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be loved themselves, "You should have equal access to Federal money, so long as you're helping to meet a Federal need." And we have a lot of need when it comes to saying to a brother or sister who's lost, "I love you. What can I do to help you?"

I've probably been going on a little too long. I hope the food's not getting cold. [*Laughter*] But I do tell you I'm proud to be here. I'm honored to stand by this good man. He's a fine, fine person and a great Member of the United States Congress who ran for a reason. And today I hope I can share some of the reasons why both he and I are proud to serve our country. I hope you can get a sense of philosophy behind why. We're not making up our minds based upon polls or focus groups. We're making up our mind based upon a philosophy and what we think is right for all the people of this country.

Please send him back to the United States Congress. He's necessary. He's important, and he's doing a fantastic job for the people of the 2d Congressional District.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:30 p.m. at Bethel College Indiana. In his remarks, he referred Sarah Chocola, wife of Representative Chris Chocola, and their two children, Caroline and Colin; Indiana Attorney General Steve Carter; Mayor Jeffrey L. Rea of Mishawaka, IN; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks to the American Legion

February 24, 2006

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. Mr. Commander, thank you for letting me come by and visit with you about the subject of how to keep the peace and protect the United States of America. I'm proud to be with my fellow Legionnaires. Always a pleasure to be in the midst of veterans who served our country. I see some people who are not quite veterans yet that are with us, members who are serving all branches of Government, and I thank you all for coming. I appreciate your interest in the direction this country must continue to lead in order to protect ourselves and promote the peace.

I want to thank Carol Van Kirk, who's the national president of the American Legion Auxiliary. Old Tom Bock is wise enough to always include the Auxiliary. He knows something about leadership. I want to thank Paul Hasz. I want to thank John Sommer, executive director. He spends quality time in the Oval Office, along with the commander. He's never shy to express his opinion, but that's what you pay him for. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank the chairman of the Senate Arms Services Committee, Senator John Warner. Senator, it means a lot to me and it means a lot to the folks here that you take time to come here to be with them. And I'm honored you're here. Thanks for coming.

The American Legion is one of America's great organizations. From your founding after World War I to today's war on terror, Legionnaires have fought for our freedom, and you fought for the brave veterans who defended our freedom as well. You served our country in uniform, and you serve our country in civilian life. The Legion was founded, in the words of your constitution, "to build a sense of individual obligation to the community, state, and nation." And when Hurricane Katrina struck our Nation's gulf coast, Legion posts all across America swung into action to help neighbors in need.

Take, for example, Post 338 in Bradner, Ohio. These good folks helped arrange medical transportation to reunite a sick child with his family, after the family was forced apart because of the storm. Or Post 27 in DeRidder, Louisiana, which turned its bingo hall into an emergency shelter for 41 kidney dialysis patients and their caregivers and their loved ones.

I think it's very interesting what the post commander, Retired Navy Master Chief Bill Loftin, said—by the way, he said it when he was cooking hot meals and helped care for disabled evacuees. He put it this way: "This is for human life. That's what the Legion is all about." In times of crisis, our citizens know Legionnaires always come through, and I appreciate you.

Members of the American Legion are showing the heart of the Legion every single day, not just when catastrophe hits. Across America, Legionnaires and members of the

Ladies Auxiliary volunteer in veterans hospitals, sponsor Scout troops and youth baseball, collect scholarship money for deserving students, including a special fund that the Legion established for the children of troops who've been killed in the war on terror. And I thank you for that as well.

Our Nation is grateful for your service on and off the battlefield. As you serve your fellow Americans in need, you're also strongly supporting the American flag. It was a Legion that helped draft our Nation's first flag code back in 1923. And Legionnaires have been working ever since to ensure the flag is cherished and protected. I appreciate your leadership of the Citizens Flag Alliance, and like you, I support a constitutional amendment to protect the American flag.

As veterans, you have placed the Nation's security before your own lives, and that sacrifice creates a debt that our country can never fully repay. Yet there are things Government can do, such as strongly support our veterans, and that's precisely what my administration is doing. The time when we're holding down discretionary spending, my 2007 budget—with my 2007 budget, my administration will have increased funding for our veterans by $35 billion since I took office, which is an increase of 75 percent.

