

speaker, my wife, the First Lady, Laura Bush.

[At this point, the First Lady spoke, a video was shown, and the President signed the Executive order.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:54 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Executive Order 13459, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Statement on Senate Action on Economic Growth Legislation February 7, 2008

Two weeks ago, my administration reached an agreement with Speaker Pelosi and Leader Boehner on a short-term economic growth package that would quickly put money into the hands of the American people and provide our economy the boost it needs. Today the Senate amended that bill in ways I can support.

This plan is robust, broad-based, timely, and it will be effective. This bill will help

to stimulate consumer spending and accelerate needed business investment.

This economic growth package is an example of bipartisan cooperation at a time when the American people most expect it. I thank members of both parties and both Houses for their efforts to advance this important legislation.

Remarks to the Conservative Political Action Conference February 8, 2008

The President. Thank you all. Good morning, and thank you all very much. I thank you for coming. I apologize to my friend; he likes to sleep in. [Laughter]

I really do want to thank you all for adjusting the schedule. Right after the speech, I'm going to get on an airplane and fly to Tennessee. I'll be taking the prayers of the American people to those who suffered from the devastating tornadoes.

Mr. Leader, thank you for that introduction, and I appreciate your outstanding leadership in the United States Senate. You know, Mr. Leader, I used to think that leading a group of strong-willed Senators was one of the toughest jobs in the country. I may have found one even tougher one: father of the bride. You know, I told Laura

I was going to say that, and she said, well, you might add another one: son-in-law to the President. [Laughter]

I thank you for the invitation. I appreciate the fact that you've invited our candidates to your forum, and thank you for the hearing you gave them. These are good, honorable people. And I appreciate the fact that you invited Vice President Cheney here. He is the best Vice President in history. Mother may have a different opinion. [Laughter] But don't tell her I said this, but my opinion is the one that counts.

Since I spoke with you last, some things have changed. It seems like my hair is little grayer. [Laughter] And my jokes are a little older. And some say my speeches are a little windier. Some things haven't changed:

the principles I believe in and my deep, abiding faith in the American people.

It just doesn't seem all that long ago that David invited me here, but it's been about 7 years. And during that time, we have stood together, and we have advanced a philosophy of freedom and responsibility that's made our Nation a better place and a stronger place. And today I want to talk to you about what you and I have achieved together, what it tells us about the stakes in the year ahead, and why it is so important that we keep the White House in 2008.

I thank the leader, David Keene. He's a good guy. You know, this is the 35th—yes—anniversary, which means he started the deal when he was 15. [Laughter] At least that's what he claims. [Laughter] But thank you for your leadership. I thank you for your board. I've got a lot of friends up here at the head table and a lot of friends in the audience, and I really do appreciate what you've done.

Audience member. We love you, George.

The President. Well, thank you.

A lot has happened over 8 years—that was the last time I spoke to you, was 8 years ago. And we've seen vigorous debates, a lot of debates on nearly every conceivable issue, matters that affected the prosperity and peace.

Our views are grounded in timeless truths. During these debates, we stuck to timeless truths. We believe that the most reliable guide for our country is the collective wisdom of ordinary citizens. We believe our culture benefits from a diversity of faith, a respect for values, and the guidance of a higher power. We believe in personal responsibility. We believe in the universality of freedom. We believe our Nation has the right to defend itself, even if sometimes others disagree. And we believe America remains a force of good in our world.

There's another philosophy, and it's advanced by decent people who see the world differently. They tend to think Washington

has the answers to our problems. They tend to believe our country only succeeds under the expansive Federal Government. They tend to be suspicious of America's exercise of global leadership, unless, of course, we get a permission slip from international organizations. [Laughter]

Over the past 7 years, we have engaged this opposition with a clear and consistent philosophy. We didn't take polls to decide what to say. We didn't seek the advice of editorial pages to decide what to think. And we darn sure didn't seek the approval of groups like CODEPINK and MoveOn.org before deciding what to do.

We applied our philosophy on issues relating to economic prosperity. When I took office, we inherited a recession, and then we acted. We were guided by this principle: The best way to help our economy grow is to leave money in the hands of those responsible for our prosperity. That, of course, would be the American people. And so with your support, we passed one of the largest tax cuts in American history, and then we cut taxes again. In all, we delivered nearly \$2 trillion in tax relief over the past 7 years.

