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The President's News Conference in Crawford
August 24, 2001

Nominations for Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The President. Be seated, please. For those of you who didn't stand, stay seated. [*Laughter*]

As President of the United States, I have no more important responsibility than safeguarding the security of our country and our citizens and supporting our friends and allies throughout the world. As Commander in Chief, I have the obligation to make sure America's military is properly trained, equipped, and manned to meet the threats of today, while also preparing to meet the changing threats of tomorrow.

When I took the oath of office and assumed the title of Commander in Chief, our military faced significant challenges. I'm proud to report that, thanks to the leadership of Secretary of Defense Don Rumsfeld and the work of our military and civilian leaders, as well as the cooperation of the United States Congress, we're making progress.

We've increased pay for our service men and women and funded improved military housing and medical benefits. I've asked Congress to provide our military an increase of $39 billion over the original 2001 appropriations. That will be the largest increase in military spending since Ronald Reagan was the Commander in Chief. This money—this is our money our military needs and money our budget allows.

We are not only going to spend more on national defense, we're going to spend it more wisely. Secretary Rumsfeld and our military leaders are in the midst of a comprehensive review of our entire defense structure, from which will come recommendations to accelerate the transformation of America's military.

Transformation is a process, not a one-time event. It's not easy, because it requires balancing two sometimes conflicting priorities: the need to train and maintain our forces to meet all our security responsibilities in the world right now, with the need to research, develop, plan, and deploy new systems and strategies that will allow us to meet our responsibilities in a much different world in years to come. Transformation is important because the decisions we make today, or put off, will shape our Nation's security for decades to come.

I am pleased that my administration has assembled an outstanding national security team. I asked Don Rumsfeld to come to Washington because of his creativity and his experience and because I know he is a results-oriented leader who will get the job done. Don and I will work closely with our new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, who will serve as my principal military adviser, and who will make sure the military's point of view is always heard in the White House.

The Chairman, together with the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, will make sure all our Armed Forces work in a coordinated and effective way. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is also charged with reporting faithfully to the U.S. Congress on the state and needs of our Armed Forces.

In the last several years, our Nation has been ably served by an outstanding military leader and a good man, General Hugh Shelton. He has done a great job as the most senior officer in the world's greatest military. I've appreciated his advice and counsel, and our entire Nation is grateful for his service.

Today I name a new Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, one of the most important appointments a President can make. This appointment is especially so because it comes at a time when we need great leadership. Secretary Rumsfeld and I thought long and hard about this important choice, and we enthusiastically agree that the right

man to preserve the best traditions of our Armed Forces, while challenging them to innovate to meet the threats of the future, is General Richard B. Myers.

General Myers is a man of steady resolve and determined leadership. His is a skilled and steady hand. He is someone who understands that the strengths of America's Armed Forces are our people and our technological superiority. And we must invest in both.

I'm also pleased to announce that General Pete Pace, current commander of SOUTHCOM, will serve as Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. General Pace is a proud marine and represents a new generation of leadership and military thinking.

I have spent a substantial amount of time with both these men, and I am convinced they are the right people to lead our military into the future. Times like these, times of rapidly changing technology and ever-changing threats, will require tough choices. This team of strong leaders, Don Rumsfeld, General Myers, and General Pace, knows that our Nation must think differently and we will think differently to protect and defend America's values and interests in the world.

To tell you more about our new Chairman and Vice Chairman, it is my pleasure to welcome to Crawford the Secretary of Defense, Don Rumsfeld.

Mr. Secretary.

[*At this point, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld, Chairman-designate Gen. Richard B. Myers, USAF, and Vice Chairman-designate Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, each made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you.

Sonya [Sonya Ross, Associated Press].

United Nations Conference on Racism

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned thinking long and hard about these nominations. I hope to ask you about another long deliberation.

The United Nations Conference on Racism convenes in just one week. Do you want your administration represented there? If so, at what level? And are the Zionism and reparations agenda items absolutely prohibitive to any U.S. participation?

