

Week Ending Friday, January 6, 2006

The President's Radio Address

December 31, 2005

Good morning. Two thousand five has been a year of strong progress toward a freer, more peaceful world and a more prosperous America. This year we watched the Iraqi people defy the terrorists and suicide bombers and hold three successful elections, voting to choose the only constitutional, democratic government in the Arab world. We also saw the people of Afghanistan elect a democratic Parliament in a nation that only a few years ago was ruled by the Taliban.

These are amazing achievements in the history of liberty. As freedom and democracy take hold in a troubled region, we are making the American people safer here at home and laying the foundation of peace for future generations.

The United States has a vital interest in the success of a free Iraq, so in the year ahead, we will continue to pursue the comprehensive strategy for victory that I have discussed with you in recent weeks. This strategy has security, political, and economic elements. First, our coalition is staying on the offense, finding and clearing the enemy out of Iraqi cities, towns, and villages, transferring more control to Iraqi units, and building up the Iraqi security forces so they can increasingly lead the fight to secure their country. Second, we are helping Iraqis build the political institutions of an inclusive, unified, and lasting democracy. And third, our coalition is overcoming earlier setbacks and moving forward with a reconstruction plan to rebuild Iraq's economy and infrastructure. As we help Iraq build a peaceful and stable democracy, the United States will gain an ally in the war on terror, inspire reformers across the Middle East, and make the American people more secure.

During 2005, thanks to our tax relief, spending restraint, and the hard work of the American people, our economy remained the

envy of the world. Our economy has been growing strongly for more than 2 years, and has added nearly 4½ million jobs since May of 2003. More Americans own their homes than at any time in our Nation's history. Inflation is low. Productivity is high, and small businesses are flourishing. Real disposable income is up. Consumers are confident, and early reports suggest good retail sales this holiday season.

To keep our economy moving forward, we must continue to pursue sound policies in Washington and be wise with taxpayers' money. We made real progress this year in restraining Government spending. Last February, I submitted to Congress the most disciplined budget proposal since Ronald Reagan was President. Working with the Congress, we ended or reduced about 90 lower priority or poorly performing Government programs, cut nonsecurity discretionary spending, and kept overall discretionary spending growth below the rate of inflation. We have now cut the rate of growth in non-security discretionary spending each year I have been in office.

Before their holiday recess, both the House and the Senate also voted to cut mandatory spending by nearly \$40 billion. This will be the first reduction of entitlement spending in nearly a decade. By being responsible with the taxpayers' money, we are funding our Nation's priorities, while staying on track to cut the deficit in half by 2009.

In the new year, we must also make permanent the tax relief that has kept our economy growing. We will work to expand free and fair trade, so America's farmers, workers, and businesses can enjoy the opportunities the global economy offers. We'll build on the progress we've made with this year's energy bill, so our Nation will be less dependent on foreign sources of energy. We will continue to promote an ownership society in which

people have more control over their retirement and health care. We'll continue to improve education and job training programs, so our citizens have the skills necessary to compete and succeed in the 21st century. And we will show the compassionate heart of our Nation and provide the people of the gulf coast the help they need to rebuild after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In 2005, America grew in prosperity, advanced the cause of freedom and peace, and enhanced our security. Our duties continue in the new year, and I'm confident that our Nation will meet the challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you for listening, and happy New Year.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:52 a.m. on December 30 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on December 31. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 30 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks to Reporters Following a Visit With United States Troops and an Exchange With Reporters in San Antonio, Texas

January 1, 2006

The President. Happy New Year to you all. Thanks. I can't think of a better way to start 2006 than here at this fantastic hospital, a hospital that's full of healers and compassionate people who care deeply about our men and women in uniform. It's also full of courageous young soldiers, marines, airmen—men and women—who are serving our country and making great sacrifice. I'm just overwhelmed by the great strength of character of not only those who have been wounded but of their loved ones as well. And so, thank you all for bringing great credit to our country.

As you can probably see, I have injured myself, not here at the hospital but in combat with a cedar. I eventually won. The cedar gave me a little bit of a scratch. As a matter of fact, the Colonel asked if I needed first aid when she first saw me. I was able to avoid

any major surgical operations here, but thanks for your compassion, Colonel.

I've been thinking long and hard about 2006. My hopes, of course, are for peace around the world. I'll continue to work as hard as I can to lay that foundation for peace. And also my hope is that this country remains as prosperous as it was in 2005. We had a very strong economy, and we'll work to keep the economy as strong as it possibly can, so anybody that wants to find a job can find one.

With that, I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Toby [Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters]—or, excuse me, Deb. You are Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press], right?

NSA Wiretaps

Q. Yes, sir. Mr. President, were you aware of any resistance to the launching of the NSA program at high levels of your administration, and if so, how did that influence your decision to approve it?

The President. First of all, the NSA program is an important program in protecting America. We're at war, and as the Commander in Chief, I've got to use the resources at my disposal, within the law, to protect the American people. And that's what we're doing.

The NSA program is one that listens to a few numbers, called from the outside of the United States in, of known Al Qaida or affiliate people. In other words, the enemy is calling somebody, and we want to know who they're calling and why. And that seems to make sense to me, as the Commander in Chief, if my job is to protect the American people.

This program has been reviewed, constantly reviewed, by people throughout my administration. And it still is reviewed. It has got—not only has it been reviewed by Justice Department officials; it's been reviewed by Members of the United States Congress. It's a vital, necessary program.

Now, some say, "Well, maybe this isn't a war. Maybe this is just a law enforcement operation." I strongly disagree. We're at war with an enemy that wants to hurt us again, and the American people expect the Commander in Chief to protect them, and that's exactly what I intend to do.