okay, small. [Laughter] Here's why it matters to a small-sized/midsized company like Coastal Maritime. [Laughter] Coastal Maritime—about a quarter of its cargo goes to Colombia. So in other words, if you're somebody wondering whether you're going to have a job and a fellow comes along and says, "Would you like to be able to sell more goods to Colombia? After all, a quarter of your revenues go to Colombia," I think the answer ought to be, yes, we want to be able to access more of

Colombia. We're good at what we're doing now.

They send, by the way, mining equipment, bulldozers, and cranes. Magnus doesn't make the cranes and bulldozers and mining equipment. He just ships it. But somebody in America is making the cranes, and somebody in America is making the bulldozers. And so when you think about trade, you're not only thinking about dock workers who are working good jobs because of trade, but somebody has got to make the products that the people in Colombia are buying as well.

If Colombia approves the free trade agreement, Coastal Maritime estimates that the volume of products they ship to Colombia would increase by 20 to 50 percent in a short period of time. Magnus says he's going to use the extra revenues for two purposes: to reinvest in technology and equipment—like that crane we—a guy tried to get me to drive over there—*[laughter]*—I told him I was a history major—*[laughter]*—and he wants to raise wages for his workers.

I want to quote Magnus: "Trade is our entire business. All our workers depend on it. An increased volume of cargo to Colombia would be tremendous from us because the more cargo we have to handle, the more revenue is generated."

American exporters aren't the only ones who will benefit. The free trade agreement will guarantee permanent duty-free access to the U.S. market for businesses in Colombia. And why is that important? Because it will help them attract investment and stimulate growth. It will lead to additional opportunities at a port such as this. The more prosperous our neighborhood, the more commerce there will be. And the more commerce there is, it's more likely to pass through a port just like this. We want people doing well. We want programs that are good for small businesses and farmers. And that's exactly what this vote will be. And it's important. And it's an important vote for the United States Congress to understand. It's in our national security interests and economic security interests.

And during this time of economic uncertainty, when consumer spending and investment is slowing down, it's important to understand the role trade has made for our

economy. Last year, exports accounted for more than 40 percent of our total growth. That's good news. Export is continuing. This January, exports were up more than 16 percent over last January. If you're worried about the economy, it seems like you ought to be sending a clear signal that the United States of America will continue to trade, not shut down trade. And that's what this Colombia vote says.

And once Congress approves the free trade agreement with Colombia, they can—then they can approve one with Panama. And once they finish one with Panama, then they can do one with South Korea. All these agreements are important. These agreements to important to enhance our friendship, but these are good for our economy.

Now, I fully understand that trade makes people nervous. It doesn't make these folks nervous because they understand the benefits firsthand. And in a political year, you hear all kinds of things about trade. One of the things people say is that people lose their jobs because of trade. Well, in the manufacturing sector, sometimes that's right, but a lot of times it's a result of productivity increases. In other words, technology changes, and one worker can produce three times as much as he or she used to be able to, and therefore, same output with fewer workers.

But whatever the case is, the question is, what should we do about people who aren't working? One alternative is to say, it's all cause of trade; let's quit trading. Then people here lose work. The other opportunity is to focus on good educational programs. You know, we could cut ourselves off, or we could have faith in our capacity to compete and focus on helping individuals. I choose the latter.

I believe strongly that we can help people gain extra skills with smart programs. That's why my budget requests \$3 billion to educate and prepare workers for the 21st century. I'm a big believer, Governor, in community colleges. I think our community colleges are great places for people to gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. So rather than resort to protectionism and say, let's shut down our trading opportunities, why don't we resort to education to give people the skills necessary to fill the jobs for the

21st century here in the United States of America?

Now, you're going to hear the word trade adjustment assistance talked about in Congress. And these two Congress folks understand what I'm talking about. That basically says that we're going to have education programs aimed at helping people find skills. And I'm a supporter. And I believe it's important that trade adjustment be a component of our trade policy. I look forward to working with Congress to reform it and to reauthorize it, to make sure it does the job that it could do—is supposed to do—just like I'm looking forward to signing those trade bills, particularly starting with the one from Colombia.

I—so I've come here as a vivid reminder to people in Congress who wonder whether or not trade is positive for America. It is. It's economically a good deal for our country. And I do have confidence that Congress will get it right. It may take a little persuading. It's going to take a lot of hard work. Oh, it may take some of you having to write letters to your Senators and Congressmen to remind them that trade is good. Confident nations are free traders.

But trade also means making sure we get treated right, that they treat us the way we treat them. That's all we're asking. That's what this agreement says: Just treat us fairly. Because America can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, as long as the playing field is level.

And so I've come to talk about our economy and a key issue facing you. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to be in your midst. I'm proud of the work you do here. And may God bless you and God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:13 p.m. at the Blount Island Marine Terminal. In his remarks, he referred to Ricardo Morales, Jr., chairman of the board of directors, Jacksonville Port Authority; and Magnus Lindeback, chief executive officer, Coastal Maritime Stevedoring, LLC. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## **Remarks on the War on Terror in Arlington, Virginia**

*March 19, 2008*

Thank you all. Deputy Secretary England, thanks for the introduction. One boss may not be here, but the other one is. [*Laughter*] I appreciate your kind words. I'm pleased to be back here with the men and women of the Defense Department.

On this day in 2003, the United States began Operation Iraqi Freedom. As the campaign unfolded, tens and thousands of our troops poured across the Iraqi border to liberate the Iraqi people and remove a regime that threatened free nations.

Five years into this battle, there is an understandable debate over whether the war was worth fighting; whether the fight is worth winning; and whether we can win it. The answers are clear to me: Removing Saddam Hussein from power was the right decision, and this is a fight America can and must win.

The men and women who crossed into Iraq 5 years ago removed a tyrant, liberated a country, and rescued millions from unspeakable horrors. Some of those troops are with us today, and you need to know that the American people are proud of your accomplishment, and so is the Commander in Chief.

I appreciate Admiral Mullen, the Joint Chiefs who are here. Thanks for coming. Secretary Donald Winter of the Navy; Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte is with us. Admiral Thad Allen of the Coast Guard is with us. Ambassador from Iraq is with us; Mr. Ambassador, we're proud to have you here. Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coast men—coast guard men, thanks for coming; thanks for wearing the uniform. Men and women of the Department of State are here as well.

Operation Iraqi Freedom was a remarkable display of military effectiveness. Forces from the UK, Australia, Poland, and other allies joined our troops in the initial operations. As they advanced, our troops fought their way through sandstorms so intense that they blackened the daytime sky. Our troops engaged in pitched battles with Fedayeen Saddam, death squads acting on the orders of Saddam Hussein, that obeyed neither the

conventions of war nor the dictates of conscience. These death squads hid in schools, and they hid in hospitals, hoping to draw fire against Iraqi civilians. They used women and children as human shields. They stopped at nothing in their efforts to prevent us from prevailing, but they couldn't stop the coalition advance.

Aided by the most effective and precise air campaign in history, coalition forces raced across 350 miles of enemy territory, destroying Republican Guard divisions, pushing through the Karbala Gap, capturing Saddam International Airport, and liberating Baghdad in less than 1 month.

Along the way, our troops added new chapters to the story of American military heroism. During these first weeks of battle, Army Sergeant First Class Paul Ray Smith and his troops came under a surprise attack by about a hundred Republican Guard forces. Sergeant Smith rallied his men. He led a counterattack, killing as many as 50 enemy soldiers before being fatally wounded. His actions saved the lives of more than a hundred American troops and earned him the Medal of Honor.