The President. She is referring to a conference that will be taking place in South Africa. We have made it very clear, through Colin Powell's office, that we will have no representative there, so long as they pick on Israel, so long as they continue to say Zionism is racism. If they use the forum as a way to isolate our friend and strong ally, we will not participate.

The Secretary of State is working hard to resolve that issue. We have made it very clear from the get-go—I remember explaining to President Mbeki our position. As I understand, the reparations issue has been solved. At least, the last information I had was that that issue looks like it's been resolved.

But the fundamental question is whether or not Israel will be treated with respect at the conference. And if not, then we will assess prior to the beginning. So I am not exactly sure where we stand at this moment.

I do know what our administration's position is. And the position is, we will not participate in a conference that tries to isolate Israel and denigrates Israel.

Q. Participate at any level?

The President. That's my feeling.

Yes.

Situation in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, on Israel, as well, following up on that, today the Israelis pushed farther into Palestinian territory, attacking two houses in Hebron. So far the peace talks that were agreed to between Peres and Arafat haven't happened.

I know you say that the U.S. is engaged, but Egyptians, Palestinians are calling for more U.S. involvement. What is it going to take for the U.S. to actually get more

involved, take more action in order to help bring about peace in the Middle East?

The President. Well, let's start with this: In order for there to be any peace talks in the Middle East, the first thing that must happen is that both parties must resolve to stop violence. The Israelis have made it very clear that they will not negotiate under terrorist threat. And if Mr. Arafat is interested in having a dialog that could conceivably lead to the Mitchell process, then I strongly urge him to urge the terrorists, the Palestinian terrorists, to stop the suicide bombings, to stop the incursions, to stop the threats.

At the same time, we have worked very closely with Prime Minister Sharon to urge him to show restraint. Terrorism is prevalent now in the Middle East, and the first thing that all parties who are concerned about peace in the Middle East must do is work to stop the terrorist activities.

The Israelis will not negotiate under terrorist threat, simple as that. And if the Palestinians are interested in a dialog, then I strongly urge Mr. Arafat to put 100-percent effort into solving the terrorist activity, into stopping the terrorist activity. And I believe he can do a better job of doing that.

Go ahead.

Q. What's your reaction to the fact that the Israelis are moving into Palestinian territory again?

The President. My reaction is, is that I would hope the Israelis would show restraint on all fronts. And we continue to urge restraint with both parties; we are constantly in dialog.

But it requires two willing participants. People have got to make up their mind this is what they want to have happen in order for the beginning of peace discussions. We've got a framework for a peaceful resolution. It's called the Mitchell plan. And our administration, as has most of the world, embraced the Mitchell plan. But in order to get to Mitchell requires there to be a cessation of terrorist activity. If not a cessation, 100-percent effort to get to a cessation, and we haven't seen that 100-percent effort yet.

And if what you're asking is, do we hear the Palestinians call for discussions? Of course we do. But my attitude is, if they are that interested in peaceful dialog, they ought to do everything they can to stop the terrorist activity that has accelerated in recent months. And we will see whether or not the will is there.

Yes. Then David [David Sanger, New York Times], then some of the TV people.

Federal Budget Priorities

Q. How realistic is it for you to expect Congress to move forward with your defense priorities when there is so little money in the budget outside of Social Security? And is it perhaps naive to expect Congress to just roll over and abandon their priorities?

The President. Well, I would hope that a congressional priority is strong national defense. And it will be very interesting to kind of get a feel for the congressional priorities this fall.

And one of the early tests will be to see whether or not the leadership will give us a defense number early in the process. And that's what I've asked Congress to do. I did so in Independence, Missouri. I repeat it today.

And we hear a lot of dialog on the Hill about the importance of national defense. If that's the case, give us a number—at the beginning of the process, not at the end of the process. Let us know what the defense—I think it's realistic to ask Congress to prioritize national defense and education. We've done so. The budget that Mitch Daniels outlined clearly shows that we've got the monies available for a good, strong national defense.

