

take a hard look at the facts. They will take a look at the consequences of rejecting a trade agreement with our close ally. They'll take a good look at the consequences of sending the wrong message to the false populists of the region. They'll take a simple, logical look at how this can benefit our farmers and small-business owners and employers.

Thanks for helping us work the issue. Thanks for giving me a chance to come and speak to you. May God bless you, and may God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:41 a.m. at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. In his remarks, he referred to David C. Lizarraga, chair, Augustine Martinez, interim president and chief executive officer, and Michael L. Barrera, former president and chief executive officer, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Hector V. Barreto, former Administrator, Small Business Administration; Marc Gonsalves, Thomas Howes, and Keith Stansell, hostages held by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC); and President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela.

Remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner March 12, 2008

Thanks for the warm welcome. I don't know about you, but I'm excited about the year 2008. I intend to finish strong with my head held high. And I intend to work to see to it that we keep the White House and elect John Boehner Speaker of the House of Representatives. [Applause] And evidently, you feel the same way.

Now, I thank you all for coming tonight. I am really pleased that this event has turned out to be as successful as it has been. I send—I bring greetings from First Lady Laura Bush. She's—[applause]—yes, thank you. She's doing great. She's wedding planning right now, so I appreciate the invitation to be here. [Laughter]

You know, I was just thinking about how next year's dinner is going to be a little different from this one. First, you're going to be welcoming a new keynote speaker, President John McCain. And President McCain will start this dinner by saying, "Thanks for the introduction, Mr. Speaker." And I'll be watching it all on TV in Crawford. [Laughter]

I do want to thank my friend John Boehner. He has been a great leader for the Republicans in the House of Representa-

tives. He's a good, solid, strategic thinker. I'm proud to call him friend, and I thank you for your service.

I want to thank the House leaders who are here: Roy Blunt, Adam Putnam, Darrell Issa. Issa, you did a heck of a job tonight. Thank you for doing this. I want to recognize my friend Tom Cole. Tom Cole has the vision and determination to effect change, and that is, elect Republicans to be the Speaker and leaders of the House of Representatives. I appreciate you coming, Tommy.

I want to thank Eric Cantor, David Dreier, Kay Granger, John Carter. I appreciate Sam [Ralph]^{*} Hall, my fellow Texan, and Sam Johnson, my fellow Texan, and Ralph Regula for presenting the awards on all the veterans who are serving in Congress tonight. That'll happen after I leave, but nevertheless, I do want to extend my congratulations.

I thank Trace Adkins for singing here tonight. Trace wondered whether I was going to sing. I told him, no, I didn't think

^{*} White House correction.

I'd sing; I thought I'd just do a little tap-dance. [Laughter] And I also appreciate my friend, one of the great voices of all time, Sam Moore. Thank you, Sam, for being here.

I also want to welcome all the candidates who are running for office. You know, it's not an easy decision to make to run for the United States Congress, but it's a noble decision. And it's a tough decision for your families. And so I want to thank you for agreeing to run; I want to thank your families for agreeing to support you. My advice is, work hard, talk about what's in your heart, let the people know your values, and win. And I think you will. I think 2008 is going to be a fabulous year for the Republican Party.

And the reason why I believe that is because when the American people look at our ideals versus the ideals of the Democrats, when they look at what we believe versus what they believe, they're with us. We represent the values of the American people. Our ideas are the ones embraced by the folks. They may not be the ones that the pundits listen to, but they're the ones who are out working every single day to make America a great and hopeful place.

We believe in strong national defense, and we will do what it takes to keep our Nation safe from a terrorist attack. We believe in limited government. We believe in the collective wisdom of the American people to make the decisions on behalf of the American Government. We would rather trust you than the people in government to make the decisions for what's best for you.

I'm optimistic about this year because I know John McCain. I've known him for many years. I've seen his character and his leadership up close. I've campaigned with him, and I've campaigned against him. [Laughter] And I can tell you this: He's a tough competitor. I've seen in every decision he makes that he is guided by the national interests of the United States, not by self-interest. I know John McCain to

be a man who will make decisions based upon sound principles, not based upon the latest focus group or political poll.