Our critics wanted a different approach. They believed that the best way to keep the economy—to help the economy was to keep taxes in Washington and expand the size and scope of the Federal Government.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. One columnist wrote this—one columnist said this: "Tax cuts—any tax cuts—are the wrong way to go." A prominent newspaper said my administration was on a tax cut rampage and called our tax relief unfair and unaffordable. A think tank expert called our tax relief a reckless gamble.

Despite these dire predictions, the tax cuts we passed contributed to a record 52 months of job creation. They helped produce strong economic growth, and the increased revenues from that growth have put us on track to balance our budget by

2012. Here is the bottom line: Tax relief works.

We're in a period of economic uncertainty, and we've acted again. I want to thank the Members for passing a good piece of legislation, which I will sign into law next week. I want you all to understand that this bill reflects our principles. It is robust. It is progrowth. It stimulates business investment. And it puts money into the hands of American consumers.

In the longer run, the best way to make sure that our economy continues to grow is to make the tax relief we passed permanent. Unfortunately, the other side still hasn't learned the lessons. They want to let the tax cuts expire, and some are claiming, of course, this isn't a tax increase. Yet if they have their way, 116 million American taxpayers would see their taxes rise by an average of \$1,800. Listen, I'm not known for my English—[laughter]—but in my way of speaking, it sure sounds like a tax increase to me.

You and I know the American people are not undertaxed. The problem is, Washington spends too much of your money. One of the things I have done is, I have set priorities. And you must understand my passion about protecting America. My number-one priority is to protect you. And after 9/11, we have substantially increased spending on defense, intelligence, and homeland security. And we will continue to provide for our troops. We will make sure the men and women who wear the uniform have the best and strongest support they need to do their job.

And so we've worked hard to make sure we hold the line on spending in other areas. For 5 years in a row, my budget requests have kept the growth of nonsecurity discretionary spending below the rate of inflation. I set clear spending limits, told the Congress I was going to veto them if they—veto bills if they exceeded those spending limits. The Democratically controlled Congress, at the end of last year, cut spending plans by billions of dollars.

Last week, I proposed a budget that terminates or substantially reduces 151 wasteful or bloated programs. Those programs total more than \$18 billion. And if Congress sends me appropriations bills that exceed the reasonable limits I have set, I will veto the bills.

Last month, I issued an Executive order that directs Federal agencies to ignore any future earmark that is not actually voted on by the United States Congress. This Executive order will extend beyond my Presidency; it will stay in effect unless revoked by a future President. What that means is, any President who wants to return to the old ways of unaccountable and wasteful spending will get to do so publicly. And if that happens, that President will have some explaining to do.

In the long run, you and I know the greatest threat to our fiscal health is the unsustainable growth of entitlement spending. We all know the painful choices ahead if America stays on this path: massive tax increases, sudden and drastic cuts in benefits, or crippling deficits. I have laid out specific proposals to reform and strengthen these programs.

On Social Security, I took the issue head on. That's what you expect a President to do. I proposed a way to make this program solvent without raising taxes and with personal saving accounts that will give individuals more control over their retirement savings.

On Medicare and Medicaid, I sent Congress a budget this week that saves nearly \$200 billion over the next 5 years. I hear all the talk from the other side on Capitol Hill about fiscal responsibility, but they haven't put any of their ideas on the table for programs. It is time to stop talking; it is time for them to stop acting and not pass these problems on to future Congresses and future generations.

On matters relating to our economy, our record is clear. You and I succeeded in cutting taxes. We're reducing wasteful spending. On these issues, both sides have

made their case. The results are in, and they are proving us right.

We applied our philosophy to questions affecting the moral fabric of our Nation. We believe that all human life is precious and deserves to be protected. In 2001, I had a grave decision to make on the question of embryonic stem cell research. I believed we could empower scientists and researchers to discover cures for terrible diseases without crossing a moral line. So I authorized research on existing stem cell lines and stood against any effort to use Federal tax dollars to support the destruction of human life.

Our critics had a different view. They thought my defense of life was shortsighted and harmful. When I vetoed two bills that sought to use tax dollars to destroy human embryos, some academics described my position as ridiculous and scientifically naive. One publication predicted our plan would not hold up over the long haul.

