

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, March 20, 2006
Volume 42—Number 11
Pages 453–493

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Editor's Note: The President was at Camp David, MD, on March 17, the closing date of this issue. Releases and announcements issued by the Office of the Press Secretary but not received in time for inclusion in this issue will be printed next week.

WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

Published every Monday by the Office of the Federal Register, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC 20408, the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* contains statements, messages, and other Presidential materials released by the White House during the preceding week.

The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* is published pursuant to the authority contained in the Federal Register Act (49 Stat. 500, as amended; 44 U.S.C. Ch. 15), under regulations prescribed by the Administrative Committee of the Federal Register, approved by the President (37 FR 23607; 1 CFR Part 10).

Distribution is made only by the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* will be furnished by mail to domestic subscribers for \$80.00 per year (\$137.00 for mailing first class) and to foreign subscribers for \$93.75 per year, payable to the Superintendent of Documents, Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402. The charge for a single copy is \$3.00 (\$3.75 for foreign mailing).

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Week Ending Friday, March 17, 2006

Proclamation 7988—National Poison Prevention Week, 2006

March 10, 2006

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

National Poison Prevention Week helps raise awareness about the dangers of poison exposure. Our Nation has made great progress in reducing the number of poison-related deaths and injuries since the first National Poison Prevention Week in 1962, yet poisonings remain a threat to the health and safety of many Americans.

Approximately 1 million of our Nation's children under the age of 5 are exposed to poisonous substances each year. Most of these instances are preventable and result from the ingestion of household products. The Consumer Product Safety Commission requires child-resistant packaging for many medicines and household chemicals, and it is important for parents and adults to remember to act responsibly by storing these substances out of the reach of children.

The most common cause of death due to accidental poisoning results from exposure to carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless gas that is produced by products such as grills, gas stoves, water heaters, and automobiles. Every year, more than 500 Americans die from carbon monoxide poisoning, usually during winter months. Knowledge is the key to preventing this kind of poisoning. Placing a carbon monoxide alarm on each level of a home, and especially near bedrooms, is a good way to monitor air quality and remain alert to potentially high levels of carbon monoxide.

Information about poison exposure and how homes can be made safer is available

at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website, www.cdc.gov/health/poisoning.html, and the Poison Prevention Week Council website, www.poisonprevention.org. In case of emergency, families can contact their nearest Poison Control Center, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by calling 1-800-222-1222. By working together and taking the appropriate precautions, we can help to prevent deaths and injuries caused by accidental poisonings.

To encourage Americans to learn more about the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take appropriate preventive measures, the Congress, by joint resolution approved September 26, 1961, as amended (75 Stat. 681), has requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week of March each year as "National Poison Prevention Week."

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim March 19 through March 25, 2006, as National Poison Prevention Week. I call upon all Americans to observe this week by participating in appropriate activities and by learning how to prevent poisonings, especially among children.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this tenth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirtieth.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 14, 2006]

NOTE: This proclamation was published in the *Federal Register* on March 15. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks Following a Briefing by the Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization and an Exchange With Reporters

March 11, 2006

The President. Good morning. I want to thank General Meigs for being here to brief me about tactics on the ground in Iraq. One of the things that the Secretary and General Pace are constantly doing is briefing the Commander in Chief as to the nature of the enemy, what the enemy is trying to do to shake our will, and how we're adjusting, how we're constantly adapting our tactics on the ground to achieve a victory.

We face an enemy that will use explosive devices in order to shake our will; in order to foment violence in Iraq; in order to try to convince the American people that we can't win in Iraq. That's what they're trying to do. And the general has spent a lot of time thinking about the enemy's tactics and techniques, and how our military can adjust to them.

So the briefing today was a series of briefing I get from our commanders on the ground, as well as our experts hired by the Pentagon to let me know what we're doing, so I can let the American people know that we recognize the nature of this enemy. We're adjusting our tactics to defeat this enemy for the sake of peace, for the sake of the security of the United States of America, and for the sake of peace in the world.

And so, General, thank you for being here. I appreciate your time. I'll answer a couple of questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

Former Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy Claude Allen

Q. Mr. President, can you tell us your reaction to the arrest of your former Domestic Policy Adviser, Claude Allen?

The President. If the allegations are true, Claude Allen did not tell my Chief of Staff and legal counsel the truth, and that's deeply disappointing. If the allegations are true, something went wrong in Claude Allen's life, and that is really sad. When I heard the story last night, I was shocked. And my first reaction was one of disappointment, deep dis-

appointment that—if it's true—that we were not fully informed. But it was also one—shortly thereafter, I felt really sad for the Allen family.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Republican Party/Dubai Ports World

Q. Sir, are you concerned about the rift that the Dubai Ports deal has opened within your own party?

The President. The Republican Party is united in our efforts to win the war on terror. The Republican Party is united in our efforts to keep this economy strong by keeping taxes low. The Republican Party is united in making us less dependent on foreign sources of oil.

I've read all the stories about this rift or that rift. That's typical Washington, it seems like to me. I am looking forward to continuing to work with the leadership in the United States Congress to pass an agenda that will keep America the economic leader of the world and will keep this country secure. And next fall, I'm looking forward to campaigning with our candidates. I'm convinced ours is the party that has got an agenda for the future, and ours is the party that has performed.

Stretch [Richard Keil, Bloomberg News].

Progress in Iraq

Q. Mr. President, are you concerned, with reference to the IEDs, are you concerned that the sophisticated weaponry our troops are facing now might be coming from foreign, neighboring countries? And if so, what are our courses going about—

The President. We're constantly gathering intelligence. We're monitoring influence. We are adjusting our tactics. We are—obviously, if there's any kind of influence from a foreign country that is disruptive, any kind of influence—if the Iranians are trying to influence the outcome of the political process or the outcome of the security situation there, we're letting them know our displeasure.

Our call is for those in the neighborhood to allow Iran—Iraq to develop a democracy. And that includes our call to Iran as well as to Syria. We have made our concerns known, and we will continue to make our concerns

known. It's in the interests of the neighborhood that Iraq develop to be a peaceful democracy. It's important for countries to have stable, peaceful, prosperous countries on their border. Prosperity in one nation will help prosperity in other nations. It's important for our friends in the rest of the Middle East to help this new democracy.

And so, yes, we're interested in negative influence; we're also interested in positive influence. And we call on people to be a positive influence, to help this new democracy emerge. And I'm optimistic that the Iraqi people will overcome the challenges they face.

And my optimism is based upon reality on the ground. One, there were some people trying to, obviously, foment sectarian violence. Some have called it a civil war. But it didn't work. Secondly, I'm optimistic because the Iraqi security forces performed, in most cases, really well to provide security. All but two of the provinces of Iraq, after the blowing up of the mosque, were settled. I'm positive and optimistic about the development that the Iraqi security forces are achieving.

I know we've got to do more work in the police forces; we have said that very clearly. General Casey has called the year 2006, the year of police training, and we'll continue to work to train the police. I'm optimistic that the leadership recognizes that a sectarian violence will undermine the capacity for them to self govern. I believe we'll have a unity government in place that will help move the process forward. I fully recognize that the nature of the enemy is such that they want to convince the world that we cannot succeed in Iraq. I know we're going to succeed if we don't lose our will.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:46 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Montgomery C. Meigs, director, Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization; and Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

The President's Radio Address

March 11, 2006

Good morning. This month will mark the 3-year anniversary of the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, which liberated Iraq from the tyranny of Saddam Hussein. As this milestone approaches, I will be giving a series of speeches to update the American people on our strategy for victory in Iraq. I will discuss the progress we are making, the lessons we've learned from our experiences, and how we're fixing what has not worked.

On Monday I will give the first of these speeches, focusing on the security element of our strategy, the task of defeating the terrorists and training Iraqi security forces so they can take the lead in the fight and defend their own democracy.

The Iraqi security forces have made great strides in the past year, and they performed well after the recent bombing of the Golden Mosque of Samarra. This mosque is one of Shi'a Islam's holiest sites, and after it was bombed, bands of armed militia began exacting revenge with reprisal attacks on Sunni mosques and random violence that took the lives of hundreds of innocent Iraqis.

Immediately after the attack, Iraq's leaders came together and acted to restore calm and end the violence. They deployed Iraqi security forces to Baghdad and other areas threatened by violence. These forces moved rapidly and effectively to protect religious sites, enforce a curfew, and reestablish civil order where necessary. We commend them for their good work.

The situation in Iraq is still tense. Reports of kidnappings and executions are being taken very seriously. The Iraqi Government has made clear that such violent attacks cannot be tolerated. The vast majority of Iraqis have shown they want a future of freedom and peace.

By their response over the past 2 weeks and their participation in three successful elections last year, the Iraqi people have made clear they will not let a violent minority take that future away by tearing the country apart. And the Iraqi security forces have shown that they are capable of rising above sectarian divisions to protect the unity of a free Iraq.

The effective performance of the Iraqi security forces during this crisis showed that our hard work to build up and train these forces is paying off. In the coming months, we will help prepare more Iraqi battalions to take the lead in battle, and Iraqi forces will assume responsibility over more territory. Our goal is to have the Iraqis control more territory than the coalition forces by the end of this year. And as Iraqis assume responsibility over more territory, this frees American and coalition forces to concentrate on hunting down high-value targets like the terrorist Zarqawi and his associates.

As we take the fight to the terrorists, they realize they cannot defeat us directly in battle, so they have resorted to brutal attacks against innocent Iraqis and American forces using improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. IEDs are homemade bombs that can be hidden in cars or by the side of a road and detonated remotely, using everyday devices like garage door openers and cordless phones.

These weapons are now the principal threat to our troops and to the future of a free Iraq. And to defeat this threat, my administration has established a new high-level command at the Department of Defense, led by retired four-star General Montgomery Meigs. This weekend General Meigs is briefing me at the White House on our plan to defeat the threat of IEDs. We're harnessing every available resource, the ingenuity of our best scientists and engineers, and the determination of our military to defeat this threat. And we're not going to rest until this danger to our troops has been removed.