John McCain is running on a clear, consistent, and conservative agenda. He's a man of honor. He's a genuine hero. He has the wisdom and the experience necessary to be the Commander in Chief of our United States military forces. He loves this country. He's ready to lead this country. I'm proud to be his friend. I'm proud to be his supporter. And on Inauguration Day, I'll proud to be—say to John McCain, "Congratulations, Mr. President."

And I can assure you he doesn't want a lonely victory. He needs allies in the Congress to help enact his agenda. And he's going to work hard alongside these candidates and the incumbents to make sure we win. He'll be a great standard bearer. And I'm confident—I hope you go forth from this meeting with confidence because I am confident. I firmly believe that we can retake the House. I know we'll hold the White House. And I know it's necessary for the United States of America that we do both.

Let me talk about some of the issues and why I think we'll win. We trust people. We Republicans believe you can make the best decisions for your life. On health care, we trust patients to make decisions, not bureaucrats in Washington, DC. When it comes to education, we trust parents to make the right decisions for their children, and we believe in strong accountability in our public schools. We refuse to accept mediocrity. We refuse to accept the status quo when not every single child in America is learning to read and write and add and subtract.

The American people need us because we'll appoint judges who will strictly interpret the Constitution and not use the bench from which to write law, judges like John Roberts and Sam Alito.

But I think the biggest issue in this campaign is going to be your taxes. I think the biggest issue in this campaign is which

side of the political divide is going to let you keep your money and which side is going to raise your taxes. Now, we've got a record on which side will not raise your taxes. We've been through some tough economic times together. We've been through a recession and a terrorist attack and war and corporate scandal and natural disasters. And up until recently, this economy has been strong. We added jobs for 52 consecutive months. It's the longest uninterrupted job growth in the Nation's history. And the reason we did so in the face of these daunting challenges: We trusted the American people, and we cut taxes on every American who pays taxes.

And we're fixing to do so again. We've hit a rough patch, but we took the lead. We anticipated the problems. And thanks to the leadership of John Boehner and Roy Blunt, they helped shepherd through over \$160 billion of tax relief that will be reaching the mailboxes of the American people in the second week of May. Tax relief has worked in the past, and tax relief will work this time, when we get through this rough patch.

Now, apparently, the other side thinks this is a bad thing, because they want to let the tax cuts expire. Let me be clear about this: Milk expires, taxes increase. [Laughter] And we know the difference. And so will the American people when they realize that 116 million households will see their taxes rise by an average of \$1,800 if the Democrats get their way in the House of Representatives.

Our message is this: We need a Republican President and a Republican Congress to prevent the Democrats from raising your taxes. We need to make the tax cuts permanent.

There's no bigger issue than protecting our country from harm. It is the most solemn responsibility that those of us who have been honored to serve you have. We must do everything in our power to make sure the enemy doesn't strike us again. And I fully understood that after September the

11th, that the temptation would be to dismiss any threat; the temptation would be that, "Oh, perhaps since we haven't been attacked, the threat doesn't exist."

Well, the threat does exist, and it requires steadfast, strong, clear-eyed leadership here in Washington, DC. One of the things that we must do is to make sure that the hundreds of people that are out working for you every night to protect you have the tools they need. If the enemy, if the extremists who want to do America harm, if the radicals who want to kill again, like they did before on our homeland, are making phone calls into the United States of America, we need to know who they're calling, what they're saying, and what they're planning.

The Congress came together last year and passed the Protect America Act to give our professionals the tools they need. Unfortunately, that act expired. But the threat to the United States of America has not expired. Unfortunately, Democratic leaders in the House are continuing to block bipartisan legislation that would give our intelligence officials the tools they need to quickly and effectively monitor terrorist communications.

And they are doing so despite the fact that legislation, good legislation, to give our professionals the tools passed the United States Senate by an overwhelming majority of 68 to 29. Instead of holding a vote on this bill that would pass the House of Representatives, House leaders have introduced a highly partisan and deeply flawed bill of their own. Their bill would put in place a cumbersome court approval process that would make it harder to collect intelligence on foreign terrorists and could reopen dangerous intelligence gaps that we experienced last year.

Their bill fails to provide liability protection to companies believed to have assisted in protecting our Nation after the 9/11 attacks. Instead, the House bill would make matters worse by extending litigation for

years to come. In fact, House leaders simply adopted the position that class-action trial lawyers are taking in billions of dollars of lawsuits they have filed.

