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courts. They hurt the honest workers and communities of the businesses targeted by the class-action lawyers. The proper place for large interstate class actions to be tried is not in a local court but rather in a Federal court, which are designed—[*applause*]. I look forward to working with both bodies and members of both parties to get good class-action reform out of the Congress this year.

I'll also work with Congress to reform asbestos litigation. Asbestos lawsuits in southern Illinois and elsewhere have led to the bankruptcy of dozens of companies and cost tens of thousands of jobs. Many asbestos claims are filed on behalf of people who are not sick. The volume of asbestos lawsuits is beyond the capacity of our courts to handle, and it is growing. More than 100,000 new asbestos claims were filed last year alone. Congress has begun considering options to improve the current system for handling asbestos lawsuits. They need to act and get the job done. I look forward to signing an asbestos reform in 2005.

I think we're sent to Washington to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Congresses. I believe we are called to do the hard work to make our communities and quality of life a better place. And it's hard work for some in Congress to stand up to the trial lawyers. I understand that. But all we're asking for is fairness. We want our doctors treated fairly. We want the hospitals treated fairly. And most of all, we want the patients and the American people treated fairly.

And I appreciate you all giving me a chance to come by and talk about the vital issue of legal reform. I intend to go back to Washington here shortly, and when I see Members of the Congress as I work this issue, I'm going to say, "I spoke to the good folks of southern Illinois. They understand the problem, and they expect you, Members of the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives, to get the job done."

Thanks for coming by to say hello. I hope you and your families have a blessed and healthy 2005. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:13 p.m. at the Gateway Center. In his remarks, he referred to Tom Cross, minority leader, Illinois House of Representatives; and Mayor Stan Schaeffer of Collinsville, IL.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders

January 6, 2005

Class-Action Lawsuit Reform

I am very grateful that Members of the United States Senate and the House of Representatives, Members from both political parties, have come to discuss the need for the Congress and the administration to work together to get meaningful, real class-action lawsuit reform.

Class-action lawsuits have become a problem in the United States. The judicial system is not fair. It is unbalanced. It is tilted. And Members around this table understand that, and Members around this table are willing to set aside their political party to do what is right for worker and businessowner alike.

We had a very good discussion. It's a discussion that says to me that it is very possible that a good piece of legislation can move quickly this year out of both the Senate and the House, get it to conference quickly, and get it to my desk quickly, to show the American people that both parties are willing to work together to solve problems. We have a problem with class-action lawsuits. It is a problem that we all recognize, and it's a problem we intend to fix.

And I want to thank the Members for coming. I'm honored you are here, and I look forward to working with you. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:50 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Message to the Congress Transmitting an Extension of the Russia-United States Mutual Fisheries Agreement

January 6, 2005

To the Congress of the United States:

Consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*), I transmit herewith an Agreement between the Government of