

Statement on Pope John Paul II *February 24, 2005*

On behalf of all Americans, Laura and I send our heartfelt best wishes to Pope John Paul II. The Holy Father is in our

thoughts and prayers, and we wish him a speedy recovery and return to the service of his church and all humanity.

The President's Radio Address *February 26, 2005*

Good morning. This past week I was in Europe, where I had good discussions with our friends and allies about how to meet the mutual challenges we face, spreading freedom and democracy, defeating terrorism, expanding prosperity, and promoting peace. In our meetings, we reaffirmed the vital importance of the transatlantic alliance for advancing these common interests and values.

Now that I'm back home, I'm eager to move ahead with one of my top domestic priorities, strengthening and saving Social Security. I have already met with tens of thousands of you in nine States to discuss this important issue. During the recent congressional recess, many Senators and Congressmen have held their own townhall meetings to discuss Social Security reform with their constituents. For example, Senator Rick Santorum hosted forums all across Pennsylvania this week, and Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan held nearly three dozen listening sessions in his district. I am pleased with the progress of the national discussion on this issue, and I look forward to hearing everyone's ideas when the Congress returns.

Meanwhile, I'll be visiting New Jersey and Indiana next week, and I plan to keep traveling across the country to talk about Social Security. I will continue to reassure those of you born before 1950 that your Social Security benefits will not change in

any way. You will receive your checks, and that is a fact.

I will also make clear to younger workers that Social Security is heading toward bankruptcy. Massive numbers of baby boomers, like me, will soon begin to retire. People are living longer, and benefits are scheduled to increase dramatically, and fewer workers will be paying into the system to support each retiree. For you younger workers, the current system has made promises that it cannot keep, and that is also a fact. Every year we wait to address this problem will make any eventual solution more painful and drastic, and we will saddle our children and grandchildren with an ever-greater burden. We need to act now to fix Social Security permanently.

As we fix Social Security, we must also make it a better deal for younger workers. I have proposed allowing you to set aside part of your payroll taxes in personal retirement accounts. These accounts would be voluntary; the money would go into a conservative mix of bond and stock funds that would have the opportunity to earn a higher rate of return than anything the current system could provide. And that money would provide a nest egg to supplement your traditional Social Security check or to pass on to your children. Best of all, it would replace the empty promises of the current system with real assets of ownership.

I have said repeatedly that all options are on the table for strengthening Social Security, with the exception of raising the payroll tax rate. I'm willing to listen to any good idea. And I will work in good faith with Members of Congress from both parties on this issue.

Some in Washington want to deny that Social Security has a problem, but the American people know better, and you have the power to determine the outcome of this debate. I encourage all Americans, particularly our younger workers, who have so much at stake, to ask your elected leaders what they intend to do to keep the promise of Social Security alive in the 21st century. Saving Social Security will not be

easy, but if you make clear that you expect your leaders to confront problems head on, not pass them on to future generations, I am confident that we will put aside partisan politics in Washington and meet our duty to you, the American people.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:20 a.m. on February 25 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February 26. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 25 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks at a Dinner for the National Governors Association Conference February 27, 2005

It's always a pleasure to host the Nation's Governors here in Washington. Laura and I are proud to have you here for our first state dinner of my second term.

It's a joyous occasion, even made more so by the fact that I learned that the Blancos, Governor Blanco and her husband, are celebrating their 40th wedding anniversary tonight.

Ever since a former Governor of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, lived in this house, many of our Presidents have first served as Governors. And there's a reason why. The experience of running a State government, of pulling together a capable team, of setting an agenda and working with an elected legislative body, is critical to the success of any administration.

My 6 years as Governor of Texas have been invaluable to me as I carry out my duties as the Presidency. And because I know firsthand how—the valuable experience Governors get, I've asked a lot to serve in my Cabinet. I had six Governors in my first Cabinet. I am pleased that Mike

Johanns—Johanns—[laughter]—and Mike Leavitt—[laughter]—have agreed to serve in my second term. I'm proud you guys are here.

When our Founders devised our Federal system two centuries ago, they recognized, in Jefferson's words, that "our country is too large to have all its affairs directed by a single government." The President and the Governors are partners in our great enterprise, and that means we share great responsibilities. Together, we'll work to secure our homeland, to protect our environment, to strengthen our economy. Together, we will work to ensure that every child gets a good education and good health care. And together, we'll work to make sure that we care for those in our society who hurt and who need help. I'm proud of our work together during the last 4 years. I look forward to working with you for the next 4 years.

I want to ask you to join me in a toast to our partners, the Governors and the administration, in building a more perfect