We're under threat, ladies and gentlemen, and yet the House leaders blocked meaningful, substantial legislation that will help protect America for the sake of class-action trial lawyers. Companies that may have helped us save lives should be thanked for their patriotic service and should not be subjected to billion-dollar lawsuits.

This bill would require the disclosure of state secrets during the litigation process. This could lead to the public release of highly classified information that our enemies could use against us. The Democrat version of protecting America is a bad bill; it is irresponsible. It casts aside the bipartisan consensus that was reached in the United States Senate in favor of a partisan approach that has no chance of becoming law. House leaders know this, yet they're pursuing this anyway. This is bad public policy and another reason to elect Republicans to the House of Representatives.

There's a lot of folks working to protect you at home. But the enemy only has to be right one time, and therefore, the best way to protect the American people from further harm is to defeat the enemy overseas so we do not have to face them here at home. And that's precisely the strategy that we're following.

We're on the offense. Wherever we can find a terrorist who would harm the American people, we'll bring him to justice. We're constantly pressing. And this war against the extremists is now being played out on two major theaters.

First is Afghanistan. I laid out a doctrine that said, if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorists. The Taliban and—didn't believe us, and so the United States of America, after giving the enemy due warning, unleashed the fury of a great military. And in so doing, we cleaned out the terrorist training camps from which they launched attacks on the

United States and freed 25 million people from the clutches of a barbaric regime.

This young democracy is struggling for its very existence against coldblooded killers, and it's in the interests of the United States that we stand strongly with these proud Afghan citizens, that we back them in their efforts, and that we make sure Al Qaida or any other extremist can no longer find a safe haven in the country of Afghanistan.

And then, of course, the other theater is Iraq. Removing Saddam Hussein was the right decision early in my Presidency; it is the right decision now; and it will be the right decision ever. And the fight's been tough in Iraq. And for those of you here—who are here who have served in that theater, I can't thank you enough for your sacrifices and your service to the United States of America.

There have been amazing gains made in that country. After all, they wrote one of the most modern constitutions in the history of the Middle East. Iraqis braved the violence to vote. And yet nearly a year ago, the terrorists and extremists were succeeding in their efforts to plunge the country into chaos.

So I had a tough decision to make. I reviewed our strategy. I fully understood that failure in Iraq would make America more vulnerable to attack, that failure in Iraq would create unbelievable chaos in a part of the world that has—that produced suicide bombers in the first place.

And so rather than retreating, I made the considered judgment to send reinforcements into the country, in a dramatic move that's now called the surge. Fourteen months after I ordered the surge of forces, sectarian killings are down, and Al Qaida is on the defense. U.S. and Iraqi forces have captured or killed thousands of extremists in Iraq, including hundreds of key Al Qaida operatives.

Progress in Iraq is fragile, and there's no question, it's going to take strong determination to prevail. Yet even the enemy

recognizes they're on the wrong side of events. They're disheartened, they're demoralized, and they will be defeated.

When things were going poorly in Iraq early last year, Democrats called for withdrawal. Today, the situation has turned around, and Democrats are calling for withdrawal. It seems that no matter what happens on the ground, the opponents of the war have only one answer: retreat. You might even say that when it comes to withdrawing from Iraq, the Democrats' policy is, stay the course.

If we followed their advice a year ago, Iraq would be far different and a much more dangerous place than it is today, and the American people would be at greater risk. And if we followed their advice now, we would put at risk all the gains our troops have made over the past year. The United States Congress does need to act when it comes to Iraq, and they need to stand with our brave men and women in uniform and give them all the resources they need to do their job. And it—when it comes to standing with the United States military, there's no greater supporters than the Republicans in the House of Representatives.

The struggle we're engaged in is difficult for the American—some Americans to really understand the scope and the nature of the battle. We're involved in an ideological struggle between folks who murder the innocent to achieve political objectives, folks who have got a vision about what they would like to impose on the rest of the world, and particularly in the Middle East, and those of us who believe strongly in the power of liberty. I believe in the transformative power of liberty. I believe that if the United States of America does not lose its faith in the power of freedom to transform hopeless societies, that we will see the peace that we all want. I believe in the universality of freedom. I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe a gift of that Almighty to every man, woman, and child is freedom.