In the coming days, there will be considerable reflection on the removal of Saddam Hussein from power and our remaining mission in Iraq. The last 3 years have tested our resolve. The fighting has been tough. The enemy we face has proved to be brutal and relentless. We have changed our approach in many areas to reflect the hard realities on the ground. And the sacrifice being made by our young men and women who wear the uniform has been heartening and inspiring.

Amid the daily news of car bombs and kidnappings and brutal killings, I can understand why many of our fellow citizens are now wondering if the entire mission was worth it. I strongly believe our country is bet-

ter off with Saddam Hussein out of power. Under Saddam Hussein, Iraq was an enemy of America who shot at our airplanes, had a history of pursuing and using weapons of mass destruction, threatened and invaded his neighbors, ordered the death of thousands of his citizens, and supported terrorism.

After the liberation of the Iraqi people, Al Qaida and their affiliates have made Iraq the central front on the war on terror. By helping the Iraqi people build a free and representative government, we will deny the terrorists a safe haven to plan attacks against America. The security of our country is directly linked to the liberty of the Iraqi people. This will require more difficult days of fighting and sacrifice, yet I am confident that our strategy will result in victory, and then our troops can come home with the honor they have earned.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7 a.m. on March 10 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 11. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 10 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. In his address, the President referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and Montgomery C. Meigs, director, Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia

March 13, 2006

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. Thank you for coming. I always enjoy being with you because you're an optimistic, upbeat believer in the people of your country and the possibilities to work together to achieve peace. And so thanks for coming.

I admire the job you have done, and I admire the record that you have produced. A lot of times in politics, people are pretty good talkers, but they don't follow through. You have followed through.

We discussed a lot of issues. I thank the Prime Minister for his contributions to helping young democracies succeed, democracies

in Afghanistan and Iraq. And I want to thank you for that.

We discussed the importance for transatlantic ties between the United States and not only Slovakia but also between the United States and Europe. And I assured him that those transatlantic ties are an important part of our policies here.

We talked about two issues that I found—that I know are important. One, of course, is the visa issue. The Prime Minister made it very clear that he expects there to be some progress on the visa issue, that he's—he represents the good people of Slovakia when he says to me that there needs to be a constant renewal of the process to make sure that it is fair. And I appreciate—I listened very carefully to my friend and can assure the people of Slovakia that we are working together to make the visa policy work better.

Secondly, he talked about the knowledge-based economy that he envisioned for his country. And I thought, first of all, it's very wise to—he recognizes the world and the challenges of the world and knows full well that as people gain knowledge, a country is going to end up being more competitive in the 21st century.

And so I—we strategized about ways to help Slovakia and the United States benefit from exchanges, and particularly student exchanges, so that knowledge becomes a paramount part of our future.

And so, Mr. Prime Minister, thanks for your vision. And I also feel sorry for the fact that you broke your leg. This guy's a good runner. And so now I feel comfortable challenging you to a race. [Laughter] Had you been healthy, I wouldn't even had gotten on the same track with you. But I wish you a speedy recovery, and thanks again for coming to the United States.

Prime Minister Dzurinda. Thank you, Mr. President. My leg is broken, but my heart is happy. [Laughter] My heart is happy because we are friends and strong allies, America and Slovakia, America and the European Union. I am happy being here because we are good friends. President Bush visited us a year ago; he visited President of Russia, Mr. Putin, in Bratislava, and we remember this fantastic stay of President Bush in Slovakia.

We are good friends, and we share the responsibility for development in the world. I highly appreciate the leadership of President Bush in solving of global issues, the most hot and most complicated issues in the world. And I talked to President Bush that transatlantic cooperation is and must stay the basis of our security. This is something like axis of stability, prosperity, and the future of both countries, but also the future of the democratic world.

As President Bush has already mentioned, we have some bilateral issues. I appreciate especially his State of Union, during which he announced a new program how to educate people, young generation. We want to do the same. We want to find a new way, thanks to which it would be possible to cooperate with the United States also in the area of science research and development, innovation, education. And I believe that we will discover these new ways.

Of course we spoke many issues of foreign policy, as usually. And I can only tell that our view is the same, and we will continue in this cooperation to advance freedom and democracy in the world. Mr. President, thank you very, very much for being such a good leader.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:35 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Prime Minister Dzurinda referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

Remarks to the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies

March 13, 2006

Thanks for the warm welcome. Cliff, thanks for the introduction. It's a pleasure to be with the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. This organization was formed in the wake of the September the 11th attacks to fight the ideologies that drive terrorism. You recognized immediately that the war on terror is a struggle between freedom and tyranny and that the path to lasting security is to defeat the hateful vision the terrorists are spreading with the hope of freedom and democracy.

The foundation is making a difference across the world, and I appreciate the difference you're making. You have trained Iraqi women and Iranian students in the principles and practice of democracy. You've translated "democracy readers" into Arabic for distribution across the broader Middle East. You've helped activists across the region organize effective political movements so they can help bring about democratic change and ensure the survival of liberty in new democracies. By promoting democratic ideals and training a new generation of democratic leaders in the Middle East, you are helping us to bring victory in the war on terror, and I thank you for your hard work in freedom's cause.

I also want to thank the members of the Board of the Foundation for the Defense of the Democracies. I want to thank Steve Trachtenberg, the president of George Washington University, and his wife, Fran, for joining us today. Thanks for letting me come to your campus. I'm honored to be here. He informed me that my dad will be giving the graduation speech this year—*[laughter]*—and Mother is getting an honorary degree. *[Laughter]* Smart man. *[Applause]*

Mr. Secretary, thanks for joining us. I'm proud that Secretary Rumsfeld is with us. I want to thank Senator Dick Lugar for being with us today. Mr. Chairman, proud you're here. Thanks for coming. I want to thank the Members of the United States Congress who have joined us: Congressman Lungren, Adam Schiff, Joe Wilson, Tom Cole, and Dan Boren. I appreciate you all taking time to be here today; it means a lot.

I want to thank the ambassadors who have joined us. I see two for certain, one from Jordan and one from Israel. Proud you both are here. If there's any other ambassadors here, I apologize for not introducing you, and you don't have as good a seat as these two guys. *[Laughter]*

The mission of this foundation is to defeat terror by promoting democracy, and that is the mission of my administration. Our strategy to protect America 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 a failed and oppressive state 7,000 miles away could bring murder and destruction to our country. We saw that dictatorships shelter terrorists, feed resentment and radicalism, and threaten the security of free nations. Democracies replace resentment with hope; democracies respect the rights of their citizens and their neighbors; democracies join the fight against terror. And so America is committed to an historic, long-term goal: To secure the peace of the world, we seek the end of tyranny in our world.

We are making progress in the march of freedom, and some of the most important progress has taken place in a region that has not known the blessings of liberty, the broader Middle East. Two weeks ago, I got a chance to visit Afghanistan and to see firsthand the transformation that has taken place in that country. Before September the 11th, 2001, Afghanistan was ruled by a cruel regime that oppressed its people, brutalized women, and gave safe haven to the terrorists who attacked America.

Today, the terror camps have been shut down; women are working; boys and girls are going to school; Afghans have voted in free elections—25 million people have had the taste of freedom. Taliban and Al Qaida remnants continue to fight Afghanistan's democratic progress. In recent weeks, they have launched new attacks that have killed Afghan citizens and coalition forces. The United States and our allies will stay in the fight against the terrorists, and we'll train Afghan soldiers and police so they can defend their country. The Afghan people are building a vibrant young democracy that is an ally in the war on terror, and America is proud to have such a determined partner in the cause of freedom.

Next week, we will mark the 3-year anniversary of the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. In less than 3 years, the Iraqi people have gone from living under the boot of a brutal tyrant, to liberation, to sovereignty, to free elections, to a constitutional referendum, and last December, to elections for a fully constitutional government. In those December elections, over 11 million Iraqis—more than 75 percent of the Iraqi voting-

age population—defied the terrorists to cast their ballots.

Americans were inspired by the images of Iraqis bringing elderly relatives to the polls, holding up purple ink-stained fingers, dancing in the streets, and celebrating their freedom. By their courage, the Iraqi people have spoken and made their intentions clear: They want to live in democracy, and they are determined to shape their own destiny.

The past few weeks, the world has seen very different images from Iraq, images of violence and anger and despair. We have seen a great house of worship, the Golden Mosque of Samarra, in ruins after a brutal terrorist attack. We've seen mass protests in response to provocation. We've seen reprisal attacks by armed militias on Sunni mosques and random violence that has taken the lives of hundreds of Iraqi citizens.

The terrorists attacked the Golden Mosque for a reason: They know that they lack the military strength to challenge Iraqi and coalition forces directly, so their only hope is to try and provoke a civil war. So they attacked one of Shi'a Islam's holiest sites, hoping to incite violence that would drive Iraqis apart and stop their progress on the path to a free society.

Immediately after the attack, I said that Iraq faced a moment of choosing. And in the days that followed, the Iraqi people made their choice. They looked into the abyss and did not like what they saw. After the bombing, most Iraqis saw what the perpetrators of this attack were trying to do. The enemy had failed to stop the January 2005 elections; they failed to stop the constitutional referendum; they failed to stop the December elections. And now they're trying to stop the formation of a unity government. By their response over the past 2 weeks, Iraqis have shown the world they want a future of freedom and peace, and they will oppose a violent minority that seeks to take that future away from them by tearing their country apart.

The situation in Iraq is still tense, and we're still seeing acts of sectarian violence and reprisal. Yet out of this crisis, we've also seen signs of a hopeful future. We saw the restraint of the Iraqi people in the face of massive provocation. Most Iraqis did not turn

to violence, and many chose to show their solidarity by coming together in joint Sunni and Shi'a prayer services. We saw the leadership of Sunni and Shi'a clerics who joined together to denounce the bombing and call for restraint. Ayatollah Sistani issued a strong statement denouncing what he called sectarian sedition, and he urged all Iraqis—in his words—"not to be dragged into committing acts that would only please the enemies." We saw the capability of the Iraqi security forces, who deployed to protect religious sites, enforce a curfew, and restore civil order. We saw the determination of many of Iraq's leaders, who rose to the moment, came together, and acted decisively to diffuse the crisis.

Iraq's leaders know that this is not the last time they will be called to stand together in the face of an outrageous terrorist attack. Iraq's leaders know that they must put aside their differences; reach out across political, religious, and sectarian lines; and form a unity government that will earn the trust and the confidence of all Iraqis. Iraqis now have a chance to show the world that they have learned the lesson of Samarra: A country that divides into factions and dwells on old grievances risks sliding back into tyranny. The only path to a future of peace is the path of unity.

Soon the new Parliament will be seated in Baghdad, and this will begin the process of forming a government. Forming a new government will demand negotiation and compromise by the Iraqis; it will require patience by America and our coalition allies.

In the weeks ahead, Americans will likely see a good deal of political maneuvering in Iraq, as different factions and leaders advance competing agendas and seek their share of political power. Out of this process, a free government will emerge that represents the will of the Iraqi people, instead of the will of one cruel dictator.

The work ahead in Iraq is hard, and there will be more difficult moments. The Samarra attack was a clear attempt to ignite a civil war. And we can expect the enemy will try again, and they will continue to sow violence and destruction designed to stop the emergence of a free and democratic Iraq.

The enemies of a free Iraq are determined, yet so are the Iraqi people, and so are America and coalition partners. We will not lose our nerve. We will help the Iraqi people succeed. Our goal in Iraq is victory, and victory will be achieved when the terrorists and Saddamists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, when the Iraqi security forces can provide for the safety of their own citizens, and when Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plot new attacks against our Nation.

We have a comprehensive strategy for victory in Iraq, a strategy I laid out in a series of speeches last year. Our strategy has three elements. On the political side, we are helping Iraqis build a strong democracy so that old resentments will be eased and the insurgency marginalized. On the economic side, we are continuing reconstruction efforts and helping Iraqis build a modern economy that will give all its citizens a stake in a free and peaceful Iraq. And on the security side, we are striking terrorist targets and training the Iraqi security forces, which are taking responsibility for more Iraqi territory and becoming increasingly capable of defeating the enemy. In the coming weeks, I will update the American people on our strategy, the progress we are making, the lessons we have learned from our experiences, and how we are fixing what hasn't worked.

Today I will discuss the third element of our strategy, the progress of our efforts to defeat the terrorists and train the Iraqi security forces so they can take the lead in defending their own democracy.

At the end of last year, I described in detail many of the changes we have made to improve the training of Iraqi security forces, and we saw the fruits of those changes in recent days in Iraq. After the Samarra bombings, it was the Iraqi security forces—not coalition forces—that restored order. In the hours after the attack, Iraqi leaders put the Iraqi security forces on alert, canceling all leaves and heightening security around mosques and critical sites. Using security plans developed for the December elections, they deployed Iraqi forces in Baghdad and to other troubled spots.

Iraqi police manned checkpoints, increased patrols, and ensured that peaceful

demonstrators were protected, while those who turned to violence were arrested. Public order brigades deployed as rapid reaction forces to areas where violence was reported. The 9th Mechanized Division of the Iraqi Army, which was in the midst of a major training event, regrouped and entered the Baghdad city gates, taking up assigned positions throughout the city with T-72 tanks and armored infantry vehicles. During the past 2 weeks, Iraqi security forces conducted more than 200 independent operations—each of them Iraqi-planned, Iraqi-conducted, and Iraqi-led.

Having Iraqi forces in the lead has been critical to preventing violence from spinning out of control. For example, on the day of the Samarra bombing, the Iraqi national police responded to an armed demonstration in an area immediately adjacent to Sadr City where an angry Shi'a crowd had surrounded the Sunni Al-Quds Mosque. The Iraqi brigade commander placed his troops—who were largely Shi'a—between the crowd and the mosque and talked to the crowd using megaphones and—calling for calm and urging them to disperse. After a 2-hour standoff, the crowd eventually left without incident, and the national police remained in position overnight to guard the mosque until the threat was over. The fact that Iraqis were in the lead and negotiating with their own countrymen helped diffuse a potential confrontation and prevented an escalation of violence.

In another Baghdad neighborhood, a similar situation unfolded. A group of armed militia members had gone in and occupied the Al-Nida Mosque. An Iraqi Army brigade quickly arrived on the scene, and the brigade commander negotiated with the group and secured their peaceful departure. Once again, because Iraqi forces spoke their language and understood their culture, they were able to convince the Iraqi militia to leave peacefully.

Not all Iraqi units performed as well as others, and there were some reports of Iraqi units in Eastern Baghdad allowing militia members to pass through checkpoints. But American commanders are closely watching the situation, and they report these incidents appear to be the exception, not the rule. In

the weeks since the bombing, the Iraqi security forces turned in a strong performance. From the outset, Iraqi forces understood that if they failed to stand for national unity, the country would slip into anarchy. And so they have stood their ground and defended their democracy and brought their nation through one of its most difficult moments since liberation.

General Marty Dempsey, our top commander responsible for training the Iraqi security forces, says this about their performance: "They were deliberate, poised, even-handed, and professional. They engaged local tribal, political, and religious leaders. They patiently but deliberately confronted armed groups to let them know that they had control of the situation." He went on to say, "I'm sure we will find instances where they could have performed better, but in the face of immense pressure, they performed very, very well." As a result of their performance, the Iraqi security forces are gaining the confidence of the Iraqi people. And as the Iraqi security forces make progress against the enemy, their morale continues to increase.

When I reported on the progress of the Iraqi security forces last year, I said that there were over 120 Iraqi and police combat battalions in the fight against the enemy, and 40 of those were taking the lead in the fight. Today, the number of battalions in the fight has increased to more than 130, with more than 60 taking the lead. As more Iraqi battalions come on line, these Iraqi forces are assuming responsibility for more territory. Today, Iraqi units have primary responsibility for more than 30,000 square miles of Iraq, an increase of roughly 20,000 square miles since the beginning of the year. And Iraqi forces are now conducting more independent operations throughout the country than do coalition forces.

This is real progress, but there is more work to be done this year. Our commanders tell me that the Iraqi police still lag behind the Army in training and capabilities, so one of our major goals in 2006 is to accelerate the training of the Iraqi police. One problem is that some national police units have been disproportionately Shi'a, and there have been some reports of infiltration of the national

police by militias. And so we're taking a number of steps to correct this problem.

First, we have begun implementing a program that has been effective with the Iraqi Army—partnering U.S. battalions with the Iraqi national police battalions. These U.S. forces are working with their Iraqi counterparts, giving them tactical training so they can defeat the enemy. And they are also teaching them about the role of a professional police force in a democratic system, so they can serve all Iraqis without discrimination.

Second, we are working with the Iraqi leaders to find and remove any leaders in the national police who show evidence of loyalties to militia. For example, last year there were reports that the Second Public Order Brigade contained members of an illegal militia, who were committing abuses. So last December, the Interior Ministry leadership removed the Second Brigade commander and replaced him with a new commander, who then dismissed more than 100 men with suspected militia ties. Today, this Iraqi police brigade has been transformed into a capable, professional unit, and during the recent crisis after the Samarra bombing, they performed with courage and distinction.

Finally, we are working with Iraqis to diversify the ranks of the national police by recruiting more Sunni Arabs. For example, the basic training class for the national police public order forces that graduated last October was less than one percent Sunni. The class graduating in April will include many, many more Sunnis. By ensuring the public order forces reflect the general population, Iraqis are making the national police a truly national institution—one that is able to serve, protect, and defend all the Iraqi people.

As more capable Iraqi police and soldiers come on line, they will assume responsibility for more territory, with the goal of having the Iraqis control more territory than the coalition by the end of 2006. And as Iraqis take over more territory, this frees American and coalition forces to concentrate on training and on hunting down high-value targets like the terrorist Zarqawi and his associates. As Iraqis stand up, America and our coalition will stand down. And my decisions on troop

levels will be made based upon the conditions on the ground and on the recommendations of our military commanders, not artificial timetables set by politicians here in Washington, DC.

These terrorists know they cannot defeat us militarily, so they have turned to the weapon of fear. And one of the most brutal weapons at their disposal are improvised explosive devices, or IEDs. IEDs are bombs made from artillery shells, explosives, and other munitions that can be hidden and detonated remotely. After the terrorists were defeated in battles in Fallujah and Tall 'Afar, they saw that they could not confront Iraqi or American forces in pitched battles and survive. And so they turned to IEDs, a weapon that allows them to attack from a safe distance, without having to face our forces in battle.

The principal victims of IED attacks are innocent Iraqis. The terrorists and insurgents have used IEDs to kill Iraqi children playing in the streets, shoppers at Iraqi malls, and Iraqis lining up at police and army recruiting stations. They use IEDs to strike terror in the hearts of Iraqis in an attempt to break their confidence in the free future of their country.

The enemy is also using IEDs in their campaign against U.S. and coalition forces in Iraq, and we are harnessing every available resource to deal with this threat. My administration has established a new high-level organization at the Department of Defense, led by retired four-star General Montgomery Meigs. On Saturday, General Meigs along with the Secretary of Defense briefed me at the White House on our plan to defeat the threat of IEDs. Our plan has three elements: targeting, training, and technology.

The first part of our plan is targeting and eliminating the terrorists and bombmakers. Across Iraq, we are on the hunt for the enemy—capturing and killing the terrorists before they strike, uncovering and disarming their weapons before they go off, and rooting out and destroying bomb-making cells so they can't produce more weapons.

