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Editor's Note: The President was at Camp David, MD, on April 16, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, April 16, 2004

Proclamation 7770—National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day, 2004

April 9, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Americans look to our veterans as examples of honor and patriotism. These loyal citizens have risked capture, imprisonment, and their lives to protect our homeland and advance freedom abroad. As we observe National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day, we honor brave Americans who have demonstrated extraordinary courage in the face of hardship and terror.

Today, nine out of ten former prisoners of war are veterans of World War II. These Americans helped to liberate millions and defeat tyranny around the world, and survived unspeakable horrors for the cause of freedom. From enduring hard labor in German and Japanese POW camps to the torturous Bataan Death March, these proud patriots showed strength of character and incredible resolve in captivity. Their devotion to duty and love of country stand as a measure of service few others will attain.

America will never forget these quiet heroes and all of our former prisoners of war who suffered adversity in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, Somalia, Kosovo, Iraq, and other conflicts. Our Nation is grateful to our former prisoners of war for their sacrifice to help protect the democratic ideals that make our country strong. Because of the dedication of these men and women in uniform, people in our own country and in lands far away can live in freedom. These citizens inspire us, and we will always remember their service for liberty's blessings.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 9, 2004, as National Former Prisoner of War Recognition Day. I call upon all Americans to join me in remembering all former American prisoners of war who suffered the hardships of enemy captivity. I also call upon Federal, State, and local government officials and private organizations to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this ninth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-eighth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:31 a.m., April 12, 2004]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on April 13. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

The President's Radio Address

April 10, 2004

Good morning. This week in Iraq, our coalition forces have faced challenges and taken the fight to the enemy, and our offensive will continue in the weeks ahead.

As the June 30th date for Iraqi sovereignty draws near, a small faction is attempting to derail Iraqi democracy and seize power. In some cities, Saddam supporters and terrorists have struck against coalition forces. In other areas, attacks were incited by a radical named Muqtada Al Sadr, who is wanted for the murder of a respected Shiite cleric. Al Sadr has called for violence against coalition troops, and his band of thugs have terrorized Iraqi police and ordinary citizens.

Coalition forces are conducting a multicity offensive. In Fallujah, marines of Operation Vigilant Resolve are taking control of the city,

block by block. Further south, troops of Operation Resolute Sword have taken the initiative from Al Sadr's militia. Our coalition's quick reaction forces are finding and engaging the enemy. Prisoners are being taken, and intelligence is being gathered. Our decisive actions will continue until these enemies of democracy are dealt with.

Some have suggested that we should respond to the recent attacks by delaying Iraqi sovereignty. This is precisely what our enemies want. They want to dictate the course of events in Iraq and to prevent the Iraqi people from having a true voice in their future. They want America and our coalition to falter in our commitments before a watching world. In these ambitions, the enemies of freedom will fail. Iraqi sovereignty will arrive on June 30th.

In March, the Iraqi Governing Council signed a document that protects the rights of the Iraqi people, offers the timetable for elections, and paves the way for a permanent constitution. At this moment, United Nations Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi is conducting intensive consultations with a wide range of Iraqis on the structure of the interim government that will assume control on July the first. We welcome this U.N. engagement.

The transition to sovereignty will mark the beginning of a new Government and the end of the coalition's administrative duties, but the coalition's commitment to Iraq will continue. We will establish a new American Embassy to protect our Nation's interests. We will continue helping the Iraqi people reconstruct their economy, undermined by decades of dictatorship and corruption. And our coalition forces will remain committed to the security of Iraq.

Iraq's elections for a permanent Government are scheduled to be held near the end of 2005, and the elected Government can count on coalition assistance. We will stand with the Iraqi people as long as necessary to ensure that their young democracy is stable and secure and successful.

As we have done before, America is fighting on the side of liberty, liberty in Iraq and liberty in the Middle East. This objective serves the interests of that region, of the United States, and of all freedom-loving countries. As the greater Middle East increasingly becomes a place where freedom flourishes, the lives of millions in that region will be bettered, and the American people and the entire world will be more secure.

From the first days of the war on terror, I said our Nation would face periods of struggle and testing. As the June 30th transition approaches, we will continue to see a test of wills between the enemies of freedom and its defenders. We will win this test of wills and overcome every challenge, because the cause of freedom and security is worth our struggle.

This weekend, many of the men and women who serve that cause in uniform will celebrate Easter and Passover far from home. In this season that celebrates hope and freedom, our Nation remembers in prayer the good and the brave people of our military. They are the best of America, and America is firmly behind them.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:50 a.m. on April 9 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 10. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 9 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Executive Order 13334—Establishing an Emergency Board To Investigate a Dispute Between the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and Its Conductors Represented by the United Transportation Union

April 10, 2004

A dispute exists between the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, and its conductors represented by the United Transportation Union.

The dispute has not heretofore been adjusted under the provisions of the Railway Labor Act, as amended, 45 U.S.C. 151–188 (the "Act").

A party empowered by the Act has requested that the President establish an emergency board pursuant to section 9A of the Act (45 U.S.C. 159a).

Section 9A(c) of the Act provides that the President, upon such request, shall appoint an emergency board to investigate and report on the dispute.

Now, Therefore, by the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, including section 9A of the Act, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. *Establishment of Emergency Board ("Board").* There is established, effective April 12, 2004, a Board of three members to be appointed by the President to investigate and report on this dispute. No member shall be pecuniarily or otherwise interested in any organization of railroad employees or any carrier. The Board shall perform its functions subject to the availability of funds.

Sec. 2. *Report.* The Board shall report to the President with respect to this dispute within 30 days of its creation.

Sec. 3. *Maintaining Conditions.* As provided by section 9A(c) of the Act, from the date of the creation of the Board and for 120 days thereafter, no change in the conditions out of which the dispute arose shall be made by the parties to the controversy, except by agreement of the parties.

Sec. 4. *Records Maintenance.* The records and files of the Board are records of the Office of the President and upon the Board's termination shall be maintained in the physical custody of the National Mediation Board.

Sec. 5. *Expiration.* The Board shall terminate upon the submission of the report provided for in section 2 of this order.

George W. Bush

The White House,
April 10, 2004.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 9:10 a.m., April 13, 2004]

NOTE: This Executive order was published in the *Federal Register* on April 14.

Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters at Fort Hood, Texas

April 11, 2004

Easter

The President. Happy Easter to everybody. It's our honor to have celebrated this holy day with family members whose loved one is in Iraq. Fort Hood has made a mighty contribution to freedom in Iraq and to security for the country. I value my time with the family members and those who sacrifice on behalf of the country.

Today I ask for God's blessings for our troops overseas. May He protect them, and may He continue to bless our country.

I'll answer a couple of questions. Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press].

Situation in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. We're coming off a week in which dozens of American soldiers have died. We've seen images of incredible violence and chaos. Should Americans brace for weeks or months of this? Do you expect it to abate soon? And also, what's General Abizaid telling you about how many more troops he'll need, if any?

The President. Yes, I've spoken to General Abizaid twice in the last 4 or 5 days. He knows full well that when he speaks to me that if he needs additional manpower, he can ask for it. He believes, like I believe, that this violence we've seen is part of a few people trying to stop progress toward democracy. Fallujah, south of Baghdad—these incidents were basically thrust upon the innocent Iraqi people by gangs, violent gangs.

And our troops are taking care of business. Their job is to make Iraq more secure so that a peaceful Iraq can emerge, and they're doing a great job. And it was a tough week last week, and my prayers and thoughts are with those who paid the ultimate price for our security. A free Iraq will make the world more peaceful. A free Iraq is going to change the world. And it's been tough, and our troops are performing brilliantly and bravely.

Q. Do you think it's right to add—[*inaudible*]——

The President. It's hard to tell. I just know this, that we're plenty tough, and we'll remain tough. Now, listen, obviously, we're

openminded to suggestions—members of the Governing Council wanted a chance to move into Fallujah and see if they could bring some order to the gangs and violence. And as you can tell, our military is giving them a chance to do so. Obviously, I pray every day there's less casualty.

But I know what we're doing in Iraq is right. It's right for long-term peace. It's right for the security of our country, and it's hard work. And today, on bended knee, I thank the good Lord for protecting those of our troops overseas and our coalition troops and innocent Iraqis who suffer at the hands of some of these senseless killings by people who are trying to shake our will.

Yes, sir.

President's Daily Briefing

Q. Mr. President, could you tell us, did you see the Presidential—the President's Daily Brief from August of '01 as a warning——

The President. Did I see it? Of course I saw it. I asked for it.

Q. No, no, I'm sorry. Did you see it as a warning of hijackers? And how did you respond to that?

The President. My response was exactly like then as it is today, that I asked for the Central Intelligence Agency to give me an update on any terrorist threats. And the PDB was no indication of a terrorist threat. There was not a time and place of an attack. It said Usama bin Laden had designs on America. Well, I knew that. What I wanted to know was, is there anything specifically going to take place in America that we needed to react to?

As you might recall, there was some specific threats for overseas that we reacted to. And as the President, I wanted to know whether there was anything, any actionable intelligence. And I looked at the August 6th briefing. I was satisfied that some of the matters were being looked into. But that PDB said nothing about an attack on America. It talked about intentions, about somebody who hated America—well, we knew that.

Yes, Dave [David Gregory, NBC News].

Q. Just to follow up on that, Mr. President. There was, in that PDB, specific information about activity that may speak to a larger battle plan, even if it wasn't specific. So I wonder if you could say what specifically was done, and do you think your administration should have done anything more?

The President. David, look, let me just say it again. Had I known there was going to be an attack on America, I would have moved mountains to stop the attack. I would have done everything I can. My job is to protect the American people. And I asked the intelligence agency to analyze the data to tell me whether or not we faced a threat internally, like they thought we had faced a threat in other parts of the world. That's what the PDB request was. And had there been actionable intelligence, we would have moved on it.

I'm not exactly sure what you're referring to in the PDB, but if you're referring to the fact that the FBI was investigating things, that's great. That's what we expect the FBI to do.

Q. Wasn't that current threat information? That wasn't historical; that was ongoing.

The President. Right, and had they found something, they would have reported it to me. That's—we were doing precisely what the American people expects us to do, run down every lead, look at every scintilla of intelligence, and follow up on it. But there was—again, I can't say it as plainly as this: Had I known, we would have acted. Of course we would have acted. Any administration would have acted. The previous administration would have acted. That's our job.

Q. Are you satisfied, though, that each agency was doing everything it should have been doing?

The President. Well, that's what the 9/11 Commission should look into, and I hope it does. It's an important part of the assignment of the 9/11 Commission. And I look forward to their recommendations, a full analysis of what took place. I am satisfied that I never saw any intelligence that indicated there was going to be an attack on America—at a time and a place, an attack. Of course we knew that America was hated by Usama bin Laden. That was obvious. The question was, who was going to attack us, when and where and with what. And you might recall the hijacking that was referred to in the PDB. It was not a hijacking of an airplane to fly

into a building; it was hijacking of airplanes in order to free somebody that was being held as a prisoner in the United States.

Okay, thank you all. Happy Easter to everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; and Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt in Crawford, Texas

April 12, 2004

President Bush. Thank you all for coming. I'm pleased to welcome my friend Hosni Mubarak to my home. Welcome. I always look forward to visiting with him, and I look forward to hearing his wise counsel. I appreciate his frank views on many challenges that face our two nations and that face the greater Middle East.

Our nations have a relationship that is strong and warm. Our people share the bonds of friendship, a commitment to prosperity and peace and regional stability. Egypt is a strategic partner of the United States, and we value President Mubarak's years of effort on behalf of the peace and stability of the Middle East.

The meetings we have just had focused on these goals and on ways to make the Middle East safer and more secure. We recognize that the starting point for a prosperous and peaceful Middle East must be the rejection of terror. Egypt has taken a firm stand against terror by working to disrupt the activities and capabilities of the region's terrorist organizations. These are the policies of a nation and a statesman that understand the threat that terrorism poses to all of us, to my Nation, to his, to all the Arab states, to Israel, and to the future of any Palestinian state. Terrorism must be opposed, and it must be defeated. And I'm grateful for President Mubarak's support in the global war against terror.

Our objective in the Middle East must be true peace, not just a pause between wars, which can only happen within a framework of democracy and stability. I'm pleased that Egypt has engaged its neighbor Israel on closer trade ties that will help the Egyptian people find jobs and improve their lives. President Mubarak and I discussed the possible Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and our shared view that creation of a democratic, peaceful Palestinian state is a necessary goal on the road to peace.

We also believe that the future of the Middle East and the future of Iraq are closely linked, and I am grateful for President Mubarak's support for Iraq as it transitions to democracy and stability. The people of the greater Middle East have a right to be safe, secure, prosperous, and free.

President Mubarak and I spoke about the future of the region and of Egypt. Just as Egypt has shown the way toward peace in the Middle East, it will set the standard in the region for democracy by strengthening democratic institutions and political participation.

I'm encouraged by the ongoing debate on reform in Egypt, including the excellent discussions involving civil society representatives from the Arab world who met at the Alexandria Library in March. And President Mubarak can be confident in my friendship and America's partnership as he moves forward to realize the hopes of his people.

I welcome my good friend Hosni to my home. Our countries have three decades of solid, beneficial relations behind us, and the United States will continue to work with Egypt and the Arab world in a spirit of common purpose and mutual respect.

Thank you for coming, sir.

President Mubarak. I would like to thank President Bush for inviting me to his ranch in Crawford and for the friendly atmosphere and the gracious hospitality that prevailed throughout our meeting today. I had constructive, candid, and friendly discussions with President Bush and with members of his administration on a wide range of issues of mutual concern.

Our strategic relationship, which has matured over the past 30 years, has constituted

a force for stability, both regionally and globally. The statement issued today, on the 30th anniversary of the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Egypt and the United States, gives a clear reflection of our strong commitment to advance our special relationship and deepen our cooperation.

Together we have faced the challenges of peace, fighting terror and defeating aggression. In cooperation with the United States, many of Egypt's reform and development objectives have been achieved over the years. Our partnership is based on trust, mutual respect, and the increasing political will on both sides to continue to assume the responsibilities of leadership. These same principles will guide us into the future as we face a new set of challenges on the world stage and as we enter a new phase of reform on our domestic front.

Egypt has moved with vigor and determination over the past years to shoulder its increasing responsibilities in the Middle East. At the same time, we've confronted domestic challenges through an ambition and irreversible program of reform. Our reform efforts have and will continue to emanate from my Government's desire to further widen the scope of democracy, freedom, and political participation in a vibrant and dynamic civil society.

Egypt's political reform program constitutes a core component of our comprehensive effort to improve the quality of life of our people. Our efforts continue to focus on opening up new opportunities for our citizens to improve their livelihood within a competitive global environment. In this, we seek to build on our numerous achievements in the areas of good governance, sustainable economic growth, education, and health care within a caring society in which social policies are central to our development goals. We continue to move forward within a process of debate and interaction between Government, civil society, and different political parties in Egypt.

We have also expanded the debate to include participation from the Arab world through a process of interaction among the civil society representatives in the region, which was launched at the Library of Alexandria last March. Your support, Mr. President, for our steps in that endeavor is appreciated.

On regional issues, we discussed our respective responsibilities regarding the peace process in the Middle East. The United States has always assumed a leading role in the search for peace in our region. I expressed my strong desire to see that leading role continue with ever greater vigor and determination to realize our vision of a two-state solution as early as possible in the context of a comprehensive, just, and lasting settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

I expressed to the President the centrality of the conflict to the people of the region. It is our conviction that reviving the hopes of peace through our determined efforts to put the peace process back on track is central to enhancing the prospects of reform and the prosperity in the region. Egypt has pioneered the path of peace in the region for over 25 years and will continue to assume its responsibilities for peace today. I reaffirmed to President Bush Egypt's steadfast commitment to do whatever it takes to revive the hopes for a comprehensive settlement and to bring the parties back to the path of dialog and negotiations.

On Iraq, I conveyed to the President our serious concerns about the current state of affairs, particularly in the security and the humanitarian areas. I further stressed the importance of restoring Iraq's sovereignty as soon as possible within a context that preserves its territorial integrity and unites all Iraqis toward a common future. The recent efforts to increase the role of the U.N. in that process is an important step that should be further encouraged.

We discussed our joint effort to fight terror. We agreed to intensify our extensive cooperation in this regard, to include finding solutions to the political and economic problems that represent the underlying causes of terrorism.

We discussed also various aspects of our bilateral relations, including the importance of deepening our economic and cultural ties. In the economic field, I briefed the President on our economic reform program and said the importance of free trade with the United States in attaining our economic objectives. I also stressed the importance of promoting

cultural exchange and furthering the links between civil society in both our nations. This is certain to enhance mutual understanding between our two peoples and between the United States and the Arab world at large.

I am confident, Mr. President, after your talks today, that through our strategic partnership, we will continue to confront the challenge before us with greater determination and resolute leadership.

Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Good job.

We'll answer two questions a side. We'll start with the American side here with Scott [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press].

President's Daily Briefing

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'd like to take you back to August 6, 2001, if I could, ask you about your personal response when you received the PDB. Do you recall whether you called Bob Mueller, asked him about what the FBI was doing, asked about these 70 field investigations? And also, did your mind go back to the PDB when September 11th hit?

President Bush. Bob Mueller wasn't the Director of the FBI at the time.

Q. Did you call the Director?

President Bush. I don't think there was a Director. But no, here's my recollection. First, I asked for the PDB. In other words, I said to the intelligence agency, "Bring me up to date. What do you know? Give me an assessment," I guess is the best way to put it. And I read it and, obviously, was discomforted by the fact that Usama bin Laden hated America. But as I mentioned yesterday, we already knew that, and the fundamental question is, what was—was there any actionable intelligence. And by that I mean, was there anything that the agency could tell me that would then cause me to have to do something to make a decision to protect America.

There was nothing in there that said, you know, "There's an imminent attack." There was nothing in this report to me that said, "Oh, by the way, we've got intelligence that says something is about to happen in America." That wasn't what this report said. The report was kind of a history of Usama's intentions, I guess is the best way to put it, kind of a history of what the agency had known.

And you're right, there was included—they included the fact that the FBI was conducting field investigations, which comforted me. You see, it meant the FBI was doing its job. The FBI was running down any lead. And I will tell you this, Scott, that had they found something, I'm confident they would have reported back to me. That's the way the system works. And whoever was the Acting FBI Director, had they found something, would have said, "Mr. President, we have found something that you need to be concerned about in your duties to protect America." That didn't happen.

Q. Are you satisfied with their performance, then, today?

President Bush. I'm confident that had they found something that was a direct threat to America, they would have brought it to my attention.

Now, the 9/11 Commission hearings are going to analyze that which went on and, hopefully, bring recommendations forward to help this administration and future administrations do our solemn duty to protect the American people. And that's why I think the hearings are good things, particularly when they address any weaknesses in the system.

And Condi mentioned the other day something very interesting, and that is that now may be a time to revamp and reform our intelligence services. And we look forward to hearing recommendations. We're thinking about that, ourselves, and we look forward to working with the Commission.

Q. What's on the table in the way of reform——

President Bush. Hold on a second, please. Lindlaw, I don't want to lecture you here, but you were given one question and President Mubarak is going to wonder, is the press corps totally out of control here in America. So I'm going to have to cut you off at this point in time.

Mr. President, why don't you call on somebody?

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. Welcome.

Situation in Iraq

Q. President Bush, in recent days, we've seen a significant deterioration in the security situation in Iraq. Do you see a serious risk in that such events and the American military response to them would lead to a wider popular resistance to the American presence in Iraq, and would that complicate the process of transferring sovereignty to the Iraqi people? Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, and welcome. We will transfer sovereignty. And as a matter of fact, the United Nations representative, Brahimi, is in Baghdad as we speak, working with different parties to help devise the system to which we transfer sovereignty, and we look forward to that.

Secondly, the situation in Iraq has improved. But you're right, it was a tough week, because of—there was lawlessness and gangs that were trying to take the law in their own hands. These were people that were trying to make a statement prior to the transfer of sovereignty that they would get to decide the fate of Iraq, through violence. A civil society, a peaceful society can't grow with people who are willing to kill in order to stop progress. And our job is to provide security for the Iraqi people so that a transition can take place, and that's what you were seeing.

And our job also is to protect American lives. If our soldiers are at risk, they will defend themselves. And I'm proud of the fact that our soldiers did so, mindful that there are innocent Iraqis oftentimes in between them and an enemy that is shooting at them. We're a compassionate country that cares about the loss of innocent life, and it grieves us when we see innocent life lost. However, we will defend ourselves.

I believe—strongly believe that by far the vast majority of Iraqis want there to be a peaceful country and a free country. And so the Iraq people are on the side of the transition to a peaceful country. We just can't let a few people—and I say "a few"—listen, there was enough to cause harm, but a few, relative to the rest of the people. You just can't let a small percentage of the Iraqi people decide the fate of everybody, and that's what you're seeing.

Thank you.

Excuse me for a second, please. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Israeli Withdrawal From Gaza

Q. Thank you, sir. If I could ask both of you—are both of you prepared to endorse the Israeli withdrawal plan?

President Bush. Steve, I welcome—first of all, let's not prejudge what Prime Minister Sharon is going to tell me. So I don't want to put words in his mouth until he actually comes to America on Wednesday. We discussed the rumors of such a withdrawal, and we discussed it in the context of the two-state solution and the roadmap.

In other words, we both are in agreement that if Israel makes the decision to withdraw, it doesn't replace the roadmap; it is a part of the roadmap, so that we can continue progress toward the two-state solution. And I really welcomed my friend's advice. He is—he knows the area well, and he's been in touch with the parties, and he has got good judgment on this matter. Let's wait until the Prime Minister comes. But if he were to decide to withdraw from the Gaza, it would be a positive development.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. He wanted to know your—just a second, excuse me. He wanted to have your reaction to a possible withdrawal, if you'd like to share that. You don't have to, if you don't want to. He's a kind fellow——

President Mubarak. I have discussed this with the President, the withdrawal from Gaza. I think any withdrawal from the occupied territory is very highly appreciated. But I would like the withdrawal to coincide with the roadmap, which is very important, because withdrawing from Gaza alone, without connecting it with the roadmap, we never know it will be Gaza alone. It will be very difficult. It will not be accepted by the public opinion in the area. So the withdrawal from Gaza, if it is a part from the roadmap, I think it will be very highly appreciated.

President Bush. Yes, the point is that the decision doesn't replace the path toward the establishment of a Palestinian state that will provide hope for the Palestinian people and provide continuity and put the institutions in

place necessary for a state to evolve. I'm confident there will be ample willingness of people in Europe or the United States Government to enact economic—to take economic measures necessary to provide a hopeful future. And we're in accord on this issue, and I look forward to meeting with the Prime Minister and hear what he has to say.

Final question, if you'd like to call on somebody.

Q. Thank you very much. My question is for you, Mr. Excellency Bush and Mr. Excellency Mubarak. But let me first tell you, happy Easter, before asking about the peace process. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. Thank you. We had a great Easter. I'm sorry it's so chilly here. It's usually warmer.

Two-State Solution for the Middle East

Q. Thank you very much. Sir, you announced your vision of a two-state solution almost 2 years ago——

President Bush. Yes.

Q. Do you think this vision can be realized in spite of the Israeli policy of expanding settlements and establishment of the separate wall, which violates the green line?

And for you, Mr. President Mubarak, how can Egypt help the Palestinians to take their responsibilities after the Israeli withdrawal?

President Bush. Great question. Yes, I think we can achieve a two-state solution. You're right, I think I made the speech at the United Nations in 2001, if I'm not mistaken—September of 2001—the first American President to do so, to make that public declaration a policy. And the reason I did is because I believe it's in the Palestinians' interest to have their own state, and I believe it's in Israel's interest that the Palestinians develop a peaceful state.

The reason why—we've made some progress, by the way. There is what they call the roadmap, a strategy to achieve that, which is good. The problem is, is that there's terrorists who will kill people in order to stop the process, and that's why it is essential that we work together to stop terrorist killing. There will never be a Palestinian state, in my judgment, if terrorists are willing to kill. And so the first step we've all got to do is to work on the mutual security concerns of the region. And we can't let people blow up a process, but that's what's happened, as you might recall. And there's been suiciders and killers, and you know—and it's essential that we work together to stop that kind of terror.

It will be much easier for the Palestinians to assume their responsibilities—and there are responsibilities for the Palestinians, particularly when it comes to developing a state that is a peaceful state—it will make it a lot easier if we can continue to keep the pressure on the terrorists, make it a lot easier for them to assume their responsibilities.

President Mubarak. The problem of the Middle East has stayed nearly about—about to be 50 years now. It's a very complicated problem, and if we keep it, more and more, it will be much more complicated than ever before. It could have been solved several years ago, but now it's very difficult. But in this context, I really thank President Bush, the first President of the United States who could say that, "I'm ready to agree on establishing two states beside each other, independent states, Palestinian state and the Israeli state." This is the first time we could hear it. We have to build on it.

Concerning Gaza, I think we could help a lot in Gaza by training the police, by giving them advice, by sending them some groups to make plans for them how to work. And in that regard, we are ready to do. We have contacts with them, we have contact with the different factions which could create problems now and then. And you remember, they convened in Cairo several times. We are ready to invite them again so as to help stability in Gaza for a continuation for more withdrawal.

Thank you.

April 13 News Conference

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

By the way, tomorrow night I'm interested in answering more questions for you all. So if you pick out a red or blue tie——

Q. A news conference?

President Bush. Why not. See you at the East Room.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:52 a.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; National Security

Adviser Condoleezza Rice; Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General; and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel.

Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt

April 12, 2004

Thirty Years of American-Egyptian Relations: A Partnership for Peace and Development

For thirty years, Egypt and the United States have enjoyed a partnership dedicated to peace, stability, prosperity, and freedom in the Middle East.

Secretary Powell and Foreign Minister Maher plan soon to conduct a session of our bilateral strategic dialogue in Washington, reaffirming the determination of our two countries to strengthen our partnership.

In our meetings today, we reiterated our resolve to continue working, along with our partners in the region, in Europe, and around the world, to promote peace in the Middle East, maintain regional stability, fight terrorism, and bolster the region's efforts toward economic, political, and social development and modernization.

Our two nations have nurtured a vision of peace that is anchored by the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. This first peace agreement between Israel and an Arab country has been a model for subsequent endeavors to achieve a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the region.

Our two nations' unwavering commitment to this process led to the universal acceptance of the necessity and inevitability of a negotiated settlement. We envisage two states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace and security. We will continue our determined efforts in the forthcoming months to achieve these objectives. We believe that an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank can, under the right conditions, and if it is within the context of the implementation of the Roadmap and President Bush's vision, be a significant step forward. It is our firm conviction that resolving the Arab Israeli conflict will be a major contribution to stability and progress in the region, removing a major source of tension.

Egypt and the United States also recognize the need for political and economic reform in the region. The United States has followed the steps taken by Egypt over the past few years, as well as the ongoing debate on reform in different sectors of Egyptian society. This ongoing debate, including the call for reform produced at the meeting of Arab civil society held at the Library of Alexandria last March, as well as the speech given by President Mubarak in the opening of that meeting reaffirming his commitment for a continuing reform process, provide for a constructive foundation for further efforts toward democracy and development.

Egyptian-American cooperation will also continue to encompass many other areas. Iraq faces a critical moment in its history, with wide implications across the region. We are committed to helping the Iraqi people realize their aspirations to build a sovereign, prosperous, stable, unified, and peaceful modern nation.

We intend to maintain our close cooperation in the fight against terrorism. Our two nations are among those who have suffered the most from the scourge and have no intention to relent in this fight. The United States expresses its appreciation for Egypt's invaluable help and its readiness to continue its contributions towards combating and eliminating terrorism.

Since the 1970s, the United States has been Egypt's leading partner in economic, political, and social reform efforts, providing highly appreciated material and moral support. The two nations look forward to strengthening their partnership in this respect for the benefit of the people of both countries and region as a whole.

The Egyptian-American partnership has promoted peace and stability, while supporting positive change in the Middle East, for thirty years. We are confident that it is equally capable of meeting the challenges of the next thirty years and beyond. We look forward to an intensified dialogue about Egyptian-American cooperation and partnership in the 21st century.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Statement on Signing Legislation To Provide for the Conveyance to the Utrok Atoll Local Government of a Decommissioned National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Ship, and for Other Purposes

April 13, 2004

Today, I have signed into law H.R. 2584, a bill to provide for the conveyance to the Utrok Atoll local government of a decommissioned National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship, and for other purposes.

Section 101(c) of the bill purports to require the Utrok Atoll local government, in consultation with the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, to submit a plan to four committees of the United States Congress for the use of the ship to be conveyed. The Republic of the Marshall Islands, of which Utrok is a political subdivision, is a self-governing republic with a sovereign right to self-determination whose government has the capacity to conduct foreign affairs. Accordingly, in light of the status of the Republic of the Marshall Islands and the exclusive authority of the President with respect to the conduct of the foreign affairs of the United States, the executive branch shall construe section 101(c) as asking the President to request, rather than as requiring, that the Utrok political subdivision submit a plan for use of the ship to be conveyed. The Secretary of State, after consultation with the Secretary of Commerce, shall communicate on my behalf as appropriate with the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to effectuate to the extent permissible the purposes of section 101.

George W. Bush

The White House,
April 13, 2004.

NOTE: H.R. 2584, approved April 13, was assigned Public Law No. 108–219.

Proclamation 7771—Pan American Day and Pan American Week, 2004

April 13, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Each year on Pan American Day and during Pan American Week, we honor the bonds of friendship that unite the Pan American community. With the exception of one country, the nations of the Western Hemisphere recognize the importance of working together to strengthen democratic institutions, promote economic prosperity, invest in our people, and improve our security. At the recent 2004 Special Summit of the Americas, the 34 democratic nations of the Western Hemisphere reaffirmed their commitment to the Inter-American Democratic Charter to defend democracy and freedom whenever they are threatened. Our unity and support of democratic institutions, constitutional processes, and basic liberties give hope and strength to those struggling around the world.

The nations of the Western Hemisphere will continue to draw upon the Charter to strengthen the rule of law, protect human rights and freedoms, encourage economic growth, and promote good governance. As neighbors, we are expanding prosperity through open markets and economic reforms—creating new opportunities for millions of people and continued economic progress benefiting the nations of our hemisphere. My Administration will continue to work toward the creation of the Free Trade Area of the Americas, scheduled for completion in 2005.

To protect the rights and freedoms of all our citizens, the Pan American community must also combat the forces that threaten democracy: terrorism, drug trafficking, and other crimes that transcend national borders. The Declaration on Security in the Americas, adopted at the October 2003 Organization of American States Special Conference on Security, underscores our hemisphere's interest in collectively maintaining peace and security across the Americas. The United States welcomes the opportunity to work

with our neighbors to advance the Declaration's goals to safeguard our citizens as we build for a future that is peaceful, just, and prosperous.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 14, 2004, as Pan American Day and April 11 through April 17, 2004, as Pan American Week. I urge the Governors of the 50 States, the Governor of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, and the officials of other areas under the flag of the United States of America to honor these observances with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-eighth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., April 15, 2004]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on April 16.

The President's News Conference

April 13, 2004

The President. Good evening. Before I take your questions, let me speak with the American people about the situation in Iraq.

This has been tough weeks in that country. Coalition forces have encountered serious violence in some areas of Iraq. Our military commanders report that this violence is being instigated by three groups: Some remnants of Saddam Hussein's regime, along with Islamic militants, have attacked coalition forces in the city of Fallujah; terrorists from other countries have infiltrated Iraq to incite and organize attacks; in the south of Iraq, coalition forces face riots and attacks that are being incited by a radical cleric named Al Sadr. He has assembled some of his supporters into an illegal militia and publicly supported the terrorist groups Hamas and Hezbollah. Al Sadr's methods of violence and intimidation are widely repudiated by other Iraqi Shi'a. He's been indicted by Iraqi authorities for the murder of a prominent Shi'a cleric.

Although these instigations of violence come from different factions, they share common goals. They want to run us out of Iraq and destroy the democratic hopes of the Iraqi people. The violence we have seen is a power grab by these extreme and ruthless elements. It's not a civil war. It's not a popular uprising.

Most of Iraq is relatively stable. Most Iraqis, by far, reject violence and oppose dictatorship. In forums where Iraqis have met to discuss their political future and in all the proceedings of the Iraqi Governing Council, Iraqis have expressed clear commitments. They want strong protections for individual rights. They want their independence, and they want their freedom.

America's commitment to freedom in Iraq is consistent with our ideals and required by our interests. Iraq will either be a peaceful, democratic country, or it will again be a source of violence, a haven for terror, and a threat to America and to the world. By helping to secure a free Iraq, Americans serving in that country are protecting their fellow citizens. Our Nation is grateful to them all and to their families that face hardship and long separation.

This weekend, at a Fort Hood hospital, I presented a Purple Heart to some of our wounded, had the honor of thanking them on behalf of all Americans. Other men and women have paid an even greater cost. Our Nation honors the memory of those who have been killed, and we pray that their families will find God's comfort in the midst of their grief. As I have said to those who have lost loved ones, we will finish the work of the fallen.

America's Armed Forces are performing brilliantly, with all the skill and honor we expect of them. We're constantly reviewing their needs. Troop strength, now and in the future, is determined by the situation on the ground. If additional forces are needed, I will send them. If additional resources are needed, we will provide them. The people of our country are united behind our men and women in uniform, and this Government will

do all that is necessary to assure the success of their historic mission.

One central commitment of that mission is the transfer of sovereignty back to the Iraqi people. We have set a deadline of June 30th. It is important that we meet that deadline. As a proud and independent people, Iraqis do not support an indefinite occupation, and neither does America. We're not an imperial power, as nations such as Japan and Germany can attest. We are a liberating power, as nations in Europe and Asia can attest as well. America's objective in Iraq is limited, and it is firm: We seek an independent, free, and secure Iraq.

Were the coalition to step back from the June 30th pledge, many Iraqis would question our intentions and feel their hopes betrayed. And those in Iraq who trade in hatred and conspiracy theories would find a larger audience and gain a stronger hand. We will not step back from our pledge. On June 30th, Iraqi sovereignty will be placed in Iraqi hands.

Sovereignty involves more than a date and a ceremony. It requires Iraqis to assume responsibility for their own future. Iraqi authorities are now confronting the security challenge of the last several weeks. In Fallujah, coalition forces have suspended offensive operations, allowing members of the Iraqi Governing Council and local leaders to work on the restoration of central authority in that city. These leaders are communicating with the insurgents to ensure an orderly turnover of that city to Iraqi forces, so that the resumption of military action does not become necessary. They're also insisting that those who killed and mutilated four American contract workers be handed over for trial and punishment. In addition, members of the Governing Council are seeking to resolve the situation in the south. Al Sadr must answer the charges against him and disband his illegal militia.

Our coalition is standing with responsible Iraqi leaders as they establish growing authority in their country. The transition to sovereignty requires that we demonstrate confidence in Iraqis, and we have that confidence. Many Iraqi leaders are showing great personal courage, and their example will bring out the same quality in others. The transition to sovereignty also requires an atmosphere of security, and our coalition is working to provide that security. We will continue taking the greatest care to prevent harm to innocent civilians, yet we will not permit the spread of chaos and violence. I have directed our military commanders to make every preparation to use decisive force, if necessary, to maintain order and to protect our troops.

The nation of Iraq is moving toward self-rule, and Iraqis and Americans will see evidence in the months to come. On June 30th, when the flag of free Iraq is raised, Iraqi officials will assume full responsibility for the ministries of Government. On that day, the transitional administrative law, including a bill of rights that is unprecedented in the Arab world, will take full effect.

The United States and all the nations of our coalition will establish normal diplomatic relations with the Iraqi Government. An American Embassy will open, and an American Ambassador will be posted.

According to the schedule already approved by the Governing Council, Iraq will hold elections for a national assembly no later than next January. That assembly will draft a new, permanent constitution which will be presented to the Iraqi people in a national referendum held in October of next year. Iraqis will then elect a permanent Government by December 15th, 2005, an event that will mark the completion of Iraq's transition from dictatorship to freedom.

Other nations and international institutions are stepping up to their responsibilities in building a free and secure Iraq. We're working closely with the United Nations envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, and with Iraqis to determine the exact form of the Government that will receive sovereignty on June 30th. The United Nations election assistance team, headed by Karina Parelli, is in Iraq, developing plans for next January's election.

NATO is providing support for the Polish-led multinational division in Iraq. And 17 of NATO's 26 members are contributing forces to maintain security. Secretary of State Powell and Secretary of State Rumsfeld and a number of NATO defense and foreign ministers are exploring a more formal role for

NATO, such as turning the Polish-led division into a NATO operation and giving NATO specific responsibilities for border control.

Iraqis' neighbors also have responsibilities to make their region more stable. So I am sending Deputy Secretary of State Armitage to the Middle East to discuss with these nations our common interest in a free and independent Iraq and how they can help achieve this goal.

As we've made clear all along, our commitment to the success and security of Iraq will not end on June 30th. On July 1st and beyond, our reconstruction assistance will continue, and our military commitment will continue. Having helped Iraqis establish a new Government, coalition military forces will help Iraqis to protect their Government from external aggression and internal subversion.