Today, in light of the challenges we have faced in Iraq, some look back at this period as the easy part of the war. Yet there was nothing easy about it. The liberation of Iraq took incredible skill and amazing courage. And the speed, precision, and brilliant execution of the campaign will be studied by military historians for years to come.

What our troops found in Iraq following Saddam's removal was horrifying. They uncovered children's prisons and torture chambers and rape rooms where Iraqi women were violated in front of their families. They found videos showing regime thugs mutilating Iraqis deemed disloyal to Saddam. And across the Iraqi countryside, they uncovered mass graves of thousands executed by the regime.

Because we acted, Saddam Hussein no longer fills fields with the remains of innocent men, women, and children. Because we acted, Saddam's torture chambers and rape rooms and children's prisons have been closed for good. Because we acted, Saddam's regime is no longer invading its neighbors or attacking them with chemical weapons

and ballistic missiles. Because we acted, Saddam's regime is no longer paying the families of suicide bombers in the Holy Land. Because we acted, Saddam's regime is no longer shooting at American and British aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones and defying the will of the United Nations. Because we acted, the world is better and United States of America is safer.

When the Iraqi regime was removed, it did not lay down its arms and surrender. Instead, former regime elements took off their uniforms and faded into the countryside to fight the emergence of a free Iraq. And then they were joined by foreign terrorists who were seeking to stop the advance of liberty in the Middle East and seeking to establish safe havens from which to plot new attacks across the world.

The battle in Iraq has been longer and harder and more costly than we anticipated, but it is a fight we must win. So our troops have engaged these enemies with courage and determination. And as they've battled the terrorists and extremists in Iraq, they have helped the Iraqi people reclaim their nation and helped a young democracy rise from the rubble of Saddam Hussein's tyranny.

Over the past 5 years, we have seen moments of triumph and moments of tragedy. We have watched in admiration as 12 million Iraqis defied the terrorists and went to the polls and chose their leaders in free elections. We watched in horror as Al Qaida beheaded innocent captives and sent suicide bombers to blow up mosques and markets. These actions show the brutal nature of the enemy in Iraq, and they serve as a grim reminder. The terrorists who murder the innocent in the streets of Baghdad want to murder the innocent in the streets of America. Defeating this enemy in Iraq will make it less likely that we will face the enemy here at home.

A little over a year ago, the fight in Iraq was faltering. Extremist elements were succeeding in their efforts to plunge Iraq into chaos. They had established safe havens in many parts of the country. They were creating divisions among the Iraqis along sectarian lines. And their strategy of using violence in Iraq to cause divisions in America

was working as pressures built here in Washington for withdrawal before the job was done.

My administration understood that America could not retreat in the face of terror. And we knew that if we did not act, the violence that had been consuming Iraq would worsen and spread and could eventually reach genocidal levels. Baghdad could have disintegrated into a contagion of killing, and Iraq could have descended into full-blown sectarian warfare.

So we reviewed the strategy and changed course in Iraq. We sent reinforcements into the country in a dramatic policy shift that is now known as the surge. General David Petraeus took command with a new mission: Work with Iraqi forces to protect the Iraqi people; pressure the enemy into strongholds; and deny the terrorists sanctuary anywhere in the country. And that is precisely what we have done.

In Anbar, Sunni tribal leaders had grown tired of Al Qaida's brutality and started a popular uprising called the Anbar Awakening. To take advantage of this opportunity, we sent 4,000 additional marines to help these brave Iraqis drive Al Qaida from the Province. As this effort succeeded, it inspired other Iraqis to take up the fight. Soon similar uprisings began to spread across the country. Today, there are more than 90,000 concerned local citizens who are protecting their communities from the terrorists and insurgents and the extremists. The Government in Baghdad has stepped forward with a surge of its own; they've added more than 100,000 new Iraqi soldiers and police during the past year. These Iraqi troops have fought bravely, and thousands have given their lives in this struggle.

Together, these Americans and Iraqi forces have driven the terrorists from many of the sanctuaries they once held. Now the terrorists have gathered in and around the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, and Iraqi and American forces are relentlessly pursuing them. There will be tough fighting in Mosul and areas of northern Iraq in the weeks ahead. But there's no doubt in my mind, because of the courage of our troops and the bravery of the Iraqis, the Al Qaida terrorists

in this region will suffer the same fate as Al Qaida suffered elsewhere in Iraq.

As we have fought Al Qaida, coalition and Iraqi forces have also taken the fight to Shi'a extremist groups, many of them backed and financed and armed by Iran. A year ago, these groups were on the rise. Today, they are increasingly isolated, and Iraqis of all faiths are putting their lives on the line to stop these extremists from hijacking their young democracy.

To ensure that military progress in Iraq is quickly followed up with real improvements in daily life, we have doubled the number of Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq. These teams of civilian experts are serving all Iraqi—18 Iraqi Provinces, and they're helping to strengthen responsible leaders and build up local economies and bring Iraqis together, so that reconciliation can happen from the ground up. They're very effective. They're helping give ordinary Iraqis confidence that by rejecting the extremists and reconciling with one another, they can claim their place in a free Iraq and build better lives for their families.

There's still hard work to be done in Iraq. The gains we have made are fragile and reversible. But on this anniversary, the American people should know that since the surge began, the level of violence is significantly down, civilian deaths are down, sectarian killings are down, attacks on American forces are down. We have captured or killed thousands of extremists in Iraq, including hundreds of key Al Qaida leaders and operatives. Our men and women in uniform are performing with characteristic honor and valor. The surge is working. And as a return on our success in Iraq, we've begun bringing some of our troops home.

The surge has done more than turn the situation in Iraq around, it has opened the door to a major strategic victory in the broader war on terror. For the terrorists, Iraq was supposed to be the place where Al Qaida rallied Arab masses to drive America out. Instead, Iraq has become the place where Arabs joined with Americans to drive Al Qaida out. In Iraq, we are witnessing the first large-scale Arab uprising against Usama bin Laden, his grim ideology, and his murderous

network. And the significance of this development cannot be overstated.

The terrorist movement feeds on a sense of inevitability and claims to rise on the tide of history. The accomplishments of the surge in Iraq are exposing this myth and discrediting the extremists. When Iraqi and American forces finish the job, the effects will reverberate far beyond Iraq's borders. Usama bin Laden once said: "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse." By defeating Al Qaida in Iraq, we will show the world that Al Qaida is the weak horse. We will show that men and women who love liberty can defeat the terrorists. And we will show that the future of the Middle East does not belong to terror. The future of the Middle East belongs to freedom.

The challenge in this period ahead is to consolidate the gains we have made and seal the extremists' defeat. We have learned through hard experience what happens when we pull our forces back too fast; the terrorists and extremists step in, they fill vacuums, establish safe havens, and use them to spread chaos and carnage. General Petraeus has warned that too fast a drawdown could result in such an unraveling with Al Qaida and insurgents and militia extremists regaining lost ground and increasing violence.

Men and women of the Armed Forces: Having come so far and achieved so much, we're not going to let this to happen.

Next month, General Petraeus and Ambassador Crocker will come to Washington to testify before Congress. I will await their recommendations before making decisions on our troop levels in Iraq. Any further drawdown will be based on conditions on the ground and the recommendations of our commanders. And they must not jeopardize the hard-fought gains our troops and civilians have made over the past year.