Because the Iraqi people are the targets—primarily the targets of the bombers, Iraqis are increasingly providing critical intelligence to help us find the bombmakers and stop new attacks. The number of tips from Iraqis has

grown from 400 last March to over 4,000 in December. For example, just 3 weeks ago, acting on tips provided by local citizens, coalition forces uncovered a massive IED arsenal hidden in a location northwest of Baghdad. They found and confiscated more than 3,000 pieces of munitions in one of the largest weapons caches discovered in that region to date. Just 2 weeks ago, acting on intelligence from Iraqis, coalition forces uncovered a bomb-making facility northeast of Fallujah. They captured 61 terrorists at the facility and confiscated large numbers of weapons.

In all, during the past 6 months, Iraqi and coalition forces have found and cleared nearly 4,000 IEDs, uncovered more than 1,800 weapons caches and bomb-making plants, and killed or detained hundreds of terrorists and bombmakers. We're on the hunt for the enemy, and we're not going to rest until they've been defeated.

The second part of our plan is to give our forces specialized training to identify and clear IEDs before they explode. Before arriving in Iraq and Afghanistan, our combat units get training on how to counter the threat of IEDs. And to improve our training, last month we established a new IED Joint Center of Excellence headquartered at Fort Irwin, California, where we're taking lessons learned from the IED fight in Iraq and sharing them with our troops in the field and those preparing to deploy. This new initiative will ensure that every Army and Marine combat unit headed to Afghanistan and Iraq is prepared for the challenges that IEDs bring to the battlefield.

Before deploying, our troops will train with the equipment they will use in the IED fight. They'll study enemy tactics and experience live-fire training that closely mirrors what they will see when they arrive in the zone of combat. Our goal with this training is to ensure that when our forces encounter the enemy, that they're ready.

The third part of our plan is to develop new technologies to defend against IEDs. We are putting the best minds in America to work on this effort. The Department of Defense recently gathered some—gathered 600 leaders from industry and academia, the national laboratories, the National Academy

of Sciences, all branches of the military, and every relevant Government agency to discuss technology solutions to the IED threat. We now have nearly 100 projects underway. For security reasons, I'm not going to share the details of the technologies we're developing. The simple reason is, the enemy can use even the smallest details to overcome our defenses.

Earlier this year, a newspaper published details of a new anti-IED technology that was being developed. Within 5 days of the publication—using details from that article—the enemy had posted instructions for defeating this new technology on the Internet. We cannot let the enemy know how we're working to defeat him. But I can assure the American people that my administration is working to put the best technology in the hands of our men and women on the frontlines, and we are mobilizing resources against the IED threat.

I assured General Meigs that he will have the funding and personnel he needs to succeed. In 2004, the administration spent \$150 million to fight the IED threat. This year, we're providing \$3.3 billion to support our efforts to defeat IEDs. These investments are making a difference. Today, nearly half of the IEDs in Iraq are found and disabled before they can be detonated. In the past 18 months, we've cut the casualty rate per IED attack in half. More work needs to be done. Yet by targeting the bombmakers and training our forces and deploying new technologies, we will stay ahead of the enemy, and that will save Iraqi and American lives.

Some of the most powerful IEDs we're seeing in Iraq today includes components that came from Iran. Our Director of National Intelligence, John Negroponte, told the Congress, "Tehran has been responsible for at least some of the increasing lethality of anticoalition attacks by providing Shi'a militia with the capability to build improvised explosive devices," in Iraq. Coalition forces have seized IEDs and components that were clearly produced in Iran. Such actions—along with Iran's support for terrorism and its pursuit of nuclear weapons—are increasingly isolating Iran, and America will continue to rally the world to confront these threats.

We still have difficult work ahead in Iraq. I wish I could tell you that the violence is waning and that the road ahead will be smooth. It will not. There will be more tough fighting and more days of struggle, and we will see more images of chaos and carnage in the days and months to come. The terrorists are losing on the field of battle, so they are fighting this war through the pictures we see on television and in the newspapers every day. They're hoping to shake our resolve and force us to retreat. They are not going to succeed.

The battle lines in Iraq are clearly drawn for the world to see, and there is no middle ground. The enemy will emerge from Iraq one of two ways, emboldened or defeated. The stakes in Iraq are high. By helping Iraqis build a democracy, we will deny the terrorists a safe haven to plan attacks against America. By helping Iraqis build a democracy, we will gain an ally in the war on terror. By helping Iraqis build a democracy, we will inspire reformers across the Middle East. And by helping Iraqis build a democracy, we'll bring hope to a troubled region, and this will make America more secure in the long term.

Since the morning of September the 11th, we have known that the war on terror would require great sacrifice, and in this war, we have said farewell to some very good men and women. One of those courageous Americans was Sergeant William Scott Kinzer, Jr., who was killed last year by the terrorists while securing polling sites for the Iraqi elections. His mom, Debbie, wrote me a letter. She said: "These words are straight from a shattered but healing mother's heart. My son made the decision to join the Army. He believed that what he was involved in would eventually change Iraq and that those changes would be recorded in history books for 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 with—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 this?'" His mom went on: "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. Don't let my

son have given his all for an unfinished job. Please complete the mission.”

I make this promise to Debbie and all the families of the fallen heroes: We will not let your loved ones dying be in vain. We will finish what we started in Iraq. We will complete the mission. We will leave behind a democracy that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. And a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will make the American people more secure for generations to come.

May God bless the families of the fallen. May God bless our troops in the fight. And may God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:16 p.m. in the Dorothy Betts Marvin Theatre at The George Washington University. In his remarks, he referred to Clifford D. May, president, Foundation for the Defense of Democracies; Jordan’s Ambassador to the U.S. Karim Kawar; Israel’s Ambassador to the U.S. Daniel Ayalon; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, Iraqi Shiite leader; Lt. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA, commander, Multi-National Security Transition Command—Iraq; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and Montgomery C. Meigs, director, Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Notice—Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Iran

March 13, 2006

On March 15, 1995, by Executive Order 12957, the President declared a national emergency with respect to Iran pursuant to the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701–1706) to deal with the unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States constituted by the actions and policies of the Government of Iran. On May 6, 1995, the President issued Executive Order 12959 imposing more comprehensive sanctions to further respond to this threat, and on August 19, 1997, the President issued Executive Order 13059 consolidating and clarifying the previous orders.

Because the actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, the national emergency declared on March 15, 1995, must continue in effect beyond March 15, 2006. Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency with respect to Iran. Because the emergency declared by Executive Order 12957 constitutes an emergency separate from that declared on November 14, 1979, by Executive Order 12170, this renewal is distinct from the emergency renewal of November 2005.

This notice shall be published in the *Federal Register* and transmitted to the Congress.

George W. Bush

The White House,
March 13, 2006.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 12:48 p.m., March 13, 2006]

NOTE: This notice was published in the *Federal Register* on March 14.

Message to the Congress on Continuation of the National Emergency With Respect to Iran

March 13, 2006

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent the enclosed notice to the *Federal Register* for publication, stating that the Iran emergency declared on March 15, 1995, is to continue in effect beyond March 15, 2006. The most recent notice continuing this emergency was published in the *Federal Register* on March 14, 2005 (70 FR 12581).

The crisis between the United States and Iran constituted by the actions and policies of the Government of Iran that led to the declaration of a national emergency on March 15, 1995, has not been resolved. The actions and policies of the Government of Iran are contrary to the interests of the United States in the region and pose a continuing unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. For these reasons, I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency declared with respect to Iran and maintain in force comprehensive sanctions against Iran to respond to this threat.

George W. Bush

The White House,
March 13, 2006.

Remarks on Arrival in Rochester, New York and an Exchange With Reporters

March 14, 2006

Jason McElwain

The President. First of all, it's great to be here in upstate New York. As you can see, a special person has greeted me at the airport.

Jason, mind if I call you J-Mac?

Mr. McElwain. Yeah. [*Laughter*]

The President. I call him J-Mac. You call me George W. [*Laughter*]

But our country was captivated by an amazing story on the basketball court. I think it's a story of Coach Johnson's willingness to give a person a chance. It's a story of Dave and Debbie's deep love for their son, and it's a story of a young man who found his touch on the basketball court, which in turn, touched the hearts of citizens all across the country.

So I want to thank you for being here. You probably didn't realize the impact you were going to have on people all across America and around the world when you made those six 3s in a row. I've kind of gotten off the courts these days because I'm getting old, but if I got back on the courts, I'd need a

lesson—[*laughter*]—on how to rotate that ball. But let me have that there, Coach.

Jim Johnson. Okay. There you go, sir.

[*At this point, the President held a sign with Jason's picture.*]

The President. Thank you. There you go. Kind of looks like you.

Anyway, thank you all for coming. God bless. I appreciate the wonderful story that's come out of your family.

Q. Mr. President, how did you hear about the story, and what's your reaction?

The President. Saw it on TV. Saw it on TV, and I wept, just like a lot of other people. It's just one of those stories that touched a lot of people's heart.

Q. Did somebody play it for you, or did you just see it?

The President. I can't remember exactly how it happened. Probably somebody played it for me, you know, being the President and all. But it's a wonderful tale.

God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. at the Greater Rochester International Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Jason McElwain, an autistic student at Greece Athena High School who scored 20 points in his first varsity basketball game; and Jim Johnson, coach, Greece Athena High School boys basketball team.

Remarks in a Discussion on Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits in Canandaigua, New York

March 14, 2006

The President. Thank you all. Be seated. Thank you all very much. Thanks for coming. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for giving me a chance to come and talk to you about an important issue for our seniors.

Before I get started, though, I do want to thank the folks here at Canandaigua Academy for letting me come by to say hello. The assistant principal, John LaFave, kindly greeted me behind stage here. As I understand, some of the students are here in the room, and some are watching. I'm glad to provide you a convenient excuse to get out

of class. [Laughter] I want to thank the superintendent, Steve Uebbing, for greeting me as well.

