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and continued resolve. Yet people across the Middle East are choosing a future of freedom and prosperity and hope. And as they take these brave steps, Americans will continue to stand with them because we know that free and democratic nations are peaceful nations. By advancing the cause of liberty in the Middle East, we will bring hope to millions and security to our own citizens. And we will lay the foundation of peace for our children and grandchildren.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 8:20 a.m. on August 26 at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on August 27. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 26 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; and senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Hurricane Katrina and the Iraqi Constitution in Crawford, Texas

August 28, 2005

This morning I spoke with FEMA Under Secretary Mike Brown and emergency management teams, not only at the Federal level but at the State level about the—Hurricane Katrina. I've also spoken to Governor Blanco of Louisiana, Governor Barbour of Mississippi, Governor Bush of Florida, and Governor Riley of Alabama. I want to thank all the folks at the Federal level and the State level and the local level who have taken this storm seriously. I appreciate the efforts of the Governors to prepare their citizenry for this upcoming storm.

Yesterday I signed a disaster declaration for the State of Louisiana, and this morning I signed a disaster declaration for the State of Mississippi. These declarations will allow Federal agencies to coordinate all disaster relief efforts with State and local officials. We will do everything in our power to help the people in the communities affected by this storm.

Hurricane Katrina is now designated a category 5 hurricane. We cannot stress enough the danger this hurricane poses to Gulf Coast communities. I urge all citizens to put their own safety and the safety of their families first by moving to safe ground. Please listen carefully to instructions provided by State and local officials.

On another matter, today Iraqi political leaders completed the process for drafting a permanent constitution. Their example is an inspiration to all who share the universal values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. The negotiators and drafters of this document braved the intimidation of terrorists, and they mourn the cowardly assassination of friends and colleagues involved in the process of drafting the constitution.

Their efforts follow the bravery of the Iraqis who voted by the millions to elect a Transitional Government in January. The example of those voters remains a humbling testament to the power of free people to shape and define their own destiny. We honor their courage and sacrifice, and we are determined to see the Iraqis fully secure their democratic gains.

The Iraqi people have once again demonstrated to the world that they are up to the historic challenges before them. The document they have produced contains far-reaching protections for fundamental human freedoms, including religion, assembly, conscience, and expression. It vests sovereignty in the people, to be expressed by secret ballot and regular elections. It declares that all Iraqis are equal before the law without regard to gender, ethnicity, and religion. This is a document of which the Iraqis and the rest of the world can be proud.

The political process now advances to another important stage for a new and free Iraq. In coming months, Iraqis will discuss and debate the draft constitution. On October the 15th, they will vote in a national referendum to decide whether to ratify the constitution and set the foundation for a permanent Iraqi Government. If the referendum succeeds, Iraqis will elect a new Government, to serve under the new constitution, on December the 15th, and that Government will take office before the end of the year.

This course is going to be difficult largely because the terrorists have chosen to wage war against a future of freedom. They are waging war against peace in Iraq. As democracy in Iraq takes root, the enemies of freedom, the terrorists, will become more desperate, more despicable, and more vicious.

Just last week, the terrorists called for the death of anyone, including women and the elderly, who supports the democratic process in Iraq. They have deliberately targeted children receiving candy from soldiers. They have targeted election workers registering Iraqis to vote. They have targeted hospital workers who are caring for the wounded. We can expect such atrocities to increase in the coming months because the enemy knows that its greatest defeat lies in the expression of free people and freely enacted laws and at the ballot box.

We will stand with the Iraqi people. It's in our interest to stand with the Iraqi people. It's in our interest to lay the foundation of peace. We'll help them confront this barbarism, and we will triumph over the terrorists' dark ideology of hatred and fear.

There have been disagreements amongst the Iraqis about this particular constitution. Of course there's disagreements. We're watching a political process unfold, a process that has encouraged debate and compromise, a constitution that was written in a society in which people recognize that—that there had to be give-and-take.

I want our folks to remember, our own Constitution was not unanimously received. Some delegates at the Philadelphia Convention in 1787 refused to sign it, and the draft was vigorously debated in every State, and the outcome was not assured until all the votes were counted.

We recognize that there's a split amongst the Sunnis, for example, in Iraq. And I suspect that when you get down to it, you'll find a Shi'a who disagrees with the constitution and Shi'as who support the constitution and perhaps some Kurds who are concerned about the constitution. In other words, we're watching a political process unfold. Some Sunnis have expressed reservations about various provisions of the constitution, and that's their right as free individuals living in a free society. There are strong beliefs among other Sunnis that this constitution is good for all Iraqis and that it adequately reflects compromises suitable to all groups.

It's important that all Iraqis now actively engage in the constitutional process by debating the merits of this important document and making an informed decision on October the 15th.

On behalf of the American people, I congratulate the people of Iraq on completing the next step in their transition from dictatorship to democracy. And I want to remind the American people, as a democracy unfolds in Iraq, not only will it help make America more secure but it will affect the broader Middle East. Democracies don't war with their neighbors. Democracies don't become safe haven for terrorists who want to destroy innocent life. We have hard work ahead of us, but we're on the—we're making good progress toward making sure this world of ours is more peaceful for generations to come.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:31 a.m. at the Bush Ranch. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; and Gov. Bob Riley of Alabama.

Remarks in a Discussion on Medicare in El Mirage, Arizona

August 29, 2005

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. As you can see, it's not going to be just me doing the talking today. We've got some of your fellow citizens here to discuss how we can make sure our senior citizens understand there's a fantastic opportunity available for them in the improved Medicare piece of legislation I signed.

Before we start talking about Medicare, I do want to thank the good folks here at this center, those who live here, those who are helping the folks who live here, for inviting us. It's not easy to have the Presidential entourage come. [*Laughter*] I understand that. But at least my entourage was spiced up by the First Lady's traveling with me today. I appreciate you coming.