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[*Secretary-designate Kempthorne made brief remarks.*]

The President. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:29 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to John Hughes, husband of Secretary of the Interior Gale A. Norton. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary-designate Kempthorne.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Supplemental Funding Legislation

March 16, 2006

I applaud the House for its quick passage of legislation to provide vital resources for two of our Nation's top priorities. This bill will give our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan tools they need to prevail in the war on terror. The legislation also provides for additional resources for the people of the gulf coast as they continue the work of rebuilding their lives and communities. I urge the Senate to act promptly to pass legislation providing for these critical funds.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting a Report on Activities in Belarus

March 16, 2006

Dear Mr. Chairman: (Dear Representative:) (Dear Senator:)

Consistent with the Belarus Democracy Act of 2004 (Public Law 108–347), I hereby transmit a report prepared by my Administration on the Belarusian sale or delivery of weapons and weapons-related technologies and on the personal assets and wealth of the senior Belarusian leadership.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Henry J. Hyde, chairman, and Tom Lantos, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and Richard G. Lugar, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations.

Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on the National Security Strategy of the United States

March 16, 2006

To the Congress of the United States:

Consistent with section 108 of the National Security Act of 1947, as amended (50 U.S.C. 404a), I am transmitting a report prepared by my Administration on the National Security Strategy of the United States.

George W. Bush

The White House,
March 16, 2006.

Remarks at a National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner

March 16, 2006

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you all for coming. Thank you for the warm welcome. Mr. Speaker, I can't tell you what a joy it is to work with you. America is very fortunate to have Denny Hastert as the Speaker of the House of Representatives. And I want to thank you all for coming tonight to make sure that he remains the Speaker of the House of Representatives.

We're here to not only thank you but to remind you and our fellow citizens, we've got a lot of work to do to lay the foundations for peace, and we've got a lot of work to do to make sure this country remains a prosperous country so that every single citizen can realize the great promise of America.

I bring greetings from the First Lady—that would be Laura. She sends her best regards to the Speaker and the leadership of the House of Representatives. She sends her best regards to you. I'm a lucky guy that she said yes when I asked her to marry me. She is a fabulous woman, a great mom, and she's doing a wonderful job as our Nation's First Lady.

I also bring greetings from the Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney. You know, mine is an interesting job. I get to make a lot of decisions, and I have to rely on people to give me good, sound, steady advice. And Vice President Dick Cheney

gives me good, sound, steady advice. The country is lucky to have him as the Vice President of the United States.

I want to thank my friend Tom Reynolds, Congressman Tom Reynolds from New York, for being the chairman of the NRCC. I thank Buck—and Patricia—for being such a fine chairman and supporting person for this event. This takes a lot of time and a lot of effort to put together a significant event like this. And Buck, I know you worked hard, and I want to thank you and the entire team of people for making this such a successful event.

I welcome the House Majority Leader, John Boehner from Ohio. Thank you, John. The House Majority Whip, Roy Blunt from Missouri; I appreciate you being here, Roy. I thank all the leadership team for the House of Representatives who are here tonight. I want to thank all the Members of Congress. Thanks for coming. But most importantly, I thank our distinguished guests.

We've got a lot of work to do. This Nation is a nation at war, and I'm proud to work with Members of the United States Congress who understand that. After September the 11th, I vowed to our country that we would remain firm in defeating an enemy that would try to hurt us again. And I appreciate the strong allies in the House of Representatives who understand the stakes in the world in which we live.

Ours is a nation which is committed to making sure we defeat the terrorists overseas so we do not have to face them here at home. We understand that if somebody harbors a terrorist, feeds a terrorist, houses a terrorist, they're equally as guilty as the terrorist, and they will be held to account. You know, a President, when he says something, he better mean it, and when I told the Taliban, "Cough up Al Qaida or we will hold you—we will bring you to justice," I meant what I said. Thanks to the United States military, Afghanistan is now free, and America is better off for it.

I know the Members here share the great joy I have in knowing that we liberated 25 million people from the clutches of one of the most barbaric regimes in the history of man. Thanks to defending our Nation, thanks to upholding the doctrine that says if you harbor a terrorist—today, young girls go to school in Afghanistan, women have a chance to succeed. Afghanistan is free, and the world is better off for it.

I appreciate working with Members of the United States Congress who understand that one of the lessons of September the 11th is when this Nation sees a threat, we must take it seriously, before it materializes. I saw a threat in Saddam Hussein. Members of the United States Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, saw a threat. Members of the United Nations Security Council saw a threat. By removing Saddam Hussein from power, America is safer and the world is better off.

We have a strategy for victory in Iraq. Part of that victory means that we will stand by the Iraqi people as a democracy unfolds. I hope you felt the joy in your heart that I felt when millions of Iraqis—75 percent of voting-age population—defied the terrorists, defied the car bombers, surprised the world, and said loud and clear, "We want to be free."