We have made health care a top priority for my administration. With my 2007 budget, we'll increase VA's medical care budget by 69 percent since 2001. Our increased funding has given almost a million more veterans access to the VA medical care system. Since January 2002, disability claims are being processed 63 days faster than they were when I took office.

In the last 4 years, we've committed almost $3 billion to modernize and expanding VA facilities so that more veterans can get care closer to home. We're working to ensure that veterans with the greatest needs—those with service disabilities and lower incomes and special needs—are given priority. We're making sure that our men and women returning from combat are the first in line for treatment.

We're also getting results for veterans beyond the health care system. For more than a century, Federal law prohibited disabled veterans from receiving both their military retired pay and their VA disability compensation. Combat-injured and severely disabled veterans deserve better. I'm the first President in more than 100 years to sign concurrent receipt legislation. And I thank the Legion for working on these issues.

Our Nation's debt extends not just to the veterans who served but also to the families who stood by them in war. I signed into law the Veterans Benefits Act, authorizing $1 billion in new and expanded benefits for disabled veterans, surviving spouses, and their children. The families of our veterans have served our country; our Nation will honor their service by standing with them in their time of need.

As veterans you know what it means to leave your family, put on the uniform, and head off to war. And today in Afghanistan and Iraq and other fronts in this war on terror, a new generation of servicemen and women is carrying on your legacy of selfless sacrifice and courage under fire. As they fight dangerous enemies in distant lands, I know that you share America's pride in them, and I thank all of you for your strong support of our troops in harm's way. Their service is needed in these dangerous times.

We remain a nation at war. The war reached our shores on September the 11th, 2001, when our Nation awoke to a sudden attack. Like generations before us, we have accepted new responsibilities, and we will confront these dangers with firm resolve.

Our most important duty is to defend the American people, and so we're taking the fight to those who attacked us. We're taking the fight to those who share their murderous vision for future attacks. We will take this fight to the enemy without wavering, and we will prevail.

The enemy we face is brutal and determined. The terrorists have an ideology; they share a hateful vision that rejects tolerance and crushes all dissent. They seek a world where women are oppressed, where children are indoctrinated, and those who reject their ideology of violence and extremism are threatened and often murdered.

The terrorists have aims. They seek to impose their heartless ideology of totalitarian control throughout the Middle East. They seek to arm themselves with weapons of mass

murder. Their stated goal is to overthrow moderate governments, take control of countries, and then use them as safe havens to launch attacks against Americans and other free nations. To achieve their aims, the terrorists have turned to the weapon of fear. They don't have the military strength to beat us. They can't beat us on the battlefield. They just cannot defeat the United States military. And so they're trying to break our will with stunning acts of violence. The terrorists do not understand America. They're not going to shake our will. We will stay in the hunt. We will never give in, and we will prevail.

After the attacks of September the 11th, we have set forth a new strategy to do our duty to protect the American people. First, we're on the offensive, and we'll stay on the offensive, recognizing that we must defeat the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home.

Secondly, I've set a clear doctrine: America makes no distinction between the terrorists and the countries that harbor them. If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorists, and you're an enemy of the United States of America.

Thirdly, one of the clear lessons of September the 11th is that the United States of America must confront threats before they fully materialize. After September the 11th, I looked at the world and saw a clear threat in Saddam Hussein. Saddam Hussein was an enemy of the United States. He was firing at American military pilots patrolling the no-fly zones. He was a state sponsor of terror. He was in open defiance of more than a dozen United Nations resolutions. He had invaded his neighbors. He had brutalized his people. He had a history of using and producing weapons of mass destruction. Saddam defied the will of the world. And because we acted to remove this threat, Saddam Hussein is in prison, he's on trial for his crimes, and the world is better for it.

Fourthly, we're advancing our security at home by advancing the cause of freedom across the world because, in the long run, the only way to defeat the terrorists is to defeat their dark vision of hatred and fear by offering the hopeful alternative of human freedom. That's what I want to talk to you about today—our forward strategy for freedom. I'll discuss why the advance of freedom is vital to our security and the peace of the world and how our efforts to spread liberty and democracy throughout the broader Middle East are progressing. I'm going to discuss with you our work to help the world's newest democracies build institutions of liberty that are the foundations for lasting peace. Our freedom agenda is based on a clear premise: The security of our Nation depends on the advance of liberty in other nations.

