

Remarks Honoring NCAA Fall Champion Teams
February 24, 2003

Welcome. Ken, how are you? Good. Please be seated. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. Welcome to the people's house on Champions Day. It's my honor to welcome some of our Nation's finest athletes and finest people. I really enjoy the chance to rub elbows with the champs.

I first want to thank Members of the Congress who are here. Gordon Smith from Oregon, Senator, thanks for coming. I know you are proud of the Portland team for their first national championship.

For some reason it seems like we've got a large contingent from the State of Ohio with us today. Governor Taft, thanks for coming, and Ken, good to see you, sir. I'm glad you all are here. And Attorney General, thanks for coming. And I'm so honored that Oxley and Deborah and Pat Tiberi are here as well. They've been bragging about the Buckeyes every time they come to the White House. [Laughter] My little brother had to wear a Ohio State shirt today.

I want to thank Karen Holbrook, who is the president of Ohio State. Thank you, Karen, for coming. Andy Geiger is the athletic director. Archie Griffin, I'm so honored to see you, Archie. It's a—I remember when you carried the ball—back-to-back Heisman Trophies.

And of course, Coach Jim Tressel. When I had the honor of speaking at the Ohio State graduation last spring, the coach said, "You know, watch us this year. We're going to be pretty good." [Laughter] "Matter of fact, I think we'll be visiting you in the White House." [Laughter] You were right. Congratulations on doing a fine job.

Also my honor to welcome Mick Haley, who is the women's volleyball coach at the University of Southern California, here. Mick, it's great to see you. I knew Mick when I was the Governor of Texas and

he was coaching at another university at that time. I used to work out a lot at the gym, and he was always quick to give me pointers about how to stay in shape. [Laughter] I listened. I knew he was a high-quality man when he was there at the University of Texas. He's a high-quality man still, and he's brought some national champs to the White House. Congratulations.

And I appreciate Lisa Love coming and Carol Dougherty, both from the University of Southern California as well. It's one of our Nation's great schools, as is UCLA, who is represented here as the men's national soccer champs. I'm so honored you all are here. And I want to welcome Tom Fitzgerald, the head coach, and Daniel Guerrero, the athletic director, as well as the team. Welcome to the White House, and thanks for coming.

And then, of course, there's the University of Portland. They hadn't been to the White House too many times as national champs. Matter of fact, this is the first national championship of their great university. I'm so proud to welcome Reverend David Tyson, who is the president; Joe Etzel, who is the athletic director; Clive Charles, who is the head women's soccer coach, who brought the team to great things. By the way, the men's team and the ladies' team won their championships in the State of Texas. Now you must be as fond of the State as I am. [Laughter] But I do want to welcome the University of Portland here. You all did a great job in being the first national champs in your school's history. I know you're proud.

I also want to welcome Kirk Herbstreit here. Since I don't spend too much time watching national news, I get stuck with ESPN, and—[laughter]—there you are. You look just like yourself. [Laughter] But I'm glad you're here, and welcome.

The teams who are represented here represent hard work and dedication and vision and goals, the things that really make a healthy society more healthy. Not only are the folks up here with me great athletes and disciplined individuals; they're people in a position of responsibility now that they've become champs. You have a chance now to influence people's lives like you never had before.

I guarantee you there's a bunch of junior high kids in the State of Ohio wondering what it's like to be a champion. They know their football team won the championship, and now they're wondering what it's like. How does a champion behave? What does a champion do? Not only can a champion run fast and tackle hard, but hopefully the champs up here send the signal that making right choices in life for youngsters is an important part of living a responsible existence.

I know there's a lot of young ladies who are growing up wondering whether or not they can be champs. And they see the championship teams from USC and University of Portland here, girls who worked hard to get to where they are, and they're wondering about the example they're setting. What is life choices about?

I guess my point to you is that you're a champ on the field, and now you have a great opportunity to be a champion off the field by setting good examples, by showing people that there is such thing as a compassionate society, that—encourage people in the university you go to to love a neighbor just like you'd like to be loved

yourself, that recognizing in the midst of plenty here in America, there are some who suffer and some who hurt. And you have an example now as champs to help solve America's issues one person at a time. And so I'm here to recognize you as great athletes but, better yet, as great people who are a part of the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

Congratulations on your championship. More importantly, congratulations on using the capacity you now have to help this Nation fulfill its great potential. May God bless your universities. May God bless you all and the families. And may God continue to bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Bob Taft, Secretary of State J. Kenneth Blackwell, and State Attorney General Jim Petro of Ohio; Representatives Michael G. Oxley, Deborah Pryce, and Patrick J. Tiberi of Ohio; Archie Griffin, associate athletic director, Ohio State University; Lisa Love and Carol Dougherty, senior associate athletic directors, University of Southern California; and Kirk Herbstreit, reporter, ESPN television network. The President honored the Ohio State University men's football team, the University of Southern California women's volleyball team, the University of California-Los Angeles men's soccer team, and the University of Portland women's soccer team. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the National Economic Council and an Exchange With Reporters *February 25, 2003*

The President. Thank you all for coming. I'm meeting with my National Economic Council, key members of my administration

who have been traveling the country, listening to the voices of small-business people, entrepreneurs, workers, listening to their