Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Military and Civilian Personnel in Colombia Supporting Plan Colombia

November 6, 2002

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Pursuant to section 3204(f), title III, chapter 2 of the Emergency Supplemental Act, 2000 (the "Act"), as enacted in the Military Construction Appropriations Act, 2001, Public Law 106–246, I am providing a report prepared by my Administration. The report provides "the aggregate number, locations, activities, and lengths of assignment for all temporary and permanent U.S. military personnel and U.S. individual civilians retained as contractors involved in the antinarcotics campaign in Colombia."

In so doing, I note and appreciate the continued strong bipartisan support given to U.S. programs assisting Colombia in the Act and elsewhere.

This report is classified because of force protection considerations and the high level of terrorist threat in Colombia. However, the aggregate numbers given below are unclassified.

The report indicates that as of September 13, 2002, the end of this reporting period, there were 138 temporary and permanent U.S. military personnel and 250 U.S. civilians retained as individual contractors in Colombia involved in supporting Plan Colombia. This report further indicates that during July, August, and September 2002, these figures never exceeded the ceilings established in section 3204(b) of the Act, as amended.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 7.

The President's News Conference

November 7, 2002

The President. Thank you. Good afternoon. Thanks for coming. This is an important week for our country and for the world. The United Nations will vote tomorrow on a resolution bringing the civilized world together to disarm Saddam Hussein. Here at home, our citizens have voted in an election that I believe will strengthen our ability to make progress for all the American people.

I congratulate the men and women, Republicans and Democrats, who were elected this week to public office all across America. I appreciate their willingness to leave their private lives and to serve their communities and to serve our Nation.

I also commend the millions of voters across America and across the political spectrum who went to the polls. At a time when our freedoms are under attack, it is more important than ever that our citizens exercise the rights and responsibilities of our democracy.

Now that the voters have spoken, I urge the members of both political parties to come together to get things done for the American people. I've talked to leaders of both parties and assured them I want to work with them. I talked to Senator Daschle yesterday and said that, although the Republican Party now leads the Senate, I still want to work with him to get things done for the American people. I talked to Leader Gephardt as well.

I look forward to working with Members of the Congress and the newly elected Governors to make America's families safer in their homes and their communities, to make our economy stronger so people can find work, to make our country a better and more compassionate place. Members of the new Congress will take office in January, and they'll have a full agenda. The current Congress, however, will return in just a few days to take up some unfinished business.

We have a responsibility to protect the American people against threats from any source. I'm grateful to the Members of the Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, that came together to support the war against terror and authorize, if need be, the use of force to disarm Iraq. We must bring the same spirit of bipartisan cooperation to the urgent task of protecting our country from the ongoing threat of terrorist attack.

The single most important item of unfinished business on Capitol Hill is to create

a unified Department of Homeland Security that will vastly improve our ability to protect our coasts and our borders and our communities. The election may be over, but a terrorist threat is still real. The Senate must pass a bill that will strengthen our ability to protect the American people. And they must pass a bill that preserves the authority every President since John Kennedy has had to act in the interest of national security. It's imperative that the Congress send me a bill that I can sign before the 107th Congress ends.

We have a responsibility to strengthen the economy so people can find work. We're working to keep this economy moving. And one immediate thing Congress should do to help people put—back to work is to pass legislation so that construction projects can get insurance against terrorism. This will spur construction and create thousands of good hardhat jobs that are currently on hold because projects without insurance cannot be built.

Although it's late in the process, Congress must show fiscal discipline. At a time when we're at war and a time when we need to strengthen our economy, Congress must be wise with the people's money, fund the Nation's priorities, and control wasteful spending. The workers of America deserve our action on these important issues, which have been stalled, yet when approved, will strengthen our economy.

Many of the fundamental economic indicators are good. Interest rates are low, so Americans can buy more homes. Inflation is low, so paychecks go further in buying groceries and gas. The productivity of our workers is high. The economy has come out of a recession and is growing, but I'm not satisfied because I know we can do better. We must have an economy to grow at a faster and stronger pace so Americans can find a job. And so I'll work with new Congress to pass new growth and jobs packages early next year.

I look forward to welcoming a new Congress. And I look forward to working with the current Congress to finish some very important work. And now it's my privilege to take some of your questions, starting with Sandra [Sandra Sobieraj, Associated Press].