Successes we are seeing in Iraq are undeniable, yet some in Washington still call for retreat. War critics can no longer credibly argue that we're losing in Iraq, so they now argue the war costs too much. In recent months, we've heard exaggerated amounts of the costs of this war. No one are—would argue that this war has not come at a high cost in lives and treasure; but those costs are

necessary when we consider the cost of a strategic victory for our enemies in Iraq.

If we were to allow our enemies to prevail in Iraq, the violence that is now declining would accelerate, and Iraq would descend into chaos. Al Qaida would regain its lost sanctuaries and establish new ones, fomenting violence and terror that could spread beyond Iraq's borders, with serious consequences for the world's economy.

Out of such chaos in Iraq, the terrorist movement could emerge emboldened, with new recruits, new resources, and an even greater determination to dominate the region and harm America. An emboldened Al Qaida with access to Iraq's oil resources could pursue its ambitions to acquire weapons of mass destruction to attack America and other free nations. Iran would be emboldened as well, with a renewed determination to develop nuclear weapons and impose its brand of hegemony across the Middle East. Our enemies would see an America—an American failure in Iraq as evidence of weakness and a lack of resolve.

To allow this to happen would be to ignore the lessons of September the 11th and make it more likely that America would suffer another attack like the one we experienced that day; a day in which 19 armed men with box cutters killed nearly 3,000 people in our—on our soil; a day after which, in the following of that attack, more than a million Americans lost work, lost their jobs. The terrorists intend even greater harm to our country. And we have no greater responsibility than to defeat our enemies across the world so that they cannot carry out such an attack.

As our coalition fights the enemy in Iraq, we've stayed on the offensive on other fronts in the war on terror. You know, just a few weeks after commencing Operation Iraqi Freedom, U.S. forces captured Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, the mastermind behind the September the 11th terrorist attacks; we got him in Pakistan. About the same time as we launched Operation Iraqi Freedom, coalition forces thousands of—hundreds of miles away launched an assault on the terrorists in the mountains of southern Afghanistan in an operation called Operation Valiant Strike.

Throughout the war on terror, we have brought the enemy—we have fought the enemy on every single battlefield. And so long as terrorist danger remains, the United States of America will continue to fight the enemy wherever it makes its stand.

We will stay on the offense. But in the long run, defeating the terrorists requires an alternative to their murderous ideology. And there we have another advantage. We've got a singular advantage with our military when it comes to finding the terrorists and bringing them to justice. And we have another advantage in our strong belief in the transformative power of liberty.

So we're helping the people of Iraq establish a democracy in the heart of the Middle East. A free Iraq will fight terrorists instead of harboring them. A free Iraq will be an example for others of the power of liberty to change the societies and to displace despair with hope. By spreading the hope of liberty in the Middle East, we will help free societies take root. And when they do, freedom will yield the peace that we all desire.

Our troops on the frontlines understand what is at stake. They know that the mission in Iraq has been difficult and has been trying for our Nation, because they're the ones who've carried most of the burdens. They're all volunteers who have stepped forward to defend America in a time of danger. Some of them have gone out of their way to return to the fight.

One of these brave Americans is a Marine Gunnery Sergeant named William "Spanky" Gibson. In May of 2006 in Ramadi, a terrorist sniper's bullet ripped through his left knee; doctors then amputated his leg. After months of difficult rehabilitation, Spanky was not only walking, he was training for triathlons.

Last year, at the Escape from Alcatraz swim near San Francisco, he met Marine General James Mattis, who asked if there's anything he could do for him. Spanky had just one request: He asked to redeploy to Iraq. Today, he's serving in Fallujah, the first full-leg amputee to return to the frontlines. Here's what he says about his decision to return: "The Iraqis where—are where we were 232 years ago as a nation. Now they're starting a new nation, and that's one of my big reasons for coming back here. I wanted to

tell the people of this country that I'm back to help wherever I can."

When Americans like Spanky Gibson serve on our side, the enemy in Iraq doesn't get a chance. We're grateful to all the brave men and women of our military who have served the cause of freedom. You've done the hard work, far from home and far from your loved ones. We give thanks for all our military families who love you and have supported you in this mission.

We appreciate the fine civilians from many Departments who serve alongside you. Many of you served in Iraq and Afghanistan, and some have been on these fronts several times. You will never forget the people who fought at your side. You will always remember the comrades who served with you in combat [but]\* did not make the journey home. America remembers them as well. More than 4,400 men and women have given their lives in the war on terror. We'll pray for their families. We'll always honor their memory.

The best way we can honor them is by making sure that their sacrifice was not in vain. Five years ago tonight, I promised the American people that in the struggle ahead, "we will accept no outcome but victory." Today, standing before men and women who helped liberate a nation, I reaffirm the commitment. The battle in Iraq is noble; it is necessary; and it is just. And with your courage, the battle in Iraq will end in victory. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:04 a.m. at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to Iraq's Ambassador to the U.S. Samir Shakir al-Sumaydi; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and Gen. James N. Mattis, USMC, commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Central Command, and commanding general, I Marine Expeditionary Force. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

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\* White House correction.

**Remarks Following Discussions With President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia**

March 19, 2008

**President Bush.** Mr. President, welcome back to Washington. I was just reminiscing with the President about my trip to Georgia, about the unbelievably good food, and about the dancing. He was wondering whether I'd come back and start my dancing career there, and I told him I'd probably better quit while I'm ahead.

We had a good discussion. I admire the President. I admire what Georgia has gone through and what Georgia is doing. We had an interesting talk about a couple of subjects, one of which is the economic opportunities in Georgia. This is a country which has adopted a very simplified tax code. It's easy for people to understand. I told the American people I tried to simplify our Tax Code. It's difficult to do. I congratulate you on simplifying yours, and I congratulate you about your rates of growth.

We talked about Georgia's contribution to democracy movements, not only her own but to democracy and freedom movements in places like Iraq. The citizens of Georgia must know that the troops that have been provided there are brave, courageous professionals and have made a significant difference. And we want to thank you for that, Mr. President.

We talked about the need for there to be peaceful resolutions of conflicts while recognizing the territorial integrity and sovereign borders of Georgia.

And finally, we, of course, talked about NATO. The Bucharest summit is coming up. Georgia's aspirations will be decided at the Bucharest summit. MAP application, of course, as the President full well knows, is not membership. MAP is a process that will enable NATO members to be comfortable with a country eventually joining. I believe that NATO benefits with a Georgia membership. I believe Georgia benefits from being a part of NATO. And I told the President it's a message I'll be taking to Bucharest soon.

And so, Mr. President, thanks for coming. I'm pleased you're here. I'm glad you brought your wife. Turns out, our wives are

out having lunch together on the town here in DC. And I just told Laura to keep the tab down. [Laughter] I'm working on Government pay these days. But thank you for coming.

**President Saakashvili.** Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President. I mean, I'm incredibly thrilled to be back in the Oval Office. And, you know, we've been essential part of your freedom agenda. I was not President when I heard your speech in Warsaw, when you spoke about freedom between Baltics and Black Sea. And that was extremely visionary speech because you spoke about the Black Sea at the moment when nobody wanted to look in our direction. And I think we are—what we are up to now is to implement this freedom agenda to the end, for the sake of our people, for the sake of our values, for the sake of what the United States means for all of us, because the U.S. is exporting idealism to the rest of the world.

And we believe that, you know, we have very, very strong partnerships. We have a very, very strong partnership in democracy building. We have a very strong partnership in our military cooperation, because I'm very proud the Georgian troops in Iraq are not just controlling and are present there protecting people but are having success in doing so. And certainly this is something that we will state over generations.

