

we're going to make this country continue to be great. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. at the Capital Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor James A. Garner of Hempstead, NY, president, U.S. Conference of Mayors, who introduced the President; Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic of Akron, OH, vice president, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Mayor Beverly O'Neill of Long Beach, CA, advisory board chair, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., of Charleston, SC; Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL; Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston, MA; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Adnan Pachachi, Acting President, Iraqi Governing Council; Mayor Phil Gordon of Phoenix, AZ; and Roy A. Bernardi, Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Remarks Honoring the 2003 World Series Champion Florida Marlins

January 23, 2004

The President. Thank you for coming. Please be seated. *Bienvenidos a la Casa Blanca.* [Laughter] Thanks for coming to the White House. I'm honored to be here to welcome the world champs, the Florida Marlins. Maybe this will cause one of your biggest fans to stop bragging, the Governor of Florida—[laughter]—my brother. I appreciate you being here, Jeb. Thanks for coming. It's good to see you. [Laughter]

I don't know if you know this or not, but I've had the fortune of being a part of baseball, and I've never been so impressed by a club that came together and played together as the Marlins. It speaks a lot to the ownership and the manager and the support personnel and the players, that they were willing to play together to win. And they won when a lot of people said they weren't supposed to win, which is the way we kind of like it here in Washington, DC. [Laughter]

I remember when my friend Pudge Rodriguez stood up to the world and said, "2003 is going to be the year of the Marlin." And a lot of people said, "I'm not so sure he knows what he's talking about." Turns out he did know what he's talking about, and I want to congratulate Pudge. I've known

him—I'll never forget when he first came up. I think it's true that he got married on the same day that he got a hit—is that right, Isabel? The same day he got his first big league hit?

Mrs. Rodriguez. Yes.

The President. Yes, that's right; yes. [Laughter] The same day he got his first big-league hit—I think it was against the Chicago White Sox—

Audience member. It was.

The President. —he got married. And here he sits as a member of the great world champs. Pudge, congratulations for being a good friend and a great player.

You're so good about predicting victories, you got any suggestions for, like, '04?

[Laughter]

Audience member. [Inaudible].

The President. I hope so.

I do want to thank Porter Goss and Tom Feeney, Congressmen from the great State of Florida, great supporters of the Marlins, for coming. I appreciate you boys being here. They left—they let an interloper in here, Howard Coble, he's the Congressman from North Carolina. You're wondering why a guy from North Carolina is here. It's because he and the manager are members of the Old Geezers Club—[laughter]—and they're friends. Howard is a good one, isn't he?

Mr. Jack McKeon. That was nice, and for that compliment, here you go. [Laughter]

[At this point, Mr. McKeon presented the President with a cigar.]

The President. Thank you, sir. But Howard is a good one. Howard is a good one. Appreciate you coming.

Mayor, I'm glad you're here. Manny—Mayor Diaz is here. Congratulations for being the mayor of a great city. Jeffrey Loria and Sivia have been friends of mine for a long time. And one of the most joyous phone calls I have made since I was the President was to call Jeffrey and congratulate him on being the owner of the world champs. And gosh, the joy in his voice was just worth the phone call.

See, what you don't know is when I was fortunate enough to be with the Rangers, he was the owner of the AAA Oklahoma City club, our AAA affiliate. So we got to know

each other, and every time we'd call up a good player, he'd call and get madder than heck about it, and say, "You're running me out of talent." And I'd say, "Well, that's what happens when you're in the minor leagues." And here he is in the major leagues, the world championship, and I never even came close. [Laughter] But I want to congratulate you, Jeff, for being a solid owner.

David Samson came through one of these endless receiving lines that politicians stand in. And he said, "I'm David Samson." I said, "I know who you are." He said—I said, "How's the club look?" He said, "We're going to win it all this year." And I kind of dismissed him like another crank and moved him on. [Laughter]

Team member. Just like everybody else. [Laughter]

The President. Yes. And lo and behold, he was right. David, congratulations. And I appreciate you bringing Cindi.

Larry Beinfest is the general manager. It's hard to be the general manager of any ball club. It's hard to figure the right ingredients and to put it all together, but he has. And Larry, I want to congratulate you—and congratulate you and Jeff for figuring—David for figuring out that Jack McKeon was the right catalyst to serve as the manager of the club. He's what I call the Donald Rumsfeld of baseball—[laughter]—kind of crusty but knows what he's doing, you know? [Laughter] And I want to congratulate you.

You've started a trend, recycling old guys to bring championships. [Laughter] But you know what you're doing. You're a great baseball man, which is a high compliment. And you're standing up here as a world champ, and it must be a thrill.

I appreciate Ozzie Guillen being here. First, I want to congratulate Ozzie for going over to the White Sox to be a—to be the manager. I remember when Ozzie was a shortstop for the White Sox and he always had such a wonderful smile on his face. It was a joy to watch a guy participate in obviously an activity he loves so much. And Ozzie, I want to congratulate you for not only being a world champ but for now being in a position where you can bring a world championship perhaps to the Chicago—the south side of Chicago.