Then last November, scientists announced a landmark achievement. They found a way to reprogram adult skin cells to act like embryonic stem cells. This discovery has the potential to end the divisive debate over stem cell research. It will allow us to expand the frontiers of medicine while maintaining a culture of life. In the coming year, we will increase funds for this type of ethical research. And I will continue to push for a ban on the buying, selling, patenting, or cloning of human life.

When I took office, our society was grappling with a troubling rate of drug use among our children. A new generation of young people was in danger of being swept up in a cycle of addiction and crime and hopelessness. We believe people should be held responsible for their actions, and we know that people can change their behavior. Sometimes all it takes is the help of a loving soul, somebody who puts their arm around a troubled person and says: "I love you. Can I help you?" We also know that drug—

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. My soul is not that troubled, but thank you.

We also know that the drug crisis requires us to reduce both supply and demand. And so in 2002, I set our country on an ambitious goal to cut drug use among young people by 25 percent over 5 years. Critics didn't think that was possible. Some thought the drug war had already failed. Some said we focused too much on interdiction and not enough on treatment. An influential magazine and assorted commentators wanted to declare defeat and legalize the drug trade. A left-leaning drug prevention group said that our aggressive strategy was "very unlikely . . . to produce any different result than we have seen so far."

We stood our ground. We worked with international partners to interdict drugs into our country. We increased funds for drug treatment programs. We helped move drug addicts from a culture of victimization to a culture of responsibility. And we have gotten results. Since I took office, the overall use of illicit drugs by young people has dropped 24 percent. Marijuana use fell by 25 percent, steroid by a third, the use of ecstasy by 54 percent. Methamphetamine abuse has plummeted by 64 percent since 2001.

On matters relating to America's moral compass, we have defended human life. We promoted strong families. We confronted the crippling cycle of drug dependency. We challenged the critics, the self-proclaimed experts, and the status quo. Both sides made their case. The results are in, and they're proving us right.

We've also applied our philosophy to issues of national security. Six-and-a-half years ago, our country faced the worst attack in our history. I understood immediately that we would have to act boldly to protect the American people. So we've gone on the offense against these extremists. We're staying on the offense, and we will not relent until we bring them to justice. We recognized that this is a war, not

just a matter of law enforcement. We recognize that we're engaged in the decisive ideological struggle of our time.

The first battle in this war against the extremists centered on Afghanistan; the 9/11 attackers had trained and planned in Afghanistan. We believed our military could remove the Taliban from power and that we could help aid the rise of a stable and democratic government.

Critics had a different view. One commentator said most Afghans would oppose an American invasion and fight the foreign occupiers. Another declared, "We're not headed toward a quagmire; we are already in one." Another commentator scoffed, "Afghanistan as a democracy? Forget it."

Well, we stood our ground, and we have seen the results. Al Qaida lost its terrorist camps in Afghanistan and the Taliban was driven from power. The Afghan people braved threats of violence to elect a new President and a new Parliament. Roads and hospitals are being built. Girls who were once forbidden from going to school are now going to school. America, 25 NATO allies, and 15 partner nations are helping the Afghan people secure their country. The Taliban, Al Qaida, and their allies are on the run. Afghanistan has a long road ahead, and they have a future that offers promise and hope. We're going to stand with the Afghan people; we're going to help millions claim their liberty. And we will always work to make sure Afghanistan will never be—again be a safe haven for terrorists and extremists who want to do us harm.

The war against our enemies also brought us to Iraq. Our coalition confronted a regime that defied United Nations Security Council resolutions, violated a cease-fire agreement, attacked its neighbors, sponsored terrorism, and had a history of using and pursuing weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein was a threat to the United States and a threat to the world. My decision to remove Saddam was the

right decision at the time, and it is the right decision today.

Because we acted, 25 million Iraqis are free. We've seen them go to the polls. We've seen them elect a representative government. We've also seen an enemy determined to roll back this progress through horrific acts of violence designed to pit Iraqis one against another.

One year ago, things were not going well in that country. Terrorists and extremists were succeeding in their efforts to plunge Iraq into chaos. You see, they wanted to deny Iraqis their liberty. They can't stand freedom. They wanted to establish safe havens in Iraq from which to launch attacks against America and its allies. I strongly believe that America's security and peace in the world depend upon defeating this enemy. So we reviewed our strategy. Things weren't working; I needed to know why and what it would take to make things better. And that's why you review a strategy.