For all the teachers who are here and are paying attention to this, thanks for being a teacher. It's a noble profession. It's an important—it's really important. And speaking about teachers, I married one. [Laughter] She sends her love. Laura W. Bush is a unique woman who is obviously a patient woman. [Laughter] When I married her, she was a public school librarian who wasn't that much interested in politics. Now she's the First Lady of the United States. And I'm proud to call her First Lady, and I love to call her wife. And she sends her love too.

I want to thank Randy Kuhl; he served with distinction in the United States Congress. He said, "Look, you've been in my district before; come back up here if you want to be with some just good, down-to-earth people that care about the future of the country." And one of the reasons I'm here is because of Randy's invitation.

I also want to thank Congressman Sherry Boehlert, right next door. I appreciate you being here. Mighty New York Yankee fan, I want you to know—[laughter]—fierce baseball—advocate for baseball. Plus, he's a good Congressman.

I want to thank Antonia Novello. Dr. Novello, where are you? She's here—oh, there you are. Good to see you. Appreciate you coming. She's the commissioner of health for the State of New York. I'm honored you're here. I'll tell old 41 I saw you. That's the number for my dad—see, he's the 41st President; I'm the 43d President, so—I'll tell him I saw you.

I want to thank the mayor who is here—Madam Mayor, where are you? Thanks for coming. Yes, I appreciate you coming. Thanks for your hospitality. It's great to be in your city. I want to thank all the other folks who are State government and local government.

Most of all, I want to thank our panelists. There are different ways to describe an issue that's of concern to the American people. And so one way to describe the issue is to have others help describe it for you, and that's what we're doing. This is a opportunity

for me and others to share thoughts about Medicare.

The role of Government is to provide good health care for our seniors. We made that commitment, interestingly enough, when Lyndon Baines Johnson was the President. When I got to Washington, I took a look at the Medicare system to determine whether or not Medicare was providing excellent health coverage. If you're going to provide health coverage for somebody, you want to make sure it works. I found a system that was old and stale. It really wasn't a modern health care system. Medicine had changed; Medicare had not changed.

For example, the Government would pay \$28,000 for an ulcer surgery for a senior on Medicare but not a dime for the prescription drugs to prevent the ulcer surgery from being needed in the first place. There was a lot of times, the cures for disease would lag behind the Government saying it's okay to provide that as a benefit. In other words, it was an old system.

So I worked with the Congress, and we've modernized Medicare. And for the first time, seniors can now get a prescription drug benefit under Medicare. And that's what we're here to talk about—the benefits of such a program; the need for people to, at the very minimum, take a look to see whether or not that program makes sense; and if it does make sense, to sign up on it. You'll hear me make the case: It's a good deal. Now, don't take my word for it. I would hope people would seek advice, seniors seek advice as to whether or not it's a good deal. Twenty-six million seniors so far have taken a look and said, "I think it's worthwhile to sign up."

And so part of the—the main reason I'm here is to talk about the Medicare reform plan, the prescription drug benefit, all aiming to convince people to the very minimum to take a look. I think you're going to like what you see.

One of the things that was necessary in Medicare to make it work better was to have—was to start exercising preventative medicine, to analyze and diagnose disease early, before they become acute. Interestingly enough, in the new Medicare reform law that I signed, for the first time, we're beginning to screen—offer screenings and a

free physical for seniors when they sign up for the program. And that's important. Part of making sure health care is modern is to recognize that if you catch disease early, it makes it much easier to cure the problem.

And so not only are we talking about a prescription drug benefit that's important to make sure Medicare and medicine is modern but we've now got screenings and preventative care—annual screenings and a “Welcome to Medicare” physical. So if you're thinking about signing up, think about having an additional benefit of having a screening or a physical. And that's an important part of making sure that our systems are modern and Government is fulfilling its responsibility to provide good, quality health care for our seniors.

The benefit is really important because it makes sure that seniors have choices as well. See, I've always believed that the consumer has got more options from which to choose, it provides higher quality. I'm one of these people that we ought to—that says, “We ought to trust people; we ought to trust their judgment.” So one of the things about the reform plan that went forward is, not only does it provide a prescription drug benefit but it says seniors ought to have a menu of opportunity, different options from which to choose to meet their needs.

And that created some confusion initially. And I knew it would, as a matter of fact; I knew some seniors on Medicare really didn't want to be confronted with any choice, and that the myriad of options would create a little confusion to begin with. But when people have taken time to look at the options and have sought help—whether it be a son or a daughter, or a community-based organization, or a faith-based organization, or 1-800-MEDICARE—they begin to realize that maybe the system is geared toward them. The more options a senior has to choose from, the more likely it is that the benefit is going to be tailored to his or her needs. And that's important for people to understand.

If you're a low-income senior, the Government is going to pay over 95 percent of your costs. Low-income seniors must take a look at this deal. I'm telling you, it's a good opportunity for you. You know, there was a period

of time when seniors had to choose between rent and prescription drugs, and that wasn't right in our country. And this bill I signed is taking care of that problem, so people don't have to make the zero-sum choice. Prescription drugs has become an integral part of health care for a lot of folks, as you know.

The competition is good for consumers; it happens to be good for our taxpayers too. One of the interesting things that has happened is, is that because there are people saying, “I can do a better job for you,” if you're a senior, the anticipated premiums for the drug benefit has dropped from \$36—\$37 a month to \$25 a month in a 6-month period of time. In other words, people looked at the bill and they said, “Well, this is what we think it's going to cost a senior for drug benefits, 37 bucks a month—not low-income seniors but seniors.” And instead, the cost is \$25 a month.

The anticipated—in Washington, you know, we spend a lot of time guessing what something is going to cost. And the anticipated cost to the taxpayers for this drug benefit is 20 percent lower in the first year than anticipated. In other words, it matters when people have choice. It matters not only for quality but for price. The average senior on Medicare will get a—will see their prescription drug bills cut in half. If you're a low-income senior, the Government is going to pick up a significant portion of your tab. If you're an average senior—middle income senior, you're going to see your drug bills cut in half. If you're a taxpayer, the anticipated costs are significantly lower than we thought. It's working. It makes a lot of sense.

Part of my mission here, as I said earlier, was to convince people to find out about the program. If you haven't looked at the new prescription drug benefit, do so. Call 1-800-MEDICARE, or go to medicare.gov on the Internet. We're beginning to see some surveys from people who are actually using the program, and what's interesting is a lot of the seniors are getting information from the Internet. There's—and you'll see it's user-friendly. It's been designed to make it easy for the senior to take advantage of this new program.

If you're interested in the program, get your son or daughter to help you. And if

you're a son or daughter and your mom or dad is eligible for Medicare, make sure you at least take time to give your parent the benefit of finding out what's available. If you're an average-income senior, you're going to get one-half of your prescription drugs cut. If you're a poor senior, this Government is going to pay over 95 percent of the cost of your prescription drugs. It makes a lot of sense.

I called upon a fellow named Dr. Mark McClellan to join me in this effort. He's here. That's him right there. He is a—he's a Ph.D., see. I'm a C student. *[Laughter]* Look who's the President and who's the adviser. *[Laughter]*

Dr. Mark is in charge of what's called CMS. He'll tell you what that means. We use a lot of initials in Washington. The way I like to describe it to you is, he is in charge of making sure the Medicare reform plan is explained, rolled out, and administered properly.

And so, Mark, thanks for coming. Welcome.

Mark B. McClellan. Mr. President, it's great to be here. CMS is——

The President. Ph.D. in what?

Dr. McClellan. In economics, and I'm a physician as well.

The President. See, he spent a lot of time in the classroom. *[Laughter]*

Dr. McClellan. It's great to be part of the team, sir.

The President. We're glad you're here. Tell people what CMS stands for, and tell them what your job description is.

Dr. McClellan. CMS is the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services. It's the agency that oversees the Medicare program and also Medicaid. Overall, we're providing health insurance for more than 90 million people. And this is a very important year for us, as the President said. We're making some major improvements in the Medicare program so that seniors will not just think of us as the program that's going to pay the bills when they get sick but the program that's going to help them stay well and live a longer and healthier life. And we're working with States like New York to improve the Medicaid program for people with limited incomes as well.

The President. So we just cranked up. Anytime Washington passes a new law, sometimes the transition period can be interesting. And so we had some early challenges.

Dr. McClellan. That's right. In fact, I was just talking with Diane about this beforehand. Diane is a pharmacist. You're going to hear from her in a minute.

The President. No, I'm the emcee. *[Laughter]* You're the explainer. *[Laughter]* You know how these Ph.D.s are, you know, they kind of—*[laughter]*.

[At this point, Dr. McClellan made further remarks.]

The President. How about the phone lines? People have——

Dr. McClellan. The phone lines are much better wait times. If you call 1-800-MEDICARE, that 24/7 help line that we make available so seniors can find out exactly what this program means for them, your wait time now is an average of two minutes or less. So you can get through very quickly and find out what this program means for you.

The President. So would you recommend people—a loaded question—kind of leading the witness, and I'm not even a lawyer. *[Laughter]* Why would—why should people sign up for this?

Dr. McClellan. Well, now is a really good time to find out about it. We've got hundreds of thousands of people enrolling each week now, and we're ahead of what I think is going to be a rush towards the end of April and the first part of May as we approach the enrollment deadline. It's a 6-month period that people have to make a decision about the new coverage.

People are finding that they can save typically 50 percent on their prescriptions—or more—compared to not having coverage. And Consumer Reports pointed out recently that if you're willing to look at generic drugs, or other drugs that work in a very similar way to the ones you're taking now, you can save 70 or 80 percent. And if you call 1-800-MEDICARE, go to medicare.gov, or go to one of the many events happening all over the country, including right here in Canandaigua, there are places to go to get face-to-face help right here to find out about

what this means for you. You can save literally thousands of dollars on your drug costs, and you can be protected for the rest of your life against high prescription drug costs in the future.

The President. Yes, describe that—the catastrophic care component of Medicare.

