

Remarks on the Bipartisan Congressional Tax Relief Agreement and an Exchange With Reporters
May 1, 2001

The President. Good afternoon. This is a great day for the American people and the American taxpayer. Working together, Republicans and Democrats in the House and the Senate have agreed on a proposal that will provide \$1.35 trillion in tax relief over the next 11 years. One hundred billion will be distributed right away, this year and next, to help stimulate our economy and put money in people's pockets quickly. The rest of tax relief will be provided over the next decade.

I congratulate the Members of the Senate and the House, Republicans and Democrats, who have worked so hard to achieve this bipartisan agreement. You all deserve great credit for agreeing to provide the American people with meaningful, significant, sweeping tax relief, the most tax relief in a generation.

Today Republicans and Democrats have agreed to help Americans send their children to college, pay off their mortgages a little faster, or cope with rising energy costs. In short, once we've funded our Nation's priorities, we've agreed to let the American people spend their own money on their own priorities.

Today's agreement has a larger message, as well. By finding common ground on an issue that divided the two parties throughout last year's campaign, Republicans and Democrats have today proven we can work together to do what is right for the American people. Achieving the agreement on significant tax relief can help pave the way for consensus on other vital issues, including reforming our public schools, strengthening Social Security and Medicare, and transforming our national defense.

When I spoke to a joint session of Congress just a few months ago to outline my budget and tax relief proposals, I said that in the end we'll be judged not only by

what we say but by what we're able to accomplish. We have more work to do to complete the full budget. But today we have accomplished significant tax relief and shown we can work together in a constructive way to get things done for the people of this country.

Thank you.

Federal Budget

Q. Mr. President, are you going to be able to keep spending in check in order to be able to fund your tax cuts?

The President. Well, I'm absolutely convinced we'll be able to fund the tax cuts.

Q. Are you going to be able to keep spending—

The President. I've worked with Members of the House and the Senate to have a discretionary spending at a reasonable level. I hope—we're making progress. There's a lot of discussions going on. I suspect I'm going to have to remain diligent over the next year to keep the spenders in check. That's a good job for the Chief Executive Officer.

Conversation With President Vladimir Putin of Russia

Q. Mr. President, how did your conversation with President Putin go?

The President. Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News], it was good. We had a very constructive conversation. I called him early this morning to let him know that I'd be giving the speech that I just gave. I wanted to assure him that my plans were in the best interests of our two countries, that we are going to consult with the Russians, as well as our other friends and allies.

But I also made it clear to him that it's important to think beyond the old days of when we had the concept that if we blew each other up, the world would be

safe. I told him the cold war is over and that Russia was not our enemy, and I'd help try to define the threats as realistically as I could and that we needed to have defenses to meet those threats. I also told him that we would work to reduce our own nuclear arsenals and would do so in time.

He asked me whether or not there is a chance we could meet before our upcoming summits. I told him I would love to meet with him beforehand, to look him in the eye and let him know how sincere I am about achieving a new way of keeping the peace.

He reminded me at one point in time that he talked about the need to address current threats in our world with systems that might be able to intercept missiles on launch—boost phase—I talked about today. So I felt that it was a very constructive meeting.

Resignation of FBI Director

Q. Mr. President, are you concerned about Director Freeh's resignation? Did that catch you by surprise?

The President. Actually, Director Freeh came to see me late yesterday afternoon, and he asked if we could meet alone. I said, "Of course." And he said, "I'm resigning." And it did catch me by surprise. And I'm disappointed. I would hope—I was hoping that he would stay on. I think he's done a very good job. I'm sure he explained to you—I didn't see his press conference, but I suspect he explained to you the reason why, and that is, he wanted to spend more time with his family. I found Louie Freeh to be a fine public servant, and our Nation owes him a great debt of gratitude for his service to our country. And now we'll begin the process of finding replacements.

National Missile Defense

Q. What response do you expect from the European allies on missile defense? Do

you think they will get along—go along eventually, and will participate?

The President. Well, I think we've got a lot of explaining to do. That's why yesterday I called the leaders of France and Britain and Canada and Germany to explain to them exactly what I—and the head of the NATO—to explain to them exactly what I just explained—I told you, that—Mr. Putin. The phone call I made yesterday was nothing new, however. I had met with those leaders before and talked to them about what I meant.

And during the course of the campaign, when I talked about providing defenses to meet the true threats of—that all of us are now faced with, the leaders were pleased that we're sincere about our desire to go through consultations. I've sent a high-level team—a team of high-level members of my administration, Deputies Armitage, Hadley, and Wolfowitz. It's a clear signal about how, one, important this issue is and how, two, how seriously we take the idea of consulting with our allies and friends. They are very pleased with that.

But they are going to have to speak for themselves. I am a little hesitant to put words in their mouth.

Social Security Reform

Q. Mr. President, on the Social Security Commission, some are saying that if the membership is going to be sort of stacked in a way that preordains a recommendation of privatization. What is your—

The President. Well, I think—I think—let us—tomorrow is a day when we will be talking about Social Security, and that would be a very good question to the members of the Commission, to make sure that there is an objective analysis of Social Security: How do we save it; what do we do to make sure it is viable in the future? There is a lot of speculation about the Commission that will be cleared up tomorrow afternoon, if I'm not mistaken, right here in this very spot.

May 1 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:05 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Jacques

Chirac of France; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada; Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; and NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson.

Statement on the Retirement of Federal Bureau of Investigation Director
Louis J. Freeh
May 1, 2001

Louis Freeh is a dedicated public servant who has served his country and the FBI with honor and distinction. I regret the Di-

rector is leaving Government. We are fortunate to have had a man of his caliber serve our country, and we will miss him.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Proposed Legislation To Extend the
Filing Deadline for Undocumented Immigrants
May 1, 2001

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Leader:)

I am a strong proponent of government policies that recognize the importance of families and that help to strengthen them. To the extent possible, I believe that our immigration policies should reflect that philosophy. That is why I support legislation to extend the window created under section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act during which qualified immigrants may obtain legal residence in the United States without being forced to first leave the country and their families for several years.

According to agency estimates, there are more than 500,000 undocumented immigrants in the country who are eligible to become legal permanent residents, primarily because of their family relationship with a citizen or legal permanent resident. However, the law generally requires them to go back to their home country to obtain a visa, and once they do so, they are barred from returning to the United States for up to 10 years. Many choose to risk remaining here illegally rather than to be separated

from their families for those many years. This issue has been the subject of discussion in the Working Group that Attorney General Ashcroft and Secretary of State Powell co-chair with officials of the Mexican government, and should be addressed to ensure a more orderly, legal, and humane migration flow between our countries.

I encourage the Congress to consider whether there was adequate time for persons eligible under section 245(i) to apply for adjustment of status before the filing deadline expired yesterday. Information indicates an estimated 200,000 were eligible to file but did not meet the deadline. Preliminary reports suggest that many applicants were unable to complete their paperwork in time, due in part to the fact that the rules explaining how the provision would be applied were not issued until late March. It remains in our national interest to legitimize those resident immigrants, eligible for legal status, and to welcome them as full participants of our society. But we