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Gov. Barbour. The best pair of United States Senators in the country.

The President. ——and Members of the House. And so I want to congratulate you and your team for putting together a good plan. Our job and our purpose is to help people like the Akins rebuild. And we want this part of the country rising up from the devastation. You know, people really didn't lose their spirit down here. But our job is to make sure that that spirit is able to kind of recapture the hope and optimism of the people and let that spirit flourish.

And I want to thank you for being a good leader. I appreciate you all having us. Listen, thanks. After all that work I've done, I'm thirsty. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Jerry Akins. Yes, sir. We have some lemonade, and we have some refreshments.

The President. You do? That's good. The other thing that's interesting is that we've got the Allens here from the Allen Brothers Construction Company; these are local folks——

Gov. Barbour. The Martins. [*Laughter*]

The President. The Martins. As I said, the Martins. You probably thought I said, the Allens. [*Laughter*] I said, the Martins. [*Laughter*]

You know, one of the interesting things is that there is going to be a lot of work, and here are the entrepreneurs with their sons helping to build this man's house. It's neat to be with them. Small businesses, if they seize the opportunity, are going to flourish. And that's what we want. These small construction companies are going to have work to do.

The other thing about the Martins, one of the boys won the Purple Heart in Iraq. There he is right there. It's my honor to congratulate him for serving the country. Thank you. At any rate——

The First Lady. Now we're going to present Jerry and Elaine a flag for your new house.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. at a new home construction site.

Statement on a Proposed United States-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement

March 8, 2006

The United States and Malaysia share strong trade and investment ties and a commitment to generating prosperity through openness, democracy, and freedom. Today we seek to further strengthen the ties between our two countries by launching negotiations on a comprehensive U.S.-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement.

Once completed, a Free Trade Agreement with Malaysia will generate significant commercial, economic, political, and strategic benefits to both countries. It will improve our ties with the Southeast Asia region and strengthen our engagement in Asia. Malaysia is our tenth-largest trading partner, and the United States is Malaysia's second-largest source of imports. A U.S.-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement will advance our commitment to opening markets around the world and expanding opportunities for America's farmers, ranchers, workers, and businesses.

Remarks Following a Meeting on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

March 9, 2006

We just had a very interesting dialog here. I want to thank members of the faith community, the community-based action community, the corporate community, the foundation community for joining in a dialog about how we can continue to foster the good works of millions of our fellow citizens who deeply care about the future of our country and the plight of their fellow citizen.

One of the things that always strengthens my belief in our future is my understanding of how many acts of kindness take place on a daily basis in the United States—and it doesn't require any government edict or government law. People really care about the future of our country; millions of our citizens weep when they know somebody hurts. But nevertheless, there still needs to be focused efforts on encouraging more giving of money and time.

So I want to thank you all very much for joining us. Appreciate your being social entrepreneurs. I thank you for really strengthening the heart of the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:49 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel.

Remarks at the White House National Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

March 9, 2006

Thanks for coming. Appreciate you being here. Thanks for the warm welcome. This is the second White House National Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and I appreciate your attendance. I take this conference very seriously, and I'm glad you do as well.

The last conference was in June of 2004. Some of you were probably wondering whether I'd be back for this conference. [*Laughter*] For those of you who did think I was going to be back, it was just as matter of faith. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you being here. It's good to see some old faces—on some young people—and some new faces.

I want to thank my Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, for introducing me. I appreciate Secretary Elaine Chao, the Department of Labor; Secretary Jim Nicholson. It's a good sign when Cabinet members come. It shows a commitment beyond just the President.

I appreciate my friend Jim Towey. I don't know if you know Towey. There he is. His job has been to make sure that the Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative becomes an integral part of the Government and that the White House effectively reaches out to people to assure them that if they participate in the faith-based initiative, they won't have to lose their faith. It's hard to be a faith-based program if you can't practice your faith, no matter what your faith may be. And I'm proud of the work that Towey has done.

Every time I talk about Towey, I always bring up the same old, tired line about him, but I might as well try it one more time. So he was Mother Teresa's lawyer. And I always wonder about a society where Mother Teresa actually needed a lawyer, you know? [*Laughter*] But she—they picked a good one in Towey.

I want to thank Acting Administrator Fred Schieck of the USAID. He's here because USAID must continue to reach out to faith-based programs in order to make sure that we fulfill missions around the world in a compassionate way. Stephen Goldsmith, who is the Chairman of the Corporation for National and Community Service, is with us. Steve, thanks for being here.

Congressman Tom Osborne—where is the Congressman? He's somewhere here. Anyway, I appreciate you coming, Congressman. Dr. Jim Billington, who is the head of the Library of Congress—Dr. Billington, thank you for coming. Leaders in the armies of compassion—those would be your sergeants, your lieutenants, and a few generals—thank you all for joining. And I appreciate members of the corporate community who have joined us, and foundation America, that has joined us as well. This is an important conference.

We meet at a time of great hope for the country. In my State of the Union—I stated this, and I believe it firmly—that America is witnessing a quiet transformation, a revolution of conscience, in which a rising generation is finding that a life of personal responsibility is a life of fulfillment. Part of being personally responsible in America is to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. And for those of you who are finding those who have heard the call to help interface with those in need, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You represent the true strength of the United States of America.

Statistics matter, and you'll hear me talk about some of the results of the faith-based initiative. It's hard to be a results-oriented society unless you actually focus on results. I'd like to share some results with you to boost my belief that there is a quiet transformation taking place. Violent crime rates have fallen to their lowest level since the 1970s. Welfare cases have dropped by more than half. Drug use amongst youth is down 19 percent since 2001. There are fewer abortions in America than at any point in the last three decades. The number of children born