The success of free Government in Iraq is vital for many reasons. A free Iraq is vital because 25 million Iraqis have as much right to live in freedom as we do. A free Iraq will stand as an example to reformers across the Middle East. A free Iraq will show that America is on the side of Muslims who wish to live in peace, as we have already shown in Kuwait and Kosovo, Bosnia and Afghanistan. A free Iraq will confirm to a watching world that America's word, once given, can be relied upon even in the toughest times.

Above all, the defeat of violence and terror in Iraq is vital to the defeat of violence and terror elsewhere and vital, therefore, to the safety of the American people. Now is the time, and Iraq is the place, in which the enemies of the civilized world are testing the will of the civilized world. We must not waver.

The violence we are seeing in Iraq is familiar. The terrorist who takes hostages or plants a roadside bomb near Baghdad is serving the same ideology of murder that kills innocent people on trains in Madrid and murders children on buses in Jerusalem and blows up a nightclub in Bali and cuts the throat of a young reporter for being a Jew. We've seen the same ideology of murder in the killing of 241 marines in Beirut, the first attack on the World Trade Center, in the destruction of two Embassies in Africa, in the attack on the U.S.S. *Cole,* and in the merciless horror inflicted upon thousands of innocent men and women and children on September the 11th, 2001.

None of these acts is the work of a religion; all are the work of a fanatical political ideology. The servants of this ideology seek tyranny in the Middle East and beyond. They seek to oppress and persecute women. They seek the death of Jews and Christians and every Muslim who desires peace over theocratic terror. They seek to intimidate America into panic and retreat and to set free nations against each other. And they seek weapons of mass destruction to blackmail and murder on a massive scale.

Over the last several decades, we've seen that any concession or retreat on our part will only embolden this enemy and invite more bloodshed. And the enemy has seen, over the last 31 months, that we will no longer live in denial or seek to appease them. For the first time, the civilized world has provided a concerted response to the ideology of terror, a series of powerful, effective blows. The terrorists have lost the shelter of the Taliban and the training camps in Afghanistan. They've lost safe havens in Pakistan. They lost an ally in Baghdad, and Libya has turned its back on terror. They've lost many leaders in an unrelenting international manhunt. And perhaps most frightening to these men and their movement, the terrorists are seeing the advance of freedom and reform in the greater Middle East.

A desperate enemy is also a dangerous enemy, and our work may become more difficult before it is finished. No one can predict all the hazards that lie ahead or the costs they will bring. Yet, in this conflict, there is no safe alternative to resolute action. The consequences of failure in Iraq would be unthinkable. Every friend of America in Iraq would be betrayed to prison and murder, as a new tyranny arose. Every enemy of America in the world would celebrate, proclaiming our weakness and decadence and using that victory to recruit a new generation of killers.

We will succeed in Iraq. We're carrying out a decision that has already been made and will not change: Iraq will be a free, independent country, and America and the Middle East will be safer because of it. Our coalition has the means and the will to prevail.

We serve the cause of liberty, and that is always and everywhere a cause worth serving.

Now, I'll be glad to take your questions. I will start with you.

Vietnam Analogy

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, April is turning into the deadliest month in Iraq since the fall of Baghdad, and some people are comparing Iraq to Vietnam and talking about a quagmire. Polls show that support for your policy is declining and that fewer than half of Americans now support it. What does that say to you, and how do you answer the Vietnam comparison?

The President. Yes. I think the analogy is false. I also happen to think that analogy sends the wrong message to our troops and sends the wrong message to the enemy. Look, this is hard work. It's hard to advance freedom in a country that has been strangled by tyranny. And yet, we must stay the course, because the end result is in our Nation's interest. A secure and free Iraq is an historic opportunity to change the world and make America more secure. A free Iraq in the midst of the Middle East will have incredible change. It's hard—freedom is not easy to achieve. We had a little trouble in our own country achieving freedom.

And we've been there a year, Terry [Terence Hunt, Associated Press]. I know it seems like a long time. It seems like a long time to the loved ones whose troops have been overseas, but when you think about where the country has come from, it's a relatively short period of time. And we're making progress.

There's no question it's been a tough, tough series of weeks for the American people. It's been really tough for the families. I understand that. It's been tough on this administration, but we're doing the right thing.

And as to whether or not I make decisions based upon polls, I don't. I just don't make decisions that way. I fully understand the consequences of what we're doing. We're changing the world. And the world will be better off, and America will be more secure as a result of the actions we're taking.

Troop Strength/Timing of Withdrawal From Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. What's your best prediction on how long U.S. troops will have to be in Iraq? And it sounds like you will have to add some troops. Is that a fair assessment?

The President. Well, I—first of all, that's up to General Abizaid, and he's clearly indicating that he may want more troops. It's coming up through the chain of command. If that's what he wants, that's what he gets. Generally, we've had about 115,000 troops in Iraq. There's 135,000 now, as a result of the changeover from one division to the next. If he wants to keep troops there to help, I'm more than willing to say, "Yes, General Abizaid."

I talk to General Abizaid quite frequently. I'm constantly asking him, does he have what he needs, whether it be in troop strength or in equipment. He and General Sanchez talk all the time, and if he makes the recommendation, he'll get it.

In terms of how long we'll be there: as long as necessary, and not one day more. The Iraqi people need us there to help with security. They need us there to fight off these violent few who are doing everything they can to resist the advance of freedom, and I mentioned who they are.

And as I mentioned in my opening remarks, our commanders on the ground have got the authorities necessary to deal with violence and will—will in firm fashion. And that's what, by far, the vast majority of the Iraqis want. They want security so they can advance toward a free society.

Once we transfer sovereignty, we'll enter into a security agreement with the Government to which we pass sovereignty, the entity to which we pass sovereignty. And we'll need to be there for a while. We'll also need to continue training the Iraqi troops. I was disappointed in the performance of some of the troops. Some of the units performed brilliantly. Some of them didn't, and we need to find out why. If they're lacking equipment, we'll get them equipment. If there needs to be more intense training, we'll get more intense training. But eventually, Iraq's security is going to be handled by the Iraqi people, themselves.

Let's see here—Terry [Terry Moran, ABC News].

Decisionmaking on Iraq

Q. Mr. President, before the war, you and members of your administration made several claims about Iraq, that U.S. troops would be greeted as liberators with sweets and flowers, that Iraqi oil revenue would pay for most of the reconstruction, and that Iraq not only had weapons of mass destruction, but as Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld said, "We know where they are." How do you explain to Americans how you got that so wrong? And how do you answer your opponents who say that you took this Nation to war on the basis of what have turned out to be a series a false premises?

The President. Well, let me step back and review my thinking prior to going into Iraq. First, the lesson of September the 11th is, when this Nation sees a threat, a gathering threat, we've got to deal with it. We can no longer hope that oceans protect us from harm. Every threat we must take seriously.

Saddam Hussein was a threat. He was a threat because he had used weapons of mass destruction on his own people. He was a threat because he coddled terrorists. He was a threat because he funded suiciders. He was a threat to the region. He was a threat to the United States. That's the assessment that I made from the intelligence, the assessment that Congress made from the intelligence. That's the exact same assessment that the United Nations Security Council made with the intelligence.

I went to the U.N., as you might recall, and said, "Either you take care of him, or we will." Anytime an American President says, "If you don't, we will," we better be prepared to. And I was prepared to. I thought it was important for the United Nations Security Council that when it says something, it means something, for the sake of security in the world. See, the war on terror had changed the calculations. We needed to work with people. People needed to come together to work, and therefore, empty words would embolden the actions of those who are willing to kill indiscriminately.

The United Nations passed a Security Council resolution unanimously that said, "Disarm, or face serious consequences." And he refused to disarm.

I thought it was very interesting that Charlie Duelfer, who just came back—he's the head of the Iraqi Survey Group—reported some interesting findings from his recent tour there. And one of the things was, he was amazed at how deceptive the Iraqis had been toward UNMOVIC and UNSCOM, deceptive in hiding things. We knew they were hiding things. A country that hides something is a country that is afraid of getting caught, and that was part of our calculation. Charlie confirmed that. He also confirmed that Saddam had a—the ability to produce biological and chemical weapons. In other words, he was a danger. He had long-range missiles that were undeclared to the United Nations. He was a danger, and so we dealt with him.

What else—part of the question—oh, oil revenues. Well, the oil revenues are—they're bigger than we thought they would be at this point in time. I mean, one year after the liberation of Iraq, the revenues of the oil stream is pretty darn significant. One of the things I was concerned about prior to going into Iraq was that the oilfields would be destroyed, but they weren't. They're now up and running. And that money is—it will benefit the Iraqi people. It's their oil, and they'll use it to reconstruct the country.

Finally, the attitude of the Iraqis toward the American people—it's an interesting question. They're really pleased we got rid of Saddam Hussein, and you can understand why. This is a guy who was a torturer, a killer, a maimer; there's mass graves. I mean, he was a horrible individual that really shocked the country in many ways, shocked it into kind of a fear of making decisions toward liberty. That's what we've seen recently. Some citizens are fearful of stepping up. And they were happy—they're not happy they're occupied. I wouldn't be happy if I were occupied either. They do want us there to help with security, and that's why this transfer of sovereignty is an important signal to send, and it's why it's also important for them to hear we will stand with them until they become a free country.

Elisabeth [Elisabeth Bumiller, New York Times].

Hindsight on September 11

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. To move to the 9/11 Commission, you, yourself, have acknowledged that Usama bin Laden was not a central focus of the administration in the months before September 11th. "I was not on point," you told the journalist Bob Woodward. "I didn't feel that sense of urgency." Two-and-a-half years later, do you feel any sense of personal responsibility for September 11th?

The President. Let me put that quote to Woodward in context. He had asked me if I was—something about killing bin Laden. That's what the question was. And I said, "Compared to how I felt at the time, after the attack, I didn't have that." I also went on to say, "My blood wasn't boiling," I think is what the quote said. I didn't see—I mean, I didn't have that great sense of outrage that I felt on September the 11th. I was—on that day I was angry and sad, angry that Al Qaida had—well—[*inaudible*]—at the time, thought Al Qaida, found out shortly thereafter it was Al Qaida—had unleashed this attack, sad for those who lost their life.

Your question, do I feel——

Q. Do you feel a sense of personal responsibility for September 11th?

The President. I feel incredibly grieved when I meet with family members, and I do quite frequently. I grieve for the incredible loss of life that they feel, the emptiness they feel.

There are some things I wish we'd have done, when I look back. I mean, hindsight is easy. It's easy for a President to stand up and say, "Now that I know what happened, it would have been nice if there were certain things in place," for example, a Homeland Security Department. And why I—I say that because it's—that provides the ability for our agencies to coordinate better and to work together better than it was before.

I think the hearings will show that the PATRIOT Act is an important change in the law that will allow the FBI and the CIA to better share information together. We were kind of stove-piped, I guess is a way to describe it. There was kind of—Departments that at times didn't communicate, because of law, in the FBI's case.

And the other thing I look back on and realize is that we weren't on a war footing. The country was not on a war footing, and yet the enemy was at war with us. And it's—it didn't take me long to put us on a war footing. And we've been on war ever since.

The lessons of 9/11 that I—one lesson was, we must deal with gathering threats. And that's part of the reason I dealt with Iraq the way I did. The other lesson is, is that this country must go on the offense and stay on the offense. In order to secure the country, we must do everything in our power to find these killers and bring them to justice, before they hurt us again. I'm afraid they want to hurt us again. They're still there.

They can be right one time; we've got to be right 100 percent of the time in order to protect the country. It's a mighty task. But our Government has changed since the 9/11 attacks. We're better equipped to respond. We're better at sharing intelligence, but we've still got a lot of work to do.

Dave [David Gregory, NBC News].

President's Perspective on Decisionmaking

Q. Mr. President, I'd like to follow up on a couple of these questions that have been asked. One of the biggest criticisms of you is that whether it's WMD in Iraq, postwar planning in Iraq, or even the question of whether this administration did enough to ward off 9/11, you never admit a mistake. Is that a fair criticism? And do you believe that there were any errors in judgment that you made related to any of those topics I brought up?

The President. Well, I think, as I mentioned, it's—the country wasn't on war footing, and yet we're at war. And that's just a reality, Dave. I mean, that's—that was the situation that existed prior to 9/11, because the truth of the matter is, most in the country never felt that we'd be vulnerable to an attack such as the one that Usama bin Laden unleashed on us. We knew he had designs on us. We knew he hated us. But there was a—nobody in our Government, at least, and I don't think the prior Government, could envision flying airplanes into buildings on such a massive scale.

The people know where I stand. I mean, in terms of Iraq, I was very clear about what I believed. And of course I want to know why we haven't found a weapon yet. But I still know Saddam Hussein was a threat, and the world is better off without Saddam Hussein. I don't think anybody can—maybe people can argue that. I know the Iraqi people don't believe that, that they're better off with Saddam Hussein—would be better off with Saddam Hussein in power. I also know that there's an historic opportunity here to change the world. And it's very important for the loved ones of our troops to understand that the mission is an important, vital mission for the security of America and for the ability to change the world for the better.

Let's see—Ed [Ed Chen, Los Angeles Times].

President's Daily Briefing

Q. Mr. President, good evening. You've talked on the—I'd like to ask you about the August 6th PDB.

The President. Sure.

Q. You mentioned it at Fort Hood on Sunday. You said—you pointed out that it did not warn of hijacking of airplanes to crash into buildings, but that it warned of hijacking to, obviously, take hostages and to secure the release of extremists being held by the U.S. Did that trigger some specific actions on your part and the administration, since it dealt with potentially hundreds of lives and a blackmail attempt on the United States Government?

The President. Ed, I asked for the briefing, and the reason I did is because there had been a lot of threat intelligence from overseas. And so—part of it had to do with Genoa, the G–8 conference that I was going to attend. And I asked, at that point in time, "Let's make sure we are paying attention here at home as well," and that's what triggered the report.

The report, itself, I've characterized as mainly history, and I think when you look at it you'll see that it was talking about '97 and '98 and '99. It was also an indication, as you mentioned, that bin Laden might want to hijack an airplane, but as you said, not to fly into a building but perhaps to release a person in jail—in other words, serve it as a blackmail.

And of course that concerns me. All those reports concern me. As a matter of fact, I was dealing with terrorism a lot as the President when George Tenet came in to brief me. I mean, that's where I got my information. I changed the way that—the relationship between the President and the CIA Director. And I wanted Tenet in the Oval Office all the time, and we had briefings about terrorist threats. This was a summary.

Now, in what's called the PDB, there was a warning about bin Laden's desires on America, but frankly, I didn't think that was anything new. Major newspapers had talked about bin Laden's desires on hurting America. What was interesting in there was that there was a report that the FBI was conducting field investigations. And I—that was good news, that they were doing their job.

The way my administration worked, Ed, was that I met with Tenet all the time. I obviously met with my principals a lot. We talked about threats that had emerged. We had a counterterrorism group meeting on a regular basis to analyze the threats that came in. Had there been a threat that required action by anybody in the Government, I would have dealt with it. In other words, had they come up and said, "This is where we see something happening," you can rest assured that the people of this Government would have responded and responded in a forceful way.

I mean, one of the things about Elisabeth's question was, I've stepped back, and I've asked myself a lot, is there anything we could have done to stop the attacks? Of course I've asked that question, as have many people of my Government. Nobody wants this to happen to America. And the answer is that had I had any inkling whatsoever that the people were going to fly airplanes into buildings, we would have moved heaven and Earth to save the country, just like we're working hard to prevent a further attack.

Let's see—Jim [Jim Angle, FOX News].

Terrorism Investigations in the PDB

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned the PDB and the assurance you got that the FBI was working on terrorism investigations here. The number they had used

was 70. But we learned today in the September 11th hearings that the Acting Director of the FBI at the time says—now says the FBI tells him that number was wrong, that he doesn't even know how it got into your PDB. And two of the commissioners strongly suggested the number was exaggerated. Have you learned anything else about that report since that time? And do you now believe you were falsely comforted by the FBI?

The President. Yes. No, I heard about that today, obviously, and my response to that was, I expect to get valid information. As the ultimate decisionmaker for this country, I expect information that comes to my desk to be real and valid. And I presume the 9/11 Commission will find out—will follow up on his suggestions and his recollection and garner the truth. That is an important part of the 9/11 Commission's job, is to analyze what went on and what could have perhaps been done differently so that we can better secure America for the future.

But of course, I expect to get valid information. I can't make good decisions unless I get valid information.

Q. Has the FBI come back to you, sir?

The President. No, I haven't talked to anybody today yet. I will, though. We'll find out.

John [John Roberts, CBS News].

Reaction to September 11

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Two weeks ago, former counterterrorism official at the NSC Richard Clarke offered an unequivocal apology to the American people for failing them prior to 9/11. Do you believe the American people deserve a similar apology from you, and would you be prepared to give them one?

The President. Look, I can understand why people in my administration are anguished over the fact that people lost their life. I feel the same way. I mean, I'm sick when I think about the death that took place on that day. And as I mentioned, I've met with a lot of family members, and I do the best I do to console them about the loss of their loved one. As I mentioned, I oftentimes think about what I could have done differently. I can assure the American people that had we had any inkling that this was going to happen, we would have done everything in our power to stop the attack.

Here's what I feel about that. The person responsible for the attacks was Usama bin Laden. That's who's responsible for killing Americans. And that's why we will stay on the offense until we bring people to justice.

John [John King, CNN].

Nature of the Coalition/Resolve of Coalition Leaders

Q. Mr. President, thank you. You mentioned that 17 of the 26 NATO members are providing some help on the ground in Iraq. But if you look at the numbers, 135,000 U.S. troops, 10 or 12,000 British troops, then the next largest, perhaps even the second largest contingent of guns on the ground are private contractors—literally, hired guns. Your critics, including your Democratic opponent, say that's proof to them your coalition is window dressing. How would you answer those critics? And can you assure the American people that post-sovereignty, when the handover takes place, that there will be more burden-sharing by allies in terms of security forces?

The President. Yes. John, my response is, I don't think people ought to demean the contributions of our friends into Iraq. People are sacrificing their lives in Iraq, from different countries. We ought to honor that, and we ought to welcome that. I'm proud of the coalition that is there. This is a—these are people that have—the gut leaders have made the decision to put people in harm's way for the good of the world. And we appreciate that sacrifice in America. We appreciate that commitment.

I think—one of the things you're seeing is more involvement by the United Nations in terms of the political process. That's helpful. I'd like to get another U.N. Security Council resolution out that will help other nations to decide to participate.

One of the things I've found, John, is that in calling around, particularly during this week—I spoke to Prime Minister Berlusconi and President Kwasniewski—there is a resolve by these leaders that is a heartening resolve. Tony Blair is the same way. He understands, like I understand, that we cannot

yield at this point in time, that we must remain steadfast and strong, that it's the intentions of the enemy to shake our will. That's what they want to do. They want us to leave, and we're not going to leave. We're going to do the job. And a free Iraq is going to be a major blow for terrorism. It will change the world. A free Iraq in the midst of the Middle East is vital to future peace and security.

Maybe I can best put it this way, why I feel so strongly about this historic moment. I was having dinner with Prime Minister Koizumi, and we were talking about North Korea, about how we can work together to deal with the threat. The North Korea leader is a threat, and here are two friends now discussing what strategy to employ to prevent him from further developing and deploying a nuclear weapon. And it dawned on me that had we blown the peace in World War II, that perhaps this conversation would not have been taking place. It also dawned on me then that when we get it right in Iraq, at some point in time an American President will be sitting down with a duly-elected Iraqi leader talking about how to bring security to what has been a troubled part of the world.

The legacy that our troops are going to leave behind is a legacy of lasting importance, as far as I'm concerned. It's a legacy that really is based upon our deep belief that people want to be free and that free societies are peaceful societies.

Some of the debate really centers around the fact that people don't believe Iraq can be free, that if you're Muslim or perhaps brown-skinned, you can't be self-governing and free. I strongly disagree with that. I reject that, because I believe that freedom is the deepest need of every human soul, and if given a chance, the Iraqi people will be not only self-governing but a stable and free society.

Let's see here, hold on. Michael [Mike Allen, Washington Post], you're next.

New Iraqi Government/Upcoming Appearance Before the 9/11 Commission

Q. Mr. President, why are you and the Vice President insisting on appearing together before the 9/11 Commission? And Mr. President, who will you be handing the Iraqi Government over to on June 30th?

The President. We will find that out soon. That's what Mr. Brahimi is doing. He's figuring out the nature of the entity we'll be handing sovereignty over.

And secondly, because the 9/11 Commission wants to ask us questions, that's why we're meeting. And I look forward to meeting with them and answering their questions.

Q. I was asking why you're appearing together, rather than separately, which was their request.

The President. Because it's a good chance for both of us to answer questions that the 9/11 Commission is looking forward to asking us, and I'm looking forward to answering them.

Let's see——

Q. Mr. President——

The President. Hold on for a minute.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. I've got some "must calls," I'm sorry.

Threat Assessment

Q. You have been accused of letting the 9/11 threat mature too far but not letting the Iraq threat mature far enough. First, could you respond to that general criticism? And secondly, in the wake of these two conflicts, what is the appropriate threat level to justify action in perhaps other situations going forward?

The President. Yes. I guess there have been some that said, "Well, we should have taken preemptive action in Afghanistan," and then turned around and said, "We shouldn't have taken preemptive action in Iraq." And my answer to that question is, is that—again I repeat what I said earlier—prior to 9/11 the country really wasn't on a war footing. And the—frankly, mood of the world would have been astounded had the United States acted unilaterally in trying to deal with Al Qaida in that part of the world.

It would have been awfully hard to do as well, by the way. We would have had to—we hadn't got our relationship right with Pakistan yet. The Caucus area would have been very difficult from which to base. It just seemed an impractical strategy at the time, and frankly, I didn't contemplate it.

I did contemplate a larger strategy as to how to deal with Al Qaida. We were shooting cruise missiles and with little effect. And I said, "If we're going to go after Al Qaida, let's have a comprehensive strategy as to how to deal with it, with that entity."

After 9/11, the world changed for me and, I think, changed for the country. It changed for me because, like many, we assumed oceans would protect us from harm, and that's not the case. It's not the reality of the 21st century. Oceans don't protect us. They don't protect us from killers. We're an open country, and we're a country that values our openness. And we're a hard country to defend. And therefore, when we see threats overseas, we've got to take them—look at them in a new light. And I've given my explanation of Iraq.

Your further question was, how do you justify any other preemptive action? The American people need to know my last choice is the use of military power. It is something that—it is a decision that is—it's a tough decision to make for any President, because I fully understand the consequences of the decision. And therefore, we'll use all other means necessary, when we see a threat, to deal with a threat that may materialize, but we'll never take the military off the table.

We've had some success, Bill [Bill Sammon, Washington Times], as a result of the decision I took. Take Libya, for example. Libya was a nation that had—we viewed as a terrorist—a nation that sponsored terror, a nation that was dangerous because of weapons. And Colonel Qadhafi made the decision, and rightly so, to disclose and disarm for the good of the world. By the way, they found, I think, 50 tons of mustard gas, I believe it was, in a turkey farm, only because he was willing to disclose where the mustard gas was. But that made the world safer.

The A.Q. Khan bust, the network that we uncovered, thanks to the hard work of our intelligence-gathering agencies and the cooperation of the British, was another victory in the war against terror. This was a shadowy network of folks that were willing to sell state secrets to the highest bidder. And that, therefore, made the world more unstable and more dangerous. You've often heard me talk about my worry about weapons of mass destruction ending up in the hands of the wrong people. Well, you can understand why I feel that way, having seen the works of A.Q. Khan. It's a dangerous—it was a dangerous network that we unraveled, and the world is better for it.

And so what I'm telling you is, is that sometimes we use military as a last resort, but other times we use our influence, diplomatic pressure, and our alliances to unravel, uncover, expose people who want to do harm against the civilized world. We're at war. Iraq is a part of the war on terror. It is not the war on terror; it is a theater in the war on terror. And it's essential we win this battle in the war on terror. By winning this battle, it will make other victories more certain in the war against the terrorists.

Let's see here—Judy [Judy Keen, USA Today].

Iraq/2004 Elections

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Sir, you've made it very clear tonight that you're committed to continuing the mission in Iraq. Yet, as Terry pointed out, increasing numbers of Americans have qualms about it, and this is an election year. Will it have been worth it, even if you lose your job because of it?

The President. I don't plan on losing my job. I plan on telling the American people that I've got a plan to win the war on terror. And I believe they'll stay with me. They understand the stakes. But nobody likes to see dead people on their television screens. I don't. It's a tough time for the American people to see that. It's gut-wrenching. One of my hardest parts of my job is to console the family members who have lost their life. It is a—it's a chance to hug and weep and to console and to remind the loved ones that the sacrifice of their loved one was done in the name of security for America and freedom for the world.

And one of the things that's very important, Judy, as far as I'm concerned, is to never allow our youngsters to die in vain. And I've made that pledge to their parents. Withdrawing from the battlefield of Iraq would be just that, and it's not going to happen under my watch.

The American people may decide to change. That's democracy. I don't think so.

I don't think so, and I look forward to making my case. I'm looking forward to the campaign. Now is the time to talk about winning this war on terror. Now is the time to make sure that the American people understand the stakes and the historic significance of what we're doing. And no matter where they may stand on this war, the thing I appreciate most about our country is the strong support given to the men and women in uniform, and it's vital support. It's important for those soldiers to know America stands with them. And we weep when they die, and we're proud of the victories they achieve.

One of the things I'm also proud of is what I hear from our soldiers. As I mentioned, I pinned the Purple Heart on some of the troops at the hospital there at Fort Hood, Texas. A guy looks at me and says, "I can't wait to get back to my unit and fulfill the mission, Mr. President." The spirit is incredible. Our soldiers who have volunteered to go there understand the stakes, and I'm incredibly proud of them.

John [John Dickerson, TIME].

Evaluation of Past Decisions

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. In the last campaign, you were asked a question about the biggest mistake you'd made in your life, and you used to like to joke that it was trading Sammy Sosa. You've looked back before 9/11 for what mistakes might have been made. After 9/11, what would your biggest mistake be, would you say, and what lessons have you learned from it?

The President. I wish you would have given me this written question ahead of time, so I could plan for it. [*Laughter*] John, I'm sure historians will look back and say, "Gosh, he could have done it better this way or that way." You know, I just—I'm sure something will pop into my head here in the midst of this press conference, with all the pressure of trying to come up with an answer, but it hasn't yet.

I would have gone into Afghanistan the way we went into Afghanistan. Even knowing what I know today about the stockpiles of weapons, I still would have called upon the world to deal with Saddam Hussein. See, I happen to believe that we'll find out the truth on the weapons. That's why we've sent up the independent commission. I look forward to hearing the truth, exactly where they are. They could still be there. They could be hidden, like the 50 tons of mustard gas in a turkey farm.

One of the things that Charlie Duelfer talked about was that he was surprised at the level of intimidation he found amongst people who should know about weapons and their fear of talking about them because they don't want to be killed. There's a terror still in the soul of some of the people in Iraq. They're worried about getting killed, and therefore, they're not going to talk.

But it will all settle out, John. We'll find out the truth about the weapons at some point in time. However, the fact that he had the capacity to make them bothers me today, just like it would have bothered me then. He's a dangerous man. He's a man who actually—not only had weapons of mass destruction—the reason I can say that with certainty is because he used them. And I have no doubt in my mind that he would like to have inflicted harm or paid people to inflict harm or trained people to inflict harm on America, because he hated us.

I hope I—I don't want to sound like I've made no mistakes. I'm confident I have. I just haven't—you just put me under the spot here, and maybe I'm not as quick on my feet as I should be in coming up with one.

Yes, Ann [Ann Compton, ABC News].

Intelligence Reform/President's Goals

Q. Looking forward about keeping the United States safe, a group representing about several thousand FBI agents today wrote to your administration begging you not to split up the law enforcement and the counterterrorism, because they say it ties their hands, it gives them blinders—[*inaudible*]. Yet, you mentioned yesterday that you think perhaps the time has come for some real intelligence reforms. That can't happen without real leadership from the White House. Will you, and how will you?

The President. Well, you're talking about one aspect of possible—I think you're referring to what they call the MI–5. And I heard a summary of that from Director Mueller, who feels strongly that we—and he'll testify to that effect, I guess, tomorrow. I shouldn't

be prejudging his testimony. But what my point was is that I'm open for suggestions. I look forward to seeing what the 9/11 Commission comes up with. I look forward to seeing what the Silberman/Robb Commission comes up with. I'm confident Congress will have some suggestions. What I'm saying is, "Let the discussions begin," and I won't prejudge the conclusion. As the President, I will encourage and foster these kinds of discussions, because one of the jobs of the President is to leave behind a legacy that will enable other Presidents to better deal with the threat that we face.

We are in a long war. The war on terror is not going to end immediately. This is a war against people who have no guilt in killing innocent people. That's what they're willing to do. They kill on a moment's notice because they're trying to shake our will, they're trying to create fear, they're trying to affect people's behaviors. And we're simply not going to let them do that.

And my fear, of course, is that this will go on for a while, and therefore, it's incumbent upon us to learn from lessons or mistakes and leave behind a better foundation for Presidents to deal with the threats we face. This is the war that other Presidents will be facing as we head into the 21st century.

One of the interesting things people ask me, now that we're asking questions, is, "Can you ever win the war on terror?" Of course you can. That's why it's important for us to spread freedom throughout the Middle East. Free societies are hopeful societies. A hopeful society is one more likely to be able to deal with the frustrations of those who are willing to commit suicide in order to represent a false ideology. A free society is a society in which somebody is more likely to be able to make a living. A free society is a society in which someone is more likely to be able to raise their child in a comfortable environment and see to it that that child gets an education.

That's why I'm pressing the Greater Middle East Reform Initiative, to work to spread freedom. And we will continue on that. So long as I'm the President, I will press for freedom. I believe so strongly in the power of freedom. You know why I do? Because I've seen freedom work right here in our own country.

I also have this belief, strong belief, that freedom is not this country's gift to the world. Freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. And as the greatest power on the face of the Earth, we have an obligation to help the spread of freedom. We have an obligation to help feed the hungry. I think the American people find it interesting that we're providing food for the North Korea people who starve. We have an obligation to lead the fight on AIDS, on Africa, and we have an obligation to work toward a more free world. That's our obligation. That is what we have been called to do, as far as I'm concerned.

And my job as the President is to lead this Nation into making the world a better place, and that's exactly what we're doing. Weeks such as we've had in Iraq make some doubt whether or not we're making progress. I understand that. It was a tough, tough period, but we are making progress.

And my message today to those in Iraq is: We'll stay the course; we'll complete the job. My message to our troops is: We will stay the course and complete the job, and you'll have what you need. And my message to the loved ones who are worried about their sons, daughters, husbands, wives, is: Your loved one is performing a noble service for the cause of freedom and peace.

Let's see, last question here. Hold on for a second. Those who yell will not be asked. I'll tell you a guy who I've never heard from—Don [Don Gonyea, National Public Radio].

Q. I appreciate it.

The President. It's a well-received—[*laughter*].

Iraq/2004 Election

Q. Following on both Judy and John's questions, and it comes out of what you just said in some ways, with public support for your policies in Iraq falling off the way they have, quite significantly over the past couple of months, I guess I'd like to know if you feel in any way that you've failed as a communicator on this topic? Because——

The President. Gosh, I don't know. I mean——

Q. Well, you deliver a lot of speeches, and a lot of them contain similar phrases, and they vary very little from one to the next. And they often include a pretty upbeat assessment of how things are going, with the exception of tonight's pretty somber assessment, this evening.

The President. It's a pretty somber assessment today, Don, yes.

Q. I guess I just wonder if you feel that you have failed in any way? You don't have many of these press conferences, where you engage in this kind of exchange. Have you failed in any way to really make the case to the American public?

The President. I guess if you put it into a political context, that's the kind of thing the voters will decide next November. That's what elections are about. They'll take a look at me and my opponent and say, "Let's see, which one of them can better win the war on terror? Who best can see to it that Iraq emerges as a free society?"

Don, if I tried to fine-tune my messages based upon polls, I think I'd be pretty ineffective. I know I would be disappointed in myself. I hope today you've got a sense of my conviction about what we're doing. If you don't, maybe I need to learn to communicate better.

I feel strongly about what we're doing. I feel strongly that the course this administration has taken will make America more secure and the world more free and, therefore, the world more peaceful. It's a conviction that's deep in my soul. And I will say it as best as I possibly can to the American people.

I look forward to the debate and the campaign. I look forward to helping—for the American people to hear what is a proper use of American power. Do we have an obligation to lead, or should we shirk responsibility? That's how I view this debate. And I look forward to making it, Don. I'll do it the best I possibly can. I'll give it the best shot. I'll speak as plainly as I can.

One thing is for certain, though, about me—and the world has learned this—when I say something, I mean it. And the credibility of the United States is incredibly important for keeping world peace and freedom.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 8:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Muqtada Al Sadr, Iraqi Shiite cleric whose militia engaged in an uprising in Iraq in early April; Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General; Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command; Lt. Gen. Ricardo S. Sanchez, USA, commander, Coalition Joint Task Force Seven; Thomas J. Pickard, former Acting Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation; Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy; President Aleksander Kwasniewski of Poland; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; Chairman Kim Chong-il of North Korea; Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, leader of Libya; A.Q. Khan, former head of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program; and professional baseball player Sammy Sosa. The President also referred to the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (9/11 Commission); and the Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction (Silberman/Robb Commission).

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel

April 14, 2004

President Bush. I'm pleased to welcome Prime Minister Sharon back to the White House. For more than 50 years, Israel has been a vital ally and a true friend of America. I've been proud to call the Prime Minister my friend. I really appreciate our discussions today. The policy of the United States is to help bring peace to the Middle East and to hope—bring hope to the people of that region.

On June 24, 2002, I laid out a vision to make this goal a reality. We then drafted the roadmap as the route to get us there. The heart of this vision is the responsibility of all parties—of Israel, of the Palestinian people, of the Arab states—to fight terror, to embrace democracy and reform, and to take the necessary steps for peace.

Today, the Prime Minister told me of his decision to take such a step. Israel plans to remove certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza and certain military

installations and settlements from the West Bank. These are historic and courageous actions. If all parties choose to embrace this moment, they can open the door to progress and put an end to one of the world's longest-running conflicts.

Success will require the active efforts of many nations. Two days ago, I held important discussions with President Mubarak of Egypt, and I will soon meet with King Abdullah of Jordan. We're consulting closely with other key leaders in the region, in Europe, and with our Quartet partners, the EU, Russia, and the United Nations. These steps can open the door to progress toward a peaceful, democratic, viable Palestinian state. Working together, we can help build democratic Palestinian institutions as well as strong capabilities dedicated to fighting terror so that the Palestinian people can meet their obligations under the roadmap on the path to peace.

This opportunity holds great promise for the Palestinian people to build a modern economy that will lift millions out of poverty, create the institutions and habits of liberty, and renounce the terror and violence that impede their aspirations and take a terrible toll on innocent life. The Palestinian people must insist on change and on a leadership that is committed to reform and progress and peace. We will help, but the most difficult work is theirs.

The United States is strongly committed, and I am strongly committed, to the security of Israel as a vibrant Jewish state. I reiterate our steadfast commitment to Israel's security and to preserving and strengthening Israel's self-defense capability, including its right to defend itself against terror.

The barrier being erected by Israel as a part of that security effort should, as your Government has stated, be a security, rather than political, barrier. It should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues, including final borders. And its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

In an exchange of letters today and in a statement I will release later today, I'm repeating to the Prime Minister my commitment to Israel's security. The United States will not prejudice the outcome of final status negotiations. That matter is for the parties. But the realities on the ground and in the region have changed greatly over the last several decades, and any final settlement must take into account those realities and be agreeable to the parties.

The goal of two independent states has repeatedly been recognized in international resolutions and agreements, and it remains the key to resolving this conflict. The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, as part of any final status agreement, will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders which should emerge from negotiations between the parties, in accordance with U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli population centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

I commend Prime Minister Sharon for his bold and courageous decision to withdraw from Gaza and parts of the West Bank. I call on the Palestinians and their Arab neighbors to match that boldness and that courage. All of us must show the wisdom and the will to bring lasting peace to that region.

Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to the White House.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you. Thank you so much. I want to thank you, Mr. President, for your warm welcome and your strong support and friendship for the state of Israel.

I came to you from a peaceseeking country. Despite the repeated terror attacks

against us, the people of Israel continues to wish for the achievement of a viable peace in accordance with our Jewish tradition as outlined by Israel's prophets. Our people desires to be known for its achievements in the fields of culture, science, and technology, rather than in the battlefield. We are committed to make any effort to develop our country and society for our own benefit and for the benefit of the peoples of the region.

In our meeting today, I presented to you the outlines of my disengagement plan. It will improve Israel's security and economy and will reduce friction and tension between Israelis and Palestinians. My plan will create a new and better reality for the state of Israel, and it also has the potential to create the right conditions to resume negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

I was encouraged by your positive response and your support for my plan. In that context, you handed me a letter that includes very important statement regarding Israel's security and its well-being as a Jewish state. You have proven, Mr. President, your ongoing, deep, and sincere friendship to the state of Israel and to the Jewish people. I believe that my plan can be an important contribution to advancing your vision, which is the only viable way to achieve the peace and security in the Middle East.

I wish to end with a personal note. I, myself, have been fighting terror for many years and understand the threats and cost from terrorism. In all these years, I have never met a leader as committed as you are, Mr. President, to the struggle for freedom and the need to confront terrorism wherever it exists. I want to express my appreciation to you for your courageous leadership in the war against global terror and your commitment and vision to bring peace to the Middle East.

Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. Good job, good job.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you.

President Bush. We will answer two questions a side, starting with the American side. The Prime Minister will call on somebody from the Israeli press at the appropriate moment.

Prime Minister Sharon. If there will be any, there's no——

President Bush. There may not be any questions from the Israeli press, that's what you're saying? [*Laughter*] It's not the case from the American press.

Terry Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Israeli West Bank Settlements/Final Status Negotiations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'd like to go back to your opening statement and ask you, does the United States recognize Israel's right to retain some Jewish settlements in the West Bank? And if so, how does that fit with the U.S. policy that settlements are an obstacle to peace?

President Bush. First, let us recognize that the Prime Minister has made the decision to dismantle some settlements. In other words, he is beginning to implement a vision that allows for contiguous territories so that a Palestinian state can emerge.

And this is an important step today. It accelerates the process. See, I view it as creating an opportunity, an opportunity for those of us who believe that a Palestinian state should emerge, a peaceful Palestinian state, to work to put a framework for such a state to exist so that the institutions of such state are bigger than the people. See, when you have a Government where the person is bigger than the institutions, that Government will inevitably fail. It's when the institutions are bigger than the people that you're able to have continuity and people's hopes and aspirations realized and peace.

It is very important for a Palestinian state to emerge in which we have confidence, in which any Prime Minister of Israel has confidence, in which the United States has confidence, that will be a peaceful partner. And so what the Prime Minister has done is he started the process of removing settlements from the West Bank.

Your question to me is about the final status agreements. I said that the conditions on the ground have changed over time, and obviously, that must be recognized during any final status negotiations.

You know, I look forward to the moment when we're actually discussing final status negotiations. There's a lot of work to be done prior to getting there. And what the Prime

Minister has done is started the process. And now it's up for responsible Palestinians, caring Europeans, Americans, the United Nations to step in and help develop such a state that will be a peaceful state, one in which money will actually end up helping the people of the Palestinian—Palestinians to be able to grow their businesses and grow their—find wealth for their families. And then we can worry about the final status negotiations. In other words, there's a lot of work to do. What the Prime Minister has done is started the work, and we're prepared to help with the work.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you. The same question for me?

President Bush. Right over here.

Prime Minister Sharon. Oh, there's another question?

President Bush. You ask for one of the Israeli press. You don't have to answer their questions if you don't want to. [*Laughter*] I'm sorry, you didn't ask him one. No, it's too late. I'm protecting my friend here from the appetite of the American press.

Prime Minister Sharon. I'm afraid we have the same problem. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. It's not a problem, it's an opportunity, Mr. Prime Minister. [*Laughter*] Go ahead and ask a question from your press corps.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you.

Q. Mr. President, may I ask a question, please?

President Bush. It's up to the Prime Minister, but if it was up to me, of course you can.

Q. I would like to ask you, please, first.

President Bush. Please, what is it?

Prime Minister's Leadership

Q. Sharon's political future depends largely on the Americans quid pro quo, so still I'm asking on this issue, could you clarify the ambiguity surrounding few key issues, as the settlements, for example. In your eyes, Ariel is going to be on the Israeli side of the fence. I wanted to ask about the right of return, but your answer was quite clear there.

[*At this point, the journalist continued in Hebrew, and no translation was provided.*]

President Bush. Let me say this to you, his future doesn't depend upon me. His future depends upon his capacity to convince the Israeli people he's doing the right thing, and I think he is. He's a bold leader. That's what people want. They want leadership.

There is a process that got stuck, and the Prime Minister steps up and leads. And I'm confident the Israeli people appreciate that kind of leadership.

You can answer the question if you care to, but I don't buy the premise that what I say helps him get elected. What he says helps him get elected. It's his vision of Israel that the people of Israel will be looking toward.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you. First, I will answer in Hebrew.

[*Prime Minister Sharon answered in Hebrew and then continued in English.*]

The question was, did I take a risky decision. So my answer is that when the issue is the security of the state of Israel, which I am fully responsible to, and political and economic future of the state of Israel, I believe that personal issues like personal security is not to be taken in consideration. This is not the issue.

And I would say that what I have learned from my visit here, that the plan, disengagement plan, contributes to the security of Israel, contributes to the political situation of Israel in the world, and helps our economy. Therefore, I think that those questions of personal risk has not been taken into consideration. We have to look into the interests of the state of Israel.

President Bush. Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Q. Thank you, sir——

President Bush. Trudy [Trudy Feldman, Trans Features], I'm sorry. I've got to call on the wire services. I'm sorry.

Thrust of U.S. Policy/Responsibilities of Participants

Q. Former President Jimmy Carter said last week that he feels U.S. Middle East policy is tilted too much toward Israel. Is that a fair criticism?

President Bush. U.S. Middle East policy is tilted toward peace, and the best way to

achieve peace is to fight terror. And I'm the first American President ever to have articulated the creation of a Palestinian state. And the reason I did so is because I believe a Palestinian state, when properly done, will be—provide enough hope for people, provide a peaceful avenue for those who aspire for a better future. And I also believe it's in Israel's interest that there be a Palestinian state which develops in a peaceful way.

Every statement I've said, I said all parties must assume responsibilities. The Palestinians have got to assume the responsibility of fighting off terror. If they want a state which provides a hopeful future for their people, they must fight terror. They must be resolute in the fighting of terror.

Israel has responsibilities. Today the Prime Minister stepped up to those responsibilities. He started a process that I believe can be a hopeful process. The Arab world has got responsibilities to help not only fight terror but to provide hope for a peaceful Palestinian people. Those are responsibilities. America is assuming responsibilities. My position on Middle East peace is quite clear.

Final question, from the Israeli press.

Palestinian Right of Return/Israeli Security

[*A journalist asked a question in Hebrew and then continued in English.*]

Q. And Mr. President, if I may, is what you said about the Palestinian refugee mean that you deny unconditionally the—what's it called—the right of return of Palestinian refugee to the state of Israel?

President Bush. My statement—refer back to my statement that I said, and also look at the letter that I sent the Prime Minister. It will clarify my position on the issue.

[*Prime Minister Sharon answered in Hebrew and then continued in English.*]

Prime Minister Sharon. I mentioned first that I got from you, Mr. President, a letter. And I sent you a letter. And in these letters, all those issues, all those details are very clearly described in those letters. And I suggested also on your behalf that they will read the letters.

President Bush. Thank you.

Prime Minister Sharon. That's the first thing. I was asked by the Israeli media if I would say the things they held here or we discussed here or have been concluded here will provide me a weapon against my colleagues in the Government or the members of my party in Israel.

So my answer was that I was never looking for weapons to use against my colleagues in the Government or against the members of my party. I agree that I've been using weapons for many years, being a soldier for many years, against the enemies of the state of Israel. And I never hesitated, and I will not hesitate also in the future, to use weapons if it will be needed in order to defend the citizens of Israel, their life, their normal life, their development, and so on.

And therefore, I say that I don't need for that. I believe that our discussion today providing the needed security and hope for the future of the state of Israel and the future, I would say, of the region.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you all very much.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you so much.

President Bush. Welcome.

Prime Minister Sharon. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:05 p.m. in the Cross Hall at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt; and King Abdullah II of Jordan.

Statement on the Israeli Disengagement Plan and the Middle East Peace Process

April 14, 2004

I remain hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

The Israeli Plan:

I welcome the disengagement plan prepared by the Government of Israel, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These

steps will mark real progress toward realizing the vision I set forth in June 2002 of two states living side by side in peace and security, and make a real contribution toward peace.

I am hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with this vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the roadmap.

The Path to Peace:

I believe certain principles, which are very widely accepted in the international community, show us the path forward:

- The right of self defense and the need to fight terrorism are equally matters of international agreement.
- The two-state vision and the roadmap for peace designed to implement it, command nearly universal support as the best means of achieving a permanent peace and an end to the Israeli occupation that began in 1967.
- United Nations Security Council resolutions have repeatedly spoken of the desirability of establishing two independent states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders.

Having these principles in mind, the United States is able to make the following comments.

Peace Plans:

The United States remains committed to the vision of two states living side by side in peace and security, and its implementation as described in the roadmap. The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan.

Security:

There will be no security for Israelis or Palestinians until they and all states, in the region and beyond, join together to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist organizations. The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel's security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats. The United States will join with others in the international community to strengthen the capacity and will of Palestinian security forces to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure.

Terrorism:

Israel will retain its right to defend itself against terrorism, including to take actions against terrorist organizations. The United States will lead efforts, working together with Jordan, Egypt, and others in the international community, to build the capacity and will of Palestinian institutions to fight terrorism, dismantle terrorist organizations, and prevent the areas from which Israel has withdrawn from posing a threat that would have to be addressed by any other means. The United States understands that after Israel withdraws from Gaza and/or parts of the West Bank, and pending agreements on other arrangements, existing arrangements regarding control of airspace, territorial waters, and land passages of the West Bank and Gaza will continue.

The Two-State Solution:

The United States remains committed to the two-state solution for peace in the Middle East as set forth in June 2002, and to the roadmap as the best path to realize that vision.

The goal of two independent states has repeatedly been recognized in international resolutions and agreements, and it remains a key to resolving this conflict. The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete

return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

Palestinian Statehood:

The United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in accordance with the vision I set forth in June 2002 and with the path set forth in the roadmap. The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civic institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organizations.

Palestinian Obligations:

Under the roadmap, Palestinians must undertake an immediate cessation of armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere, and all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel. The Palestinian leadership must act decisively against terror, including sustained, targeted, and effective operations to stop terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Palestinians must undertake a comprehensive and fundamental political reform that includes a strong parliamentary democracy and an empowered prime minister.

Israeli Obligations:

The Government of Israel is committed to take additional steps on the West Bank, including progress toward a freeze on settlement activity, removing unauthorized outposts, and improving the humanitarian situation by easing restrictions on the movement of Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

As the Government of Israel has stated, the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

Regional Cooperation:

A peace settlement negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians would be a great boon not only to those peoples but to the peoples of the entire region. Accordingly, all states in the region have special responsibilities: to support the building of the institutions of a Palestinian state; to fight terrorism, and cut off all forms of assistance to individuals and groups engaged in terrorism; and to begin now to move toward more normal relations with the State of Israel. These actions would be true contributions to building peace in the region.

Letter to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel on the Israeli Disengagement Plan

April 14, 2004

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

Thank you for your letter setting out your disengagement plan.

The United States remains hopeful and determined to find a way forward toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. I remain committed to my June 24, 2002 vision of two states living side by side in peace and security as the key to peace, and to the roadmap as the route to get there.

We welcome the disengagement plan you have prepared, under which Israel would withdraw certain military installations and all settlements from Gaza, and withdraw certain military installations and settlements in the West Bank. These steps described in the plan will mark real progress toward realizing my June 24, 2002 vision, and make a real contribution towards peace. We also understand that, in this context, Israel believes it is important to bring new opportunities to the Negev and the Galilee. We are hopeful that steps pursuant to this plan, consistent with my vision, will remind all states and parties of their own obligations under the roadmap.

The United States appreciates the risks such an undertaking represents. I therefore want to reassure you on several points.

First, the United States remains committed to my vision and to its implementation as described in the roadmap. The United States will do its utmost to prevent any attempt by anyone to impose any other plan. Under the roadmap, Palestinians must undertake an immediate cessation of armed activity and all acts of violence against Israelis anywhere, and all official Palestinian institutions must end incitement against Israel. The Palestinian leadership must act decisively against terror, including sustained, targeted, and effective operations to stop terrorism and dismantle terrorist capabilities and infrastructure. Palestinians must undertake a comprehensive and fundamental political reform that includes a strong parliamentary democracy and an empowered prime minister.

Second, there will be no security for Israelis or Palestinians until they and all states, in the region and beyond, join together to fight terrorism and dismantle terrorist organizations. The United States reiterates its steadfast commitment to Israel's security, including secure, defensible borders, and to preserve and strengthen Israel's capability to deter and defend itself, by itself, against any threat or possible combination of threats.

Third, Israel will retain its right to defend itself against terrorism, including to take actions against terrorist organizations. The United States will lead efforts, working together with Jordan, Egypt, and others in the international community, to build the capacity and will of Palestinian institutions to fight terrorism, dismantle terrorist organizations, and prevent the areas from which Israel has withdrawn from posing a threat that would have to be addressed by any other means. The United States understands that after Israel withdraws from Gaza and/or parts of the West Bank, and pending agreements on other arrangements, existing arrangements regarding control of airspace, territorial waters, and land passages of the West Bank and Gaza will continue.

The United States is strongly committed to Israel's security and well-being as a Jewish state. It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair, and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state, and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.

As part of a final peace settlement, Israel must have secure and recognized borders, which should emerge from negotiations between the parties in accordance with UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338. In light of new realities on the ground, including already existing major Israeli populations centers, it is unrealistic to expect that the outcome of final status negotiations will be a full and complete return to the armistice lines of 1949, and all previous efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have reached the same conclusion. It is realistic to expect that any final status agreement will only be achieved on the basis of mutually agreed changes that reflect these realities.

I know that, as you state in your letter, you are aware that certain responsibilities face the State of Israel. Among these, your government has stated that the barrier being erected by Israel should be a security rather than political barrier, should be temporary rather than permanent, and therefore not prejudice any final status issues including final borders, and its route should take into account, consistent with security needs, its impact on Palestinians not engaged in terrorist activities.

As you know, the United States supports the establishment of a Palestinian state that is viable, contiguous, sovereign, and independent, so that the Palestinian people can build their own future in accordance with my vision set forth in June 2002 and with the path set forth in the roadmap. The United States will join with others in the international community to foster the development of democratic political institutions and new leadership committed to those institutions, the reconstruction of civic institutions, the growth of a free and prosperous economy, and the building of capable security institutions dedicated to maintaining law and order and dismantling terrorist organizations.

A peace settlement negotiated between Israelis and Palestinians would be a great boon not only to those peoples but to the

peoples of the entire region. Accordingly, the United States believes that all states in the region have special responsibilities: to support the building of the institutions of a Palestinian state; to fight terrorism, and cut off all forms of assistance to individuals and groups engaged in terrorism; and to begin now to move toward more normal relations with the State of Israel. These actions would be true contributions to building peace in the region.

Mr. Prime Minister, you have described a bold and historic initiative that can make an important contribution to peace. I commend your efforts and your courageous decision which I support. As a close friend and ally, the United States intends to work closely with you to help make it a success.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter. The letter was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 14 but was not issued as a White House press release. The Office of the Press Secretary also made available the text of Prime Minister Sharon's letter to the President.

Memorandum on Waiver and Certification of Statutory Provisions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization

April 14, 2004

Presidential Determination No. 2004–28

Memorandum for the Secretary of State

Subject: Waiver and Certification of Statutory Provisions Regarding the Palestine Liberation Organization

Pursuant to the authority vested in me under section 534(d) of the Foreign Operations, Export Financing, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2004, Public Law 108–199, I hereby determine and certify that it is important to the national security interests of the United States to waive the provisions of section 1003 of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1987, Public Law 100–204.

This waiver shall be effective for a period of 6 months from the date hereof. You are hereby authorized and directed to transmit this determination to the Congress and to publish it in the *Federal Register.*

George W. Bush

Remarks in Des Moines, Iowa

April 15, 2004

Thank you for having me. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for the warm weather. [*Laughter*] I really am glad to be able to come and talk to you about how to make sure people have a chance to make a living. That's what we're really here to talk about: How can people put food on the table; how can communities be vibrant and grow.

Chuck Grassley said I appreciate rural America. I do, so much so that I call Crawford, Texas my home. That's rural America. I think we've got about 661 people—until I arrive. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines for hosting this. I know we've got people from States other than Iowa, like Missouri, Minnesota, South Dakota, North Dakota. Glad you all are here. Thanks for coming by and giving me a chance to visit.

My attitude about rural America is—from the President's perspective—is that if we can make the economy strong, rural America will benefit. It's hard to talk about the health of rural America unless the overall economy is growing. I mean, it's nice to have kind of visions about how to bring development to your community, but if the economy is stagnant, it's hard to get there.

So what I want to do today is talk about the economy of the United States and how we can leave lasting prosperity, to make sure that you understand what I think the role of the Federal Government is, which is to create an environment in which the farmer and rancher can make a living, in which the small-business person can realize their dreams. Because the truth of the matter is, when you really think about rural America, rural America's vitality depends upon the

health of the agricultural sector. The economy of our rural America depends upon the vitality of small businesses.

Sure, you get some big businesses to move into your communities, and that's good, and I'd work hard to try to recruit them if I were you. But true economic vitality, the vitality that will last beyond just an economic spurt is one that recognizes the importance of the entrepreneur and the farmer and the rancher.

I want to thank my friend Chuck Grassley for introducing me. I've spent some quality time with Senator Grassley here in Iowa. You might remember the 2000 caucuses. He showed me a lot of the State—by car. [*Laughter*] I'll never forget driving the backroads of Iowa, and Chairman Grassley—I call him "Mr. Chairman"—he's a powerful guy, so I put a fancy title to his name—the Chairman says, "I know that farmer there." And then he'd go by and say, "I remember meeting that farmer there." He knew every farmer on the back roads of Iowa. No wonder he's such a popular person in this great State. He's doing a great job, by the way. I appreciate working for him. He is—he brought some of those good Iowa values to the Congress. And Mr. Chairman, it's great to be with you, and I want to thank you for your continued leadership.

I also had the honor of meeting Randy Newman, and I want to thank Randy for being the chairman of the FHLB board of directors. I want to thank the members of the board who are here as well and associate members from around the Midwest.

I had the honor of landing at the airport and also being greeted today by the other Senator from the State of Iowa. Senator Tom Harkin is with us. Mr. Senator, thank you for your hospitality and your graciousness for coming out to the airport. I'm pleased you're here.

I thank Congressman Tom Latham as well as Congressman Leonard Boswell. Boswell made sure I knew that I was in his district. [*Laughter*] I want to thank both Members of the Congress for serving your State.

I want to thank—I'm a member of the ex-Governors club. Those are those of us who are fortunate to be Governors of a State. I'm a member, proud alumnus. I see another member of the ex-Governors club with us today. That would be former Governor Bob Ray of the State of Iowa. Good to see you, Bob. Thank you for coming.

Also when I landed, I met an interesting person named Sarah Sindlinger. Sarah is right there. You don't know Sarah yet, but you're about to find out about this remarkable American. She is a 16-year-older. She has volunteered over 150 hours of time. See, she's a high school junior, and she said, "What can I do to make my community a better place?" And instead of just asking the question, she's actually acted on the question. She has volunteered in a daycare center. She has volunteered in a library. She understands the value of mentoring. She has worked in a hospital. She's been a best buddy to a fellow student in the special education program.

You know, the reason I bring up Sarah is this: There's a lot of talk about the strength of America, and we're strong. We're plenty strong. We're strong militarily. I will keep us strong militarily. We're strong economically, and we need to get stronger economically. But the true strength of the country is in the hearts and souls of our citizens. See, that's the really good strength of America. You know that if you live in rural America. You know what I'm talking about, the notion of people taking time out of their lives to make their community a better place.

Sarah is here because she is a soldier in the army of compassion. She's a part of the true strength of the country. She's a soul who's willing to dedicate her time to love a neighbor just like she'd like to be loved herself. My call to you as you do your work in your community is to continue to rally that compassion to help change America, one heart, one soul, one conscience at a time.

Sarah, I'm honored you're here. Thank you for setting such a fine example, and may God continue to bless your soul and your spirit.

It is nice of you all to welcome somebody from the Federal Government on tax day. [*Laughter*] There's a lot of people filling out their tax—putting in their taxes today. Laura and I put in ours a little early. See, the newspapers wanted to see what I paid. That's just part of the job. [*Laughter*] People expect that from their public servants, and I'm more than

happy to participate in that aspect of public life. People also expect from their public service a wise stewardship of the taxpayers' money. People also expect that we keep the Federal tax burden as low as possible, which was one of my pledges to the American people. I take that responsibility seriously. And I want to thank Senator Grassley for his help in reducing the tax burden on the American people.

Tax day is something most people really don't look forward to. But this year, it's a little better because of the tax relief we delivered, and the economy is stronger for it.

I mentioned small businesses as a part of the strategy to make sure rural America is strong. A major component of the tax relief was aimed at our small businesses. See, most small businesses are Subchapter S corporations or limited partnerships and, therefore, pay tax at the individual income-tax rate. And therefore, when you heard the fact that we lowered individual income taxes, I want you to think about more money in the pockets of small businesses so they can expand and hire new people.

A lot of the tax relief that we passed was aimed at our seniors. By reducing the taxes on dividends, we've helped our seniors. You've got seniors living in rural America. It's good that they have a little more money in their pocket.

A lot of the tax relief we passed was aimed at people with children. We've raised the child credit to $1,000. Some of the tax relief we passed was trying to mitigate the effects of the marriage penalty. It didn't seem like—make much sense to me that we would tax marriage in a country where we are trying to encourage marriages and stable families.

The tax relief we passed is driving—helping to drive the economy forward, and it came at about the right time—just the right time, for that matter—because we're emerging from a period of incredible economic challenges. Rural America has been challenged economically, just like the rest of America has been challenged economically. We went through a recession. The recession hurt. It hurt in all sectors of our country. Recession means that we had negative growth for three quarters. Negative growth meant it was hard for people to find work. Negative growth meant it was hard to be optimistic about the future. And yet, we overcame that recession. I will argue that the tax relief made the recession one of the most shallow in American economic history.

Right after we started recovering from that, we got attacked. The attacks hurt us all. The attacks on America hurt every single American. The attacks on America hurt our economy. We lost nearly one million jobs in just 3 months after September the 11th, 2001. Some of those jobs were in rural America.

It also affected our way of thinking about the world. We grew up thinking that oceans could protect us. We learned a horrible lesson on that day, that we were no longer immune from threats that might be gathering overseas. I vowed that day that I would take whatever action was necessary to stay on the offensive to protect America. We'll do everything we can at home to protect us. But the best way to secure the homeland is to bring the killers to justice, one person at a time. And that's exactly what the United States of America will continue to do.

We're a tough country and a compassionate country. We refuse to be intimidated by the terrorists. It took us a while to kind of figure out what was going on, but when we figured it out, this country started moving forward again. See, the people of this country are resolute, and they're strong. It doesn't matter whether you live in urban America or rural America; there's a wonderful strength, the fiber of the people of America.

Then we found out another challenge to our economy, and that is there were some people that forgot to be responsible citizens and didn't tell the truth. They were CEOs that betrayed the trust. And that affected us. It really did, when you think about it. It created a challenge that we had to overcome. I appreciate the Members of Congress from both political parties working together to pass good reforms that made it very clear that this country will not tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America. I think the American citizens now believe that the laws we passed are beginning to work. After all, you're looking on your TV screens and seeing some of those who betrayed the trust being held to account.

And then, as you know, I made a difficult but necessary decision to help defend America and make the world more peaceful. One of the lessons of September the 11th is anytime an American President sees a gathering threat, we must deal with it. We must take it seriously. I saw a threat, based upon intelligence, in the form of Saddam Hussein. The Congress, by the way, looked at the very same intelligence and saw a threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the same intelligence, and it saw a threat as well.

I went to the U.N., as you might remember, and said, "There is a threat. September the 11th changed—Saddam Hussein is—must be viewed in a different light, at least from the American perspective, than before. He's a serious threat to us." I based that upon the intelligence but also upon the knowledge that he had used chemical weapons against his own people, the knowledge that he was paying for suicide bombers to go kill, the knowledge that he hated our country. So I called the United Nations—at the United Nations, I called for them to collectively deal with the threat, and they agreed to, in a unanimous decision. They said, "This man is a threat." They passed a Security Council resolution that said, "Disarm, or face serious consequences."

Now, anytime an American President says, "Disarm, or face serious consequences," the American President better mean it. When the Commander in Chief speaks for the country, I believe the person ought to speak clearly and mean what he says. And so I acted on those sentiments as well. I said, "Mr. Saddam Hussein, disarm, or face serious consequences." He chose not to. He defied the world again. Given the lessons of September the 11th, I was faced with a choice, either to trust the word of a madman, a tyrant, a dictator, or defend the country. Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

That decision created an economic hurdle that we had to cross, because marching to war is not conducive for economic growth and vitality. The lenders who are here know what I mean. I mean, it's kind of hard to lend into an environment when you know the country is preparing for war. War is negative, not positive. We're now marching to peace. But that march is tough; it's hard work.

These last weeks have been tough weeks for America. We've encountered—I say "we"; it's just not American forces. It's coalition forces and innocent Iraqi citizens, by the way, have encountered serious violence in parts of Iraq. The different factions, former Saddam loyalists, some foreign fighters, Sadr, who is a radical cleric, and his gangs have a common goal. They want to stop the march to democracy in Iraq. The idea of a free society really bothers them. Freedom is something they can't stand, and they want to run us out of Iraq. That's what they want to do.

I—we're not going to be run out of Iraq. We're not going to let a ruthless power grab affect that which is important. See, it's in our national interest that Iraq be free and peaceful. It's in our national interest, the long-term interest of this country, that right in the heart of the Middle East there be a free society, one that will help spread hope and opportunity. See, I believe free societies are peaceful societies.

I also am motivated by this American value, that says freedom is not our gift to the world; freedom is the Almighty's gift to every man and woman in this world. That's what I believe. And I believe—Iraq will either be peaceful and democratic, or it will be a source of violence, a source of instability, a source of hatred, and a threat to free societies.

I'm proud of those who have served our Nation and are serving our Nation. Our military is doing incredibly good work. They've been given a hard job. They've been given a tough job, and they're performing brilliantly. See, the transition from torture chambers and rape rooms and mass graves and fear of authority is a tough transition. And they're doing the good work of keeping this country stabilized as a political process unfolds.

We saw yesterday Mr. Brahimi from the United Nations begin to lay out the specific strategy necessary to, first, pass sovereignty and then eventually put a constitution in place and then free elections in Iraq. We're moving toward democracy, but the situation on the ground, I readily concede, is tough

work. And we've got good people there working it. And some have paid the highest price of all. Some of the people there in Iraq have made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of a more stable and peaceful world.

Tom Latham told me about coming from the funeral of Marine Lance Corporal Ben Carman from Jefferson, Iowa. My deepest sympathies go to the Carman family. I know how incredibly difficult it is for them to put their loved one into the ground. Ben Carman's father said this, he said, "He knew that America was in danger"—he, talking about his son, the dad talking about his son—he said, "He knew that America was in danger, and it was time for guys like him to step up to the plate." That's what his dad said about his courageous son.

Mr. Carman must know that our prayers are with him and with those of others who have lost a loved one in Iraq and that the mission that his son was on was a noble and important mission for peace and freedom and for the security of America. And we will stay the course in Iraq so that his son did not die in vain.

We've overcome a lot of challenges, when you think about it. Rural America has overcome a lot of economic challenges. In 3 short years, we've been through a recession and, by the way, a stock market correction. That affected people in rural America. We've been through an attack on our country, a national emergency. We've been through corporate scandals. We're making the world more peaceful and secure.

Those are challenges that are hard for any economy to overcome. But this is America. This is a country that's full of vibrancy—vibrant people. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong, and I intend to keep it that way. Tax relief helped. Here on tax day, we can say that by cutting taxes, we helped the entrepreneurial spirit of both urban and rural America.

And the facts bear me out. Economic growth in the second half of 2003 was the best in nearly 20 years. Things are improving. More manufacturers are seeing rising activity than any point in about two decades. Inflation is low. That's good for rural America. Interest rates are low. That's good if you want to buy a house. Homeownership is at the highest rate ever. That's a proud statistic for America to hold up. You know why? Because we want more people owning their own home. An ownership society is a positive society. When people own something, they have a vital stake in the future of our country, whether it be in rural America or urban America.

There was good confirmation last month about the strengthening economy: We created 308,000 new jobs in March, 750,000 since August. That's positive. People are getting hired. People are going back to work. The unemployment rate in Iowa is 4.1 percent. That's below the national average. I'm sure there's pockets of unemployment that are higher than that, but overall, this State's unemployment rate is better than the Nation, which is a credit to the entrepreneurs of the State of Iowa and the entrepreneurs, by the way, of other States here as well. You're doing well, and I appreciate that.

My job is to make sure that the environment is such that you can continue to do well. You see, I'm interested in the lasting prosperity. I want prosperity to be achieved in the out-years, and there is some uncertainty. I mean, look, people are worried about finding work. There are families wondering whether or not their loved one can find a job close to home, because this is a changing economy. It's just different. Some things don't change: We need farmers out there planting the field, although agriculture is different from 30 years ago. We need our ranchers feeling good about things. We need to make sure, though, that this is the best place in the world to do business.

If you're really interested in making sure that people can find work at home, America has got to be the best place to do business. The environment has got to be a good place for people to make a living, is what I'm telling you.

And the first way to do so is to make sure our legal system is balanced and fair. You know, too many lawsuits run up the cost of doing business in America. Frivolous lawsuits are really hard on small businesses, and we need good legal reform. And Congress has got a responsibility, like on class-action legal reforms. We need to get it out of Congress. We need to send a message that we'll have

a fair and equitable legal system, not one that is full of frivolous and junk lawsuits that make it hard for people to find work.

We need less regulations. We're working on regulatory relief at the administrative branch. Congress needs to work on regulatory relief, too, in the laws they pass. I wish I could say that every single form that people are required to fill out was read in Washington or in Des Moines or anywhere else where there's a statehouse. I don't think so. We need to streamline these regulations. We don't need our small-business people spending enormous amounts of time filling out forms that don't get read.

We also need to make sure that we can help—make sure health care is accessible and affordable. The rising cost of health care makes it difficult for people to employ people. It's hard on small businesses. I'm telling you, it's hard on rural America, and you know what I'm talking about.

So we passed some good laws that allow for health savings accounts, which are an imaginative way to help control the cost of health care for individuals and small businesses and farming families. Congress needs to pass association health care plans that allow small businesses in rural America to pool their risk with other businesses, perhaps in urban America, so that they get the same purchasing power that big businesses do in the marketplace. It's a smart way to make sure that the rural economies stay healthy, so that your small businesses out there are able to find affordable health care.

I appreciate Senator Grassley working with me on Medicare reform in order to make sure health care is available. The Medicare reform package we worked, with emphasis on rural hospitals, made a difference and will make a difference in the health care in rural America. A vibrant rural America must have the ability for people to find health care, and the Medicare reforms are going to help a lot.

As well, I appreciate Congress working on community health centers. These are places where people—low-income people can find primary care so they're not using the emergency rooms of urban or rural hospitals. There's just practical things we can do to make sure that the economy stays strong, people can find work, the rural economies are vibrant, by dealing with health care. I'm not going to allow the health care system to be federalized. I think that would be a terrible mistake to have a Federal delivery of the health care.

We need to make sure we maintain spending discipline in Washington. One way to make sure the economy, the overall economy, grows is there to be wise expenditure of people's money. It's always a battle, of course. Every idea is a good idea. Every idea requires more money. I've submitted my budget, which reduces the deficit in half by 5 years without raising taxes on the American people. It's going to require some discipline, spending discipline. Fortunately, Iowa is represented by Congressman Jim Nussle of the Budget Committee.

And so we will have an interesting battle in this election year about keeping spending down. But I think if the will is right, we can. We can meet our priorities, make sure our soldiers get what they want, make sure the homeland is defended without busting the budget.

To make sure the economy continues to grow and rural America is healthy, we need an energy plan. We need to get sound energy legislation to my desk.

If you're a businessperson thinking about hiring somebody or wanting to start a business and you're worried about getting electricity, you're not going to start your business. If you're somebody who's a manufacturer in the State of Iowa or Missouri, Minnesota, the Dakotas, and your energy supplies are disrupted, your price of natural gas goes too high, or you're worried about the reliability of electricity, you're not going to be in a mood to expand your business.

We're hooked on foreign sources of energy right now. The country needs to change its attitude. Of course, we've got to encourage conservation—that's important—and use new technologies. In my judgment, we ought to open up lands for exploration for natural gas. We can do so in an environmentally friendly way, to make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

We need to continue to promote clean coal technology so we become less dependent on foreign sources of energy. We need to use that which we grow right here in places like

Iowa to make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy. That's why I've worked with the Senator on ethanol, which I think is an important ingredient, an important part of making sure that we have a modern energy plan as we go into the 21st century. Let's grow it, instead of depending upon foreign sources to provide it. I hope I can get an energy bill to my desk. It will be good for rural America if I do so—when I do so. Let me be optimistic.

Another thing that's important for rural America is to be confident in our trade policy. There's a lot of talk about economic isolationism in Washington right now. That means throwing up barriers to trade. That will be bad for rural America. It's not going to happen on my watch. I will resist that mightily, because I believe that when you're good at something, you ought to promote it. We're really good at growing things, and we ought to be selling things that we grow everywhere around the world. We're 5 percent of the world's population. Why don't we sell to the other 95 percent, as opposed to walling ourselves off. Good economic development policy in rural America depends upon our ability to open up markets for products made in rural America, products grown in rural America.

I'll tell you something really interesting—first off, let me take a step back. Many Presidents of both parties have made the decision that America's markets should be open. That's good for the consumers. When you have more choices to make, it's generally good for consumers. It helps with price, and the more competition there is for your demand, the better selections you will have at a better price. That's just how the markets work.

In return, countries haven't reciprocated. They haven't opened up their markets as generously as we've opened up ours. And so the choice we have to make is, do we retaliate by closing ours, and therefore, they keep theirs closed, or do we work to open up other markets? I've chosen the latter route. See, "Just treat us the way we treat you," is my message when it comes to foreign trade. "Our markets are open for you. You open up our markets to your consumers—your markets to our products."

And it's beginning to work. And if you ask any farmer, they know what I'm talking about, because farm income is at a record level in 2003, much of it thanks to the ability for our farmers to export into other markets. And it's important to keep those markets open. It's important to make sure that we're confident about our trade policy, not pessimistic, not willing to fall prey to the false hopes of economic isolationism. Economic isolationism will hurt rural America, and it's not going to happen.

We'll be tough when we have to, to make sure we're treated fairly. I filed the first WTO case against China over unfair tax burdens it gives to its semiconductor makers. In other words, when we see inequity, we'll file a complaint; we'll take people to the court. We just want to open the fields. We just want to be treated the exact same way we treat them.

The interesting thing that happened last month is that America hit an alltime record for exports. And that's positive news, positive news throughout the country. The reason why—you know why? It's because we produce the best products. When it says, "Made in the USA," they're the best.

One of the great challenges we have is to make sure our workforce is trained for the jobs of the 21st century, make sure people growing up in rural America have got the skills necessary to become employed in the jobs that will be available as we move into the 21st century. The Workforce Investment Act needs to be reformed in a positive way, so that people are trained for jobs which actually exist.

And one of the great strengths of our country is the community college system, and it needs to be utilized in an effective, smart way, to combine those who are looking for workers and those who want to work with a place in order to learn the skills so they can get hired. That sounds pretty simple, but sometimes the system doesn't work that way. So I've laid out a Jobs for the 21st Century program that really utilizes the community college system in a way that I think is strategically important to make sure people get the skills.

Listen, you hear a lot of talk about productivity. That means one worker can produce more goods or services than before. We want

people to be more productive. And oftentimes the way that that has to happen is through education. There's plenty of ways for people to find money to help with the education. We just want to make sure our workforce training programs are applicable to the 21st century.

As well we've got to make sure you get it right early in the public school system. I mean, you can talk all you want about productivity in workers, but if people can't read, it's a steep hill to climb. And I know in Iowa you do a great job at your public schools of holding people to account, of measuring so that you can determine whether or not your curriculum is working or not. And that's important. It's important in rural America as well. It's important to make sure that you set high standards, you challenge what I call the soft bigotry of low expectations, you expect nothing but excellence for every single child being educated in any public school across the State in which you live.

That's the spirit behind the No Child Left Behind Act, and it's going to make a difference. People are learning to read and write and add and subtract. We've got kind of a flaw in the pipeline in some places, where the accountability hasn't kicked in soon enough. So I've got—we've got some intermediate measures that I'd like for Congress to support me on, so that there is intensive reading and math for junior high and high school students, because we've got to solve these problems early, before they're too late, and make sure that the workforce training programs are relevant.

You know, I think one of the interesting things for rural America is going to be the spread of broadband technology. It's going to really change much of the way that education can be delivered or health care can be delivered. It's an exciting opportunity and an exciting moment for people who live in rural America. The objective of this administration is to make sure that every American has access by the year 2007 and, shortly thereafter, have more than just one deliverer of broadband. In other words, you've got choice. Rural America needs just as much choice as urban America does in order for the consumers to benefit.

I see people nodding their heads as leaders in your communities. This is going to be a fantastic opportunity for you, and the Government's job is to make sure the regulatory environment is such, and the taxing environment is such, that broadband spreads as quickly as possible all throughout the country.

Let me talk about one other way to make sure the economic environment in both urban and rural America remains conducive to job growth and vitality, and that is, the Tax Code has got to be fair. And in my budget, I proposed a 10.7-percent increase to make sure that tax cheaters are found, make sure the IRS gets after those who don't pay taxes, make sure that the system is fair for those of us who do pay taxes. We want everybody paying their fair share. If I'm going to pay it, I want somebody else to pay it too, if they're obligated to pay. And that's why we expect the IRS to be tough, and they need the resources necessary to do so, and we'll provide them.