2002 Elections

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Do you believe that Tuesday's election gave you, personally, a mandate? And now that you have the Republican Congress, what will you do specifically, beyond terrorism insurance and Government spending restraints, to address the real anxieties—[*inaudible*]—of everyday Americans—[*inaudible*]?

The President. Yes. First, I think candidates win elections because they're good candidates, not because they may happen to have the President as a friend or a foe, for that matter. Races that were won were won because people were able to convince the voters they could trust their judgment, convince the voters they care deeply about their circumstances. I believe if there is a mandate in any election, at least in this one, it's that people want something to get done. They want people to work together in Washington, DC, to pass meaningful legislation which will improve their lives.

The best way to win an election is to—is to earn the trust of the voters, and that's what happened in State after State after State. We had some really good candidates who overcame some pretty tough odds. They were running against incumbents in a lot of cases, and they ran great races. And they were reassuring people. And I really attribute the successes to the nature of their candidacies and the hard-working people that turned out the vote. There were some really effective voter turnout organizations around the country.

And I think the way to look at this election is to say the people want something done. They see the risks are high, the risk of being able to find a job or the risk of keeping the homeland secure. And they want people to come together to work on it, and that's what I intend to do.

Helen [Helen Thomas, Hearst Newspapers].

Legislative Agenda

Q. The specifics of your——

The President. Oh, sorry, yes. Well, I'll let you know at the right time. For right now, we got to get through a lameduck session. A lameduck session, for people who don't know what that means, it means the Senate

is coming and the House is coming back between now and Christmas, and they've got a few days to get some big things done. And the most important thing to get done, I want to emphasize, is get a Department of Homeland Security finished.

Some rumors moving around that we may not be too keen on getting that done. I want it done. It is a priority. We got a good bill out of the House, and they need to get a bill out of the Senate and to conference and to my desk. I don't know how much time that's going to take, but having watched the debate prior to the election, it may take some time. But it doesn't matter how long it takes, they need to get it done.

Secondly, they need to get a budget done. We need to get the bills, the appropriation bills, done. And I mentioned, they've got to get the terrorism insurance bill done.

Now, given the amount of time they're likely to be here, that's a pretty big agenda. And in terms of afterwards, I'll let you know. But there are some issues, of course, that I intend to work with the Congress on, and one of them is to get prescription drug benefits to our seniors. That's an important issue. It's an issue that I talked about at every speech. The candidates, I'm sure both political parties, talked about it. And that's something that we need to get done.

But let's get this—get out of this lameduck session first.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

United Nations Resolution on Iraq

Q. Mr. President, how confident are you that the Security Council will approve the tough new resolution on Iraq? And if that happens, what happens next? What's the next step? Is war inevitable?

The President. Well, first of all, the resolution we put down is a tough new resolution. It talks about material breach and inspections and serious consequences if Saddam Hussein continues to defy the world and not disarm. So, one, I'm pleased with the resolution we put down. Otherwise, we wouldn't have put it down.

I just talked to Jacques Chirac, and earlier today I talked to Vladimir Putin. I characterize our conversation—I'm loathe to put words in somebody else's mouth. That's, evidently, not the case with a lot of people in Washington, but nevertheless, I am. And I'm optimistic we'll get the resolution vote tomorrow, let me put it to you that way.

And Steve, the resolution is a disarmament resolution; that's what it is. It's a statement of intent to, once and for all, disarm Saddam Hussein. He's a threat. He's a threat to the country. He's a threat to people in his neighborhood. He's a real threat, and it's now time for the world to come together and disarm him. And when this resolution passes, I will—we'll be able to say that the United Nations has recognized the threat, and now we're going to work together to disarm him.

And he must be cooperative in the disarmament. So the job of inspectors is to determine his level of cooperation, see. He has got to be the agent of disarming. He's got to agree that what we're doing is what he said he we do. And just like the United Nations has agreed that it is important to disarm him, for the sake of peace, and so the next step will be to put an inspection regime in there to—after all the declarations and after all the preamble to inspections, that he's got to show the world he's disarming. And that's where we'll be next.

Let's see here. Helen.

Q. I have a followup——

The President. Yes, I have a list. [*Laughter*] I don't want to be so discriminatory that people will say that I haven't thought this through. After all, the new arrangement—and by the way, we're here in honor of Ari Fleischer. Otherwise, we'd be in his house. But since he's getting married this weekend, I thought it appropriate to leave the podium that he occupies empty, in honor of the fact that he's getting married. I hope you all have sent your gifts to him. [*Laughter*]

Ari, I did what you asked me to do. [*Laughter*] I'm sure he's on C–SPAN right now.