I have to thank you, Mr. President, for your unwavering support for our freedom, for our democracy, for our territorial sovereignty, and for protecting Georgia's borders and for Georgia's NATO aspirations. I think this is a very unequivocal support we are getting from you.

And, you know, this is the last year of your administration, but I can tell you, what you've done for—not only for my country but what you've done for all over the region will be remembered greatly and will be remembered as absolutely revolutionary change of way of thinking, of environment, of giving chances to the people who never thought about having those opportunities and chances before. That's what America is all about. That's what Bush freedom agenda is all about. And we are very proud to be part of that agenda, Mr. President.

You should know that this will stay as a photographic memory in our people's mind, and we will always remember it. We'll never—and we are very grateful, of course. You will dance Georgian dance much better than I do. [Laughter] You are invited back, to come. You've shown considerable talent. [Laughter] I know you're not Georgian; you're a Texan. But we are pretty close. [Laughter] But deep in your mind, you should have something Georgian. [Laughter]

**President Bush.** That's right. [Laughter]

**President Saakashvili.** That's for sure. And, I mean, we certainly—and if you don't want to dance with us, then you can come and bike with us or do anything. But you're always welcome back as somebody who really put Georgia firmly on the world's freedom map—and not only Georgia but many of the countries in the region—and gave us a chance. I think we will continue this cooperation.

I thank you for your support today. We've heard today everything we wanted to hear from the leader of the free world, and I think that's going to give a new opportunities opening to my people. I'm bringing back hope and inspiration.

**President Bush.** Thank you, buddy.

**President Saakashvili.** Thanks.

**President Bush.** Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sandra E. Roelofs, wife of President Saakashvili.

### **Statement on the 175th Anniversary of Thailand-United States Relations**

*March 19, 2008*

Laura and I join in celebrating the 175th anniversary of relations between the United States of America and the Kingdom of Thailand. The United States and Thailand have long been linked by bonds of trust, appreciation, and friendship. The Treaty of Amity and Commerce, signed on March 20, 1833, solidified our commitment to working together for mutual benefit and marked the first

agreement of its kind between the United States and an Asian nation. Over the past 175 years, our two governments have worked together on issues such as economic development, health care, and security. Today, we share a commitment to democracy and to free and fair trade, as well as a respect for human rights. Our tradition of cooperation and support remains strong.

I thank His Majesty the King and the citizens of Thailand for our enduring partnership. This anniversary is an opportunity to underscore our shared ideal of liberty and reinforce our bonds of friendship and understanding. We are proud to celebrate this historic day.

NOTE: The statement referred to King Phumiphon Adunyadet of Thailand.

### **Statement on the Appointment of Kenneth L. Wainstein as Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism**

*March 19, 2008*

I am pleased to announce that I have selected Kenneth L. Wainstein to serve as Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism. Ken is a proven leader and a dedicated public servant with nearly two decades of law enforcement experience, including as United States Attorney for the District of Columbia. As Assistant Attorney General for National Security, he helped improve our ability to confront the threats of a new era. His experience at the Federal Bureau of Investigation as general counsel and Chief of Staff has provided him with a clear understanding of the dangers we face and the importance of ensuring that we have the necessary tools to protect America.

In his new role, Ken will coordinate our Nation's homeland security efforts to ensure that we continue to make progress on combating terrorism, securing our borders, and strengthening our emergency preparedness. I look forward to working with Ken to make America safer.

**Message on the Observance of  
Nowruz**

March 19, 2008

I send greetings to those celebrating Nowruz.

For the millions of people who trace their heritage to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia, Nowruz is a time to celebrate the New Year with the arrival of spring. This cherished and ancient festival brings together family and friends to reflect on what has come before and celebrate a season of new beginnings.

Our country is proud to be a land where individuals from many different cultures can pass their traditions on to future generations. The diversity of America brings joy to our citizens and strengthens our Nation during Nowruz and throughout the year.

Laura and I send our best wishes to all those celebrating Nowruz, both here in the United States and abroad. May the year ahead be filled with peace and many blessings.

**George W. Bush**

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

**Memorandum on Eligibility of  
Kosovo To Receive Defense Articles  
and Defense Services Under the  
Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as  
Amended, and the Arms Export  
Control Act, as Amended**

March 19, 2008

Presidential Determination No. 2008–15

*Memorandum for the Secretary of State*

*Subject:* Eligibility of Kosovo to Receive Defense Articles and Defense Services under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as Amended, and the Arms Export Control Act, as Amended

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, including section 503(a) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, as amended, and section 3(a)(1) of the Arms Export Control

Act, as amended, I hereby find that the furnishing of defense articles and defense services to Kosovo will strengthen the security of the United States and promote world peace.

You are authorized and directed to transmit this determination to the Congress and to arrange for the publication of this determination in the *Federal Register*.

**George W. Bush**

**Interview With Setareh Derakhshesh  
of VOA Persian News Network**

March 19, 2008

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** Mr. President, let me thank you first on behalf of the Voice of America, on behalf of the Persian News Network for giving us your time. We really appreciate that, sir.

**The President.** Thank you.

**Iran**

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** As you know, Mr. President, this is the eve of Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. What is your message to the Iranian people as they face tough economic circumstances and infringement on their freedoms?

**The President.** Well, first, *Nowruz a tan Mubarak*. Secondly, that the people of the United States respects the people of Iran, that we respect the traditions of Iran, the great history of Iran. We have differences with the Government, but we honor the people. And we want the people to live in a free society. We believe freedom is a right for all people and that the freer the world is, the more peaceful the world is. And so my message is: Please don't be discouraged by, you know, the slogans that say America doesn't like you, because we do, and we respect you.

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** What do you say to the regime, sir? What would you say to the regime?

**The President.** I'd say to the regime that they've made decisions that have made it very difficult for the people of Iran. In other words, the Iranian leaders, in their desire to, you know, enrich uranium, in spite of the fact that the international community has

asked them not to, has isolated a great country. And that if—there's a way forward. I mean, the Iranian leaders know there's a way forward. And that is, verifiably suspend your enrichment, and you can have new relationships with people in the U.N. Security Council, for example.

And it's just sad that the leadership is in many ways very stubborn because the Iraqi—the Iranian people are not realizing their true rights. And they're confusing people in Iraq, as well, about their desires. And you know, it's a tough period if—in history for the Iranian people, but it doesn't have to be that way.

#### **Iran/Uranium Enrichment/Russia**

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** On the nuclear issue, sir, is there a solution to the problem that would both satisfy the United States concern and, at the same time, allow Iran to proceed with nonmilitary nuclear energy research?

**The President.** Well, part of the problem is that it's very hard for people to trust the Iranian Government because they haven't told the full truth, and that's why the people of Iran have got to understand there's great suspicions right now, not only in the United States but around the world. But there is a better way forward. And I thought, for example, the Russians proposed an interesting way, that says—and I have said publicly, and the Iranian people need to know that I believe Iran has the right to have civilian nuclear power. I believe in civilian nuclear power. Iran is a sovereign country, and they should have it.

The problem is, we just don't trust the Government because they haven't been forthcoming about their enrichment of fuels to go into the reactor. And therefore, Russia's offer to provide fuel on a contractual basis and provide fuel on a consistent basis would help solve the problem. And that is, the Iranians wouldn't need to enrich; they would have fuel for their reactor; and the people would have cheaper electricity. And I support that idea.