On September the 11th, 2001, we saw that problems originating in an oppressive state 7,000 miles away could bring murder and destruction to our country. We saw that dictatorships shelter terrorists, and feed resentment and radicalism, and threaten the security of free nations. We know throughout history that democracies can replace resentment with hope, and respect the rights of their citizens and our neighbors, and join together to fight in this global war against terror.

History has shown that free nations are peaceful nations. Think about all the bloodshed on the continent of Europe the past 100 years. In World War I and in World War II, there were bloody battles. Thousands of Americans went to Europe to fight in those wars and never came home. Democracy took hold in Europe, and today, Europe is whole, free, and at peace.

Think about the example of the Far East. You know, my dad, like many of your relatives, went off to fight the Japanese as an 18-year-old fighter pilot; 60 years later, his son is working with the Prime Minister of Japan to keep the peace. And what took place between war and friendship was the development of a Japanese-style democracy. As we march into the future, America must be confident in the capacity of democracies to yield the peace we all want.

We're committed to an historic long-term goal: To secure the peace of the world, we seek the end of tyranny in our world. Far from being a hopeless dream, the advance of freedom is the great story of our time. Just 25 years ago, at the start of the 1980s, there were only 45 democracies on the face of the Earth. Today, there are 122. And in the past 4 years alone, more than 110 million

human beings have joined the ranks of the free.

In our time, we've witnessed revolutions of Rose and Orange and Purple and Tulip and Cedar, and these are just only the beginnings. Across the world freedom is on the march, and we will not rest until the promise of freedom reaches people everywhere across the globe. It's in our national interest. It's important that we understand the capacity of freedom to yield the peace.

In the march of freedom, some of the most important progress is taking place in a region that has known—has not known the blessings of liberty, and that's the broader Middle East. Since September the 11th, 2001, the nation of Afghanistan has gone from the terror of the Taliban to a democratic Constitution, to successful Presidential elections, to the seating of a democratically elected Parliament.

In less than 3 years, the nation of Iraq has gone from living under the boot of a brutal tyrant to liberation, to sovereignty, to free elections, to a constitutional referendum, and to elections for a fully constitutional government.

By any standard or precedent of history, these two countries have made incredible progress on the road to a free society. America is inspired by Afghan and Iraqi determination to live in freedom.

Freedom's progress in Afghanistan and Iraq is inspiring millions around the world to demand their liberty as well. In Lebanon, in Kyrgyzstan, voters have gone to the polls to choose their leaders in free elections. In other nations across the broader Middle East, hope is stirring at the prospect of change, and change is going to come. In that region that has known decades of tyranny and oppression, we're seeing the rise of a new generation whose hearts burn for freedom, and they will have freedom.

As freedom spreads to new parts of the world, we're seeing something else as well, the uncertainty that often follows democratic change. Free elections are exhilarating events. Yet history teaches us that the path to a free society is long and not always smooth. I've seen that in our own history. In the years following the American Revolution, there were riots and uprisings and even a planned coup. In 1783, Congress was chased from Philadelphia by angry veterans demanding back pay, and Congress stayed on the run for 6 months. [*Laughter*] It was then that Congress learned, don't mess with America's veterans.

It's important to remember that our first effort at a governing charter, the Articles of Confederation, failed, and it took over a decade after independence before we adopted our Constitution and inaugurated George Washington as our first President. Other countries have had similar experiences. After the collapse of communism in Eastern and Central Europe, nations like Slovakia and Romania and Ukraine struggled for many years to overcome the legacy of oppression before freedom finally took root.

No nation in history has made the transition to a free society without setbacks and false starts. Free elections are an important step on the road to a free society, but they're the first step. What separates nations that succeed from those that falter is their progress in establishing a civil society based on free institutions. So, as we work for democratic change across the broader Middle East, we're also working to help new democracies establish the institutions that are the foundations of lasting free societies.

Our efforts in the broader Middle East have been guided by a clear principle. Democracy takes different forms in different cultures. Yet all cultures, in order to be successful, have certain common truths, universal truths—rule of law, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, a free economy, freedom of women, and the freedom to worship. Societies that lay these foundations not only survive but they thrive. Societies that don't lay these foundations risk backsliding into tyranny.