Helen.

Iraq and North Korea

Q. Mr. President, what is the logic of your insistence on invading Iraq at some point, which may someday have nuclear weapons, and not laying a glove on North Korea, which may have them or may produce them—both

of which, of course, would be against international law. And I have a followup. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well, I may decide to let you have that followup or not, depending upon—[*laughter*]—depending on whether I like my answer. [*Laughter*]

I am insistent upon one thing about Iraq, and that is that Saddam Hussein disarm. That's what I'm insistent on. He agreed to do that, by the way. Saddam Hussein said he would disarm, and he hasn't. And for the——

Q. And you don't——

The President. Is that the followup? [*Laughter*] Okay, that is the followup. I do care about North Korea. And as I said from the beginning of this new war in the 21st century, we'll deal with each threat differently. Each threat requires a different type of response. You've heard my strategy on dealing with Iraq. I've been very clear on the strategy all along, and tomorrow it looks like part of that strategy is coming to fruition.

With North Korea, we're taking a different strategy, initially, and it's this, that we're going to work with countries in the neighborhood to convince North Korea that it is not in the world's interests that they develop a nuclear weapon through highly enriched uranium.

We know they've got the capacity through plutonium. We have IAEA inspectors there watching carefully their plutonium stockpile. And then we discovered that, contrary to an agreement they had with the United States, they're enriching uranium, with the desire of developing a weapon. They admitted to this. And so, therefore, we have worked with our Japanese friends and South Korean friends, with the leadership in China—I will talk with Vladimir Putin about this after my trip to the NATO summit—to remind North Korea that if they expect to be a—welcomed into this family of peaceful nations, that they should not enrich uranium.

I thought it was a very interesting statement that Jiang Zemin made in Crawford, where he declared very clearly that he wants a nuclear-weapons-free Korean Peninsula. That was, in my judgment, an important clarification of Chinese policy that I hope the North Koreans listen to. I believe we can achieve this objective, Helen, by working closely with this consortium of nations, which have got a valid interest in seeing to it that North Korea does not have nuclear weapons.

Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

Q. Mr. President, can I have a followup——

The President. Of course, you can. Yes, it's fine. [*Laughter*] If the elections had gone a different way, I might not be so generous. [*Laughter*]

Q. You are leaving the impression that Iraqi lives, the human cost, doesn't mean anything——

The President. Say that again?

Q. You are leaving the impression that you wouldn't mind if you go to war against Iraq, but you deal with another nation which may have weapons in a different way. But there are two other impressions around: one, that you have an obsession with going after Saddam Hussein at any cost; and also that you covet the oil fields.

The President. Yes. Well, I'm—some people have the right impressions and some people have the wrong impressions.

Q. Can you——

The President. Well, those are the wrong impressions.

Q. Okay.

The President. I have a deep desire for peace. That's what I have a desire for, and freedom for the Iraqi people. See, I don't like a system where people are repressed through torture and murder in order to keep a dictator in place. It troubles me deeply. And so the Iraqi people must hear this loud and clear, that this country never has any intention to conquer anybody. That's not the intention of the American people or our Government. We believe in freedom, and we believe in peace. And we believe the Iraqi dictator is a threat to peace. And so that's why I made the decisions I made, in terms of Iraq.

Now, Terry Moran.

Consequences of Action/Inaction in Iraq

Q. Thank you, sir. On Iraq, you've said many times that if Saddam Hussein does not disarm, he will be disarmed militarily, if necessary, by the U.N. or the U.S. and others. There's a school of thought that says that

going to war against Iraq would be a dangerous and misguided idea because it would generate a tremendous amount of anger and hatred at the United States, and out of that you'd essentially be creating many new terrorists who would want to kill Americans. What's wrong with that analysis?

The President. Well, that's like saying we should not go after Al Qaida because we might irritate somebody, and that would create a danger to Americans. My attitude is, you got to deal with terrorism in a firm way. And if they see threats, you deal with them in all different kinds of ways. The only way, in my judgment, to deal with Saddam Hussein is to bring the international community together to convince him to disarm.