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** Sir, would you allow enrichment inside Iran if there are guarantees and international supervision?

**The President.** I would have to be convinced that any secret programs, you know,

would be disclosed. In other words, I—you know, once you—once a nation hasn't told the truth, it requires a lot of work to convince people that they'll be telling the truth in the future. And my problem is, is that the Iranian Government has not been forthcoming, has not fully disclosed their programs like the IAEA asked them to. So there's a lot of distrust right now.

And the better way forward is for there to be a contractual, solid obligation to provide fuel for a nuclear reactor, and then the Iranians can have their civilian nuclear power.

#### **Iran/U.S. Foreign Policy**

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** At a time when Iranians are going through very difficult economic circumstances—there's high employment, high unemployment; there are high prices; there are unfilled promises—the United Nations Security Council just passed a new set of sanctions against the regime. Is the United States concerned, sir, that the regime might exploit these circumstances to whip up anti-American sentiments, and also to use those and misuse them?

**The President.** Sure. No, I appreciate that. Of course we are. We're always concerned about the individual. You know, I'm concerned about the mom trying to raise her child in a hopeful environment. And I'm concerned about a child wanting to gain the knowledge so that he or she can realize her God-given talents. And of course, we're worried about the human condition.

And any time a government is failing to meet the needs of the people—or a lot of times, not any time—but a lot of times governments have failed to meet the needs of their people, particularly in relatively non-transparent, nonfree societies, they always look for somebody to blame. And I'm not surprised that, you know, the leaders would blame the United States for the problems they, themselves, have created.

And so, yes, I mean, it enters my mind. On the other hand, the people of Iran must understand that the conditions exist in large part because of either mismanagement by the Government or isolation because of the Government's decisions on foreign policy

matters, such as announcing they want to destroy countries with a nuclear weapon. I mean, it is irresponsible remarks like that which cause great credibility loss with the Iranian Government and the actions of which will—are affecting the country.

### **Progress in Iraq/Iran**

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** Mr. President, if I may, I want to ask you about Iraq also. Today is the fifth anniversary of the start of the Iraq war, and you had a speech on the war on terror. Are you satisfied with the political situation in Iraq in view of the improving security situation? And also, has Iran played a role in this?

**The President.** I am pleased, but not satisfied. I am pleased because there's a modern Constitution in Iraq. I am pleased because people have voted in Iraq. I am pleased because there's, you know—they're heading toward Provincial elections in Iraq. I'm pleased to see democracy moving. I'm not satisfied because there's more work to be done.

One of the problems we do have in Iraq is the—there's been some negative Iranian influence, such as the exportation from Iran of certain weapons that have been used by extremists to murder and to kill people. And it's been particularly unhelpful.

Now, look, I understand Iraq and Iran are going to have relations. After all, they've got a long border. But from my perspective, Iran has not been helpful in terms of helping this young democracy survive. I would think it would be in Iran's interests to have a peaceful neighbor. They had been at war at one time with Iraq. I would believe that a peaceful Iraq would be in the long-term interests of the Iranian people. And yet it's hard to have a peaceful Iraq if there are elements inside the country that are trying to use violence and murder to continue to stir up sectarian doubts and raise concerns which will cause more violence.

### **Iran-U.S. Relations/Iraq**

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** There have been recent contacts between the United States and Iran over Iraq. Some dissidents inside Iran think that these might expand to other areas—

**The President.** Yes.

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** —and they feel that this will undercut their position and that would strengthen the regime's hand. What are your thoughts on that, sir?

**The President.** My thought is, is that the reformers inside Iran are brave people. They've got no better friend than George W. Bush, and I ask for God's blessings on them, on their very important work. And secondly, that I would do nothing to undermine their efforts. And thirdly, that the talks between Iran—between the U.S. and Iran about Iraq are solely about Iraq, and that the message to the Iranians is: Stop importing your weapons, your sophisticated IEDs, and—or there will be consequences inside of Iraq. And when we find people transporting weapons that are aimed to harm innocent people or to arm militias that are aiming to harm innocent people, then they will be brought to justice—that there's a better way to deal inside of Iraq than the Iranians are now dealing. And so this message is nothing more than limited to Iraq.

**Ms. Derakhshesh.** Mr. President, thank you very much. And thanks for allowing me to do the interview, sir.

**The President.** Thank you; yes, ma'am.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:11 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20.

## **Interview With Parichehr Farzam of Radio Farda**

*March 19, 2008*

### **Nowruz/Iran**

**Ms. Farzam.** Mr. President, thank you so much for your time in this interview with Radio Farda. On the beginning of Nowruz, the Persian New Year, what message do you wish to share with the people of Iran, especially with the Iranian women, as well as the young generation?

**The President.** First, that the United States of America wishes everybody a happy New Year. Secondly, that the United States—people of the United States respects the great Iranian history and culture. We have great respect for the people. And we've got problems with the Government. We have

problems with the Government because the Government has been threatening, has made decisions that—and statements that really have isolated the people of Iran.

My message to the young in Iran is that someday your society will be free, and it will be a blessed time for you. My message to the women of Iran is that the women of America share your deep desire for children to be—to grow up in a hopeful society and to live in peace.

### ***Iran/Spread of Freedom***

**Ms. Farzam.** Speaking of women of Iran, Mr. President, the majority of population in Iran are women. And even in the Iranian culture they are considered the foundation on which men deeply rely. Is there any plan or could there be one to promote and engage the Iranian women in the U.S. to a unified and centralized movement for a free and democratic Iran?

**The President.** Well, I think the people of Iran are going to have to come to the conclusion that a free country is in their interest. We, of course, support freedom movements all around the world. We're supporting a freedom movement on the Iranian border in Iraq. We are promoting and helping the Iraqis develop a free society. By the way, a free Iraq will help the Iranians see the blessings of a free society.

There's no doubt in my mind that the women will be leading freedom movements in Iran and elsewhere. And the role of the United States is to provide, you know, moral support without—and other support without undermining their cause.

### ***Iraq/Iran***

**Ms. Farzam.** Mr. President, in this fifth anniversary of the Iraq war, what impact do you think a peaceful solution on the Iranian nuclear crisis and a normalization of our relations with Iran would have on the security and political situation in Iraq and more generally in the whole Middle East?

**The President.** I think that success in Iraq will first of all depend upon the Iraqis' desire to reconcile their differences and to live in peace, and that's happening. It's hard work to overcome the—a dictatorship like Saddam

Hussein's, but nevertheless, most Iraqis want to live in peace with their neighbor.

Secondly, a peaceful Iraq will depend upon making it clear to the Iranians to stop exporting weapons from Iran into Iraq—that arm militias and arm criminal gangs—that cause there to be harm for the innocent people.

Thirdly, it's very important for the neighborhood to understand that the United States is committed to peace and that we're not—that we won't be run out because of violence; that we believe that we're there for the right reason, which is to promote freedom and peace.

The free—you know, there's a chance that the U.S. and Iran can reconcile their differences, but the Government is going to have to make some—make different choices. And one is to verifiably suspend the enrichment of uranium, at which time there is a way forward. And the Iranian people have got to understand that the United States is going to be firm in our desire to prevent the nation from developing a nuclear weapon, but reasonable in our desire to see to it that you have civilian nuclear power without—you know, without enabling the Government to enrich.

And the problem is, is that they have not told the truth in the past. And therefore, it's very difficult for the United States and the rest of the world—or much of the rest of the world—to trust the Iranian Government when it comes to telling the truth. And so I support the Russian proposal to provide Iran with enriched uranium to go into a civilian nuclear powerplant.