This principle has guided our efforts in Iraq. When our coalition arrived in Iraq, we found a nation where almost none of these basic foundations existed. Decades of brutal rule by Saddam Hussein had destroyed the fabric of Iraqi civil society. Under Saddam, Iraq was a country where dissent was crushed, a centralized economy enriched a dictator instead of the people, secret courts meted out repression instead of justice, and Iraqis were brutally oppressed by Saddam's

security forces. And when Saddam Hussein's regime fled Baghdad, they left behind a country with few civic institutions in place to hold Iraqi society together.

So our coalition has worked to help the Iraqi people rebuild its civil society and the free institutions that sustain a democracy. And it has been very difficult work. Today, Iraq, though, does have a thriving free press, with hundreds of independent newspapers and magazines and talk radio shows where Iraqis openly debate the future course of their country. In spite of the difficulties, Iraq does have a emerging free market with an independent central bank, and thousands of small businesses operating across the country.

Iraq is building an independent judiciary that is replacing the rule of a tyrant with the rule of law, and which is now holding Iraq's former dictator to account for his crimes against the Iraqi people. Iraqis have adopted one of the most progressive democratic constitutions in the Arab world with protections for minority rights and women's rights. Iraqis now enjoy freedom of association, as we saw in the December elections, when parties and coalitions openly campaigned for the vote of the Iraqi people.

We're carrying out our clear strategy of victory in Iraq. On the political side, we're helping Iraqis build a strong democracy so old resentments will be eased and the insurgency marginalized. On the economic side, we're continuing reconstruction efforts and helping Iraqis build a modern economy so all Iraqi citizens can experience the benefits of freedom.

And on the security side, we're striking terrorist targets and, at the same time, training Iraqis which are becoming increasingly capable of carrying the fight to the enemy. Our strategy in Iraq is, as the Iraqis stand up, we'll stand down. Troop levels on the ground will be decided by commanders on the ground—not by politicians in Washington, DC.

In all aspects of our strategy, we've learned from experiences. We've learned from the good advice of people like Chairman Warner. We're fixing what hadn't worked. We'll continue to make changes as necessary to complete the mission, to meet the objective, and that is a country which can sustain itself, defend itself, protect itself, and serve as a strong ally in the war on terror.

For every terrorist working to stop freedom in Iraq, there are many more Iraqis and Americans and troops from around the world working to defeat them. There's still a lot of work to be done. The enemies of a free Iraq are working to stop Iraq's democratic progress. Democracy scares them. They understand a democratic Iraq will be a major defeat in their totalitarian aims.

They're going to continue their campaign of violence and destruction. We saw their brutality again this week when terrorists bombed the Golden Mosque in Samarra. That mosque is one of the holiest sites in Shi'a Islam. This senseless attack is an affront to people of faith throughout the world. The United States strongly condemns this cowardly act of terror and the subsequent attacks on other mosques and holy sites in Iraq. We'll do everything in our power to help the Iraqi Government identify and bring to justice those responsible for the terrorist acts.

This is a moment of choosing for the Iraqi people. This morning I talked to our Ambassador in Iraq, Zal Khalilzad, and General Casey. Zal is actively engaged with leaders of all political factions to ensure a common message of restraint and unity. He reports to me that the leaders are committed to stopping civil strife. The Government is taking concrete steps to determine how the attack happened and the necessary actions to help move the political process forward. The Ambassador reports many religious leaders are committed to a unified Iraq, a peaceful Iraq. The response by the Grand Ayatollah Sistani and many other leaders has been constructive and very important, and we appreciate their leadership. It's also been a test for the Iraqi security forces. General Casey reports that they're doing a fine job of enforcing curfew and working to restore order and calm.

We can expect the days—coming days will be intense. Iraq remains a serious situation. But I'm optimistic, because the Iraqi people have spoken, and the Iraqi people made their intentions clear. In December, more than 11 million Iraqis sent a clear message to the world and to the terrorists: They want their freedom. They want their country to be a

democracy. Each of these elections that took place last year saw larger and broader participation than the one that came before. And with the results from the December elections in, the Iraqi leaders are now working to form a new Government under a new Constitution with different factions competing for position and jockeying for power.

Listen, the way ahead is going to require some patience as this process unfolds. The Iraqi Constitution requires two-thirds of the Parliament to form a government, which makes it harder to get agreement, but it helps ensure that all groups have a say in who governs them. The days ahead in Iraq are going to be difficult and exhausting. We're likely to see a lot of political bargaining. That doesn't happen under dictatorships. They seem orderly, particularly when one man makes all the decisions, and there is no need for negotiation or compromise.