But if he's not going to disarm, we'll disarm him, in order to make the world a more peaceful place. And some people aren't going to like that—I understand. But some people won't like it if he ends up with a nuclear weapon and uses it. We have an obligation to lead. And I intend to assume that obligation to make the world more peaceful.

Terry, listen, there's risk in all action we take, but the risk of inaction is not a choice, as far as I'm concerned. The inaction creates more risk than doing our duty to make the world more peaceful. And obviously, I weighed all the consequences about all the differences. Hopefully, we can do this peacefully—don't get me wrong. And if the world were to collectively come together to do so, and to put pressure on Saddam Hussein and convince him to disarm, there's a chance he may decide to do that.

And war is not my first choice, don't—it's my last choice. But nevertheless, it is a—it is an option in order to make the world a more peaceful place.

Let's see here. King. John King [Cable News Network], that is.

Legislative Agenda

Q. Sir, in referring to the elections, you're being quite humble about the results and your role. But many conservative lawmakers and many more conservative groups are saying, "Seize the moment." They say early in the new Congress, you should push your plan to partially privatize Social Security; you should push for new restrictions on abortion; you should push and renominate the judges that were rejected by the Senate; and that you should push a total overhaul of the Tax Code. What are your views on that?

The President. Well, I appreciate all the advice I'm getting. [*Laughter*] One of the things about this job, if you listen carefully, you get a lot of advice. And I—it's important for a President to set priorities, and the two biggest priorities are the protection of the American people—that's why I wanted to get this Homeland Security Department done—and the other one is people being able to find jobs. And we'll work on those. And tax relief or tax reform, however you want to describe it, is part of, in my judgment, of creating economic vitality.

But there are other things we can work on. Obviously, I'd like to see some of my judges get a good—a fair hearing and get approved. And Medicare, prescription drugs is a very important issue, needs to get done. Terrorism insurance is an important issue. Energy bill is an important issue. I mean, there's a lot of things we can do and should do when they come back. And I can't remember the litany of things. Listen, there's going to be a huge laundry list of things people want to get done, and my job is to set priorities and get them done. And job creation and economic security—job creation and economic security, as well as homeland security, are the two most important priorities we face.

Q. Social Security and any new restrictions——

The President. No, I think the Social Security debate is an incredibly important debate. And we call them personal savings accounts, John, so that people have the option, at their choice, to manage their own money. That would be younger workers. Obviously, we've got to assure older workers that the promises we have made will be kept.

And the danger, really, is for young workers. That's the threat, as to whether Social Security will be around for young workers without some massive tax increase. And I still strongly believe that the best way to achieve security in Social Security for younger workers is to give them the option of managing their own money through a personal savings account. Yes, it's an important issue as well.

Listen, there's a lot of important issues. The budget is an important issue. The budget is an important issue coming out of the lame-duck session. And the budget, as you know—you're an old hand around here—is always an important issue in the next session. So that's always an issue, too. There are some practical matters as well that will occupy time here in Washington, DC.

Roberts. John Roberts [CBS News], that is.

Securities and Exchange Commission/ Economic Team

Q. I'm wondering, sir, is Harvey Pitt, the Chairman of the SEC, just the first member of your economic team to go? And a separate question: Will you ask William Webster to resign?

The President. Well, let's see, let me start with Pitt. Harvey Pitt did some very good things at the SEC, and it's important for the American people to know that. Right after 9/11, he did a lot to get the markets opened. He really was—played a major role in that and received good credit for that. And I want to thank Harvey Pitt for that, and the American people should as well.

He has done a lot to make it clear to corporate Americans that think they can—don't have to be responsible in their positions—a lot of enforcement, more so than ever in the history; he's enforced the corporate responsibility ethos. He has disbarred more people; more money has been disgorged as a result of illegal activity. And that's positive, what Harvey has done as well.

And under his watch, CEOs now must verify their returns, and that's good. All that's positive. He made the decision himself that he thought that he couldn't be as effective as he needed to be. I received his letter. I appreciate his service.

William Webster, the—there's a IG investigation going on there at the SEC. We'll see what that says. But I will tell you, William Webster is a fine man. He is a decent, honorable public servant who has served our country well.

Q. ——with respect to——

The President. Is this a three-part question?