We've got a comprehensive strategy to help that country rebuild its economy, and we've got a strategy to train Iraqis so they can defend their freedom. We fight a terrorist, an enemy that has got only one weapon. They can't beat us on the battlefield, but they have the capacity and the willingness to kill innocent life. They know full well that our TV screens are full of images of the innocent dying, and they know full well it breaks our heart. The only way the enemy can defeat us, the only way that Iraq will not become a democracy is if we lose our nerve. I will not lose my nerve in the face of assassins and killers.

I thank the Members of the United States Congress understanding that in order to achieve a victory in Iraq, that we will rely upon the wisdom of our commanders on the ground. As Iraqis stand up, we will stand down. And the troop levels in Iraq will not be decided by artificial timetables set in Washington, DC, but by our commanders on the ground.

The work is hard in Iraq, but it's necessary. It's necessary for our security; it's necessary to lay the foundations of peace in a troubled part of the world. We believe that democracy

is the right of every man and woman on this world. And we understand that history says loud and clear that democracies do not war.

I want to read a letter from—to you, if you don't mind, from a mother of a courageous American named Sergeant William Scott Kinzer, Jr. I read this letter the other day, and I thought you might like to hear one mother's point of view of what we're doing. William Scott Kinzer was killed last year while securing election sites in Iraq. His mom, Debbie, wrote me. She said: "These words are straight from a shattered but healing mother's heart. My son made a decision to join the Army. He believed that what he was involved in would eventually change Iraq, and those changes would be recorded in history books in years to come. On his last visit home, I asked him what I would ever do if something happened to him in Iraq. He smiled at me, and his blue eyes sparkled as he said, 'Mom, I love my job. If I should die, I would die happy. Does life get any better than that?' "

His mom went on to say, "Please do not let the voices we hear the loudest change what you and Scott started in Iraq. Please do not let his dying be in vain. Do not let my son have given his all for an unfinished job. Please complete the mission." My message to Debbie and the message from people here from the United States Congress is the same: We will complete the mission; we will secure this country; we will spread freedom for the sake of peace for our children and our grandchildren.

I thank the Speaker and the leaders of the United States Congress who understand that when we ask our law enforcement officials and intelligence officials to protect us, they must have all the tools necessary to do their job. So we passed the PATRIOT Act right after September the 11th. It's an important act. It's an act that protected the civil liberties of the United States while giving law enforcement the tools necessary to protect us. Parts of the PATRIOT Act expired last year. It came up for reauthorization.

I want to remind the people what the Democrat leader from Nevada said in the United States Senate. He boasted, the "Democrats killed the PATRIOT Act." They didn't kill it for long. Thanks to the leadership of the people up here on this dais, the PATRIOT Act passed, and the homeland is more secure.

The Speaker and I were sitting back there talking about some of the challenges we've faced over the past years. This economy of ours faced some serious challenges. We had a recession, a stock market collapse. There was terrorist attacks, corporate scandals, major natural disasters, rising energy prices. But we acted. We had a plan, an economic recovery plan. And by working together, we passed that plan. And the heart of that plan was this: We believe that when Americans have more money to save and spend or invest, the economy is better off. So we cut the taxes. We cut the taxes on working families; we cut the taxes on family with children; we cut the taxes on small businesses; we cut the taxes on dividends; we cut the taxes on capital gains.

I remember clearly in 2003 when a Democrat leader attacked our economic growth plan and said of the tax relief, it is "reckless and irresponsible;" it's a "reckless and irresponsible tax plan that will undermine opportunity in our country." Today, the United States economy is strong, and it's getting stronger. We grew last year at 3.5 percent, faster than any major industrialized nation. We added 243,000 jobs in February, almost 5 million jobs in the last 2½ years. The unemployment rate across the United States is 4.8 percent—that's lower than the average rate of the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s. Real after-tax income is up for working people. Productivity is high in America. Homeownership are at alltime levels; more minorities own a home today in America than ever before in our Nation's history. The economic recovery plan that we passed works.

Today, many Democrats want the tax relief we passed to expire in a few years. Some even want to repeal it now. If the tax relief is not made permanent, the American people will get a mighty tax increase they do not want and they do not deserve. In order to make sure this economy of ours remains strong, we need to make the tax relief permanent.

We have a plan to cut the deficit in half by 2009. Oh, you'll hear some in Washington say, "Well, let's raise your taxes in order to

balance the budget." Folks, that's not the way Washington works. Here's how Washington works: They'll raise your taxes, and they'll figure out new ways to spend your money. The best way to cut the deficit is to keep our progrowth economic policies in place and be wise about how we spend your money. We set priorities in Washington, DC—[*applause*]. By the way, every single spending program sounds great. They've all got wonderful titles. We believe that it's important to set priorities. So long as we've got any troops in harm's way, they'll have all the equipment, all the support, the best pay, the best housing possible. And I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who are here for supporting the troops of the United States military.

I thank the Speaker, and I thank the leaders here who've helped us put austere budgets in place, budgets that have cut the rate of growth of nonsecurity discretionary spending every year since 2001. I put out another tight budget for 2007, and I look forward to working with Congress to be wise about how we spend your money, to make sure that the deficit is cut in half by 2009.