In democracies, different party advance competing agendas, and they seek their share of power. And yet they reach accommodation and respond to the will of the people. And Iraqis are doing all this for the first time in the midst of violence and terrorist attacks. Yet out of negotiations now taking place in Iraq, a free government will emerge that will represent the will of the Iraqi people, instead of that of a cruel dictator, and that will help us keep the peace.

We're encouraging Iraqi leaders to reach out across political, religious, and sectarian lines and form a Government that gives a voice to all Iraqis. And when a new Iraqi Government assumes office, Iraq's new leaders will face tough decisions on issues such as security and reconstruction and economic reform. This Government will need to provide effective leadership and earn the confidence of the Iraqi people by showing it can protect them. The Government will also need to put a stop to human rights abuses by security officers. By building free institutions and an inclusive society that provides minority rights, Iraqi leaders will bring the nation together, and this will help to defeat the terrorists and the Saddamists who are fighting Iraq's democratic progress.

Some critics have pointed out that the free elections in the Middle East have put political power in the hands of Islamics and extremists, in the case of the Palestinian elections, a notorious—notorious terrorist organization. Critics argue that our policies of promoting democracy are backfiring and destabilizing the region. I strongly disagree. First, their argument rests on the false assumption that the Middle East was a bastion of stability before the United States came in and disturbed the status quo by promoting democracy.

It was the status quo of the Middle East that led to the bombing of our embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. It was the status quo in the Middle East that led to the attack of the U.S.S. *Cole* that killed 17 American sailors. It was the status quo in the Middle East that produced 19 hijackers and took planes and crashed them into the Pentagon and the World Trade Towers, and killed nearly 3,000 innocent people on September the 11th, 2001. The status quo in the Middle East was dangerous and unacceptable, and our security demanded that we change it.

Secondly, the idea that lasting stability can be achieved by denying people a voice in the future control of their destiny is wrong. It is, in large part, because people in the Middle East have been denied legitimate means to express dissent that radical extremism has flourished. And it's only by giving people in the Middle East the freedom to express their opinions and choose their leaders that we will be able to defeat radical extremism. As liberty spreads in the broader Middle East, freedom will replace despair and hope. And over time, the terrorist's temptation will fall away.

Third, free societies do not take root overnight, especially in countries that have suffered from decades of tyranny and repression. It should come as no surprise that after 60 years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East, civil society in that region is not strong and those with the most extreme views are the most organized.

It will take time for the people of this region to build political parties and movements that are moderate in their views and capable of competing in a free democratic system. Yet free elections cannot wait for perfect conditions. Free elections are instruments of change. By giving people an opportunity to

organize, express their views, and change the existing order, elections strengthen the forces of freedom and encourage citizens to take control of their own destiny.

Finally, as democracy takes root, the responsibilities of governing will have a moderating influence on those who assume power in free elections. It's easier to be a martyr than a mayor or a cabinet minister. When you're responsible for building roads and bridges and power stations and educating people and providing help, you're less likely to blow up health clinics and schools and bridges.

In democracies, elected leaders must deliver real change in people's lives, or the voters will boot them out at the next election time. This is a lesson that the leaders of Hamas will now have to learn, as they take power after their election victory in the Palestinian Territories. Hamas campaigned on a platform of fighting corruption and improving social services, and that is how a Hamas government will be judged by the Palestinian people. The leaders of Hamas have a choice to make. If they want the help of America and the international community to build a prosperous, independent Palestinian state, they must recognize Israel, disarm, reject terrorism, and work for lasting peace. The international community must continue to make clear to Hamas that democratically elected leaders cannot have one foot in the camp of democracy and one foot in the camp of terror. The world is waiting to see what choice Hamas makes.

The international community is also speaking with one voice to the radical regime in Tehran. Iran is a nation held hostage by a small clerical elite that is isolating and repressing its people and denying them basic liberties and human rights. The Iranian regime sponsors terrorists and is actively working to expand its influence in the region. The Iranian regime has advocated the destruction of our ally Israel. And the Iranian regime is defying the world with its ambitions for nuclear weapons.