Now, I readily concede, if Congress goes off on a spending spree in other areas, it's going to create a competition for defense dollars. And my point is going to be, to the Members of the United States Congress

and their constituents, that national defense ought to be a funding priority, and I expect it to be. I expect it to be in '01, '02, and '03.

Q. So you are using a veto threat as a way of bringing a hard line into——

The President. Wait, wait, you put the word "veto" in my mouth. I have said that I will work for fiscal sanity in Washington, DC. And one way for a President to make—effect the fiscal condition of our Government is to express displeasure when certain budgets get busted. And so far we haven't had that, and that's why I praised Senator Byrd and Congressman Young. We've had a couple of supplementals.

And as the Washington watchers will tell you, the supplementals have been restrained. They have been within the budget guidelines, and I appreciate that very much. There has been some fiscal sanity thus far. Hopefully—and I am optimistic there will continue to be some fiscal sanity in Washington. We'll find out.

And there's going to be a battle. There's always a battle over whether defense is getting too much or not enough. Our position is, it has been underfunded, and we expect Congress to respond. And our job, as well, is to present a coherent strategy as to why, why there ought to be more money. And that's what the Secretary is here to discuss with me in Crawford today.

You know, there's a lot of discussion about transformation. Transformation isn't one document. It's not a moment in time. It's a strategy, and it starts with assessing the true threats facing America today and in the future. And then we size our forces depending upon the threats that face the country. And those are the dialogs we're now having.

And one of the jobs of Dick, should he be confirmed, is to make sure the Congress understands why our force size—why we are asking for monies for certain force sizes and how it relates to keeping the national security of the country in the long term, as well as today.

Dave.

Q. Mr. President, to follow up on that, the administration's budget projections show these fairly thin surpluses outside of Social Security for the next several years, and the budget that you've been discussing, of course, does not include missile defense, does not include a number of the conventional weapons, transformations that your team that you've introduced here today is going to be working on.

Would it be reasonable to dip into Social Security and into the Social Security funds to pay for missile defense and to pay for military transformation, or is there any other contingency you can imagine that would make it worthwhile to go into the Social Security funds?

The President. Well, I've said that the only reason we should use Social Security funds is in case of an economic recession or war. Secondly, our budget does call for missile defense expenditures. If I'm not mistaken, I think it's to the tune of $8 billion. And you might recall, as we left town, there were some Members of the United States Congress saying that that was way too much expenditure on a missile defense program, and they would like to divert that money to other programs, some within the defense budget, some outside the defense budget.

And so we do make—we've also increased research and development by a significant amount of money, David. But I think the thing that's important to know is that Secretary Rumsfeld is taking a long look, addressing—assessing all the threats or the perceived threats that could face our country and how we address those threats.

One of the threats that faces America is the threat of blackmail as a result of some rogue nation having a weapon of mass destruction. And that not only is a threat to our own land; it's also a threat to our forward-thinking foreign policy. Take, for example, some nation in the Middle Eastern area developing a weapon of mass destruction and then threatening the United

States if we were to move troops into an area to protect an ally.

So, in other words, the ability to have a weapon of mass destruction not only affects our people living in America, because some of these weapons have now got longer ranges than ever anticipated, but also affects our foreign policy. It could be used as an attempt to isolate America, and we're not going to let that happen.

So one of the things you will hear us talk about is the need to develop an effective missile defense system, and we do have money in the budget for that. And there is going to be an interesting dialog over whether it's too much. We're going to stand our ground and say the $8 billion—I believe it's $8 billion, if I'm not mistaken—is the right amount of money.

And you'll see, Dave, as well, as you look at other parts of the defense budget request, particularly the '02 and then the add-on '03, which we haven't laid out yet, there's a lot of money for research and development, which is absolutely necessary. And one of the reasons Dick Myers is the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs—nominee—is because he has had a lot of experience in space, for example. It's an area that we need to explore and know more about. He's had a lot of experience when it comes to the leading edge of technology that is becoming more and more prevalent in our military. And our budget reflects the need to fully explore and, at the same time, make sure that today's military can fulfill the missions. And it's a balancing act, and I fully recognize it's one, but our budget does reflect that.