I love to share the story, and I'm sure some of you have heard this before—but the story about my friendship with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan. He's the guy that we went down to Elvis's place in Memphis with. He is a good pal. He's no longer in power, but when he was in office, right after the attacks of September the 11th, he clearly saw the dangers and the opportunities. He saw the dangers that hopelessness was the only way that these ideologues could recruit suicide bombers. And he knew that the United States of America and our allies must be firm in our resolve to bring the terrorists to justice and, at the same time, spread the blessings of liberty.

And what's interesting about this story is that he was the leader of a country that my father fought against some 60 years prior. Think about that. Eighteen-year-old Navy Ensign George H.W. Bush, like many of your relatives, signed up to fight the Japanese. As a matter of fact, the war was so bitter that our vocabulary had slur words in it about the Japanese for years after the war ended. They were the hated enemy.

And yet 60 years later, his son, the son of a Navy fighter pilot, was at the table talking with the Prime Minister of the former enemy about the peace. Something amazing took place. And what happened was, Japan adopted democracy, a system of government with liberty at its core.

My friends, freedom is transformative. Freedom can transform an enemy into an ally. And someday, an American President will be thanking this Congress for its steadfast support of liberty, because he'll be sitting down at the table talking about keeping the peace for generations to come, and our children and our grandchildren will be better off for it.

I thank you for coming. I thank you for your prayers. May God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:38 p.m. at the Hilton Washington Hotel. In his remarks,

he referred to entertainers Trace Adkins and Sam Moore.

Remarks at the Kuwait-America Foundation's Stand for Africa Gala Dinner
March 12, 2008

Thank you all. Mr. Ambassador, thank you for the invitation. You've got a beautiful place here. [Laughter] Rima, thanks very much. I'm honored to be with you. I'm a little late because Laura had me watching "Father of the Bride." [Laughter] And in that I didn't finish it, I'm going to make my remarks short and go home and watch it. It's going to be a big year for us. So the guy comes to see me, and he says, "I want to marry your daughter." I said, "Done deal." [Laughter]

It's also a big year for us because I'm absolutely convinced the momentum that we have started on the continent of Africa in dealing with HIV/AIDS or malaria is going to continue on for a long period of time. And I want to thank you all very much for supporting the initiative.

I do want to say something about our Secretary of State. I can remember early on in my administration—she was the National Security Adviser then—and she said, "I presume you're going to pay attention to Africa." And I said, "That's a good presumption because I believe to whom much is given, much is required." And the United States of America has been given a lot. And I firmly believe we're required to respond to human tragedy when we see it.

And there's nothing more tragic than a young baby dying because of a mosquito bite. And so I come to you optimistic about this initiative and thankful for the folks who are supporting Malaria No More. I too want to thank Ray Chambers for his leadership. I like it when people do well in the business world and then, rather than retire, decide to put something back into society.

That's exactly what you've done, and we're very grateful for doing what you're doing.

I see Justice Alito is here. That's good. Hey, Sam, good to see you.

Youssou N'Dour—so, Youssou, I've been practicing my dancing recently—[laughter]—and singing. [Laughter] And I'm available for a few tips. [Laughter]

I appreciate the members of my Cabinet who are here and Members of Congress. I too want to thank Admiral Mike Mullen for serving as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and his wife Deborah. It's amazing to be the Commander in Chief of a group of people that are dedicated, selfless, and courageous like our military. And Admiral Mullen represents the very best of the U.S. military. I thank the diplomatic corps who is here as well.

So my friends in Texas say, "You know, don't we have enough problems here at home?" And my answer is, "We're wealthy enough and we're strong enough and we're good enough to take problems—take on problems here at home as well as in other parts of the world." And then I remind them that we're living in a very difficult period in the history of the world. After all, we're witnessing an ideological struggle between those who kill the innocent to achieve political objectives and those who believe in human dignity and human rights and human freedom.

And it's a tough time, and it's going to take awhile to prevail. But one thing is for certain, that this enemy we face cannot possibly find recruits based upon their vision. Their vision for life is so dark and so dim and so degrading that it's impossible