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their courage. We pray for the comfort of their families. We will uphold the cause they served.

The rise of democratic institutions in Afghanistan and Iraq is a great step toward a goal of lasting importance to the world. We have set out to encourage reform and democracy in the greater Middle East as the alternatives to fanaticism, resentment, and terror. We've set out to break the cycle of bitterness and radicalism that has brought stagnation to a vital region and destruction to cities in America and Europe and around the world. This task is historic and difficult. This task is necessary and worthy of our efforts.

In the 1970s, the advance of democracy in Lisbon and Madrid inspired democratic change in Latin America. In the 1980s, the example of Poland ignited a fire of freedom in all of Eastern Europe. With Afghanistan and Iraq showing the way, we are confident that freedom will lift the sights and hopes of millions in the greater Middle East.

One man who believed in our cause was a Japanese diplomat named Katsuhiko Oku. He worked for the Coalition Provision Authority in Iraq. Mr. Oku was killed when his car was ambushed. In his diary he described his pride in the cause he had joined. "The free people of Iraq," he wrote, "are now making steady progress in reconstructing their country while also fighting against the threat of terrorism. We must join hands with the Iraqi people in their effort to prevent Iraq from falling into the hands of terrorists." This good, decent man concluded, "This is also our fight to defend freedom."

Ladies and gentlemen, this good man from Japan was right. The establishment of a free Iraq is our fight. The success of a free Afghanistan is our fight. The war on terror is our fight. All of us are called to share the blessings of liberty and to be strong and steady in freedom's defense. It will surely be said of our times that we lived with great challenges. Let it also be said of our times that we understood our great duties and met them in full.

May God bless our efforts.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:02 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Javier Ruperez, Spain's Ambassador to the United States; A.Q. Khan, former head of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi.

Remarks After Visiting Wounded Soldiers and Their Families at Walter Reed Army Medical Center

March 19, 2004

It is such an honor to come to a hospital like Walter Reed, for a couple of reasons. One is to meet the wounded who have made a decision to sacrifice for this Nation's security and for freedom in the world. It is an honor to meet their parents or their wives, their children—brave souls who support their loved one with all their heart.

It's an honor to be with the doctors and nurses of this fantastic facility who are doing unbelievable work in helping bring these people back on their feet, back into their communities.

One of the most important things for a Commander in Chief is to be able to say to a loved one, if your son or daughter or husband or wife gets injured, you'll get the best possible care as quickly as possible. Every time I come to Walter Reed, it confirms that which I know, which is: we're providing the very best—the best care, the best compassion. We're moving these soldiers from the battlefield to hospitals as quickly as we can so they can begin their rehab.

And it's fantastic to go upstairs. The spirit is strong. The attitudes are terrific. Several soldiers told me today, badly injured soldiers—they want to get well quickly and get back on their duty stations in Iraq, want to serve our Nation.

It is so refreshing and great to be here. I want to thank you, General, for your hospitality.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:05 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Kevin Kiley, USA, commanding general, North Atlantic Regional Medical Command and Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 13

In the morning, at Camp David, MD, the President had an intelligence briefing.

March 14

In the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush attended a gala at Ford's Theatre.

March 15

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Vladimir Putin of Russia to discuss President Putin's March 14 reelection victory. President Bush then had a telephone conversation with President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia to thank her for Latvia's support in Iraq and discuss Latvia's upcoming accession into NATO.

Later in the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he had a telephone conversation with outgoing President Jose Maria Aznar of Spain to thank him for his support, friendship, and leadership during his term. President Bush then had a telephone conversation with President-elect Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero of Spain to congratulate him on his March 14 election victory.

Also in the morning, the President participated in a photo opportunity with finalists of Intel Corporation's Science Talent Search.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Ardmore, PA, where, upon arrival, he greeted USA Freedom Corps volunteer Robert S. Bright. Later, he visited the home of first-time homebuyer Pearl Cerdan.

Later in the afternoon, the President returned to Washington, DC.

March 16

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, in the East Room, the President participated in a photo opportunity with recipients of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Science and Mathematics Teaching.

The President announced his intention to nominate Constance Berry Newman to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.

The President announced his intention to nominate Jonathan W. Dudas to be Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

The President announced his intention to designate Thomas Neil Hull III as Ambassador to Sierra Leone.

The President announced his intention to nominate Jendayi Elizabeth Frazer to be Ambassador to South Africa.

The President announced his intention to designate Mitchell B. Reiss as Special Envoy for Northern Ireland and to nominate him for the rank of Ambassador during his term of service.

March 17

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

Later in the morning, in the Oval Office, the President met with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland. Then, in the Diplomatic Reception Room, he participated in a photo opportunity with Northern Ireland political and civic leaders. Later, on the State Floor, he participated in a Saint Patrick's Day reception.

In the afternoon, at the Capitol, the President and Prime Minister Ahern attended a Saint Patrick's Day luncheon hosted by Speaker of the House of Representatives J. Dennis Hastert.

Later in the afternoon, in the Oval Office, the President met with Director General Mohamed ElBaradei of the International Atomic Energy Agency to discuss efforts to combat the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The President announced his intention to nominate R. Niels Marquardt to be Ambassador to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea.