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Week Ending Friday, February 13, 2004

The President's Radio Address

February 7, 2004

Good morning. The past few weeks have confirmed that America's economy is strong and growing stronger. The Nation's unemployment rate fell to 5.6 percent in January, the fourth consecutive monthly decline, and we added 112,000 new jobs, the largest single month increase since December of 2000. Overall, the Nation has added 366,000 jobs in the past 5 months.

There's more evidence of a strengthening economy. Manufacturers report new orders. GDP rose at a 6.1 percent in the second half of 2003, the fastest pace in nearly 20 years. Inflation remains low, and our Nation's homeownership rate just reached an alltime high. For the first time in our history, more than half of minority households own their own homes.

All of these are signs that our economic recovery is becoming a lasting expansion. Yet many of the new jobs being created require workers to learn new skills, and we can make sure that more Americans are prepared for these new opportunities.

Our efforts begin in our elementary schools, where students learn the basic skills that carry them through life. With the No Child Left Behind Act, we have raised standards, and we're making sure children learn the basics. Now we need to stay the course of reform, because the No Child Left Behind Act is opening the door of opportunity for all of America's children.

We must also help high school students to prepare for the new jobs our economy is creating. I've asked Congress to pass my Jobs for the 21st Century proposal, a plan that would help students who fall behind in reading and math, expand advanced placement programs in low-income schools and provide larger Pell grants for students who prepare for college with demanding courses in high school.

We also recognize that many workers change jobs in the middle of their careers, and they often get the training they need at community colleges. I have asked Congress to provide $250 million to community colleges to help Americans get the skills they need for high-growth fields. Over the last several weeks, I have met with men and women who are studying at these colleges and are on their way to better careers.

Toledo, Ohio, I met with Mike Potter. After getting laid off in March 2003, Mike enrolled at Owens Community College's integrated systems technology program, which is supported by a Department of Labor grant. Mike got a new job soon and is earning more than he did before. Here is what Mike told me: "People don't want to see a person with just one skill anymore. They want several skills."

My administration is committed to helping more people like Mike learn the skills they need. And we will continue pursuing a progrowth economic agenda so that every person who wants to work can find a job.

We'll help create more jobs in America by making tax relief permanent, by enforcing spending discipline and reducing the deficit, by enacting commonsense reforms to our regulatory and legal systems, by taking steps to make health care more affordable and accessible, by passing a national energy policy, and by opening up more foreign markets for trade. Taking these steps will add momentum to our Nation's economic expansion and extend jobs and prosperity to more Americans.

I'm optimistic about our future, and one reason is because of America's workers and entrepreneurs. They are talented and hard-working, and they carry with them the spirit that has always made America a place of hope and opportunity.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 11 a.m. on February 6 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on February

7. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on February 6 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks in a Discussion on the National Economy in Springfield, Missouri

February 9, 2004

The President. Jack, thanks for having me. I want to thank the good folks who work here for allowing us to disrupt your day to talk about our economy and how it works. And hopefully out of this discussion, people will learn better how people make decisions, decisions with their own money or decisions with investors' money. I hope people come away from this discussion with this great sense of optimism about the future for our country. It's exactly what I believe. I believe we ought to be—[*applause*]. So this ought to be a lot of fun.

I am thrilled to be here with the two United States Senators from Missouri, Kit Bond and Jim Talent. I appreciate their friendship and thank them for coming. Congressman Roy Blunt, who you know well, is with us today. He's a man who knows a good deal. I said, "Would you like to fly down to your hometown on Air Force One?" [*Laughter*] Guess what his answer was? [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the mayor coming, Tom Carlson. Mr. Mayor, thank you for being here. Fill the potholes. [*Laughter*] Sorry, Mr. Mayor, you didn't ask for any advice. [*Laughter*]

I also want to thank the other State and local officials and community and business leaders for coming here. Thank you all for coming as well.

Before I begin to talk a little bit about the economy and then of course have our panelists talk about what they think and some of the decisionmaking they made, I want to introduce a fellow who you may or may not know. His name is Travis Morrison. Travis, why don't you stand up right quick. [*Applause*] I guess you know Travis. [*Laughter*] I didn't until I arrived, but I know a lot of people like Travis.

See, Travis is a person who takes time out of his life to volunteer in your community. When the tornadoes hit here, he went up to help those who suffered. When people are looking for food, particularly children, he's willing to take time out of his life to fill the knapsacks full of food for the kids. He walks for the March of Dimes. He works for the United Way. He's a soldier in the army of compassion.

A lot of times, this country talks about our strengths, and we should. We talk about the military strength of America, and that's important, and we're going to keep us strong. We talk about how fat our wallets may be, and that's important too. But the true strength of America is found in the hearts and souls of people like Travis, people who are willing to love their neighbor just like they'd like to love themselves.

I like to talk about the Travis Morrisons of the world because everybody can be an army—a soldier in the army of compassion. Everybody can make a difference. This country's strength is found in the faith centers and neighborhoods and community centers, where people help somebody who hurts. And one of my jobs is to lift that spirit of America and invigorate it and to call people to action. One of the best ways to do so is to remind people that in Springfield, Missouri, there are thousands of people like Travis, and if you want to help your community, help make somebody's life a little brighter. Travis, thanks for what you do. Thanks for being a solid, sound American by volunteering to help somebody who hurts.

Speaking about strengths, our country has been through a lot over the last 3 years. I just want you to think about what the economy has been through. In March of 2000, the stock market started to decline. And that matters if you own stocks, and a lot of you do. You own them through your retirement accounts, for example. It's the indication of the rough times ahead. See, when a stock market sometimes indicates—is a predictor of the future, and sure enough, in the first quarter of 2001, the country was in a recession. And when you're in a recession, it means somebody is not going to be able to work. Things are going backwards. The economy is in decline. People are starting to get