Yeah, John [John King, Cable News Network].

National Economy/Federal Spending

Q. Mr. President, looking ahead to those budget fights down the road, though, in '02 and '03, when you will undoubtedly be asking for more money for missile defense, many question your economic assumptions—more mixed signals today: durable good orders down, home sales up. People question whether your 3.2 percent forecast for growth next year—even many economists who are allied with your administration say they think that's too overly optimistic. On what do you base it?

The President. I think—I'm sorry Mitch Daniels isn't here to lay out all the forecasts that led to our assumption. And we're right in the middle, as I understand. We picked the number that seemed reasonable.

Let's—the facts are, our economy has slowed down. We had an anemic one-percent growth over the last 12 months, and that affected tax revenues. And our administration, instead of wringing our hands, put in place a fiscal stimulus package that was the first real tax cut in a generation. And we believe that's going to have a positive effect on our economy.

No question the economy's slowed down, and therefore Congress must adjust its spending attitudes. The surest way to make sure that the recovery doesn't happen in a meaningful period of time or a reasonable period of time is to overspend.

So my message to the Congress is: I'm proud of your vote for tax relief; it was the right thing to do because it responded to economic circumstances that our Nation now faces. But don't go hog wild. I mean, appropriators appropriate. Don't overspend. And one of my jobs as the President is to make sure we keep fiscal sanity in the budget.

Q. But if you're off by just a point or two, Washington will be billions and billions short.

The President. Well, if I'm off by a point or two, then Congress can adjust their sights. See, I'm glad that Congress finally, for the first time in a long period of time, has said, "We're not going to spend Social Security, except on emergencies." That wasn't the case up until this administration. It's a useful part of the dialog, if you believe in fiscal sanity in Washington, DC. It set some important parameters.

So we have the tax relief plan, which is important for fiscal stimulus, coupled with Social Security being off limits except for—except for emergency. That now provides a new kind of a fiscal straitjacket for Congress. And that's good for the taxpayers, and it's incredibly positive news if you're worried about a Federal Government that has been growing at a dramatic pace over the past 8 years, and it has been.

Listen, the '02 budget we submitted has got discretionary spending growing by 6 percent. That's a pretty significant number. Certainly not as much as some of the appropriators would like to see in Washington, DC, but we think it's a nice, balanced number. It's one that will help meet the needs and, at the same time, not overspend and therefore affect economic growth.

Of course, the other side of things is, if the economy gets back to where it was growing, Washington could conceivably be awash in money, and so there's leverage on both sides.

Stem Cell Research

Q. On stem cells, you've said that the 60 stem cell lines can be experimented on. It now turns out they've been mixed in the laboratory with mice cells. Under FDA guidelines, they could have no practical effect. Did you know that when you made this decision, that these possibly couldn't be used?

The President. Here's what I knew. I knew that I sat down with the NIH experts, the people who were—people who are charged by our Federal Government to follow the research opportunities on all fronts, and they feel like the existing stem cell lines are ample to be able to determine whether or not embryonic stem cell research can yield the results necessary to save lives. This is their opinion, and I can think of no better opinion on which to make my—base my judgment.

And so I haven't changed my opinion in the least. As a matter of fact, I read some comments today where the NIH scientists again confirmed that we've got enough existing stem cell lines to do the research necessary to determine whether or not the promise of embryonic stem cells will be met.

Q. Sir, did no one warn you that the animal viruses could invalidate the use of these cells?

The President. The NIH came into the Oval Office, and they looked me right in the eye, and they said, "We think there is ample stem cell lines to determine whether or not this embryonic stem cell research will work or not." And I appreciated their candor, and I appreciated their advice.