The other thing we need to do on the Tax Code is there needs to be certainty in the Tax Code. If you're a job creator and you're worried about what the Tax Code will look like next year, it creates uncertainty. See, it's the worry about whether the environment in which you'll be taxed is—creates enough uncertainty so that there's a lack of confidence about expanding the job base. You know, a small-business owner needs to know with certainty what the code will look like, and that's not the way the Tax Code has been structured. The tax relief that we passed about—talked about is scheduled to go away. I can't explain it very well, but that's just the way it happens, tax relief today and not tax relief tomorrow. And we need to do something about it, because there needs to be certainty in the code.

For example, the child credit will go down next year unless Congress makes the tax relief permanent. That means if you've got a child, you're going to pay a tax increase. That's what that means. The marriage penalty will go up. Once again, the Tax Code will make—say, "It's great that you're married, but we're going to penalize you for it." The 10-percent bracket, which has helped millions of low-income families, will fade

away, and I think Congress needs to make it permanent. I think Congress needs to make all aspects of tax relief permanent.

See, I think the uncertainty in the Tax Code is going to make it difficult for us to confidently move out into the 21st century. Now is not the time to be raising taxes on hard-working people. With this economy growing strong and getting stronger, we don't need to raise the tax burden.

I had the honor of meeting some of your fellow citizens prior to coming in here. There's three examples, and I hope these examples will help people understand why I am insistent upon making the tax relief permanent. It will help—you see, I fully understand that when those of us in office talk—we talk about numbers, and we talk about this, and we talk about that, and that theory and this theory—the best thing to do is talk about how it affects people's—the tax relief affects people's lives.

Ted Stuart is with us. He's an entrepreneur. He owns a company called Architectural Arts. They do custom mill and cabinetry work in Des Moines, Iowa. He is what we call a Subchapter S corporation. That means they pay tax at the individual income-tax level. So when you hear "tax on the rich," that's his company. He's part of that "tax on the rich" part.

He is—most new jobs in America are created by small businesses. Seventy percent of new jobs in this country are created by entrepreneurs like Ted. Ted has added 20 workers over the past 2 years. That's a really healthy sign, see. When you've got a guy like Ted who's an entrepreneur, who's willing to add workers, it's a sign that there's a vibrancy. He said that without the tax relief, he wouldn't have hired as many.

See, the tax relief went into Ted's small-business coffers. The individual tax cuts—when you hear that we cut the individual rates, it really helped his business. And with that money, he had confidence to expand. He said taking tax relief away from businesses like Ted's means that small businesses won't be allowed to grow. He said, "It allows us to grow the business more quickly." That's what Ted said when he talked about the tax relief. "It allows us to grow the business more quickly," which means somebody is more likely to find work. Congress should not penalize the entrepreneurial spirit by raising the taxes on Ted.

The Chenoweths are with us, Rob and Marci, and two of their four children, wherever they are. There they are. I can see them smiling. I promised the youngest son there that I wouldn't speak too long. I've already broken the promise, I guess. [*Laughter*] The lad is about to doze off. [*Laughter*]

The Chenoweths saved $2,700 on their taxes this year because of the child credit increase. That's a lot of money for a family of four. A young family of four can use $2,700. It helps them a lot. He said it helped pay for auto bills. With a family of four, you'd better have an automobile that can run. He said it helped them take a trip, which is good. And by the way, when you take the trip, you might go to a motel during the trip, in which case, the person at the motel is—receives some business, which means that the person working at the hotel might more likely keep his or her job. He also put more money aside in his retirement plan at work. He's beginning to do his duty as a citizen to save for his family's future.

The tax relief matters. If Congress does not make the parts of the Tax Code that are set to expire permanent this year, his taxes will go up by $1,300. That's the reality. So when you hear us talking about making the tax cuts permanent, think about the Chenoweths. By not making it permanent, we're taking money out of their pocket; we're making it harder for them to raise their children; we're making it harder for this good family to realize its dreams.

And finally, I met Jim and Ann Sage from Waterloo, Iowa. I remember the time—Chuck and I were laughing about this—during the 2000 caucuses, I was going to give a speech at an elementary school in Waterloo, and it was—they had the heat cranked up pretty high in the elementary school cafeteria. By the time I got there, some people were pretty wobbly. [*Laughter*] And I got up there and started to speak, and a lady dropped out over there. [*Laughter*] About a third of the way through the speech, another one hit the deck. [*Laughter*] I tried to blame it on Senator Grassley, but I was the only one talking at the time. [*Laughter*]

But anyway, these good folks are from Waterloo. They are a ninth-generation farm family—ninth generation, that goes way back in Iowa history. He wants his children to be the tenth generation to farm. It's a great Iowa tradition, and it's a great Dakota tradition. It's a great Missouri tradition among the farmers, a great Minnesota tradition, for families to take over the farm. That's what the Sages want. After all, it's their asset, isn't it? It's their farm. It's nobody else's farm. They ought to be able to leave their farm to who they want to leave their farm to without the interference of the Federal Government.

The death tax is bad for economic development in rural America because it's bad for small-business owners and farmers. We put the death tax on its way to extinction, but it—unfortunately, in the year 2011, it comes back to life. It's time to plan. If you're involved with economic development in rural America, you better be planning about things that will affect economic development in rural America. And one of the things that will affect it is for the death tax to come back to life. It makes no sense for the Federal Government to tax a person's assets twice, once when they're living and making money, and after they depart. The death tax is bad for rural America, and Congress needs to make it extinct forever.

I want to thank our—I want to thank the three folks for joining us here and letting me use their stories as examples of what will happen, what will happen if Congress doesn't do the right thing.

Let me conclude by also talking about a contribution that rural America makes that's important for the future of our country as well. It's the spirit of rural America. I oftentimes talk about the need to change this culture of ours in America from one that has said, "If it feels good, why don't you just go ahead and do it," and "If you've got a problem, blame somebody else," to a culture in which each of us understands we're responsible for the decisions we make in life. And it's changing. The culture is changing in America. A lot of it has to do with the culture of rural America, a culture based upon faith and family.

When I say "responsibility era," here's what I mean. I mean if you're a mother or a father, you're a responsible for loving your child with all your heart. That's your responsibility. I think people in rural America understand that well. I think it's a part of the culture of rural America. If you're in rural America or anywhere in America and you're worried about the quality of the education in which you live, you're responsible for doing something about it, see? Don't hope the faraway Government in Washington solves your problem. Do something about it. Work with your teachers and thank your teachers and get involved so that the quality of the education is what you want it to be.

Of course, you know I'm going to say this, but if you're a CEO in corporate America, you're responsible for telling the truth. That's part of what I mean by ushering in a responsibility era. You're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholder. You're responsible for telling the truth to your employees.

You know, you oftentimes hear talk about neighborliness in rural America, neighbors caring for neighbors. Part of a responsibility era is a neighbor loving your neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself. That's part of the responsibility era as well.

Rural America provides such strength to the American culture. It's a part of helping a culture shift to the better, so that America can realize its full potential—every citizen can be hopeful about their future. It's happening. It's happening in this country. And I want to thank those of you who are a part of making sure that the economy is strong in rural America and making sure the spirit of that important part of our country remains vibrant and hopeful and healthy.

We've overcome a lot in America. The reason we have is because the good people of this country are fabulous people—strong hearts, good souls, and hopeful characters.

God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:20 p.m. at the Des Moines Marriott Downtown. In his remarks, he referred to Randy Newman, chairman, board of directors, Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Muqtada Al Sadr, Iraqi Shiite cleric whose militia engaged in an uprising in Iraq in early April; and Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

April 16, 2004

President Bush. Thank you all. Mr. Prime Minister—Tony, as I like to call you—Cherie Blair, thanks for coming. It's great to see you. Laura and I are pleased to welcome you once again to America and to the White House.

Throughout the last century, the United Kingdom and the United States have stood together when liberty was assaulted and free people were tested. And now in this century, our nations see clearly the dangers of our time, and we share a determination to meet them.

Since our two countries shared the loss of September the 11th, 2001, we've joined in a global manhunt for terrorist killers. We've removed the terrorist camps of Afghanistan and the brutal Government that sheltered them. We've enforced the demands of the United Nations in Iraq and removed a dangerous threat to the region and to the world.

We've worked together to end the WMD programs of Libya and bring that country back into the community of nations. We're engaged in difficult and necessary work of helping Iraqis build their own democracy, for the sake of our security and to increase the momentum of freedom across the greater Middle East.

The stakes in Iraq are clear. Iraq will either turn back the challenges to democracy or return to the camp of tyranny and terror. Iraq will either be an example of a region that is weary of poverty and oppression or will be a threat to the region and to our own people.

Our nations face a stark choice as well. Britain and America and our allies can either break our word to the people of Iraq, abandon them in their hour of need, and consign them to oppression, or we can help them defeat the enemies of a free Iraq and build the institutions of liberty. The Prime Minister and I have made our choice. Iraq will be free. Iraq will be independent. Iraq will be a peaceful nation, and we will not waver in the face of fear and intimidation.

The past few weeks have been hard, and the days ahead will surely bring their own challenges. What we're seeing in Iraq is an attempted power grab by extremists and terrorists. They will fail. The extremists will fail because our coalition will not allow Iraq's future to be stolen by a violent few. They will also fail because they are not widely supported by the Iraqi people, who have no desire to trade one tyrant for another.

Many Iraqi leaders are showing great personal courage in helping to build a free Iraq. And we stand with them, and we appreciate their courage. And troops from our countries and other coalition friends are showing great personal courage as they help Iraq move toward democracy, and we appreciate their sacrifice and courage as well.

One of the essential commitments we've made to the Iraqi people is this: They will control their own country. No citizen of America or Britain would want the Government of their nation in hands of others, and neither do the Iraqis. And this is why the June 30th date for the transfer of sovereignty will be kept. This transfer will demonstrate to the Iraqi people that our coalition has no interest in occupation. On that date, the Coalition Provisional Authority will cease to exist, but coalition forces will remain in Iraq to help the new Government succeed.

This week, we've seen the outlines of a new Iraqi Government that will take the keys of sovereignty. We welcome the proposals presented by the U.N. Special Envoy Brahimi. He's identified a way forward to establishing an interim Government that is broadly acceptable to the Iraqi people. Our coalition partners will continue to work with the U.N. to prepare for nationwide elections that will choose a new Government in January of 2005. We thank the U.N. and Secretary-General Annan for helping Iraqis secure a future of freedom. We're grateful that Mr. Brahimi will soon return to Iraq to continue his important work.

A free Iraq will stand as an example to the Middle East, encouraging reform and hope by demonstrating what life in a free society can be like. At the same time, we must also work to end longstanding sources of bitterness and conflict in the Middle East.

Our commitment to freedom and peace in that region requires us to make every effort to help resolve the conflict between

Israel and Palestine. On Wednesday, the Prime Minister of Israel presented his plan to withdraw from Gaza and some parts of the West Bank. I support that plan. It's a good opportunity. It gives the Palestinians a chance to create a reformed, just, and free government. Palestinian leadership must rise to the challenge. It gives all sides a chance to reinvigorate progress on the roadmap. I'm committed to the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

As I said Wednesday, all final status issues must still be negotiated between the parties. I look forward to the day when those discussions can begin so the Israeli occupation can be ended and a free and independent and peaceful Palestinian state can emerge.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, in a future Palestinian state, and across the greater Middle East, the best hope for lasting stability, security, and peace is the advance of human freedom. When men and women live in societies that reward their hopes and recognize their dignity, they are far less likely to dwell on resentments and turn to violence. This is not an easy task. For whole nations to construct free institutions after decades of terror and tyranny requires patience and courage and the help of friends.

Yet, this difficult work is also necessary work. In the Middle East, as elsewhere, the path to peace is the path of liberty, and all who choose that path will have the strong support of the United States and the United Kingdom. In all these efforts, the American people know that we have no more valuable friend than Prime Minister Tony Blair. As we like to say in Crawford, he's a standup kind of guy. He shows backbone and courage and strong leadership. I thank him and Cherie for coming. I thank the British people for their strength and their unyielding commitment to the cause of liberty.

Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Blair. Thank you very much, Mr. President. George and Laura, thank you very much for welcoming myself and Cherie back to the White House. The many years that—particularly most recently, since September the 11th—our two countries have been friends and allies standing side by side, and we will continue to do so.

Let me restate the historic nature of what we're trying to achieve in Iraq. It is to take a state that, under Saddam Hussein and his family, was a merciless tyranny that brutalized the country over many decades, that used chemical weapons against his own people, a state that threatened its neighbors in the wider world, that caused two wars with over a million casualties, that funded and supported terrorism, a country where, already, the remains of 300,000 innocent men, women, and children have been found in mass graves in Iraq, a state that under Saddam was without human rights, civil liberties, or the rule of law. And our task is to take this state and turn it into a democracy, stable and prosperous, a symbol of hope to its own people and throughout the whole of the Middle East.

Against us in this task are ranged every variety of reactionary forces, sympathizers of Saddam Hussein, outside terrorists, religious fanatics. We know the future that they have in mind for the people of Iraq, and we reject it utterly, as do the overwhelming majority of the Iraqi people.

It was never going to be easy, and it isn't now. I pay wholehearted tribute to the American and British troops and troops from all the different coalition countries, and to the civilians, also, from many nations. We mourn each loss of life. We salute them and their families for their bravery and their sacrifice. And our promise to them, in turn, is very clear. It is to succeed, to get the job done, to ensure their courage and their sacrifice has not been in vain. And our plan to do this is clear, and we shall see it through.

Our strategy, political and military, is as follows. First, we stand firm. We will do what it takes to win this struggle. We will not yield. We will not back down in the face of attacks either on us or on defenseless civilians. Second, we hold absolutely to the 30th of June timetable for the handover of sovereignty to the Iraqis themselves. Third, we will redouble our efforts to build the necessary capability of the Iraqis, themselves, to take increased responsibility for security and law and order. The measures for recruiting, training, and equipping Iraqi police and civil defense corps will be intensified. Fourth, we will carry forward the plan for reconstruction

and investment in Iraq so that all parts of Iraq, Sunni, Shi'a and Kurdish, know that they have a place and a future in the new Iraq that is being created. Fifth, the U.N. will have a central role, as now, in developing the program and machinery for political transition to full Iraqi democracy. And we will seek a new U.N. Security Council resolution to embody the political and security way forward.

It follows from this that the political and military strategies will reinforce each other, as they do now. The purpose of the military action is to create the security environment in which the political aims can be achieved. And of course there will be resistance. We have resistance now by assorted terrorists in Fallujah, by supporters of Muqtada Al Sadr in Najaf. We shall deal with both with the right balance of firmness in the face of terror and a clear offer to all people in Iraq, including those who might be tempted to support lawbreaking.

The new Iraq will give opportunities to all its citizens, whatever their ethnic or religious background, but it will not tolerate or compromise with those who want to wreck the future for the law-abiding majority in Iraq.

Alongside this strategy for Iraq, we will seek to broaden the agenda for international action and cooperation. The G–8 gives us the chance, under the chairmanship of the United States this year and Britain the next, to construct such an agenda, to allow us to defeat the security threat but also to confront the issues upon which the terrorists prey, to tackle the poverty, conflict, religious and ethnic strife which mar so much of the world.

In this regard, we reaffirm again the importance of a solution for the Middle East peace process. We welcome the Israeli proposal to disengage from the Gaza and parts of the West Bank. We want the Quartet to meet as soon as possible to discuss how it can support the Palestinian Authority in particular, economically, politically, and in respect of security, to respond to that offer. We reaffirm that this is part of a process to get us back into the roadmap, which we continue to believe offers the only realistic route to the two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace.

We have, therefore, an agenda for Iraq, for change and for democracy in Iraq. We have, also, an agenda to help overcome the problems in our world, the problems not just of terrorism but the problems of the breeding grounds of terrorism. And I believe that our two countries will continue to play a role as allies and friends in securing not just a decent future for the people of Iraq but a decent future for people everywhere in our world today.

Thank you.

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, thank you, sir. We will take three questions a side, and so why don't you ask one question to each of us.

You can start, Mr. Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Timetable for Planning Action in Iraq

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, did you ask Secretary Rumsfeld to draw up war plans against Iraq in November 2001, just as the military action was getting underway in Afghanistan? Why couldn't Iraq wait?

And Mr. Prime Minister——

President Bush. No, I thought—one question apiece, not one question or one question apiece.

You know, I can't remember exact dates that far back. I do know this, that at a key meeting at Camp David, the subject of Iraq—this was on September the——

Q. Fifteenth.

President Bush. Fifteenth. We had been attacked on September the 11th, obviously. On the 15th, we sat down. I sat down with my national security team to discuss the response, and the subject of Iraq came up. And I said as plainly as I possibly could, "We'll focus on Afghanistan. That's where we'll focus." I explained this to the Prime Minister as well in a subsequent meeting. That was about the 20th of September, I think, we came and talked about the response we were going to take in dealing with the attacks on our country.

So I don't remember in times of—what was being developed or not being developed. But I do know that it was Afghanistan that was on my mind. And I didn't really start focusing on Iraq until later on, particularly about the time I started going to the United

Nations with this message—to the United Nations, I said, "Let's uphold the demands of the world, finally, after decades of—after a decade of threats to Saddam. You know, 'If you don't do this, this will happen.' Why don't we finally just say something that we mean?"

And it was at that point in time, when a President steps up in front of the United Nations and you say, "Either take care of business, or we others will," you better mean it. And I meant it when I went up in front of the United Nations at that point in time.

Q. I was asking you about November.

President Bush. I can't remember. I'd have to get back to you about a specific moment. But I can tell you, in September, I said, "Let us focus on Afghanistan. Let us make sure that we do this job and do it well."

Level of Violence and the Transition in Iraq

Q. Prime Minister, the—Prime Minister, the handover of power is just, what, 80 days away, and yet the killing is going on, there is still kidnaping. Do you accept it was an error not to involve the U.N. much more early in the process? And I wonder, Mr. President, if I could ask you if that's a mistake that you're prepared to accept as well?

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, we have been involving the U.N. throughout. And actually, the work that Mr. Brahimi has done, we've both made it clear that we welcome. And I can tell you from the conversations I had with Kofi Annan last night that I think there's a common approach. Obviously, we have to discuss the details in particular with the Iraqi groups themselves as to how this political transition is to come about.

But let me just say one thing to you about the violence and the killing there. There was always going to be resistance to transition to democracy. And in particular, as the date for transition to a sovereign Iraqi Government that's going to be broad-based—as that date draws near, there's going to be violence. There's going to be violence from people who don't want an Iraqi future different from the past, and I don't think we should be surprised at this. There will be religious fanatics, outside terrorists, former Saddam people who will come together, and they will kill innocent civilians. They will try and kill coalition troops. They will kill Iraqis. They'll kill anyone who stands in their way. And the reason that they're doing this is because they don't want a democratic Iraq.