There's a way forward. In other words, I don't know what the Iranian people believe about the United States, but they must believe that we have proposed a way forward that will yield to peace. And it's their Government that is resisting these changes.

### ***Iran/Uranium Enrichment***

**Ms. Farzam.** Mr. President, as you and your allies launched a global initiative to combat nuclear terrorism, what do you think is your most important challenge to expose and stop the secretive ambition of Iran's

Government to enrich uranium, while assuring its citizens that their happiness and prosperity and peace is a benefit within their reach?

**The President.** Sure, absolutely. Well, one thing is, is to reiterate my belief that the Iranians should have a civilian nuclear power program. It's in their right to have it. The problem is the Government cannot be trusted to enrich uranium because, one, they've hidden programs in the past, and they may be hiding one now, who knows; and secondly, they've declared they want to have a nuclear weapon to destroy people—some in the Middle East. And that's unacceptable to the United States, and it's unacceptable to the world.

But what is acceptable to me is to work with a nation like Russia to provide the fuel so that the plan can go forward, and which therefore makes it—you know, it shows that the Iranian Government doesn't need to learn to enrich.

My only point to the Iranian people is we want you to be able to realize your sovereign rights. The Government has been duplicitous to the world. Very few people trust your Government. And if the Government changes its behavior, there's a better way forward for the Iranian people.

### **Freedom in Iran**

**Ms. Farzam.** Thank you. Mr. President, world democracy is everyone's rightful way of life. In Iran, on the other hand, there is no respect for the basic rights of Iranian citizen; there is no rule of law; and there is no, certainly, the freedom of speech. Do you believe that the people of Iran stand a chance against this regime, to bring about the positive change in anytime soon with your support?

**The President.** Well, I would like very much for the Iranian people to realize a society based upon rule of law and free speech and free worship of religion. There's nothing I'd like to see more than a society in which young girls can grow up to realize their dreams with a good education system.

You know, this is a—this regime, however, is one that sometimes when people express themselves in an open way, there can be seri-

ous punishment. This is a regime that says they have elections, but they get to decide who's on the ballot, which is not a free and fair election. So this is a regime and a society that's got a long way to go. But the people of Iran can be rest assured the United States, whether I'm President or the next President, will strongly support their desires to live in a free society.

**Ms. Farzam.** May I have, Mr. President, my last question?

**The President.** Yes.

### **Missile Defense System/Russia**

**Ms. Farzam.** Thank you. You said many times that the U.S. missile defense system in Czech and Poland is to defend America and its European allies from attack by rogue states such as Iran. But some—this argument is still between U.S. and Russia. Are you optimistic to solve the problem?

**The President.** Well, it's interesting you ask that question. We intend to move forward with the—and the Czech Republic and Poland, for the good of NATO. Obviously, it'd be—make life easier if the Russians and the United States cooperated in such a missile defense. Condi Rice and Bob Gates—Secretary Gates, Secretary Rice were in Russia this past couple of days talking about the very subject, as to whether or not we can find grounds to cooperate. The missile systems, defense systems, would not be aimed at Russia; they'd be aimed at nations that would, you know, try to hold the free world hostage with a nuclear weapon.

And so it's—I'm optimistic. I'm cautiously optimistic. I don't know whether we can find common ground. But we are trying to find common ground, and that's what's—that's the first step, is to make the attempt.

**Ms. Farzam.** Thank you so much, Mr. President, for your time.

**The President.** Yes, ma'am, thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:24 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

## Interview With Master Sergeant Erin Roberts of the Pentagon Channel

March 19, 2008

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** Sir, I want to thank you for this opportunity that you've given us to talk to you.

**The President.** My honor.

### Progress in Iraq

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** Today is the fifth-year anniversary of U.S. military presence in Iraq. And my first question for you would be, as Commander in Chief, what are the areas you are most focused on, and most proud of, as U.S. forces and the Iraqi forces continue to work towards stability and security in Iraq?

**The President.** I'm most proud of the performance of our troops. We have asked a lot of our military and the military families. We've got men and women who have been to both theaters in the war on terror, multiple times. And that's a strain, and it's hard. And I understand it is. On the other hand, our troops know it's necessary.

I am focused on making sure that we do not allow the sacrifice that has gone over the last 5 years to go in vain; that we end up making the hard decisions now, and helping the Iraqis now to develop a peaceful and free society in the heart of the Middle East, which will enable the next generation's children to grow up in a peaceful world—or the next generation to grow up in a peaceful world.

And so I'm pleased with the progress. It's been hard; it's been really hard. It's been hard on our country. It's been hard on the military, but I'm proud of the fact that the military has been so steadfast and courageous.

### Wounded Military Personnel/Military Families

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** Speaking of the military and their families, you meet with many family members, many spouses, on a regular basis, of those that are lost and wounded in the conflicts—difficult situation, I'm sure. Could you take a moment and just tell us what it's like meeting with them and what you say to them and what they say to you?

**The President.** Sure. First of all, obviously, each circumstance is a little dif-

ferent—and you're right, I've met with a lot. Let me first start with the wounded. Generally what happens is, is that, in a place like Walter Reed or Bethesda, you know, a soldier will look at their Commander in Chief and say, "I can't wait to get back in the battle," which obviously—you know, first of all, it's just so inspiring to me, but it also—it's got to change the perspective of their family a little bit.

Secondly, with the wounded, I am obviously always conscious to make sure that these kids, these soldiers—people in uniform—get the best care. And I truly believe they are. And I love our doctors and nurses. It's unbelievable the care they get.

In terms of meeting with the families of the deceased—as you can imagine, it's very emotional. First of all, meeting the President alone can be an emotional experience, and when you put on top of that the Commander in Chief who made the decision of—that got their child in a position where he or she got killed, so, you know, the meetings can be very tearful. I'm a crier, at times. I'm not afraid to hug a mom or hug a wife or hug a husband and cry.

I try to get them to talk about their loved one. I want to learn about each individual person who sacrificed—what they were like, what their interests were—and a lot of times the families love sharing their stories with the Commander in Chief. And to a person, nearly, I have been told that, "Whatever you do, Mr. President, complete this job." Don't—and basically what they're saying is, "Don't let politics, don't let the Gallup poll, don't let a focus group cause you to make a decision that is not in the best interests of our country and our military." And I assure them that they don't have to worry about that about George W. Bush.

I tell my friends who ask me this question a lot, what—they say, "What's it like? You're the guy who made the decision to put their loved one in harm's way. They didn't come home. What's it like to meet with them?" And I say that oftentimes the comforter in chief is the person who gets comforted, because of the strength and courage and great love of country of these folks.

**Progress in Afghanistan**

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** Let's move to Afghanistan. It's been 6½ years—

**The President.** Right.

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** —since we forced the Taliban out of power over there. What do you see the current situation for our troops right now, and how much work do you think needs to be done to sustain the progress that we've made?

**The President.** Afghanistan obviously is different from Iraq. Afghanistan—I mean, Iraq is a wealthier nation. Afghanistan is broke, and they had a long way to go and—from the days of the Taliban, and, you know, they have made interesting progress. I'm going to get some of these statistics a little wrong, but the point I want to make is that infrastructures change. I mean, it's—I think there was like less than 100 miles of roads, and today, there's over 1,000 miles of road. Young girls weren't going to school, basically, and now there's a lot of young girls going to school. Health care was very rudimentary, and today, a lot of people have got basic health care. In other words, the condition—human condition is changing, which is important.