Q. No. I'm just kind of reiterating the first. He is just the first member of your economic team to go? The implication is—do you have——

The President. Listen, my economic team came in during very difficult times. There was a recession; there was a terrorist attack; there were corporate scandals. We have done a lot to return confidence and to provide a—provide stimulus through tax cuts. My economic team developed a tax cut package, sold the tax cut package, is implementing the tax cut package. And for that, they deserve a lot of credit. They made good—we're making good progress on the economy. There's still work to do. And I appreciate the hard work of the economic team.

Campbell [Campbell Brown, NBC News].

2002 Elections

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You were very gracious earlier, giving credit in this last election to the individual candidates. But a lot of those candidates say they have you to thank. Given the fact that your own election for President was so close it had to be decided by the Supreme Court, do you now feel personally reassured that these midterm elections validated your Presidency?

The President. Thank you for that loaded question. [*Laughter*] Look, sometimes you win them, and sometimes you lose elections. That's just the way it is. And I was pleased with the results. I was more particularly pleased for the candidates who worked so hard, and their families and their workers. That's how I feel about it. I really don't put this in personal terms.

I know people in Washington like to do that. You know, "George Bush won." "George Bush lost." That's the way they do it here, zero sum, in Washington. And I know that. But if you're really interested in what I think, I think the fact that Norm Coleman ran a very difficult race in difficult circumstances and won speaks volumes about Norm Coleman. The fact that John Thune ran a difficult race against difficult circumstances and at this point is still short, nevertheless, speaks volumes about his desire and his intention to serve the country.

There's case after case of people who have put their reputations on the line, who spent

a lot of time away from their homes and their families, shaking a lot of hands and putting their hearts and souls—in both parties. They deserve the credit. Thank you for trying to give it to me, but they deserve the credit.

I know what it's like to run for office. I know the strains it puts on families. I know the tired—the endless hours you spend campaigning and all the wonderful questions you have to answer as part of a campaign. I know all that, and these candidates deserve all the credit.

And I was proud to help some of them the best I could. But the way you win a race is, you convince the people of your State or your district that they can trust your judgment and they can trust your character and they can trust your values. And it takes a lot of work to do that, and these candidates get the credit. And I—I appreciate you pointing out that some people have given me credit. The credit belongs to people in the field.

Yes, sir, Wendell [Wendell Goler, Fox News].

Iraqi Compliance With U.N. Resolution

Q. Mr. President, thank you very much. You have put a lot of effort toward getting the United Nations to rally the world to disarm Saddam Hussein. And yet you and your aides have expressed a great deal of skepticism about whether Saddam Hussein will actually comply. Can you give us an idea, sir, how long you think it might take for the world to know whether Saddam Hussein actually intends to go along with the call of the world to disarm? Will it be a matter of days or weeks, months, or perhaps a year, sir?

The President. Well, Wendell, this much we know: It's so far taken him 11 years and 16 resolutions to do nothing. And so we've got some kind of history as to the man's behavior. We know he likes to try to deceive and deny, and that's why this inspection regime has got to be new and tough and different. The status quo is unacceptable, you know, kind of send a few people in there and hope maybe he's nice to them and open up the baby milk factory—it's unacceptable.

And so that's why you'll see us with a different inspection regime, one that works to see to it that Saddam Hussein disarms. It's his responsibility to disarm. I don't put timetables on anything. But for the sake of peace—sooner, better.

And we'll see. But you must know that I am serious—so are a lot of other countries—serious about holding the man to account. I was serious about holding the U.N. to account. And when they pass this resolution, which I hope they do tomorrow, it shows that the U.N. is beginning to assume its responsibilities to make sure that 11 years of defiance does not go unanswered. It's very important that the U.N. be a successful international body because the threats that we face now require more cooperation than ever. And we're still cooperating with a lot of nations. We're still sharing intelligence and cutting off money the best we can. And there's still law enforcement efforts taking place all around the world.

And that's why the international—this international body called the U.N. is an important body for keeping the peace. And it's very important that they're effective. And we'll see tomorrow—starting tomorrow.

And then the key on the resolution, I want to remind you, is that there are serious consequences. And that's one of the key elements to make sure that everybody gets the picture that we are serious about a process of disarming him in the name of peace. Hopefully, he'll choose to do so himself.

Sammons, Super Stretch [Bill Sammon, Washington Times].

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

The President. You and I are eye-to-eye. Well, actually—[*laughter*]

2004 Election

Q. Now that the 2004 Presidential campaign has unofficially begun, can you tell us whether Vice President Cheney will be your running mate again? Or will you, instead, choose someone who might harbor greater Presidential ambitions to, perhaps, succeed you one day?

