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sector working in close coordination. Don Powell is going to help put together a strategy that will be, one, it's easy to understand; and two, that will have moments that we'll be able to measure whether or not we're making progress.

The GO Zone Act does a couple of other things. It increases funding for Hope Scholarships and lifetime learning credits for students attending colleges and graduate students in the—and graduate schools in the Gulf Opportunity Zone. It's going to make continuing education for workers more accessible and help support high school training that these gulf coast residents are going to need to fill the jobs which are actually going to be existing.

By the way, in a year from now, we're going to be talking about, "What are we going to do about all these jobs, and who's going to fill them?" As a matter of fact, there's a job shortage already down there. And again, I repeat to you, this provides a great opportunity to make sure that the folks in Mississippi and Louisiana who—can find work. And those are the folks we want to be first in line, by the way. If you're from New Orleans, Louisiana, we want you to be the first person to get the job. And what I'm telling you is we're going to work to make sure housing is available for you and that there's a training center or training program that will help you meet your—match your desire to work with the jobs which actually exist.

If you're from Mississippi, we want those new jobs to go to Mississippi residents, and we want to help the Mississippi community college, for example, to become a vital training center for the jobs which are going to be needed to help this important part of our country get back up on its feet.

The Senate passed a deficit reduction bill that's going to provide $2 billion to help States pay for critical medical care for those evacuees who need it. That's important. The defense appropriations bill that the Senate is now considering—and I hope passes—would help repair damaged transportation infrastructure and provide important Federal funding for New Orleans to rebuild the levees and correct any design and construction flaws of those levees. These bills are important for the future of the gulf coast.

DOD bill is really important, as the good Senator will tell you. This time of year, Americans, we give our thanks for the many blessings we have. We renew our commitment to help those who are in need. We are going to continue to work together to build a better future for the people of the gulf coast. And the bill I'm about to sign is going to make a difference. It's an important piece of legislation. It's part of our strategy to accomplish an important national goal, and that is a revitalized gulf coast and a New Orleans that is a shining example of what America can do when it puts its mind to something.

So again, thank you all for coming. Now, my honor to sign the bill.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:07 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. H.R. 4440, approved December 21, was assigned Public Law No. 109–135.

Statement on Senate Action To Extend the PATRIOT Act

December 21, 2005

I appreciate the Senate for working to keep the existing PATRIOT Act in law through next July, despite boasts last week by the Democratic leader that he had blocked the Act. No one should be allowed to block the PATRIOT Act to score political points, and I am grateful the Senate rejected that approach. The terrorists want to attack our country again and inflict even greater damage than they did on September 11, 2001. The PATRIOT Act is a vital tool for America in the war on terror. The Act has torn down the wall between law enforcement and intelligence officials to help us connect the dots and prevent attacks. The work of Congress on the PATRIOT Act is not finished. The Act will expire next summer, but the terrorist threat to America will not expire on that schedule. I look forward to continuing to work with Congress to reauthorize the PATRIOT Act.

Statement on the Senate Vote To Reduce Entitlement Spending

December 21, 2005

The Senate vote to reduce entitlement spending is a victory for taxpayers, fiscal restraint, and responsible budgeting, and it will help keep us on track to cut the deficit in half by 2009. I applaud the Republicans in the House and Senate who supported the legislation. This will be the first time in nearly a decade that Congress has reduced entitlement spending. This strong bill demonstrates our commitment to funding our Nation's priorities and ensuring that taxpayer money is spent wisely.

Remarks on Departure for Camp David, Maryland

December 22, 2005

I hope you all have a happy holiday. This has been a year of strong progress toward a freer, more peaceful world and a prosperous America. We had three sets of elections in Iraq. This is an amazing moment in the history of liberty. A new Parliament has been seated in Afghanistan. Our economy is strong and getting stronger. People are working. We've added 4.5 million new jobs since April of 2003. Productivity is up. Small businesses are flourishing. Homeownership is high. It's been a good year for the American people.

We've got a lot of work to do. Yesterday and during this past week, the Congress acted in a wise way with the taxpayers' money, fiscally responsible set of appropriations bills that were passed that funded important priorities, key priorities—to make sure our troops have what they need to do their job. The DOD bill did just that. Another key priority is to make sure the people in the gulf coast of our country get the help they need to help rebuild New Orleans and the Mississippi gulf coast. And there is a good deal of money available for those who suffered from Katrina and Rita.

It appears to me that the Congress understands we've got to keep the PATRIOT Act in place, that we're still under threat. There's still an enemy that wants to harm us, and they understand the PATRIOT Act is an important tool for those of us here in the executive branch to use to protect our fellow citizens. The Senate extended the PATRIOT Act by 6 months.

As we head into the holiday season, I do want to say to the families of those who have got a loved one deployed overseas, we stand with you, and we pray with you for the safety of your loved one. We want to send our greetings to your loved one overseas and tell him how much we appreciate you serving for the cause of freedom and peace.

Anyway, I hope you all have a great holiday. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Congressional Action Funding the Armed Forces for the War on Terror in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Elsewhere

December 22, 2005

I applaud the Congress for passing legislation to fund our troops who are fighting the war on terror in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere. This funding will help us continue to hunt down the terrorists, pursue our strategy for victory in Iraq, and make America more secure. I look forward to signing the bill into law.

Statement on Congressional Action To Reauthorize the PATRIOT Act

December 22, 2005

I appreciate the strong commitment by the majority of the House and of the Senate to reauthorize the PATRIOT Act. The terrorists are determined to strike America again and inflict even greater damage than they did on September 11, 2001. The PATRIOT Act is essential to protecting the American people against the terrorists. The Act tore down the wall between law enforcement and intelligence officials so that they can share information and work together to help prevent