The Taliban has not been defeated. In other words, they keep coming back. And an enemy such as this gets defeated when two things happen: One, you know, we bring their people to justice, as well as a society develops which marginalizes them—in other words, something that competes with their ideology. Everybody in Afghanistan knows what the Taliban's ideology is like. They had to live under them. And now that—we're trying to help them realize there's another way and a more hopeful life. And until a—you know, a civil society develops that provides hope for the Afghan people, it's going to be—the Taliban will be a factor.

And so they're a factor now. Are they winning? No; they're not winning. Can they beat us militarily? Absolutely not. And so a lot of what—and we're bolstering our troops there, by the way, just to make sure that they're not able to intimidate the people to the point where a civil society and a free society can't develop.

So we've got work to do there. The good news is we're not there in alone. There's a

lot of NATO troops—some of whom fight, some of whom don't fight, but all of whom make a contribution. And I'm going to NATO next week and—the NATO meeting in Romania. And I'll of course be urging our allies to bolster their presence in Afghanistan because—and I'll remind them that this was the country that had failed so miserably, that not only were people brutalized but an enemy that hates America and hates free societies developed safe havens from which they launch brutal attack.

And now is the time to deal with them and not hope they change their mind or hope they become better citizens of the world, because they're not.

**U.S. Africa Command**

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** Africa—

**The President.** Yes.

**M. Sgt. Roberts.** —the new Africa Command; you just were on a trip to five countries in Africa. Tell me, if you can, briefly, the significance of Africa Command, and—strategically and how it will play in the global war on terror.

**The President.** Well, first of all, there's some nervousness about the African command in Africa because nations don't want U.S. troops stationed on their border. And so I had to spend time saying, wait a minute, this isn't a typical command. What this is, is a command that will help Africans deal with African problems, such as Sudan. We want well-trained African troops going into places like Sudan, helping the poor folks there who are being brutalized by, you know, thugs, to be able to survive and thrive.

And—first of all, this administration recognizes that Africa is important. That's why we name an African command. Secondly, that hopelessness is the only way radicals can recruit, and therefore, we have programs to, you know, deal with malaria and HIV/AIDS and hunger. But the other source of instability on the continent of Africa is civil unrest, is civil war, is, you know, inflamed passions that break out into violence. And it's in our interests that we help Africans deal with those problems. That's what Africa Command is meant to do.

And so it fits into the broader scope of things, the broader war on terror, and also

is a—it's a commitment that we care about the people on the continent of Africa.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 1:37 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House and was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20.

### Remarks on the National President's Challenge

March 20, 2008

Thank you, all. Please be seated. I'm honored to be joined by members of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. And today I've got an announcement to make as to how to encourage our fellow citizens to exercise more.

First, I do want to thank the Chairman of this Council, John Burke. His business is to make mountain bikes, Trek mountain bikes. [Laughter] I use Trek mountain bikes. [Laughter] That's not why he's the Chairman. [Laughter] But I like to exercise a lot. And I hope my fellow citizens learn to love exercise as well. It's good for your mind; exercise is good for your body; and it's good for your soul. If you ride mountain bikes, make sure you keep your eyes on the road—[laughter]—because sometimes you can go over the handlebars—[laughter]—which I have done.

I want to thank the members of the Council for their good work to promote physical fitness. I believe physical fitness is a vital issue for our country. Nearly two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese. That's too many. More than half of American adults do not get enough physical activity to realize the health benefits. Not enough people are exercising. The benefits include lower risk for many serious conditions, ranging from heart disease to diabetes to depression.

America's young people are three times more likely to be overweight than they were three decades ago. Lack of physical fitness places a huge financial burden on our Nation. Diseases linked to unhealthy habits drive up the price of health care for all Americans.

So we're encouraging Americans to take personal responsibility for their own health. And one way we're doing so is through the HealthierUS Initiative. Now this is an initia-

tive I announced in 2002. And the key—program had key four components.

First, be physically active every day. People say, "I don't have time to be physically active every day." Well, my suggestion is, make time. Secondly, eat well. Thirdly, get preventive screenings. And fourthly, you know, don't do stupid things to your body—like drugs and tobacco and excessive alcohol.

Today we're unveiling a new way to encourage people across the United States to boost their physical activity, and to have some fun doing it. It's called the National President's Challenge. I appreciate very much the Acting Surgeon General Steve Galson is with us, and the person who went to the Press Club and kind of lent a little extra stuff to the announcement, and that would be Eli Manning. You know, he helped kick off this initiative, and he probably thought he'd be—not having to deal with kickoffs anytime after the Super Bowl. [Laughter] But I want to thank you all very much for helping to highlight an interesting and exciting and a fun way for people to realize the benefits of physical activity.

So here's how it works. First, you can go online at [www.presidentschallenge.org](http://www.presidentschallenge.org)—[www.presidentschallenge.com](http://www.presidentschallenge.com)—and you can sign up to participate. You can sign up as an individual, or you can sign up as a group, which would be kind of a fun way to work out together. The deadline, by the way, for signing up is April the third. So get on your web page there and sign up.

Secondly, you get to decide how you're going to meet your physical fitness goal. In other words, you set a goal, and then you pick the exercise or activity. And there's about 100 different activities to choose from, ranging from gardening or skydiving. [Laughter] So I suspect my father will be signing up for skydiving. [Laughter] Mother wants him to sign up for gardening. [Laughter]

Thirdly, start exercising. If you're an adult—and that means 30 minutes of activity a day, 5 days a week; or if you're a kid, 60 minutes. That's—it's not that hard to do if you prioritize and discipline yourself. You've got 6 weeks of activity to meet the challenge—in other words, this ends on May the 15th.

Fourth, you keep track of your activities. In other words, there's the—on the web site there's an activity log that will help make it easier to track whether or not you're accumulating enough points to get an award.

And that's the fifth step. Individuals who meet their fitness goals can receive certificates and medals. Schools that meet their goals will be honored. And when you register, be sure to include the State you're from, because all of us here—up here on the stage will be watching to see which State has the highest percentage of participants. And of course, there will be proper recognition for the State that does the best. I suspect Texas will do very well. [Laughter] I certainly hope so.

I want to thank the members of the President's Physical—Council on Physical Fitness and Sports for leading the effort. I really appreciate your care about the country. I want to thank you for thinking innovatively about how to, you know, encourage our fellow citizens to become active. I wish my citizens the fellow best as they sign up for this exciting new challenge. Have good exercise; have fun; and remember, you'll have a healthy tomorrow when you do so. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:09 p.m. in the East Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Eli Manning, quarterback, New York Giants.

**Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham of the Bahamas, Prime Minister David Thompson of Barbados, and Prime Minister Dean Barrow of Belize**  
March 20, 2008

**President Bush.** Secretary Rice and I have had the pleasure of welcoming three of our neighbors—neighborhood's strong leaders: the Prime Ministers of the Bahamas, Barbados, and Belize.

And we had a discussion like you would expect neighbors to have: How do we work together for our mutual benefit? We talked about trade and tourism. We talked about how to make sure that our security needs are met without interrupting the ability for our people to travel as freely as possible, and

for the ability of people to be able to make a good living as a result of tourism.

We talked about the region. I assured the leaders that the neighborhood is important to the United States of America. We often-times are talked about in dealing with the Middle East or dealing on the continent of Africa. But it was important for these leaders to know that we believe that a good, strong, healthy, vibrant neighborhood is in the interests of the United States. And so we had a good, friendly, important discussion, and I can't thank the leaders enough for coming. I appreciate very much for you being here—two of whom have just recently won elections—good, fair, clean elections.