The President. Well, first of all, I'm still recovering from the '02 elections. [*Laughter*] And we got plenty of time to deal with this issue. But should I decide to run, Vice President Cheney will be my running mate. He's done an excellent job. I appreciate his advice. I appreciate his counsel. I appreciate his

friendship. He is a superb Vice President, and there's no reason for me to change.

I also want to thank him for all his hard work during the campaign. He was out there toiling along, working hard and turning out the vote, and I want to thank him for the hours he put out there as well.

Please, yes.

Q. If I may follow? Last time you had——

The President. Thank you for not standing up. You block the cameras. [*Laughter*]

Q. Last time you had to kind of convince him to take the job. Have you talked to him this time, whether he is interested in serving another term?

The President. I'm confident that he will serve another term.

Judy [Judy Keen, USA Today].

United Nations Resolution on Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You said this afternoon that the U.N. Security Council vote tomorrow would bring the civilized world together against Iraq. But broad opposition remains all over the world to your policy. Will you continue to try to build support? If so, how will you do that? Or do you think that a Security Council vote would be all the mandate you need?

The President. First of all, broad opposition around the world not in support of my policy on Iraq?

Q. Yes, sir.

The President. Well, I think most people around the world realize that Saddam Hussein is a threat. And they—no one likes war, but they also don't like the idea of Saddam Hussein having a nuclear weapon. Imagine what would happen. And by the way, we don't know how close he is to a nuclear weapon right now. We know he wants one. But we don't know. We know he was close to one at one point in time. We have no idea today. Imagine Saddam Hussein with a nuclear weapon. Imagine how the Israeli citizens would feel. Imagine how the citizens in Saudi Arabia would feel. Imagine how the world would change, how he could alter diplomacy by the very presence of a nuclear weapon.

And so a lot of people—serious people around the world are beginning to think about that consideration. I think about it a lot. I think about it particularly in the regard of making the world a more peaceful place.

And so it's very important for people to realize the consequences of us not taking the case to the U.N. Security Council. People need to think about what would happen if the United States had remained silent on this issue and just hoped for a change of his attitude or maybe hoped that he would not invade somebody again or just hoped that he wouldn't use gas on his own people when pressure at home began to mount.

I'm not willing to take those kind of risks. People understand that. I think a lot of people are saying, you know, "Gosh, we hope we don't have war." I feel the same way. I hope we don't have war. I hope this can be done peacefully. It's up to Saddam Hussein, however, to make that choice.

I also want to remind you that, should we have to use troops, should it become a necessity in order to disarm him, the United States, with friends, will move swiftly with force to do the job. You don't have to worry about that. We will do—we will do—we will do what it takes militarily to succeed.

I also want to say something else to people of Iraq, that the generals in Iraq must understand clearly there will be consequences for their behavior. Should they choose, if force is necessary, to behave in a way that endangers the lives of their own citizens, as well as citizens in the neighborhood, there will be a consequence. They will be held to account.

And as to the Iraqi people, what I said before—the Iraqi people can have a better life than the one they have now. They can have a—there are other alternatives to somebody who is willing to rape and mutilate and murder in order to stay in power. There's just a better life than the one they have to live now.

I think the people of the world understand that too, Judy. I don't take—I don't take—I don't spend a lot of time taking polls around the world to tell me what I think is the right way to act. I've just got to know how I feel. I feel strongly about freedom. I feel strongly about liberty. And I feel strongly about the obligation to make the world a more peaceful place. And I take those responsibilities really seriously.

Elisabeth [Elisabeth Bumiller, New York Times].

President's Leadership

Q. Thank you, sir. You just said you've reached out to Democrats. Does this mean that you will be governing more from the center and taking fewer cues from the conservative arm of your party?

The President. I don't take cues from anybody. I just do what I think is right. That's just the way I lead. And what's right is to work to stimulate the economy. I strongly believe the tax relief was the right thing to do. If people are really interested in job creation, they ought to join me in my call to make the tax cuts permanent. It's an important part of sending a signal that there is certainty in the Tax Code, that all the benefits from tax relief don't go away after 10 years.

As I like to say—you might have heard me once or 10 times or 100 times—the Senate giveth, and the Senate taketh away. That means there's uncertainty when that happens. And you've got to have certainty in a system that requires risk. And making the tax cuts permanent is an essential part. I mean—and so that is a commonsense drive to create jobs.

