

And now if Brianna and Damarcus will join Laura, and if you will join me in a countdown: five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his re-

marks, he referred to Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, who introduced the President; Vin Cipolla, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; and Rev. Roger P. Freeman, senior pastor, First Baptist Church, Clarksville, TN.

## Remarks Following a Meeting With First Minister Ian Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Northern Ireland *December 7, 2007*

*President Bush.* One of the great experiences for me during my Presidency is to witness historic occasions, and I'm witnessing such an occasion with the arrival of Reverend Paisley and Mr. Martin McGuinness here to the White House. These two men are—have dedicated themselves to embettering their—Northern Ireland through their courage and conviction and desire to put aside the past and focus on a hopeful future.

And so I want to welcome you all here. I congratulate you for seizing the moment and writing a hopeful chapter. I'm looking forward to hearing about how the United States can help Northern Ireland move forward. I know one way we can help, and that is to encourage our business leaders to take a good look at the economic opportunities that Northern Ireland presents.

And so I welcome you here. I'm proud of your accomplishments. And I welcome you all to say a few comments to the TV, if you care to do so.

*First Minister Paisley.* Well, Mr. President, our first words on that—[*inaudible*]. We want to say from the people of Northern Ireland, "Thank you." Thank you to the American people for all they have done for us in the past. We did a lot for you in the past too.

But what I can say is we deeply appreciate that. And we also deeply appreciate the fact that we're here today, and that you have met us and have tried to encour-

age us on this. We have had our political squabbles and fights. I think we have come to the end of that. I think that peace has come; there will be a fight for peace. You don't win peace; you have to fight to keep it.

*President Bush.* Yes, sir.

*First Minister Paisley.* And we intend to that, and we're dedicated to that.

But we do need help in the economic field. And that—we're glad that the door has opened. We have had a very good reception in your country so far, and of course—[*inaudible*]. And when we look back and see this mighty army that's following hard in your tracks, we know that this is your final. And we say, thank you, and we look forward to good dealings between our little country and yours in the coming days.

*President Bush.* Thank you, sir.  
Martin.

*Deputy First Minister McGuinness.* Yes. Can I too reiterate the comments of the First Minister in expressing our deepest thanks and appreciation to you and your administration for the tremendous help that we have received throughout the course of the process; follows on from the tradition of President Clinton and his administration.

So we're hugely appreciative of both of you for all of the tremendous support that we have received. Up until the 26th of March this year, Ian Paisley and I never

had a conversation about anything—[laughter]—not even about the weather. And now we have worked very closely together over the course of the last 7 months, and there hasn't been an angry word between us.

*President Bush.* Thank you.

*Deputy First Minister McGuinness.* So I think that that clearly shows that we are set for a new course. There is peace and stability. We have transformed the political situation. What we now need to do, as you have correctly identified, is transform the economic situation so that we can give our young people, in particular, a better future.

I am confident that we can do that, and with the tremendous assistance we've received here in the United States, and particularly working towards the economic investment conference in May, the future looks greater than it ever has in the course of Irish history.

*President Bush.* Thank you, sir. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:49 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## The President's Radio Address December 7, 2007

Good morning. Today I'm going to talk to you about some important policies affecting taxpayers and homeowners this holiday season. On Thursday, the United States Senate passed a bill to fix the Alternative Minimum Tax, or AMT. The AMT was designed to ensure that the wealthy paid their fair share of taxes. But when Congress passed the AMT decades ago, it was not indexed for inflation. As a result, the AMT's higher tax burden is creeping up on more and more middle class families, and as many as 25 million Americans would be subject to the AMT. On average, these taxpayers would have to send an extra \$2,000 to the IRS next year. This is a huge tax increase that taxpayers do not deserve and that Congress must stop.

I congratulate the United States Senate for acting to do so. Now it's up to the House of Representatives to move the bill. They've already delayed the bill so long that 75 billion in tax refund checks could be delayed next year.

I urge the House of Representatives to get the Senate-passed AMT relief bill to my desk before they adjourn so I can sign it and protect millions of families from

higher taxes and avert any further delay in the tax refund checks next year.

I also know many Americans are concerned about meeting their mortgage obligations. The private sector and the Government both have a role to play. More than 3 months ago, I announced a series of targeted actions to help responsible homeowners avoid foreclosure. And on Thursday, I met with Treasury Secretary Paulson and Housing Secretary Jackson, who updated me on the progress.

The first step we took was to launch a new initiative at the Federal Housing Administration called FHASecure. This program gives the FHA greater flexibility to offer refinancing to homeowners who have good credit histories but cannot afford their current payments. In just 3 months, the FHA has helped more than 35,000 people refinance their homes. And in the coming year, the FHA expects this program to help more than 300,000 families.

Second, we helped assemble the HOPE NOW Alliance, which includes lenders, loan servicers, investors, and mortgage counselors. HOPE NOW is an example of