The Hawk, Dawson is with us, Andre Dawson as well. He's another great champ. One reason why this organization obviously did well is it found excellence and incorporated excellence throughout the organization. Tony Perez as well, a hall-of-famer. I mean, Jack and Jeffrey were not afraid to find the very best people they could and say, "Help us fashion a team," and you did. And I welcome you all here.

I do have to take some credit for the success. [Laughter] You know how politicians are. You got Doug Davis, former Ranger—[laughter]—a guy we used to call Rosie, Wayne Rosenthal is the pitching coach, former Ranger, Perry Hill, former Ranger. [Laughter] Somehow, the Rangers deserve a little bit of credit, you know? We never—[laughter].

I want to congratulate the three folks I just named. I got to know them there in Arlington. Really fine people as well. I know it's a thrill for them to be here as well. I do want to help the team a lot.

You know, champs are people that play hard, play smart, and play as a team, and that's exactly what the Marlins did. The kind of a lineup that was pesky at the top, tough in the middle, and reliable at the bottom. And you could field your positions, and it was a true team effort to win.

I'll never forget watching the classic Series game against the Yankees in Australia. The time thing was a little awkward, so we taped it. But it was a dramatic victory, and it spoke to the character of the team. And this team does have character, and it's character not only on the field but off the field. And the other night in the State of the Union, I said something I think is vital, that professional sports has got an obligation to send the right message to our children.

And there's ways you do that. One is you play hard and play fair, and when you win, you're good sports. Another way to do it is you keep your bodies clean. And I hope the Florida Marlins and the players and players all around America join me in getting rid of steroids out of sports right now, so as to send the right signal to our kids and help parents raise healthy children. Character matters. And these performance-enhancing drugs say, "What matters more is achievement over

character.” And that’s just not the way we think, and championship teams are teams made of character.

I also appreciate so very much the fact that the players and the organization understands that when you’ve got the spotlight, you have an obligation to serve your community. And I’m very aware that the Marlins management contributes to Florida’s Adopt-a-Classroom program. I appreciate that, Jeffrey, and I appreciate you using your position to not only provide entertainment for the people of South Florida but to help lives, improve lives one person at a time.

I appreciate the fact that Josh Beckett—a big, old Texan I might add—[laughter]—is involved with youth baseball. I hope that youth baseball reaches into places where a lot of kids may have lost hope. There’s nothing more hopeful than for a person to be able to play on a team and realize their God-given talents on the athletic field. It’s essential that baseball brings us joy, to not only suburbia but inner-city America as well. And Josh, I appreciate you understanding the vitality of youth baseball in America.

I appreciate A.J. Burnett working with the Florida division of the Center of Missing and Exploited Children, being willing to be involved, to use his position as somebody who South Florida looks up to, to help children. And what I found interesting is that more than 30 children featured in his “Play It Safe” days at Marlins games have been rescued. You know, winning baseball games is one thing; rescuing children has got to be a fantastic accomplishment. And A.J., I appreciate so very much your heart.

And then there’s Juan Pierre. Every team in baseball wants him leading off, feisty little guy that he is and a great ballplayer. [Laughter] Yes, don’t worry about putting weight on, you did all right. [Laughter] Whatever you did last year, do it again this year. [Laughter] And keep doing what you’re doing—it’s called “Pierre’s Pack.” It brings underprivileged kids to the ballpark. See, he makes a good living, and he’s willing to share those hard-earned dollars with the underprivileged kids.

To me, this is what being leaders are all about and champs are about. It’s one thing to win on the field, and that’s what we’re

here to herald, and it’s a fantastic—fantastic moment for the ballplayers and the fans and everybody involved with the organization. But winners also do things off the field too. Winners understand they have obligations. They’ve got obligations to be a good mom or a dad. They’ve got obligations to give something back to the community and to the country that has made this opportunity for them possible.

And the Marlins are fulfilling it all. They won on the field, and they’re winning off the field. And I’m grateful. Congratulations to the world champs.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:50 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Mayor Manuel Diaz of Miami, FL; Ivan “Pudge” Rodriguez, catcher, Florida Marlins, and his wife, Maribel; Jeffrey H. Loria, chairman, chief executive officer, and managing general partner, Florida Marlins, and his wife, Sivia; David Samson, president, Florida Marlins, and his wife, Cindi; Jack McKeon, manager, Larry Beinfest, senior vice president/general manager, Ozzie Guillen, former third base coach, Andre Dawson and Tony Perez, special assistants to the president, Doug Davis, bench coach, Wayne Rosenthal, pitching coach, Perry Hill, first base/infield coach, Josh Beckett and A.J. Burnett, pitchers, and Juan Pierre, outfielder, Florida Marlins.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

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.

January 17

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

January 18

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC.

January 19

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.