I will just tell people what I think about how to solve the problems we face. And I ran on a political philosophy; I'm not changing my political philosophy. I am who I am prior—the same guy after the election that I was prior to the election. That's just who I am and how I intend to lead this country.

Jean Cummings [Wall Street Journal]. I'm having such a good time. [*Laughter*] Jean Cummings—there she is, yes.

Securities and Exchange Commission

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Getting back to the question of Harvey Pitt.

The President. Pitt, yes.

Q. What kind of person are you looking for to fill that position now? And how quickly do you want to move on that? And then also, as much as you said that Mr. Webster is a well-respected and quality person, do you think that the Chairman, whoever that new Chairman is, should have a chance to select their own person and have a fresh start?

The President. Well, I think—that's kind of the double-whammy hypothetical there, Jean. I think that the—on Webster, first, let's find out what the facts are so that everybody knows. That's why they're doing this investigation. And it's—one fact is irrefutable: He's a decent man; he's served the country well. And I know he can do that job.

Secondly, as soon as possible, for the SEC nominee and somebody who is going to continue to fulfill the obligation that—of holding people to account. In other words, holding wrongdoers to account and making sure the numbers are fair and open and transparent and everybody understands the facts when it comes to—to accounting, so that we continue to regain confidence in our system; that people, when they invest based upon the numbers of a particular stock, are confident in that which they read. And that's an essential part of the SEC job, and I'm confident we can find somebody soon to be able to do that.

Hutch [Ron Hutcheson, Knight Ridder].

Consequences of Action/Inaction in Iraq

Q. Thank you. I wanted to go back to your earlier point about the risk of an action versus the risk of inaction.

The President. Where would that be, in the Congress or at the U.N.?

Q. With Iraq.

The President. Oh, okay.

Q. Your CIA Director told Congress just last month that it appears that Saddam Hussein "now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks against the United States." But if we attacked him he would "probably become much less constrained." Is he wrong about that?

The President. No. I think that—I think that if you would read the full—I'm sure he said other sentences. Let me just put it to you: I know George Tenet well; I meet with him every single day; he sees Saddam Hussein as a threat. I don't know what the context of that quote is. I'm telling you, the guy knows what I know, that he is a problem and we must deal with him.

And you know, it's like people say, "Oh, we must leave Saddam alone. Otherwise, if we did something against him, he might attack us." Well, if we don't do something, he

might attack us, and he might attack us with a more serious weapon. The man is a threat, Hutch, I'm telling you. He's a threat not only with what he has; he's a threat with what he's done. He's a threat because he is dealing with Al Qaida. In my Cincinnati speech, I reminded the American people, a true threat facing our country is that an Al-Qaida-type network trained and armed by Saddam could attack America and leave not one fingerprint. That is a threat. And we're going to deal with it.

The debate about whether we're going to deal with Saddam Hussein is over. And now the question is, how do we deal with him? I made the decision to go to the United Nations because I want to try to do this peacefully. I want Saddam to disarm. The best way to convince him to disarm is to get the nations to come together through the U.N. and try to convince him to disarm.

We're going to work on that. We've been spending a lot of time—I wouldn't exactly call it gnashing of teeth, but working hard on the U.N. resolution. It took a while, but we've been grinding it out, trying to bring a consensus, trying to get people together, so that we can say to the world the international community has spoken through the Security Council of the United Nations, and now, once again, we expect Saddam to disarm.

This would be the 17th time that we expect Saddam to disarm. This time we mean it. See, that's the difference—I guess. This time it's for real. And I say it must not have been for real the last 16 times because nothing happened when he didn't. This time something happens. He knows—he's got to understand that. The members of the U.N. Security Council understand that. Saddam has got to understand it so he—so in the name of peace, for a peaceful resolution of this, we hope he disarms.

Jackson [David Jackson, Dallas Morning News], from Texas. You got anything—a Texas question?

Judicial Confirmation Process

Q. As a matter of fact, I do. [*Laughter*]

The President. Thank you.

Q. Do you intend to resuscitate the nomination of Priscilla Owen and Charles Pickering? And also, how bloody do you think the next Supreme Court nomination will be?