Dr. McClellan. Well, the drug benefit will, in most cases, start paying right off the bat. Most seniors who have signed up are already saying they're saving money with the program just 2 months into the benefit. There is what's called catastrophic protection as well. So if you have very high drug expenses, your coverage is never going to run out. For people who have higher—relatively high incomes, if they spend \$3,600, Medicare will then pick up as much as 95 percent of all their subsequent drug costs. So no matter what your drug needs are for the rest of your life, you're going to be protected against very high expenses.

And, Mr. President, as you said, for people with limited means, about one in three seniors is living just on a fixed income—they get extra help, so they pay, typically, just a few dollars for each prescription. It's very important help.

The President. People need to take a look. I get out of Washington, people say, "Well, I'm not so sure we can trust the Government all that much." Take a look. One of the reasons I have come is to ask people who are eligible for Medicare just to explore the options. It's a good deal.

For the taxpayers who are here as well, we're doing an—we're providing an important service for our seniors. I repeat to you, the Federal Government has made the commitment to our seniors for good, modern health care. I happen to believe if that's the commitment, we ought to keep it. And the bill that I had the honor of signing keeps that commitment.

And so, Mark, thanks for coming. Stay on it. I'm a results-oriented guy. When I heard that it took a while for people to get on that—call that number and somebody wouldn't answer, I started asking, why? And they're solving it. We're making sure this opportunity for our seniors is done in a cost-effective, efficient way. We want it to be user-friendly for our seniors.

Again, I repeat, I fully understand some people are perfectly content with life the way it is, and they're not interested in looking at forms and opportunities and choices. I would urge you to get somebody to help you take a look at the opportunities available for you.

Somebody who is helping people understand the opportunities is Susan Wilber. Susan, what do you do? [*Laughter*]

Susan Wilber. Well, I'm an A student, always was, so I became a health care professional. [*Laughter*]

The President. Look, you don't need to rub it in, you know.

[*Ms. Wilber, director, The Brighter Day, made brief remarks.*]

The President. That's good. If you're a church or community-based group or a synagogue, talk to your folks who go to your facility and encourage them to contact 1-800-MEDICARE, medicare.gov, Susan. I mean, there's all kinds of people like Susan.

What have you found to be the response, initially, today? Give us a sense for—

Ms. Wilber. Initially, there was a lot of panic and confusion, a lot of new information coming from all directions—the newspaper, the television, the mailings. I think that we're a strong health care system in this community and that we're all well-connected as a health care network, so people were very willing to bring their concerns to us and to ask for help. And that's certainly a confidence that we've instilled in people. And I'm very grateful for that opportunity.

But we've set up individual meetings; we've set up situations where we meet with family members; we've done conference calls with families out of State to help their loved one here. So it's really been quite a collaborative effort to get people signed up.

The President. Thanks. Thirty—26 million people have signed up. That requires a lot of community effort around the country. And I want to thank Susan and others who just make sure the opportunity is at least presented in a way that people can make a choice. And the amazing thing about our country is, we've got a lot of really decent souls, like Susan, at the community level who are very concerned about somebody else, that they want to help somebody. And one

way to help somebody is to let seniors know about the opportunities available in this Medicare reform.

And you're signing up quite a few people, I understand.

Ms. Wilber. We've had quite a few people sign up initially.

The President. Good. How's it going?

Ms. Wilber. It's going well. There was a little bit of confusion at first, but—

The President. But, I mean, you don't want to recommend somebody to sign up and they say, "Why did you get me to sign up for this?"

Ms. Wilber. For the most part, it's worked very well. We've gotten some excellent feedback from our customers.

The President. Good. Thanks for being here.

Ms. Wilber. Thanks for having me.

The President. My call is, please help. I really hope a son or a daughter takes time on behalf of their mother or father and get on the Internet, medicare.gov, and take a look. You ought to do it. I think it happens to be a duty. If your mother or father is not that interested in getting on the Internet, get on with them. Walk through the steps and take a look at what's available.

We've got with us Diane Lawatsch. Welcome.

Diane Lawatsch. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm happy to be here.

The President. You're gainfully employed?

Ms. Lawatsch. I am gainfully employed.

The President. How? [Laughter]

Ms. Lawatsch. Uh-oh. [Laughter] I am a pharmacy operations manager for Wegmans Food Markets. I've been a registered pharmacist for almost 18 years. And a pharmacy operations manager helps to oversee the operations in pharmacy. And I have four stores in this region, and the Canandaigua store is one of them.

The President. Good. So give us a feel for how you view the Medicare bill, how it came to be, your reaction. Obviously, you're very much involved in prescription drugs.

[Ms. Lawatsch made brief remarks.]

The President. Obviously, pharmacists have got a stake in this. I mean, people show

up at the counter and there's a lot of pharmacists around the country who are saying, "Can we help you?" It's, frankly, in the interest of the pharmacist to give people the opportunity to get a very generous prescription drug benefit from the Government. I don't know if you've seen attitudinal changes yet amongst the people using the program.

Ms. Lawatsch. Well, absolutely. We definitely see customers come in that say, "Gee, I've never had coverage before," and now they have the coverage. One of the things, too, that we did at Wegmans was we started over a year ago preparing and investing in our people and putting our pharmacists and our technicians through training programs. We had four different online training courses so that they were prepared come January, and that helped a great deal.

The President. Good. Thanks. You're on the frontline.

Ms. Lawatsch. Yes, we are.

The President. So we've got Bob and Eleanor with us. Isn't that right?

Bob Wisnieff. Yes, we're here.

The President. So, in my family, the wife starts speaking first. [Laughter]

Eleanor Wisnieff. Okay, I'll go first.

[Mrs. Wisnieff, retiree, made brief remarks.]

The President. I like the idea of somebody saying, "Here are three choices from which to choose." See, if you give people an opportunity to choose, it means they're more likely to be able to find something that meets their needs. It's a different approach, isn't it? The older—one approach is, "We'll tell you what you need; the Government probably knows a little better than you do, anyway; we'll think on your behalf." What this bill says is, is that, let's have some options available so people get to tailor the options to meet their needs. And what ends up happening is, is that there's choice. When we trust seniors with judgment, it helps on price and it helps on quality.

Do you have anything to offer, Bob?

Mr. Wisnieff. Well, I think Eleanor has pretty much got the punch line of my whole thing, so I'll have to be a bit of a Paul Harvey and say "the rest of the story." [Laughter]

The President. Pretty good. How long have you all been married?

Mr. Wisnieff. Fifty-two years.

The President. Fifty-two years?

Mr. Wisnieff. Fifty-two happy years. I hope you have the same.

The President. He said 52 happy years, by the way. Thanks for setting a good example.

[*Bob Wisnieff, retiree, made brief remarks.*]

The President. The key is saving a little money in retirement. They're on a fixed income. They've got now a prescription drug benefit. They don't have to make the awful choice between food, electricity, and prescription drugs. And they're actually putting a little extra money in their pocket. If that's true—is that true?

Mr. Wisnieff. That's true.

The President. Okay. If it's true, you ought to look at it. Senior citizens not only here in upstate New York but all across the country, ought to look at this plan, ought to look at the opportunities. If you like it, sign up. It's a good deal. If you need help, ask for help. If you want to find out more about it, call 1-800-MEDICARE or get on the Internet, medicare.gov.

For the students listening here, one of my jobs is to help explain things to the American people, explain why we make the decisions we make. Today I've tried to explain to you why the Medicare system needed to be changed and some of the principles inherent in the change that benefits our seniors. Part of explaining something is to have people who are actually involved with the program, people that are helping to educate, people that know something about the pharmaceutical industry, people who are benefiting from the plan, to come and share their experience as well. And so I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come.

One thing I didn't say, I do want to conclude by saying, Dr. Steve Uebbing, who is the superintendent of schools—when I came through the line, he told me about his son Daniel's service in the United States military. I meant to thank a good, proud dad, but more importantly, I want to thank his son for volunteering to serve his country, for volunteering to serve.

And for the students listening, I urge you to find out a way to serve your community.

Mentor somebody; help feed the hungry; provide shelter for the homeless. If you're interested in volunteering for the military, that's one way to serve. Peace Corps is a fantastic opportunity to serve your country. Being a teacher is a fantastic way to serve your country. The strength of the United States of America is not the size of our military or the size of our wallets; the strength of the United States of America is found in the hearts and souls of decent, honorable, compassionate people who have heard a call to serve something greater than themselves.

Thank you all for giving me a chance to come by. I ask for God's blessings on you all and on the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:45 a.m. in the Canandaigua Academy Theatre. In his remarks, he referred to Stephen J. Uebbing, superintendent, Canandaigua City School District; and Mayor Ellen Polimeni of Canandaigua, NY.

Remarks Following a Visit to Ferris Hills at West Lake Senior Center in Canandaigua

March 14, 2006

The reason I have come is, I'm trying to explain to people the benefits of a new Medicare program. Congressman Randy Kuhl asked me to come, and so I did. It shows how influential he is.

I thought the system needed to be changed because it didn't provide a modern form of medicine. A lot of it was good, but some of it was stuck in the past. And so I worked with Congress to get a prescription drug benefit added on to Medicare. The problem is, is that when something changes, people get a little concerned; you know, they say, "Well, I'm not so sure I want to see a change; I'm not so sure change is something that I'm interested in." And I knew that was going to be the case.

But I also knew that if we could convince people who pay attention to take a look and see what options were available, that people would begin to make rational choices, particularly if they had some help. And so I want to thank the Thompson Health Care Group for helping. And as I said at the high school

over there, I said, “If your mom or dad could use a little Medicare, you owe them the opportunity to explain different options and show what’s available.” But the pharmacists are helping a lot to say, “Look, you ought to take a look at the program.”

So we’re in your community to urge people to, you know, kind of step back, see what’s available, design a program that meets your needs, if that’s your interest, and it’s going to save some money. That’s the key, because this—the benefit is costing less than anticipated, as a result of competition and choice. It’s really worthwhile looking at.

