

Remarks Following a Meeting With the House Republican Conference March 29, 2007

I want to thank the Republican leadership and the Republican Members of Congress for coming down to have a very frank and open discussion about issues facing our country. Yesterday I gave a speech, making it clear that I'll veto a bill that restricts our commanders on the ground in Iraq, a bill that doesn't fund our troops, a bill that's got too much spending on it. I made that clear to the Members.

We stand united in saying loud and clear that when we've got a troop in harm's way, we expect that troop to be fully funded; and we've got commanders making tough decisions on the ground, we expect there to be no strings on our commanders; and that we expect the Congress to be wise about how they spend the people's money.

We spent time talking today about our strong belief that we've got to keep taxes low. And so we had a very productive session, a session of friends talking amongst friends, all aiming to put a strategy together of how we can work together to secure this Nation and keep it prosperous. And so I appreciate you all coming. You're welcome back at the White House any time you want to join us.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:28 a.m. on the North Portico at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Gold Medal to the Tuskegee Airmen March 29, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you. Madam Speaker, Mr. Leader, Members of Congress, Secretary Powell, distinguished guests: You know, the Speaker and I had the honor of having our picture taken with you, and as I walked into the rotunda, a place that occasionally I get invited up here and I walk into, I was impressed by the fact that I wasn't amongst heroes who were statues; I was impressed that I was amongst heroes who still live. I thank you for the honor you have brought to our country. And the medal you're about to receive means our country honors you, and rightly so.

And I want to thank Senator Carl Levin and Sergeant Rangel. [*Laughter*] Excuse me, Mr. Chairman. I thank you for your leadership on this issue. I have a strong

interest in World War II airmen; I was raised by one. He flew with a group of brave young men who endured difficult times in the defense of our country.

Yet for all they sacrificed and all they lost, in a way, they were very fortunate, because they never had the burden of having their every mission, their every success, their every failure viewed through the color of their skin. Nobody told them they were a credit to their race. Nobody refused to return their salutes. Nobody expected them to bear the daily humiliations while wearing the uniform of their country.

It was different for the men in this room. When America entered World War II, it might have been easy for them to do little for our country. After all, the country didn't do much for them. Even the Nazis asked

why African American men would fight for a country that treated them so unfairly. Yet the Tuskegee Airmen were eager to join up.

You know, I'm interested in the story about a young man who was so worried that the Army might change its mind about allowing him to fly, that he drove immediately to the train station. He left his car, as well as \$1,000 worth of photography equipment. He never saw his car, he never saw his camera, but he became a flyer.

These men in our presence felt a special sense of urgency. They were fighting two wars: One was in Europe, and the other took place in the hearts and minds of our citizens. That's why we're here. The white commander of the Tuskegee airfield was once asked, with all seriousness, "How do African Americans fly?" Kind of reflecting the ignorance of the times, they said, "How do African Americans fly?" He said, "Oh, they fly just like everybody else flies—stick and rudder." [Laughter]

Soon, Americans in their kitchens and living rooms were reading the headlines. You probably didn't realize it at the time, but you were making headlines at home, headlines that spoke about daring pilots winning a common battle.

And little by little, every victory at war was translated to a victory here in the United States. And we're in the presence of men who are earning those victories, important victories, leaders who pierced the unquestioned prejudices of a different society. You gave African Americans a sense of pride and possibility.

You saw that pride and awe—I'm sure you remember—in the faces of young children who came up to you right after the war and tugged on your uniforms and said, "Mister, can you really fly an airplane?" Some of you have been in Germany and Iraq, and you still see that sense of pride.

I appreciate your going. I appreciate the fact that one of our young soldiers today took pictures for a—of you for a scrapbook for his children. I appreciate the fact that one of our soldiers today said: "It is not often that you get a chance to meet the guys who have paved the path for you."

The Tuskegee Airmen helped win a war, and you helped change our Nation for the better. Yours is the story of the human spirit, and it ends like all great stories do—with wisdom and lessons and hope for tomorrow. And the medal that we confer today means that we're doing a small part to ensure that your story will be told and honored for generations to come.

And I would like to offer a gesture to help atone for all the unreturned salutes and unforgivable indignities. And so, on behalf of the Office I hold and a country that honors you, I salute you for the service to the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:23 p.m. at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks During a Visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center *March 30, 2007*

Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you all for joining me. Every time I come to Walter Reed, my spirits are lifted. They're first lifted by the soldiers and marines who

are recovering from some very tough wounds. I had the honor of pinning the Purple Heart on quite a few people today, and I am always impressed by their resolve