Root [Jay Root, Fort Worth Star-Telegram], good to see you, my boy.

Weapons Systems

Q. You talked about the need to——

The President. How are you? Used to cover me as Governor. Fine lad, fine lad.

Q. You talked about the need——

The President. Little short on hair but a fine lad. [*Laughter*]

Q. I am losing some hair.

You talked about the need to maintain technological superiority. Given some of its well-known problems, do you think that a part of that would include the B–22, and do you think that, given some of the budget problems that have been discussed, that it compromises, maybe, your ability to go forward with the B–22, the F–22, and the Joint Strike Fighter?

The President. Root represents Fort Worth.

Secretary Rumsfeld. I never would have guessed.

The President. The Secretary and both the civilians who work with him and the military who works for him are charged with not only assessing the threats that will face us but then are charged with not only designing a force structure to meet those threats, as well as the capital expenditures necessary to meet them.

There is no question that we probably cannot afford every weapons system that is now on—being designed or thought about. And you should ask the Secretary this question, if you care to, because he is going to bring to my desk, in a reasonable period of time, what the Pentagon recommendations are as to what weapons systems should go forward and which should not.

One of the things that happens inside the Pentagon is, people are encouraged to think outside the box, so to speak, and help design systems that could or could not affect security in the long term. And there are many good ideas.

But this administration is going to have to winnow them down. We can't afford every single thing that has been contemplated. And when we make decisions, they will fit into a strategic plan. And we need one. And there is going to be one, and it's coming this fall, starting with—as the Secretary will talk about.

Q. I will take you up on your invitation to ask the Secretary——

The President. You can ask him next. I'm on a roll here. [*Laughter*]

Q. Good morning, sir.

The President. This will give him a little time to think of the answer.

President's Priorities

Q. You've talked about limits on spending. If your wish came true that the Federal budget is once again awash in money, what would your priorities be? Where would you like to spend——

The President. Education, defense, and making sure the taxpayers had ample money to make choices for themselves. You know, I think one of the things we've got to recognize is that our Government should fund priorities, but we've always got to remember where the money came from.

And I can't tell you how proud I am to be traveling around the country, and people walk up and say, "Thanks for the $600." Now, there are some cynics who say $600 doesn't mean anything to a working family in America. That's not what I hear. I hear it means a lot to people.

So if we're awash—and I think our economy has got very strong underpinnings. We're certainly going through a correction, but there are some signs we're improving. Some signs, as John accurately noted, still show that there's an anchor on economic growth. But I believe we'll be back and be robust, and when we are, then we'll deal with the budget.

In the meantime—in the meantime, however, it's important for Congress and the appropriators to realize there's not as much money around Washington as there used to be, and therefore, they need to readjust their sights. And our priorities are going to be educating our children and national defense. Those are our priorities, and I hope a lot of Congress comes with me on that.

Q. Are you implying that another tax cut might be——

The President. No, I'm not implying. I'm saying that if we are awash—I think you were implying we might be awash with money, and I hope we are. I think we've got a very strong economy. Let me say, we've got a strong economic potential. We could have a very strong economy again. I think I am going to get trade promotion authority, which should help. This tax cut will help. Monetary policy should help.

And when we get economic growth going again, after the correction in some of our sectors like the high-tech sector, we may have good money. And if we do, then I want to always remember where it came from. It didn't come because of the genius of the Federal Government; it came because of the genius and hard work of the American people. But let's wait until that happens. Let's just hope it happens soon.

Yes, sir.

Immigration Policy

Q. Mr. President, you said yesterday that you oppose blanket amnesty for illegal immigrants from Mexico. But even if you only grant guestworker status to some illegals, doesn't that amount to rewarding illegal activity, when other immigrants are struggling to come to this country legally?

The President. Colin Powell and John Ashcroft are taking a hard look at our immigration policy. They are not only reviewing our policy in our own working group; they are reviewing the policy with their counterparts in Mexico. And we have had some very good dialogs; it's been a very constructive dialog.