I made up my mind. I listened carefully to a lot of folks, and I decided to send more troops into Iraq, in a dramatic policy shift. And the policy shift has come—become known as the surge.

Our critics had a different view. They looked at rising violence in Iraq and declared the war was lost.

Audience members. Boo!

The President. Some concluded the surge had failed even before it had fully begun. Two foreign affairs experts proposed, quote, "a well-managed defeat . . . to boost U.S. credibility."

We stood our ground, and we're seeing results. A year after I ordered the surge of forces, high-profile terrorist attacks in Iraq are down, civilian deaths are down, sectarian killings are down. U.S. and Iraqi forces have captured or killed thousands of extremists in Iraq, including hundreds of key Al Qaida leaders and operatives. There is more work to be done. It takes awhile for young democracies to take root,

but reconciliation is taking place. I recognize the progress in Iraq is fragile, and there's going to be tough days ahead. Yet even the enemy recognizes the progress we're being making. They recognize they're on the wrong side of events. They are disheartened, they are demoralized, and they will be defeated.

We can have confidence in Iraq's ultimate success because we believe in the transformative power of freedom. We believe there is an Almighty God. And a gift of that Almighty to every man, woman, and child on the face of this Earth is freedom. We have seen that free societies become peaceful societies. We know that a free Iraq will be a friend of America, an ally in this war against the extremists, and a source of hope and stability in a dangerous part of the world.

We'll fight the enemy overseas so we do not have to face them here at home. And as we do so, we must take measures to protect America, the homeland. We must give our intelligence officials the tools they need to uncover terrorist plots and prevent new attacks. And one of the most important tools is the ability to monitor terrorist communications. My most important job is to protect the American people. In order to do that job, we need to know who the terrorists are talking to; we need to know what they're saying; we need to know what they're planning. And so Congress passed the Protect America Act. This law modernized an outdated surveillance law and closed dangerous gaps in our intelligence.

Now, critics had a different view. One liberal interest group called the law an end run around the Constitution. Others falsely claimed law enforcement officials wanted to spy on Americans. Still another summed up the initiative as "a groupthink travesty."

We countered these critics, and we stood our ground. Our ability to monitor the communications of terrorists overseas has helped us gain crucial elements on terrorist cells and helped keep our country safe. The

Protect America Act is working. The problem is that Congress set the law to expire 1 week from tomorrow. I don't think the Al Qaida threat is going to expire 1 week from tomorrow. [Laughter] Congress must ensure the flow of vital intelligence is not disrupted. Congress must pass liability protection for companies believed to have assisted in the efforts to defend America. The time for temporary fixes has ended. Congress must pass this law, and they must pass it now.

On matters of war and peace, we have taken the fight to our enemies abroad, and we are defending our people here at home. We're standing with new partners in Afghanistan and Iraq to help them build free nations. We refused to yield when the going got tough. And when the history of our actions is written, it will show that we were right.

We will face other challenges ahead that will require new energy and, before long, new leadership. I'm absolutely confident, with your help, we will elect a President who shares our principles. As we take on the challenges, we must be guided by the philosophy that has brought us success. Our policies are working. The American people support our points of view. They share our philosophy.

And consider our advantage on other great questions before us. On health care, one side says we should expand the Federal Government's control over your private medicine. You and I say we should expand access to health care, empower consumers to make choices, and ensure that medical decisions are left in the hands of patients and their doctors.

On education, one side said—one side says we should spend your tax dollars without measuring whether or not our children are actually learning to read and write and add and subtract. You and I believe in accountability. We believe parents should have more options, and we believe in liberating children from failing public schools.

On the rights of the unborn, the most vulnerable among us, one side supports abortion on demand. You and I believe in the worth of every human being, the matchless joy of adoption, and the right to life.

On the Federal judiciary, one side says we should confirm judges who believe in the “living Constitution,” which basically means they can make up laws as they go along. You and I say we need judges who respect our values, do not follow the political winds, and revere the plain meaning of our Constitution. We need more judges like John Roberts and Sam Alito.

On America’s role in the world, some believe that our Nation is often the cause of global turmoil, a mentality once called “blame America first.” You and I believe that America is a leading light, a guiding star, and the greatest nation on the face of the Earth.

