

to credit bureaus and tracked down credit card purchases he had not made. He even found the address of the person who had taken out the cards. He closed the credit card accounts as fast as he could, but applications for more credit in his name were being made every day. And many were getting approved. He had to call every credit card company to get each card canceled before it was issued.

Nearly 2 years later, Michael is still fighting the effects of the fraud. The system was broken. Michael is living testimony to what I'm saying when I said the system was broken, and Congress acted. I want to thank you all for stepping up and doing the right thing here.

See, in an age when information about individuals can be found easily, sold easily, abused easily, Government must act to protect individual privacy. And with this new law, we're taking action. First, under this law, we're giving every consumer the right to get a copy of his or her credit report free of charge every year. That's important. The credit report is more than a record of past actions; it has great influence over a person's financial future. People should be able to check their credit report for accuracy and to challenge any errors. The bill does just that.

Second, this law will help prevent identity theft before it occurs, by requiring merchants to delete all but the last five digits of a credit card number on store receipts. Many restaurants and merchants have already adopted this practice. All will now do so.

Won't they, Tim? [*Laughter*] Just making sure he was awake. [*Laughter*]

Chairman Muris. Always. [*Laughter*]

The President. Slips of paper that most people throw away should not hold the key to their savings and financial secrets.

Third, this law will create a national system of fraud detection so that identity theft can be traced and dealt with earlier. Up to now, victims of identity theft have been left to manage the problem themselves—ask Michael—by calling all their credit card companies to shut down each of their accounts. And then the victims must call each of the three major credit rating agencies to report the crime and to protect their credit rating. Under this legislation, victims will only have

to make one phone call to receive advice and to set off a nationwide fraud alert. It's an important reform. I appreciate you all for putting this into law. Credit bureaus will then take immediate measures to protect the consumer's credit standing.

And fourth, this law will encourage lenders and credit agencies to take action before a victim even knows an identity crime has occurred. In many cases, identity thieves follow predictable patterns. Bank regulators working with credit agencies will draw up guidelines to identify these patterns and develop methods to stop identity theft before it ever happens.

These practical steps will help consumers protect their credit and their good name. People work hard to build up good credit histories and rely on their credit to move forward in life. Today we're helping to make our credit system fair, fair to all, and to better protect those—better protect people from those who would abuse it.

I'm pleased to sign into law the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act of 2003, a good, solid piece of legislation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to John Bryant, chairman and chief executive officer, Operation HOPE, Inc. H.R. 2622, approved December 4, was assigned Public Law No. 108-159.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

December 4, 2003

Thank you all very much. Welcome to the Christmas Pageant of Peace. This evening we continue a tradition in Washington as we gather to light the National Christmas Tree. Tonight and throughout the Christmas season our thoughts turn to a star in the east, seen 20 centuries ago, and to a light that can guide us still. Laura and I are so pleased to join you in this ceremony, and we thank you all for being here.

It's always good to see Santa. I know you've got a lot of commitments this time of year. [*Laughter*] We also know how Santa gets around: He travels in the dark of night; he arrives unannounced—[*laughter*—and

he's gone before you know he was there. [Laughter] Santa, I can assure you, it's a lot easier on a flying sled than it is on Air Force One. [Laughter]

I want to thank Peter Nostrand, the chairman of the Christmas Pageant of Peace, and John Betchkal, the president. I want to thank very much Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and her staff for helping put this fine event on. I want to thank all the members of my Cabinet who are here. I appreciate Fran Mainella, who's the Director of the National Park Service. I want to thank all the National Park Service employees who work so hard on behalf of the American people.

I want to thank Father Kleinweber for his gracious offering of prayer. I appreciate the musicians—fantastic job tonight. Thank you all for coming. I want to thank the members of the board of the Christmas Pageant of Peace. I want to welcome all the children from the Boys and Girls Clubs from this region for being here.

Also with us this evening are military personnel, including some who have recently returned from duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. I know your families are glad to have you back. They're proud of your service, and so is our country. On behalf of all Americans, welcome home, and job well done.

We also honor all of our fellow Americans serving far away from home during the holidays. Separation from loved ones is especially difficult this time of year. Our people in uniform can know that their families miss them and love them, that millions are praying for them, and that America is grateful for the men and women who serve and defend our country.

The story of Christmas is familiar to us all, and it still holds a sense of wonder and surprise. When the good news came first to a young woman from Nazareth, her response was understandable. She asked, "How can this be?" The news would bring difficulty to her family and suspicion upon herself. Yet, Mary gave her reply, "Be it unto me according to Thy word." The wait for a new king had been long, and the manner of his arrival was not as many had expected. The king's first cries were heard by shepherds and cattle. He was raised by a carpenter's son.

Yet this one humble life lifted the sights of humanity forever. And in His words we hear a voice like no other. Across the generations, the poor have heard words of hope, the proud have heard words of challenge, and the weak and the dying have heard words of assurance. And mankind has been given a message first delivered by angels on a shepherd's field: "Fear not."

As we near Christmas in a time of war, these words bring comfort. We don't know all of God's ways, yet the Christmas story promises that God's purpose is justice and His plan is peace. At times this belief is tested. During the Civil War, Longfellow wrote a poem that later became a part of a Christmas carol, "Hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on Earth, good will to men."

That poem also reminds us that hate is not the final word: "Then pealed the bells more loud and deep, 'God is not dead, nor doth He sleep, the wrong shall fail, the right prevail, with peace on Earth, good will to men.'"

And now as an expression of our own hope for peace in this Christmas season, we light the national tree. Maggie Stuempfle and Andre Joyner are with us here. They're members of the Boys and Girls Clubs of America. Laura and I would like to ask Maggie and Andre to come up, and we'll turn on the lights. But I ask you all to join us in a national count down, starting with five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse during the annual Christmas Pageant of Peace. In his remarks, he referred to Father Dennis Kleinweber, pastor, St. Philomena Catholic Church, East Cleveland, OH.

Statement on Signing the Proclamation To Provide for the Termination of Action Taken With Regard to Imports of Certain Steel Products

December 4, 2003

Today, I signed a proclamation ending the temporary steel safeguard measures I put in place in March 2002. Prior to that time, steel prices were at 20-year lows, and the U.S. International Trade Commission found that a surge in imports to the U.S. market was