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NOTE: The President spoke at 10:24 a.m. at the Roswell Convention and Civic Center. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Robert D. Beckel, USAF (ret.), superintendent, New Mexico Military Institute; Mayor Bill B. Owen of Roswell, NM; Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Exchange With Reporters in Roswell, New Mexico

January 22, 2004

President's Visit to Roswell

The President. I need some ribs.

Q. Mr. President, how are you?

The President. I'm hungry, and I'm going to order some ribs.

Q. What would you like?

The President. Whatever you think I'd like.

Homeland Security

Q. Sir, on homeland security, critics would say you simply haven't spent enough to keep the country secure.

The President. My job is to secure the homeland, and that's exactly what we're going to do. But I'm here to take somebody's order. That would be you, Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News]—what would you like? Put some of your high-priced money right here to try to help the local economy. You get paid a lot of money, you ought to be buying some food here. It's part of how the economy grows. You've got plenty of money in your pocket, and when you spend it, it drives the economy forward. So what would you like to eat?

Q. Right behind you, whatever you order.

Nuthin' Fancy Cafe

The President. I'm ordering ribs. David [David Gregory, NBC News], do you need a rib?

Q. But Mr. President——

The President. Stretch, thank you, this is not a press conference. This is my chance to help this lady put some money in her pocket. Let me explain how the economy works. When you spend money to buy food, it helps this lady's business. It makes it more likely somebody is going to find work. So instead of asking questions, answer mine: Are you going to buy some food?

Q. Yes.

The President. Okay, good. What would you like?

Q. Ribs.

The President. Ribs? Good. Let's order up some ribs.

Q. What do you think of the Democratic field, sir?

The President. See, his job is to ask questions; he thinks my job is to answer every question he asks. I'm here to help this restaurant by buying some food. Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News], would you like something?

Q. An answer.

Q. Can we buy some questions?

The President. Obviously these people—they make a lot of money, and they're not going to spend much. I'm not saying they're overpaid; they're just not spending any money.

Q. Do you think it's all going to come down to national security, sir, this election?

The President. One of the things David does, he asks a lot of questions, and they're good, generally.

NOTE: The exchange began at 11:25 a.m. at the Nuthin' Fancy Cafe. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement on Senate Passage of the "Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2004"

January 22, 2004

I am pleased that the Senate has passed the omnibus budget bill, which fulfills important commitments like AIDS relief, education and DC school choice, veterans health care, law enforcement, and other priorities.

This bill stays within the spending limits I proposed, which is necessary as we work to cut the deficit in half over the next 5 years. I will continue to work with the Congress to focus on priorities, cut wasteful spending, and be wise with the people's money. I look forward to signing this bill into law.