And I reminded them that there's no stronger advocate for democracy than my administration. And I admire the fact that you agreed to run, had the courage of your convictions, and took your message to the people. And then, of course, there's the old senior man here who's been around quite a while. [Laughter] You've seen a lot come and go. And so, Mr. Prime Minister, why don't you say a few remarks, if you don't mind.

**Prime Minister Ingraham.** Thank you, Mr. President. We've had a wonderful discussion this morning. We're very pleased and grateful that the U.S. President invited us to come. We have discussed with him a number of issues of relevance and concern to ourselves, including the desire on our part to have the Caribbean Basin Initiative act extended. We learned it expires in September of this year. We talked about tourism, the impact that the current increase in the price of oil is having on travel. We talked about security and democracy.

And my two colleagues, who are recent Prime Ministers, David Thompson of Barbados and Dean Barrow of Belize, were able to engage in a full, frank discussion. As for myself, this is my fourth time to have been so fortunate to have come to this place. Thank you, Mr. President.

**President Bush.** Yes, sir. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:29 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

**Proclamation 8227—Greek Independence Day: A National Day of Celebration of Greek and American Democracy, 2008**

*March 20, 2008*

*By the President of the United States of America*

**A Proclamation**

On Greek Independence Day, we recognize the important contributions Greek Americans have made to our national character, celebrate the deep friendship between our two countries, and honor the anniversary of the Greek call for independence.

The United States and Greece share a close relationship based on our common belief in the power of freedom. The ancient Athenians gave birth to the principles of democracy, and America's Founding Fathers were inspired by Greek ideals that honored and respected human dignity and rights. When the people of Greece claimed their independence in 1821, they had the strong support of the United States. Greek patriots risked their lives because they knew freedom and democracy were both their proud legacy and their ultimate destiny. Today, our nations remain allies in the cause of freedom and are working to lay the foundations of peace and spread the blessings of liberty around the world.

In celebrating Greek Independence Day, we commemorate the heritage of freedom our countries hold dear, and we remember the Greek Americans whose strong spirit, resolve, and courage helped shape America.

**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, 2008, 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 twentieth day of March, in the

year of our Lord two thousand eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-second.

**George W. Bush**

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 24, 2008]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on March 25.

**Message on the Observance of Easter 2008**

*March 21, 2008*

*"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."*

**John 11:25**

Laura and I send greetings to all those celebrating the joyful holiday of Easter.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ reminds people around the world of the presence of a faithful God who offers a love more powerful than death. Easter commemorates our Savior's triumph over sin, and we take joy in spending this special time with family and friends and reflecting on the many blessings that fill our lives. During this season of renewal, let us come together and give thanks to the Almighty who made us in His image and redeemed us in His love.

On this glorious day, we remember our brave men and women in uniform who are separated from their families by great distances. We pray for their safety and strength, and we honor those who gave their lives to advance peace and secure liberty across the globe.

Happy Easter. May God bless you, and may God bless our great Nation.

**George W. Bush**

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this message. An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

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**Digest of Other  
White House Announcements**

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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.

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**March 15**

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

The President declared an emergency in Texas and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local response efforts in the area struck by wildfires beginning on March 14 and continuing.

**March 16**

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC. Later, he met with Secretary of the Treasury Henry M. Paulson, Jr., who informed him of the Federal Reserve's latest actions to help the economy.

**March 17**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he had a telephone conversation with Gov. David A. Paterson of New York to wish him well in his new position.

In the afternoon, at the U.S. Capitol, the President attended the Speaker of the House of Representatives annual St. Patrick's Day luncheon. Later, in the Roosevelt Room, he met with the President's Working Group on Financial Markets. Then, on the South Portico, he participated in a photo opportunity with Children's Miracle Network Champions Across America representatives.

In the evening, in the State Dining Room, the President and Mrs. Bush hosted a St. Patrick's Day social dinner.

**March 18**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Jacksonville, FL, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Holly Cleveland.

In the afternoon, at a private residence, the President attended a Republican National Committee luncheon. Later, at the Jacksonville Port Authority Blount Island

Marine Terminal, he toured Coastal Maritime Stevedoring, LLC.

Later in the afternoon, the President traveled to Palm Beach, FL, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Cheryl Crowley. Then, at a private residence, he attended a Republican National Committee reception.

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

The President announced his intention to nominate Philip T. Reeker to be Ambassador to Macedonia.

The President announced his intention to nominate Christopher R. Wall to be Assistant Secretary of Commerce (Export Administration).

The President announced his intention to nominate Miguel R. San Juan to be U.S. Executive Director of the Inter-American Development Bank.

The President announced his intention to appoint Peter Pace as a member of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board.

The President announced his intention to appoint James B. Peake as a member of the Advisory Council to the Board of Governors of the American Red Cross.

The President announced his intention to designate Peter Schaumber as Chairman of the National Labor Relations Board.

**March 19**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, in the Old Family Dining Room, the President had a working lunch with President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia.

The President declared an emergency in Wisconsin and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local response efforts in the area struck by record snow and near record snow on February 5 and 6.

The President declared a major disaster in Missouri and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and flooding beginning on March 17 and continuing.

The President announced his intention to nominate Michael E. Leiter to be Director of the National Counterterrorism Center in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence.

The President announced that he has named Heather Ann Hopkins as Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Legislative Affairs in the National Security Council.

The President announced that he has named Rhonda Houston as Special Assistant to the President and Deputy Director for Appointments and Scheduling.

### **March 20**

In the morning, the President had breakfast with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, and National Security Adviser Stephen J. Hadley. He then had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the Old Family Dining Room, he participated in an interview with Brian Lamb of C-SPAN.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Camp David, MD.

The White House announced that the President will welcome King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain to the White House on March 25.

The President declared a major disaster in Georgia and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms and tornadoes on March 14–16.

The President announced his intention to nominate Constance S. Barker to be a member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The President announced his intention to nominate Robert Beecroft to be Ambassador to Jordan.

The President announced his intention to nominate Tyler D. Duvall to be Under Secretary (Transportation Policy) at the Department of Transportation.

The President announced his intention to nominate John R. Vaughn to be a member of the National Council on Disability and, upon appointment, to redesignate him as Chairperson.

The President announced his intention to nominate the following individuals to be members of the National Council on Disability: Victoria Ray Carlson; Chad Colley; Kristen Cox; Marvin G. Fifield; John H. Hager; Lisa Mattheiss; Katherine O.

McCary; Ann Rader; Renee L. Tyree; and Tony J. Williams.

The President announced his intention to appoint William D. James as Commissioner of the U.S. section of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

### **March 21**

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

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## **Nominations Submitted to the Senate**

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

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## **Checklist of White House Press Releases**

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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 15**

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Texas

### **Released March 17**

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Text of a question taken during a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

### **Released March 18**

Transcript of a press gaggle by Deputy Press Secretary Tony Fratto

Excerpts from the President's remarks on the war on terror

### **Released March 19**

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Missouri

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Wisconsin

Fact sheet: Five Years Later: New Strategy Improving Security In Iraq

***Released March 20***

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Dana Perino

Statement by the Press Secretary on the visit of King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa of Bahrain

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Georgia

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**Acts Approved  
by the President**

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NOTE: No acts approved by the President were received by the Office of the Federal Register during the period covered by this issue.