I talked to Vicente Fox about this subject a couple of days ago, and we both agreed that the discussions thus far have been positive. I do not believe in blanket amnesty.

One of the issues you referred to is an important issue, and that is, how do we make sure that as we facilitate willing employer hooking up with willing employee, that we don't penalize those who have been waiting in line legally? And so our deliberations are taking that into account. And that's a far cry, however, from blanket amnesty.

I believe that—strongly believe that if someone is willing to work and someone's looking for a worker and can't find anybody, we ought to facilitate the two hooking up. And so there are ways to make sure that people are rewarded for hard work without affecting those who have been patiently waiting in line for legal status.

Q. Respectfully, sir, can I follow up and say——

The President. Is this a question or a speech?

Mexico-U.S. Relations

Q. Well, how do you respond to those who say you are courting the Hispanic vote with this outreach?

The President. Well, I respond by saying that, first of all, I can't think of anything more important for our foreign policy in our hemisphere than to have good relations with Mexico. Mexico is our neighbor, and we ought to have a neighborhood that is prosperous and peaceful.

The basis for good foreign policy is to make sure your own area, your own neighborhood, is in good shape. And I have got a great relation with the President of Mexico, symbolized by the fact that the first state dinner I'm going to have is with Vicente Fox, and it's going to happen in 2 weeks.

The history of the relationship between Mexico and the United States hasn't always been smooth. I mean, it's been pretty hostile at times. And to me, that didn't inure to our country's benefit.

We've got good relations, and one of the things we've got to do is discuss common problems. We've got problems on our border; we've got problems with drug interdiction; we've got problems with environmental issues on our border; we've got water problems; and we've got immigration problems. And if we're going to have good relations with our neighbor, we ought to deal constructively with the problems, admit there's a problem, and figure out ways to deal with it.

The long-term solution, however, for immigration is for Mexico to be prosperous enough to grow a middle class where people will be able to find work at home. And I remind people all across our country, family values do not stop at the Rio Bravo. There are people in Mexico who have got children who are worried about where they are going to get their next meal from. And they are going to come to the United States if they think they can make money here. That's a simple fact. And they're willing to walk across miles of desert to do work that some Americans won't do. And we've got to respect that, it seems like to me, and treat those people with respect.

Now, I get accused of being political on everything I do. I guess that's just the nature of being the President. And what I

try to assure people of is, I deal with problems as I see them. And some people are going to like the solution, and some are not, and we'll just let the chips fall where they may.

I'm going to let Rumsfeld talk to Root. Listen, I've got to go get briefed. Okay, one more. One more. Two more—make them quick.

Representative Gary Condit

Q. You said yesterday that you had no plans to watch the interview last night with Congressman Gary Condit, that you would——

The President. Yes, I followed through on that.

Q. ——but that you would read about it. And I was wondering if you had and if you have any thoughts?

The President. Actually, I haven't read about it yet. I have been briefed on it by Karen Hughes and Condi Rice, who watched it, and you might ask them what their opinion is. [*Laughter*] I'm trying to get Condi and Karen some national exposure. [*Laughter*]

Q. Sir, seriously though, if I could follow up, this is—you've been reluctant to talk about this issue, and 23.6 million Americans watched this interview last night——

The President. Well, I was one who didn't.

Q. There is enormous interest in it.

The President. There was 270-some million Americans, and I was one of the 250 who didn't watch it. Did you watch it?

Q. I did, indeed.

The President. Okay, good. Do I have—I don't have an opinion yet on it.

I do know that—I hope that the Levy prayers are answered. That's my hope. This isn't about a Congressman or about a network. This is about a family who lost a daughter, and that's what I'm concerned about. I hope that if she is alive, she's returned soon. I pray she's alive. That's where my heart is, and that's where my concerns are on this issue. I'm not worried about the gossip or the Washington whispers. I am worried about a young girl's life, and so should America be worried about a young girl's life.