The President. Well, first, I want the new chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee to understand that I am very serious about the reforms that I suggested in the East Room, about how to get this process of nominating judges and approving judges on the right course, not only for this administration but future administrations, not only for this Senate but future Senates. And so step one on the judiciary process, I believe there needs to be reform. I would be glad to reprise the reforms if you can't remember them.

Q. Owen and Pickering, are they going to——

The President. I'll be there in a minute. [*Laughter*] I'm using this as an opportunity to make a point on judicial reform. And that is that if a judge thinks he's going to retire, give us a year's notice, if possible. And then we will act—"we," the administrative branch, will nominate somebody and clear them within 180 days. And then the Senate judiciary has got 90 days to go through the process and then get the person's name to the floor and 180 days for an up-or-down vote. To me, that would be a needed and necessary reform.

So step one on the nomination process is to work with Senator Hatch—and Senator Leahy—to put these reforms in place, is to convince Members of the Senate we're serious about a process that will get rid of the old bitterness of the judicial process.

This is probably not to your liking, by the way. You love those court fights. I'm confident it makes great covering and great stories.

I also said at the time of Priscilla Owen's being—not being put to the floor of the Senate that I would hope that the Judiciary Committee would let her name out to the Senate floor at some point in time. We don't have to recommit them. They never—they're there. Pickering and Owen are still there at the committee level. They just weren't ever—their names were never let to the floor for a vote.

By the way, if they had been let to the floor for a vote, we believe they would have won the vote—perhaps the reason why they

were never let to the floor for a vote. But—so, I hope that judiciary committee will let their names out and they get a fair hearing.

I thought you were going to talk about the Texas elections. But that's okay. [*Laughter*]

April [April Ryan, American Urban Radio Networks], last question.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you.

Ryan Tyler James

The President. How's your child, April?

Q. She's wonderful.

The President. Georgia W? [*Laughter*]

Q. My husband is watching, and the name is Ryan Tyler James. [*Laughter*].

The President. You might as well turn to the camera when you say that. [*Laughter*]

Haitian Immigrants/Immigration Policy

Q. Well, Mr. President, some critics contend there is a racial disparity in how immigrants are handled here, and speaking of the Haitians versus immigrants, the other immigrants. Do you support the current law on the books about Haiti, and why, either way?

The President. April, first of all, the immigration laws ought to be the same for Haitians and everybody else, except for Cubans. And the difference, of course, is that we don't send people back to Cuba because they're going to be persecuted. And that's why we've got the special law on the books as regards to Cubans. But Haitians and everybody else ought to be treated the same way. And we're in the process of making sure that happens.

It's been an enjoyable experience.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2 p.m. in Presidential Hall in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; President Jacques Chirac of France; President Vladimir Putin of Russia; President Jiang Zemin of China; William Webster, Director, Security Review Commission; Norm Coleman, Senator-elect from Minnesota; and Representative John R. Thune, defeated senatorial candidate from South Dakota. The President also referred to Texas Supreme Court Justice Priscilla Owen and Judge Charles W. Pickering, Sr., whose nominations to be U.S. Circuit Judges for the Fifth Circuit failed when the Senate Judiciary Committee refused to send them forward for a vote by the Senate.

Statement on Signing the Accountability of Tax Dollars Act of 2002

November 7, 2002

Today I have signed into law H.R. 4685, a bill to amend title 31, United States Code, to expand the types of Federal agencies that are required to prepare audited financial statements.

The executive branch shall construe the terms "agency," "executive agency," and "covered executive agency" as used in the legislation in a manner consistent with the separation of powers principles recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1992 in *Franklin v. Massachusetts;* the principle of construction relating to section 552 of title 5 set forth by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in 1993 in *Meyer v. Bush;* and the principle of construction relating to section 112 of title 3 set forth by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in 1995 in *Haddon v. Walters.*

George W. Bush

The White House,
November 7, 2002.

NOTE: H.R. 4685, approved November 7, was assigned Public Law No. 107–289.

Statement on Signing the Accountability of Tax Dollars Act of 2002

November 7, 2002

Earlier today I signed into law H.R. 4685, the Accountability for Tax Dollars Act. I was pleased to sign this legislation, and I thank Congressman Pat Toomey for his hard work on this bill.

The American people deserve an efficient Government. Requiring agencies to provide accurate financial information helps ensure their accountability.

NOTE: H.R. 4685, approved November 7, was assigned Public Law No. 107–289.