America will continue to rally the world to confront these threats, and Iran's aggressive behavior and pursuit of nuclear weapons is increasing its international isolation. When Iran's case was brought before the IAEA earlier this month, 27 nations voted against Iran, including Russia and China and India and Brazil and Sri Lanka and Egypt and Yemen. The only nations to support Iran were Syria, Cuba, and Venezuela. Now Iran's case will be taken up to the U.N. Security Council. The free world is sending the regime in Tehran a clear message: We're not going to allow Iran to have nuclear weapons.

The world's free nations are also worried because the Iranian regime is not transparent. You see, a nontransparent society that is the world's premier state sponsor of terror cannot be allowed to possess the world's most dangerous weapons. So, as we confront Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions, we're also reaching out to the Iranian people to support their desire to be free—to build a free, democratic, and transparent society.

To support the Iranian people's efforts to win their own freedom, my administration is requesting $75 million in emergency funds to support democracy in Iran. This is more than a fourfold increase over current levels of funding. These new funds will allow us to expand radio and television broadcasts into Iran. They will support reformers and dissidents and human rights activists and civil society organizers in Iran, so Iranians can organize and challenge the repressive policies of the clerical regime. They will support student exchanges, so we can build bridges of understanding between our people and expose more Iranians to life in a free society.

By supporting democratic change in Iran, we will hasten the day when the people of Iran can determine their own future and be free to choose their own leaders. Freedom in the Middle East requires freedom for the Iranian people, and America looks forward to the day when our Nation can be the closest of friends with a free and democratic Iran.

Freedom is on the march in the broader Middle East. The hope of liberty now reaches from Kabul to Baghdad to Beirut and beyond. Slowly but surely, we're helping to transform the broader Middle East from an arc of instability into an arc of freedom. And as freedom reaches more people in this vital region, we'll have new allies in the war on terror and new partners in the cause of moderation in the Muslim world and in the cause of peace.

Bringing greater freedom to nations in the Middle East is the work of generations, and the advance of liberty still faces determined enemies. The terrorists know the stakes in the struggle. They know that as more people in the region embrace freedom, they will lose their safe havens, lose their recruits, and lose the sources of funding they need to advance their hateful ideology. And so they'll continue to fight freedom's progress with all the murderous hatred they can muster. They will continue to create images of violence and suffering for the cameras. The terrorists know that the only way they can defeat us is to break our will and force our retreat. And that's not going to happen so long as I'm the President of the United States.

We will stay on the offense. We will continue to hunt down the terrorists wherever they hide. We'll continue to stand with the people of the Middle East as they step forward to claim their freedom. We can be confident in our cause because we have seen freedom conquer tyranny and secure the peace before. We've seen freedom arrive on waves of unstoppable progress to nations in Latin America and Asia and Africa and Eastern Europe. And now the hope of freedom is stirring in the Middle East, and no one should bet against it.

We can also have confidence in our cause—we have the greatest force for freedom in the history of the world on our side, the men and women of the United States Armed Forces. They are serving with courage and distinction on many fronts in the war on terror. And I know America's veterans feel a special bond with them as they defend freedom in foreign lands.

In this war, we've lost some really good men and women who left our shores to defend liberty and did not live to make the journey home. Others have returned from war with wounds the best medicine cannot heal. As veterans, you've lost friends and comrades in the field of battle, and you understand the sadness that has come to some of our Nation's military families. We pray for the families of the fallen, and we honor the memory of all who have given their lives in freedom's cause. And we will honor that memory by defeating the terrorists and spreading liberty and laying the foundation of peace for generations to come.

I appreciate the Legion's support for our troops in the fight. I appreciate the example you have set for those who wear the uniform today.

Before Veterans Day a few years ago, a group of soldiers serving in Iraq sent a letter to the American Legion Headquarters here in Washington. They wrote, "Veterans of past wars will forever be in our hearts as American heroes. Their sacrifices give us courage, and their devotion reminds us of what we are fighting for." Our men and women on the frontlines are taking inspiration from the valor and courage that you've shown on the field of battle. When they face dark moments in the thick of the fight, they remember that you faced enemies as brutal and determined as those who threaten America today, and they remember how you prevailed. And now they're picking up your mantle and carrying on your fight. And like our veterans, they're bringing security to our citizens and freedom to the world.

Thank you for your idealism. I thank you for your dedication to God and country. May God bless our veterans. May God bless our troops in uniform, and may God continue to bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. at the Capital Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Tom Bock, national commander, American Legion; Paul Hasz, commander, American Legion, District of Columbia; John Sommer, executive director, American Legion; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; and Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

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.