I appreciate very much the work on the line-item veto. I look forward to working with the United States Congress, to join with them to make sure that when we spend money, it's money well-spent. Today I met with members of both political parties and both chambers of the United States Congress to strategize about how we can get a line-item veto passed, to my desk, so we can assure the American people their money is going to be spent in a way they want their money spent.

We believe we should not fear the future, but we should shape the future. We believe we ought to put policies in place to make sure that America remains the economic leader of the world. And one way to do that is to make sure we have an economy which is flexible, where regulations are low, as are taxes. And one way to make sure this economy of ours remains strong and vibrant is to continue to work for meaningful, real tort reform.

I know it shocks some of you to hear a Texan say that we're addicted to oil—[*laughter*]—and we are. And that's a problem. In order to make sure this Nation remains competitive, in order to make sure we're the leader of the world, I look forward to working with the Members of the United States Congress here to pass the Advanced Energy Initiative.

Last year, thanks to the leadership of the Speaker, I was able to sign a comprehensive energy bill. There is more work to be done. We're going to harness technology to make sure the automobiles you drive consume less oil. We believe in plug-in hybrid batteries. It's the wave of the future. We believe in the use of ethanol. I love the fact that when our farmers are growing crops, it makes us less dependent on oil from the Middle East.

Ours is a party that knows you got to challenge the status quo when it comes to energy. In order to make sure this country is less dependent on fossil fuels, we must promote safe and sound nuclear power. We must promote solar energy and clean coal technology and wind energy. Ours is the party that can see into the future. We don't fear it; we welcome it because we intend to continue to lead.

We believe in a health care system that's run by doctors and patients, not by people in Washington, DC. Recently, working with the United States Congress, Members up here on the dias, we have kept a firm commitment to the Nation's elderly. Our Government said, "We're going to take care of the elderly with good health care." And the Medicare system became stagnant and old. It wasn't meeting the requirements of our seniors. So we came together and did something that no Congress had been able to do for years, and that is modernize Medicare. But as we did so, we not only provided prescription drugs for our seniors but we had a uniquely Republican idea as a part of that bill, and it said that we ought to give our seniors choices. We believe that people ought to be given choices in the marketplace. We believe that Government shouldn't tell people the nature of their health care. We believe that Government ought to say, "Here's some choices from which to choose."

So far, 25 million seniors have signed up for this program. Interestingly enough, because we've injected competition into Medicare, the projected costs for Medicare this

year are going to be 20 percent less than projected. Competition works. Trusting people to make the decisions in their lives is the right thing to do. The Medicare modernization plan we passed is good for our seniors, and I'm proud that we're able to get the job done.

We believe in health savings accounts, which puts consumers in charge of their health decisions. We believe in association health plans that enable small businesses to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries so they can buy insurance at the same rates and same discounts that big companies are able to do. We believe in information technology to help control the cost. And we believe we've got to do something about these frivolous and junk lawsuits that are running good doctors out of practice and running up the cost of medicine for our consumers.

We don't fear the future; we welcome it. And we understand that to make sure this country remains competitive, we've got to stay on the leading edge of technological change. And so therefore, I look forward to working with Congress to double the Federal commitment to the most critical basic research in the physical sciences over the next 10 years. I look forward to working with the United States Congress to make sure the research and development tax credit is a permanent part of our Tax Code. And I look forward to working with the United States Congress to make sure our children have got the skills necessary to become the scientists and engineers and chemists and physicists to keep the jobs of the 21st century right here in the United States of America.

I can stand up here and tell you that we have delivered results for the American people, and we've got an agenda to continue to do so. One of the interesting things about working with these good folks is that they've got a proper perspective of the role of Government in our life as well. The way I like to put it is this: Government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in a person's heart or a sense of purpose in a person's life. We understand that the great strength of America is not in the size of our military force or in the size of our wallets. The great strength of the United States of America lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens who all want to serve something greater than themselves. Ours is a compassionate nation; ours is a loving nation. And we understand the role of Government is not to crowd out our faith-based and community-based institutions but to welcome them in the providing of care and love and compassion for our fellow citizens who hurt.

We believe in ushering in the responsibility era, when our citizens understand they are responsible for the decisions they make in life. If you are a mother or a father, you're responsible for loving your child with all your heart. If you're a corporate citizen, you're responsible for being a—for putting something back into our culture, and you're responsible for telling the truth to your shareholders.

If you're a citizen who wants to help change America one heart and one soul at a time, you're responsible for mentoring a child, for feeding the hungry, for providing shelter to the homeless. The great strength of America is the compassion of America. And I look forward to continue to call people to service, to rally that strength so that every single citizen of our country realizes the great promise and the great hope of the blessed land we call home.

It's an honor to be here. I'm proud to be your President. I'm proud to be working with these Members of the United States Congress. I want to thank you for keeping them in power in Washington. The Nation is better off with Denny Hastert as the Speaker and these leaders running the Congress.

God bless, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:12 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Patricia McKeon, wife of Representative Howard P. "Buck" McKeon; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Shamrock Presentation Ceremony With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland

March 17, 2006

President Bush. *Taoiseach*, thank you very much. Welcome back.

Prime Minister Ahern. Thank you.