Q. But sir, do you think the Congressman's evasiveness has——

The President. I have no idea about the Congressman. I am not paying attention to the Congressman. I am paying attention to whether or not this poor girl is—is found. And that's what I'm interested in.

I understand how Washington works, and there's all kinds of stuff that goes on in Washington. People are saying this about somebody, and they're saying that about somebody. It's a town of gossip. And I'm not worried about the gossip. I'm worried about the facts. And there's a girl missing, and our prayers are with her parents. I have seen them on TV. I agonize for the mom and the dad. And that's where my heart is.

Last question, Martha [Martha Brant, Newsweek]. No, next to last. This is the last question, but there's two more answers, mine and Rumsfeld's.

Changing the Tone in Washington, DC

Q. I'll go fast. Thank you, sir.

You've talked a lot about changing the tone in Washington, and you've had some success doing it. But lately there have been some shots across the bow—the Democrats' ad this week on the surplus. I'm wondering if you think that the tone in Washington is changing back to the partisan bickering of the past?

The President. Well, it's not in Crawford. [*Laughter*] It's a great tone here in Crawford. One of the good things about coming out here is that you get a sense for what people are paying attention to, and they don't really pay attention to partisan squabbling.

The truth of the matter is, I welcome the tax debate. I hope that people try to, you know, attack based upon tax relief for the American people. I think it's—you know, if you want to try to position an

issue, it's a nice place to be, because the counterpoint is, what are you going to do, raise them? If you're against tax relief, are you then advocating you're going to raise taxes on the American people, which would be not only an economic—it would be really bad for our economy. But I look forward to hearing the debate, "Mr. President, I think you're wrong. We should raise taxes on the people, particularly after they just got their $600 check."

And so I welcome the debate. But out here in Crawford, people aren't that—you know what they're interested in? Their families, whether it's going to rain, interested in the price of fuel, they're worried about insurance rates—they're not too bad in Texas. But that's what they're worried about. They're worried about things. They're not worried about the partisan squabbling that has kind of sullied the Washington scene at times.

And frankly, I haven't seen any of the ads. Of course, I didn't watch the show.

All right. Mr. Secretary, Jay Root asked a very penetrating question. You've forgotten what it is——

Secretary Rumsfeld. I never would have guessed. But I know the answer.

Weapons Systems

Q. You know the answer? I could just be quiet. But let me just ask, on the B–22, is it a viable program, or given its problems, do you think it's just not going to survive?

Secretary Rumsfeld. The issue, with respect to weapons systems, is there are several things that are required by Congress. One is the Presidential budget to be offered in the first part of next year. And there is a process that precedes it in every department to produce that budget that the President then pulls together. The other is a so-called quadrennial defense review, and another is the nuclear posture review. Those are all going on. And through an iterative process with the services, the budget for the 2003 Presidential budget is being built and those kinds of decisions get made.

As the President suggested, we are balancing some risks. There are operational risks with respect to near-term threats. There are also risks of not transforming, of not modernizing the force at a rate that makes sense, or of not taking proper care of the men and women in the Armed Forces, and the risks that you run then of not having the people you need to see that the United States of America can continue to contribute to peace and stability in the world.

So it is that complicated process of balancing those risks that will lead the services to come back with their recommendations, which we then will all consider and take into account in our recommendations to the President.

With respect to the specific aircraft you're talking about, we all know it's been a troubled program. It has had enormous difficulties and—but it has not come to the point of a decision, and it will in the coming period of September and October.

The President. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:44 a.m. at the Crawford Community Center. In his remarks, he referred to President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa; Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; President Vicente Fox of Mexico; and Bob and Susan Levy, whose daughter, Chandra, had been missing since April 30. The President also referred to the Report of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, chaired by former Senator George J. Mitchell, issued April 30. Reporters referred to former Prime Minister Shimon Peres of Israel and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Rumsfeld, Chairman-designate General Myers, and Vice Chairman-designate General Pace.