Now, what is the response of ourselves and, indeed, the whole of the world community, regardless of whether you support the war in Iraq or not? The response has got to be that we hold firm; we keep to the political transition; we keep to the timetable; and we do everything we humanly can to build up the capability of the Iraqis to take control of their own affairs, because in Iraq there will be all sorts of people—that vast majority of people out there who aren't terrorists, who don't want to kill people, who want to lead an ordinary life, raise their family, have a job, have some prosperity, have some freedom, as other people in the world do, and they will be sitting there, watching and waiting for one thing: Do we have the will and the determination to finish the job.

And what you're hearing from myself and the President of the United States is, we will stay there, and we will get the job done, because that's what we promised to do. And we will continue until it's finished.

Israeli Disengagement Plan

President Bush. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Q. Hosni Mubarak is saying the new U.S. policy on the West Bank could escalate violence. How do you respond to his concerns?

President Bush. I think this is a fantastic opportunity. The fact that Ariel Sharon said, "We're going to withdraw from territory," is an historic moment. And it creates a chance for the world to come together to help develop a Palestinian state based upon a solid foundation, a foundation where the institutions are bigger than the people, just like our respective Governments are founded.

It's a chance to provide a framework for international aid that will help a Palestinian economy grow. It's a chance for people to come together to work on measures that will enable people to live in peace—security measures. This is an historic moment, and I think people need to view it as such and seize the moment and help a Palestinian state

become a reality, a Palestinian state that can live in peace with its neighbors.

And you know, there's a lot of talk about the final status discussions. And that's all and good. The problem is, is that people, by doing so, don't pay attention to the moment. And it's a moment we've got to seize. The final status discussions will become a lot plainer—and by the way, we're not going to prejudge the final status discussions, but the answers will become a lot plainer once there is a peaceful state that's committed to fighting off terror and a state that's capable of providing hope for its people.

I think it's possible. And the Prime Minister and I have spent a lot of time on this subject. And I'm not going to put words in his mouth, but he thinks it's possible. And we look forward to working together to make it possible. But it's going to require a commitment by the Palestinian people to find leadership that is committed to peace and hope. And it's going to require a commitment by people in the neighborhood to support the emergence of a state.

This is an historic moment, and I appreciated the Prime Minister of Israel coming here to announce it. And we intend to seize the moment and to take advantage of an opportunity.

Prime Minister Blair. I think what's happening here is that despite all the reaction—some of which I think it's expected and natural, that always rebound around the world when a statement like this is made—let's just go back and see what the opportunity is here. If there is disengagement by Israel from the Gaza and from parts of the West Bank, that then gives us the opportunity—and this is where the international community has got to play its role—that gives us the opportunity to help the Palestinian Authority with the economic, the political, and the security measures they take, and they need to take, in order to get to the point where the concept of a viable Palestinian state becomes a real possibility, not something that's put in a document and talked about or discussed in resolutions or speeches but actually is a real, live possibility. And I see this not in any shape or form as pushing the roadmap to the side. On the contrary, I see it as a way back into the roadmap.

Now, I know there'll be all sorts of issues to do with the final status negotiations. And as the President said, no one is prejudging those. But you know, let's not look this particular opportunity in the eye and then turn away. It is an opportunity for people.

And what I want to say to, not just to the Palestinians and the Israelis but to the international community is, whatever the doubts and worries, get involved now, because there is a possibility when that disengagement happens, the Palestinian Authority have got to have the wherewithal in political, in economic, in security terms to start running the land, the territory that will be then under their control, and use that as the basis of getting back into a proper roadmap negotiation.

Because we—this is a—we deal with many difficult issues: Cyprus, we discussed earlier; Northern Ireland, that I'm dealing with. The one advantage that you have in this situation, which is as well to keep in mind, even at this difficult moment, is that there is now an agreement that there should be two states, an Israeli and a Palestinian state, and that Palestinian state should be viable. And I can assure you—and I believe this very strongly from the conversations I've had with the President—that if the Palestinians are willing to make that effort and the international community helps in doing so, then they will find all of us, then, ready to engage and ensure that the proper discussion and settlement of these issues takes place. We will be ready to step up and do that.

Yes, Mark, sorry.

Q. Mark Martel, BBC. Mr. Sharon says this agreement by the President has ended the dreams of Palestinians. Many Palestinians seem to agree with that as well. Why do you two not see it in that light? The Israelis see it as a victory for their side.

Prime Minister Blair. Well, I don't—I haven't come across those particular words, and I would like to see the context of that. But I don't think that this ends anyone's dream. I think what it does is give us at least the possibility of moving it forward.

What have people been asking for years? They've been asking for the Israelis to withdraw from the occupied territories. Now, this is not the final end of it. This is not a unilateral attempt to impose a settlement. But it

does at least give the Palestinians, if they're able, then, to seize this opportunity, the ability to construct in the Gaza and those parts of the West Bank that will be under their control, with the settlements removed from there. And remember—I can't remember exactly how many people it is—it's maybe 7,000 people that there are in the Gaza part of—and those settlements withdrawn.

Now, forgive me, but I've been dealing with this for almost a decade. And it's been very, very difficult ever to get a situation where an Israeli Prime Minister is prepared to say, "We're actually going to take these settlements away," and make that not conditional on something that the Palestinians are doing but say, "We're just going to do that."

Now of course, there's a whole string of things that then have to be decided. All these issues have to be negotiated. We have to get back into the roadmap and get on a proper process towards a resolution of those issues.

But if that disengagement takes place, surely the intelligent thing, not just for the Palestinians but for the international community, is to be ready to respond. And here's where the Quartet can play a part, the other partners in this process. The European Union, for example—we put money into reconstruction in the Palestinian Authority. I believe that there is a real possibility, if we can get the right political system there, of the European Union putting money in to help reconstruct the country, to help build the proper security capability.

These are—these are things, however difficult, that offer opportunities. That's all I'm saying, and I think we should seize them.

President Bush. Let me say one quick thing about this. I haven't seen the context in which he said it, either. But I can tell you what he told me. He told me he supported a Palestinian state. He thinks it's in Israel's interest that there be a Palestinian state. Obviously there's a caveat: He wants a peaceful Palestinian state, and he wants somebody who will promote peace, not violence, somebody who's willing to join with a lot of us to fight off terror.

He also recognizes that it's important that there be hope in his neighborhood. And a peaceful Palestinian state that gets help from the world is a state that can help small businesses grow, help an education system develop, help a health care system develop that provides basic services to its people. I think this is a great opportunity. And you're going to have to ask him exactly what—whether that was in context or not.

But the impression I got from having sat with the man right upstairs here in the White House was, he views this as a hopeful moment as well and made it clear that it's a part of the roadmap process and knows what I know, that as we gain confidence in a Palestinian leadership and a Palestinian state that's committed itself to peace, further progress will be made on territory. And therefore, the final status discussions—and I repeat, which are not being prejudged by the American Government, as stated clearly on Wednesday—will be easier to deal with. And that's what's important.

We'll seize the moment, is what the Prime Minister is saying.

Let's see—April [April Ryan, American Urban Radio Networks].

2004 Election/Transition in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, some of your critics are saying that it's a political ploy by you to stand firm to this June 30th deadline, especially that you don't have an Iraqi organization to transfer power over to. What do you say to that? And for—what organization would you like to see transferred power over to, both of you, if you could answer that?

President Bush. Well, I appreciate that. I guess, it's a political year; everything I'm going to say is being—they're going to say is political. What's important is that we honor our word and honor our commitments to the Iraqi people. I suspect that if you look deep into the soul of the Iraqi people, they'd be saying, "We don't know if we can trust America and Great Britain to be tough and hang in, hang in with us." And one of the things we've said is, "We'll transfer sovereignty on June the 30th," and we're going to.

If they believe that we'll cut and run—in other words, if times get tough, and we'll just say, "See you later," nobody is going to take a stand for freedom and liberty. They're afraid of getting killed or tortured or maimed. These are—I said the other night

that a year seems like a long time for Americans and people in Great Britain. But a year is not much when you're trying to shed yourself from the habits of tyranny and torture. Remember where these people came from. They came from a society where if they dared speak their mind, it's likely they'd end up in a mass grave or in a torture room. If they criticized Saddam Hussein in any way, they would be maimed or killed. And that's a hard thing to forget.

See, it's easy for us to not recognize that fear because, fortunately, our societies are such that we don't have to live with it. They did. And if they think that we will be leaving because of politics, then they won't take a risk toward freedom. We're not leaving because of politics, April. We're standing firm on our word because it's right, and it's in the long-term interests of our countries that we stand firm, because a free Iraq is an historic opportunity to change the world for the better.

There's a lot of talk about the war on terror, and can we win the war on terror. Of course we can win the war on terror in the long run. We can do a lot of things in the short term to protect ourselves, starting with staying on the offensive. But in the long term, it's the spread of freedom that will win the war on terror.

See, the great thing about our two countries is we believe in the power of free societies. And we don't say freedom is only—is consigned to one group of people or one religion. We believe freedom is universal, and free societies are peaceful societies. And freedom will be the cure for those who harbor deep resentment and hatred in their heart. And I appreciate the Prime Minister understanding that vision as well. It's a wonderful feeling to have a strong ally in believing in the power of free societies and liberty. And that's why we're going to stay the course in Iraq. And that's why when we say something in Iraq, we're going to do it, because we want there to be a free society. It's in our long-term interests. It's in the interests of our children and our grandchildren that Iraq be free.

Q. Mr. Prime Minister——

Q. Who is going to——

President Bush. Hold on for a second. That's going to be decided by Mr. Brahimi. That's the recommendation of Brahimi. He's in the process—you're watching a process unfold, and you won't have to ask that question on July the 1st.

Prime Minister Blair. That's absolutely right. And what will happen is that there will be discussions, obviously, that Mr. Brahimi is conducting. But the idea will be to have a broad-based Government, and then next year to move to a new constitution, and then, finally, to democratic elections. And that's the—so who's going to end up governing Iraq ultimately? It's going to be the Iraqi people with a proper democratic constitution.

President Bush. One final point on this. Thank you, April, for bringing it up. Transitional administrative law that had been written is a—this is an historic document. And it's a wonderful opportunity. It is for the people of Iraq to say, "Here's how civilized people must live. Here's how you protect minority rights. Here's how you protect the rights of religious people. And here's how civilized people should live if they're going to provide hope for the future."

And there doesn't seem to be much focus on that, what we call the TAL these days. And yet, it is a—it is the cornerstone for what is going to be a free and hopeful society.

Go ahead, final question.

Prime Minister Blair. Adam [Adam Boulton, Sky News].

Q. If I could just ask you about Iraq again, the fact of the matter is that weapons of mass destruction have not been found, that a link between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida has not been proved, and that a year on, troop numbers are going up, not coming down. So however determined you are to make a better Iraq, isn't the awkward fact for both of you that you misled your peoples in taking troops to war and shedding blood as a result?

Prime Minister Blair. First of all, I just remind you that when, in November of 2002, we passed the United Nations resolution calling upon Saddam to comply fully with the United Nations inspectors, we did that on the basis of an understanding that wasn't confined simply to Great Britain and America but was right across the hall of the Security Council, that Saddam Hussein was a threat.

And indeed, it would be difficult to conclude otherwise given that his was a regime that actually used chemical weapons, weapons of mass destruction against their own people.

And yes, a year on, we have faced some difficult times. We'll face difficult times again in the future. But one of the most interesting things to me is when I go and I actually talk to other leaders out in that region—and some of them have got very difficult politics over this issue, as you all know, for very obvious reasons—but I'm struck by how much more secure they feel with Saddam Hussein gone. And whatever their differences over the conflict, they know how important it is to their region and their stability and, actually, their chance of changing their own country, that Iraq does become a stable and democratic state.

And this is one of these situations where—you know, people often say to me, "Well is it—is the world safer, given all the difficulty and violence that you have in Iraq?" And I say to them, "Well, first of all, don't think that violence wasn't happening every day in Iraq under Saddam Hussein. It was." But secondly, when you take on and you deal with these issues, yes, of course, you face difficult times. You're bound to have them. But the question is, is the aim and objective you're trying to secure one that if you do secure will make the world, indeed, safer and better? And that's why—I find now, whatever the differences people have over the wisdom of the conflict—and that's a debate that will go on, and go on for many, many years, no doubt; the historians can all pour over it—but everybody should recognize the common interest today in making sure that Iraq achieves the aim that we have set out and that everybody of any sense in the international community supports, because if——

Q. [*Inaudible*]

Prime Minister Blair. No, because I believe the important thing is to make the world more secure as a result of Saddam Hussein going, as a result of that threat, then, from Saddam and his regime, the threat that they carried out in their own region. I just listed for you two wars in which there were over a million casualties, hundreds of thousands of his own people killed.

Now, this is an historic struggle, and we're at a very, very crucial moment. And I think, for many, many people in Iraq, I think what the President said just a moment ago is absolutely right. Of course they're going to be sitting there asking, "After all the decades of tyranny we've had, after all the promises that the international community gave us and, frankly, let us down on, are these people going to stay the course?"

And we are, and we want the international community to work with us in doing that. We're not setting aside the United Nations or that process at all. We're actually trying to work with the U.N. now, because everybody understands the importance of fulfilling that objective. And you just imagine an Iraq, stable and prosperous and democratic, and think of the signal that would send out. Think of the instant rebuttal of all that poisonous propaganda about America, about it all being an attack on Muslims or it being part of a war of civilization—Iraq, run by the Iraqis, the wealth of that country owned by the Iraqis, and a symbol of hope and democracy in the Middle East.

Now, for me this is a cause that any person of good will and good heart should be able to support.

President Bush. Good job, Prime Minister. Thank you, sir. Well done.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:57 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations, and Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General; and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. Prime Minister Blair referred to Muqtada Al Sadr, Iraqi Shiite cleric whose militia engaged in an uprising in Iraq in early April. A reporter referred to President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

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.

April 10

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with the National Security Council. He also had telephone conversations with Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq, and Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command, to discuss the situation in Iraq.

The President declared a major disaster in the Federated States of Micronesia and ordered Federal aid to supplement national and State recovery efforts in the area struck by Typhoon Sudal on April 8 and continuing.

April 11

In the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Fort Hood, TX, where they attended an Easter Sunday church service at the military chapel. Later, at Darnall Army Community Hospital, the President visited U.S. military personnel injured in Iraq, and he awarded Purple Hearts to several of them.

Later in the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to the Bush Ranch, where they had Easter dinner with family members.

April 12

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC, arriving in the evening.

The President announced his intention to appoint Richard R. Kasher (Chairman), Robert E. Peterson, and David Patrick Twomey as members of Presidential Emergency Board No. 237.

April 13

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Vicente Fox of Mexico to discuss the United Nations Human Rights Commission meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, and the human rights situation in Cuba and to convey his condolences for losses suffered by Mexican families during recent floods.

Later in the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, the President met with economic advisers, including Secretary of the Treasury John W. Snow, Secretary of Commerce Donald L. Evans, Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao, and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick.

The White House announced that the President will welcome President Oscar Berger of Guatemala to the White House on April 30.

April 14

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Nicanor Duarte Frutos of Paraguay to discuss counterterrorism efforts and other issues. Later, he had an intelligence briefing.

Later in the morning, the President had a videoconference with the National Security Council, including Ambassador L. Paul Bremer III, Presidential Envoy to Iraq, and Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, combatant commander, U.S. Central Command. He then met with Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld.

In the late morning, in the Residence, the President met with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel. In the afternoon, they had lunch in the Residence.

Later in the afternoon, the President joined Army Staff Sergeant Michael McNaughton, who was injured in Iraq, for an exercise run around the South Lawn jogging track.

April 15

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with Prime Minister David Oddsson of Iceland, who was visiting New York City, to welcome him to the United States and to discuss the situation in Iraq and counterterrorism efforts. Later, he had an intelligence briefing and then met with Secretary of State Colin L. Powell.

Later in the morning, the President traveled to Des Moines, IA, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Sarah Sindlinger.

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

The White House announced that the President will host Prime Minister Goran Persson of Sweden for a meeting at the White House on April 28.

The White House announced that the President will welcome Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore to the White House on May 5.

April 16

In the morning, the President had a telephone conversation with President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal to discuss the situations in Iraq and the Middle East. Later, he had an intelligence briefing and then met with the National Security Council.

In the afternoon, in the Residence, the President had lunch with Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.

Later in the afternoon, the President traveled to Camp David, MD.

The President announced his intention to nominate Thomas Fingar to be Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research.

The President announced his intention to nominate Suzanne Hale to be Ambassador to the Federated States of Micronesia.

The President announced his intention to nominate Anne W. Patterson to be U.S. Deputy Representative to the United Nations with the rank of Ambassador, U.S. Deputy Representative to the U.N. Security Council, and U.S. Representative to the sessions of the U.N. General Assembly.

The President announced his intention to nominate Constance Berry Newman to be a member of the Board of Directors of the African Development Foundation.

The President announced his intention to appoint William Brewer as a member of the National Veterans Business Development Corporation.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the Policy Committee of the White House Conference on Aging: Dorcas R. Hardy, Alejandro Aparicio, Clayton S. Fong, Gail Gibson Hunt, Scott Serota, Melvin L. Woods, Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson, Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Alphonso R. Jackson, and Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council: James M. Abroms, Ivan E. Becker, Dottie Bennett, Frank R. Berman, William Danhof, Arlene Herson, M. Ronald Krongold, Stuart P. Levine, and Aldona Wos.

The President announced the recess appointment of Eugene Hickok as Deputy Secretary of Education.

The President announced the recess appointment of Edward R. McPherson as Under Secretary of Education.

The President announced the recess appointment of Linda Morrison Combs as an Assistant Secretary of Transportation (Budget and Programs).

The President announced the recess appointment of Linda Mysliwy Conlin as a member of the Board of Directors of the Export-Import Bank of the United States.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

NOTE: No nominations were submitted to the Senate during the period covered by this issue.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released April 10

Statement by the Press Secretary on the establishment of Presidential Emergency Board No. 237

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to the Federated States of Micronesia

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 3108

Fact sheet: The August 6, 2001 PDB

Released April 13

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit by President Oscar Berger of Guatemala

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 2584

Announcement: President and Mrs. Bush Release 2003 Tax Return

Released April 15

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of Swedish Prime Minister Goran Persson

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore

Fact sheet: Millions of American Families Are Benefiting From the President's Tax Relief

Released April 16

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Acts Approved by the President

Approved April 10

H.R. 3108 / Public Law 108–218
Pension Funding Equity Act of 2004

Approved April 13

H.R. 2584 / Public Law 108–219
To provide for the conveyance to the Utrok Atoll local government of a decommissioned National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration ship, and for other purposes