I’ve spent a lot of time, as my administration spends a lot of time, talking about how to get people—information into people’s hands. And so that’s why we’re here. Thank you for giving us a chance to come by and visit with you. It looks like you’ve got a beautiful facility.

Okay, well, thanks to the press for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:09 p.m.

Remarks on the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits and a Question-and-Answer Session in Silver Spring, Maryland

March 15, 2006

The President. Listen, thank you all for coming. First of all, I’m proud to be traveling with a Cabinet Secretary. He runs Health and Human Services. His job is to make sure that the Medicare plan works the way it was designed to work.

We’ve come to answer some questions, if you have any—about any subject. [Laughter] But before I begin, I do want to share some thoughts with you.

First, speaking about Cabinet Secretaries, I know Mary Hill is here. Where’s Mary? Oh, hi, Mary. The reason I bring her up is that her daughter is married to one of my Cabinet Secretaries, and she is a fine woman—so is the Cabinet Secretary—[laughter]—Norm Mineta, Norm and Deni Mineta.

I want to thank the folks who run this fine facility. Thanks for letting us come by and talk about good health; that’s what we’re here

to talk about. By the way, Laura sends her best. You might remember her; she’s the most patient woman in America. I don’t know why she didn’t come; I should have asked her. I’ll ask her. You wanted her to come? Well, listen, that happens to me a lot—[laughter]—“You stay home; let Laura come.”

But I’m here to talk about Medicare. First of all, when I got to Washington I took a look at the Medicare system and thought it needed to be improved. When the Government makes a commitment, it ought to make good on its commitment, and it ought to do—make sure we deliver excellence when we say we’re going to do something. Lyndon Johnson—nice Texan—signed the Medicare bill, and it was a commitment by the Federal Government to provide health care for our seniors. And my attitude is, if we’re going to provide health care for the seniors, let’s provide a good system, a modern system.

And so I took a look at it and said that Medicare is doing a lot of good stuff, you know; it really is. It’s an important system. But I asked the question, couldn’t we do it better? And for example, just to give you an idea, you know, Medicare would pay \$28,000 for the surgery for ulcers but wouldn’t pay a dime for the medicine to prevent the surgery from being needed in the first place. That didn’t sound like a very good system to me. In other words, what had happened was, medicine started to change. You all know what I’m talking about. Pharmaceuticals became a really important part of the delivery of good health care. But Medicare did not change with medicine.

And so one of the things that we did, we worked with Republicans and worked with Democrats and said, “Let’s provide a prescription drug benefit for our seniors to make sure that Medicare is a modern system.” Now, I understood that when we began to change Medicare, modernize Medicare, it could create some confusion with people. You know, some people just don’t want to change. Some people thought things were just fine and that giving different options or giving people an opportunity to make different decisions could create some confusion.

Now, I understood that. But I also felt it was worth the risk of creating confusion to

give people different options from which to choose. And so the Medicare bill—the new Medicare bill does something different. It says there is a prescription drug benefit available for all Americans, special help for the lower income Americans, that seniors have also got the opportunity to make a choice, to design a health care plan that best suits their needs.

And so we started the program. Congress passed the bill. It did provide really good help for low-income seniors. It did provide good choices. It did provide a medical examination for people who enroll in Medicare. It does provide for annual screenings. That makes sense, doesn't it? Why don't you—if we screen for disease, it might make it easier for us to solve problems before they become acute.

And so we started saying to the people, “This bill has passed; take a look at it.” And so people got on the computers and saw a lot of different options, and said, “Whoa, this may be a little more than I bargained for.” And so recognizing that people might need some explanations, we rallied people. We got the churches and the synagogues, and we got the community groups; we got the AARP—we got people all around the country—facilities just like this, as a matter of fact—to start explaining options available to our seniors, so seniors can make the right choice for them.

Since the program got going, 26 million seniors have signed up. That's a lot. Pretty quick period of time—26 million people take a look and signed up for the program. They're signing up by the thousands every week. And so one of the reasons I've come is to encourage people who have not signed up to take a look at Medicare, the new Medicare, take a look at what's available. If you like what you see, sign up. If it doesn't meet your needs, that's fine. But I think you're going to like what you see. Drug bills have been cut in half for the average—for the typical senior. I'm not making it up. I'm just telling you what people who've signed up—realize what the plans available—what it has meant to them.

Drug costs have been cut in half. That's positive news if you're a senior. I was with some folks yesterday in upstate New York,

and old Bob got up at a deal like this, and he said in the microphone, he said, “I thought it was too good to be true; it was one of these typical Government deals, you know, where they kind of say something is going to happen, and it doesn't.” He said, “My drug bills have been cut in half.” I think if you—if people pay attention to this program and take a look at it, you'll find that there are some significant cost savings for you.

The other thing that's happened, the taxpayers have got to know is that it's anticipated—the cost of this is 20 percent lower than anticipated in the first year. In other words, it turns out when people have choices, they get better quality and they get better price. And that's what you're seeing in the Medicare bill.

If you haven't signed up—by the way, I'm not only speaking to you, I'm speaking to the cameras, too, by the way—[laughter]—because I want people to hear this; it's important. If you haven't signed up, call 1-800-MEDICARE. If you're a—if you've got—if you're a son or a daughter of a citizen on Medicare, do your parent a favor and get on the Internet and take a look at what's available and help your mom or dad take a look at this new Medicare benefit structure. There are some choices to choose from, no doubt about it. But with more choices to choose from, you can better design a program that meets your needs.

People are signing up by the thousands. There's a May 15th deadline. And so what Mike and I are going to do is travel around the country and hold seminars like this and continue to remind people there's a good opportunity. And I really urge you to take a look. It's a program that does modernize the system. It's a program that says, we trust seniors to make the right choice. It's a program that I think you're going to like a lot.

And that's what I've come to do. Part of my job is to educate the American people about what's available. It's called the Educator in Chief. [Laughter] This is a new program, and it requires a lot of work.

Yesterday I met with a group of concerned citizens from different walks of life—you know, the NAACP and the—some Latino groups, business groups, pharmaceutical

groups. I said, look—and they're there for a reason; they wanted to hear my commitment to the program and my encouraging them to go out and find people and encourage them to take a look and sign up.

And so that's what I'm doing here today, and I want to thank you all for giving me a chance to come by and visit with you. If you've got any questions for me, I'll answer them. If they're too hard, I'll turn them over to the Secretary and let him answer them. [Laughter] But I'll be glad to answer any questions you've got on any subject on your mind. If you've got something you want to ask about Medicare, you can—any other subject that you care about.

Yes, ma'am.

Private Sector Health Insurance

Q. [Inaudible]—subject. First, welcome to the Blue State of Maryland.

The President. Thank you. It's good to be here.

Q. Secondly, I am a member of Medicare, of course. I'm also a member of Kaiser Permanente. My medical bills are absolute nothing—90 days or \$8. Why does Kaiser have more of a means of putting forth these medications than does the Government of the United States?

The President. See, she is a part of a private program that has provided a benefit that you like, and you don't want to change, and you don't have to change. And that's what we're trying to do. We're trying to give people different options, like the option you have got.

In the old system, they didn't have those options. Matter of fact, they didn't have a prescription drug benefit in the old Medicare system. Now the Medicare system has invited a series of providers—I think there's 34 different providers here in the State of Maryland, if I'm not mistaken—that say, now, I want to give you a chance to be able to come up and have the same satisfaction with the program that you do.

Look, if you're happy with where you are—and it sounds like you're pretty happy about it—don't change.

Q. I'm not going to.

The President. You shouldn't. [Laughter] And I don't blame you; I wouldn't either.

But if you're—but you ought to take a look. See, people ought to take a look and see. That's all I'm saying. Nobody is making you do anything. I'm just traveling around saying to people, take a look at what's available for you. There's people on this staff here at this facility that will help you. That's all—believe me, it's worth taking a look. It's free.

Yes, ma'am.

Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits

Q. First off, as a resident, I wish to tell you how pleased we are that you took time out to come to Riderwood, because Riderwood beside has a wonderful—you look around at these vibrant, elderly people; you know we have very good health care. And we're looking for good health care.

Now, we have the Advantage—Erickson Advantage is here, which covers Medicare and Part D, which is what you're sponsoring. So we're glad that you're here to explain, even though this is Erickson's health plan. But that doesn't eliminate your Part D.

The President. No, that's right. Yes, I mean, in other words, Erickson is a part of the menu of opportunity.

Q. Right.

The President. Well, I appreciate you bringing it up. You sound like you know a lot on the subject. You ought to be up here speaking. [Laughter] No, I appreciate that. Thanks.

Part D—when they hear Part D, that's talking about the prescription drug benefit that's now available. It was not available in Medicare. I signed the bill; it is now available.

Q. Right.

The President. And again, I repeat, if you're a low-income senior, there's a lot of help for you. The Government pays over 95 percent of anything coming your way. And that's important. So you ought to look. That's all we're saying.

Yes, sir. Thanks for wearing the Texas shirt. [Laughter]

Health Care for Veterans

Q. I have a grandson here from Houston. He brought it. He gave it to me last Christmas, and I had to wear it today.

The President. I'm honored. Thanks. Yes, kind of reminds me of home. [Laughter]

Q. Mr. President, I'm happy to be here at Riderwood. I'm retired military, retired from the Veterans Administration also, and I can get treatment from VA. What is the best thing for a man like me to do? There are many retired military people here who are in the same situation.

The President. Well, I think the Veterans Affairs benefits are a very good package. And Veterans Affairs, one of their major responsibilities is to honor the commitment they've made to you, sir. And they intend to honor it. Again, I don't know all the details of your Veterans Affairs benefit package, but you ought to take a look at all options. It's just a free look. Get your son to get on the Internet with you, and just see whether or not it makes any sense. But I'll bet you'll find the Veterans' benefits are pretty good.