You see, I know of America’s greatness because I get to see it up close, and it is a privilege to see it up close. I see it in the foot-soldiers in the armies of compassion, who perform acts of kindness and hope every single day. I see it in the courage of ordinary citizens like those who rushed toward danger when the Twin Towers fell and our Pentagon burned. I see it with military families who’ve lost loved ones, and every time, I come away moved and inspired by their valor, their grit, their pride, and their love of country. I see it when I exchange salutes with the finest young men and women our country has ever known. These Americans give me endless optimism about our future, and they have made my Presidency a joyous experience.

You know, since I’ve come to Washington, I’ve been reading a lot of history. Laura notes it’s probably because I’m making up for lost time. [*Laughter*] Over the past few years, I’ve read three books on George Washington, or as I call him, the original George W.

It is interesting to me that they are still analyzing the record of our first President. My attitude is, if they’re still analyzing number 1, 43 doesn’t need to worry about it. I’m not going to be around to see the final history written on my administration. The truth is that history’s verdict takes time to reveal itself.

But we don’t have to wait on history for one thing: In the year ahead, the pundits, the so-called experts, commentators, analysts will offer more gloomy predictions and more big government solutions. And when they do, let us remember their record. This is a group that is seldom correct—[*laughter*—but never in doubt.

You and I have seen that in our own time. Ronald Reagan was called a “warmonger,” an “amiable dunce,” a “movie actor detached from reality.” Yet within a few years after President Reagan left office, the Berlin Wall came down, the evil empire collapsed, the cold war was won. And over the years, a strange thing has happened. A lot of people who spent the 1980s criticizing President Reagan now tell us they were with him all along. [*Laughter*]

You were with him all along. And over the past 7 years, you’ve been with me. I appreciate your support.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you all. I appreciate the chance that you’ve given me—help me get this opportunity to serve our country. It’s been a fantastic experience. I appreciate the countless phone calls you’ve made. I appreciate the volunteer work you did in two tough campaigns. I’ll always—always—be grateful [to each of you]* for supporting our cause, for giving me a chance, and for loving our country. And I thank you for that.

I look forward to working with you this year. My energy is up, my spirit is high, and I will finish strong. And in the meantime, we will elect a new President. We’ve

* White House correction.

had good debates, and soon we'll have a nominee who will carry a conservative banner into this election and beyond. Listen, the stakes in November are high. This is an important election. Prosperity and peace are in the balance. So with confidence in our vision and faith in our values, let us go forward, fight for victory, and keep the White House in 2008.

God bless you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:21 a.m. at the Omni Shoreham Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to David A. Keene, chairman, American Conservative Union Foundation and Conservative Political Action Conference; and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan. He also referred to H.R. 5140; and Executive Order 13457, which is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Following a Briefing on Regional Tornado Damage in Lafayette, Tennessee *February 8, 2008*

Listen, I want to thank you for the briefing. People have got to understand here in the region that a lot of folks around America care for them now. And I'm here to listen, to determine, to make sure that the Federal response is compassionate and effective. I don't want people to think something is going to happen that's not going to happen. And therefore, when we say something is going to happen to help them get their feet back on the ground, it will happen.

Secondly, I am here to thank the people that will provide the compassion for people who hurt. I notice we've got the Red Cross sitting over there. They're good responders. They respond to help people in need.

Thirdly, I will make it clear to people here that I have no doubt in my mind this community will come back better than before. Macon County people are down-to-earth, hard-working, God-fearing people, who, if just given a little help, will come back stronger.

And that's what—and so I want to thank you all for the briefing. Governor, again, thank you for being here. Appreciate the Senators and Congressmen joining us too.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 a.m. at the Lafayette Fire Department's Atwell & Scruggs Fire Station. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Philip N. Bredesen, Jr., of Tennessee.

Remarks Following a Tour of Tornado Damage in Lafayette *February 8, 2008*

The President. Phil and June Spears have just—I looked in their eyes and saw incredible sadness and worry.

Phil Spears. It's true.

The President. And I know the Governor joins me in sharing our concerns with you. But I hope a couple of things become evi-

dent to you. One, there's a lot of people who care about you, total strangers showing up here in this community to help you get back on your feet.

And the Government has got a role to play. And I want to thank the Senators and Congressmen for being here, because