Yes, sir. Thanks for serving, by the way. Appreciate the example you've set.

Yes, sir.

Electronic Medical Records

Q. The people who live here are fortunate to have their health records in a computer—in electronic medical records. Could you talk a little bit about that?

The President. Thank you, sir. [Laughter] Yes, well, it's a very good question because part of the issue we face in America is the cost of health care, the rising cost of health care. Part of the rising cost of health care is the result of a really important industry not being a part of the 21st century technology. He asked about medical records, electronic medical records. That means that everybody will have their medical records on a—digitized in a way that can be used over the Internet, for example.

You might remember the old days—and a lot of hospitals are still that way, by the way, or most doctors' offices are that way, when they actually write your prescription or write your procedure on a piece of paper. That's pretty inefficient. One reason is doctors can't write to begin with. [Laughter] Are you a doc? Sorry. [Laughter]

But carrying your files from one office to the next is not an efficient way to run a system. Files can get lost; people cannot nec-

essarily read what is written; prescriptions can sometimes not be written properly because the handwriting isn't legible. You might—you know, a person transfers from one jurisdiction to the next, and the files may get lost, or the doctor may not exactly understand what the other doctor had talked about in the handwritten files. And that leads to medical errors and a costly health care system.

And so what the good doc is asking is, are we in the process of trying to have medical records like you have here at this facility so that your health care is better delivered and there aren't mistakes? And the answer is, absolutely. I've tasked the Secretary of Health and Human Services to start working on a variety of fronts when it comes to information technology in health care, starting with a common language. The data of medicine is complicated. You can describe different ailments and different diseases in different ways. And so what Mike is doing through his department is coming up with a common language.

And the idea is—I'll give you a practical example of why this is—having medical records is important. When Hurricane Katrina hit, a lot of veterans were displaced. Now, the Veterans Administration has got medical records for people that they're serving. And so you have a person go from New Orleans to Houston and, fortunately, the electronic medical record could go with that person, which then meant the doc in Houston would see a new patient, but the medical records would lay out exactly what needed to be done to take care of the patient.

And that's precisely the kind of vision that we're talking about so that, ultimately, America is using information technology to lower the cost of medicine, but to provide higher quality of medicine for people through medical records. And Mike is in charge of that, and his department is making good progress. Thanks for bringing it up.

The other thing that's really important about medical records, and something my administration is going to be a stickler for, is to make sure that the records are private. We don't want people looking at your medical record if you don't want them looking at your medical record. In other words, it's

your record, and there's got to be a certain amount of privacy to that record. And so just because I talk about having electronic medical records, you've just got to understand that there's going to be an important privacy component to making sure that others can't look at your record if you don't want them to.

Good question.

Yes, ma'am.

Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits

Q. Mr. President, I told my mother last night that I was going to be covering the President of the United States on the health—[*inaudible*].

The President. Okay, here you go. She started off saying she talked to her mom last night.

Q. Yes. And you may have some experience with instructions from a forceful mother, sir. [*Laughter*] I got some from mine. [*Laughter*]

The President. Well-spoken.

Q. My mom is 75; she is sick; she's back in New Jersey alone. She didn't know anything about the Part D drug plan until I told her in February, with all the publicity and everything. I'm trying to walk her through it, but she doesn't know what to tell me. I don't know how to help her. I've punched her stuff into medicare.gov. I've got the basics, but it's still too much for her to afford. And I don't know where to tell her to go and get help. She wants to know if you guys will roll back the May 15th deadline.

The President. No. And the reason why is, there's got to be a fixed time for people to sign up. And we want people to realize there is—now is the time. And I'm not exactly sure about your mom's situation. I do want to thank you for helping her. Daughters ought to help their mothers realize what's available.

Now, again, there is a—I'm not sure what the plan—the structure looks like in New Jersey, but rolling back deadlines is not going to help your mom make a good decision. You're going to have to help her make the decision. And a lot of people like your mom were in the same situation—they took a look, said it looks confusing. But there's a lot of

help. That's what—one of the reasons I'm here to talk about—

Q. The thing I'm trying to find out is—this is a great system where you have a group like Riderwood—it's a great system in Riderwood, where people can come together, or the church groups. But what do you do with the people who are just sick enough, they can't go out, they don't have help, you know? Do we have a system to knock on doors, to walk—

The President. Absolutely. And that's exactly what our—

Q. Where can I send her?

The President. Well, first of all, I happen to think—and I don't want—look, I'm not going to tell you your business, but I think it's your responsibility to help your mom. And I think a lot of parents—a lot of children should help their moms. And I think you really ought to take a look at the different options for her. I mean, the best grassroots outreach is child to parent. There's other outreach; you're right. The church is outreach. Again, I don't know the particulars in the neighborhood. I can—if you can get us the area in which she lives, we can find a group that's very much involved in helping people like your mom. I appreciate it.

But that's the whole—her—she's got a great point. In order to—we've got to explain this to as many people as we can. And I fully understand that it's confusing. That's why I started off the talk, "It can be confusing to people." But when you work through the different options and look at the steps and have somebody explain it to you, in the end, it is a really good deal.

Now, if she doesn't choose to be a part of Part D, that's a choice that you and she and others will make. But it is—it has proven to be a cost-effective decision for our seniors. The typical senior has their drug bill cut in half. That's across America. If your mom qualifies, she will get more than 95 percent of her drug bills paid by the Government.

And so thanks for bringing it up.

Health Care Reform

Q. Back here.

The President. Oh, yes.

Q. We still have millions of underinsured or uninsured citizens in the United States, and what are you going to do about that?

The President. Right. No, there's no question that's an issue. And one of the reasons why is because health care costs are going up, and there are ways to address health care costs. One of them is information technology. Another one is legal reform. A lot of doctors are getting sued. And when they get sued, they practice defensive medicine in order to protect them in the courts. And by practicing defensive medicine, it causes costs to go up. Transparency in pricing is another way to make sure consumers have got the capacity to make rational decisions for themselves.

Some of the people who are not insured are younger Americans who choose not to be insured. It's like, I kind of remember that period of time. I thought I was never going to get sick, and so I thought I'd save some money.

A lot of people who are insured—or uninsured—are working uninsured, and they tend to work for small businesses. And small businesses have trouble being able to purchase insurance—so they get the insurance. And one idea to help small businesses is to allow them to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries. In other words, let the restaurateur in Texas and the restaurateur in Maryland join in a risk pool so as to make insurance more affordable for small businesses. Health savings accounts are a way to help small businesses be able to afford insurance.

Now, if you're poor, you're going to get help through Medicaid. There is an insurance plan. If you're a—if you're somebody in this country who needs primary care, we've got community health centers all across America, places where people can get good health care, not in the emergency rooms of our hospitals.

So there is a variety of ways to deal with a very difficult issue. And you're right; it's an issue that the country must address. Thanks for bringing it up.

Yes, sir.

Medicare Prescription Drug Benefits

Q. No one's quite said this, this way, I don't think, sir. Speaking as one resident

here, among a very diverse group, that it is an honor and a privilege to be visited by the President of all 300 million of us and the leader of the free world.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. Welcome.

The President. Thank you.

Q. I do have a question. When this law was passed with your encouragement—almost immediately after the bill was enacted by Congress, the chief auditor at Medicare came out and spoke on TV and said that he had compiled a projected cost significantly higher than what Congress had been told. And he was threatened with immediate dismissal if he allowed that information to come out. Is that—did that man speak the truth? And if so, why would you not want facts like that to come out to the American people?

The President. Actually, what's happened, sir, is that the estimated cost is 20 percent lower than bodies that tried to estimate the cost. And the reason why is, is because the program has worked better than anticipated, and it has been better than anticipated. And I think you'll be reflected in our budgets.

Well, they estimated, for example, the average premium was going to cost \$37 a month, and it's down to \$25 a month. In other words, it's working. And I think that's important for people to understand. And there's been a lot of estimates about the cost of the program, but what really matters is the actual costs. And it looks like the dollars are going to be lower than we thought, which is good news—good news—and more importantly, lower to the seniors than we thought. And that's the most important news of all. The most important news to you is, this is a good deal for you, the consumer, the person we're trying to help. And we think it is. And people ought to look at it. I don't know if you've looked at, but you ought to, if you haven't. Thank you.

Yes, ma'am.

Electronic Medical Records

Q. Yes, you mentioned a little while ago about chips—I mean about medical records. Today in *The Post*, they were talking about people getting chips implanted with their medical records. And it sounded good to me.

My dog has one. [*Laughter*] And I bet your dogs have them.

The President. Now, I don't know if our dogs—I don't think—we're not quite that sophisticated yet. Barney might not like it. [*Laughter*]

Q. I guess my question is, in the future, if we want people to have this, would it be possible, or thinking that far ahead, that when a child is born, a chip is implanted and you keep feeding information into it through—

The President. I don't know. That's an interesting question. I, frankly, haven't heard of that. Do you have any—maybe the Secretary—maybe it's time for the Secretary to step in. [*Laughter*]

I think the point is this—I think the point is, is that there is the capacity to carry in a very small object a lot of data that can be downloaded in other medical facilities in order to facilitate a flow of information that enables people to get good health care in a cost-effective way. I don't know about implantations or not. But nevertheless, I do think that the idea of having a medical chip that is on a card, or it can be anywhere—you got one, doc? No, I thought you were searching for—[*laughter*].

Q. We have one at Erickson.

The President. Yes, sir.

India

Q. Mr. President, I just want to take the opportunity to thank you for your farsighted policy in India, of assisting them in their civilian nuclear program.

The President. Oh, thank you, sir.

Q. I was at Tarapur 40 years ago, when General Electric inaugurated the first nuclear plant in India. And I think it's going to go a long way towards keeping our friendship with that important country in Asia. Thank you very much.

The President. Well, thanks for bringing that up. He's referring to a trip I just took to India and Pakistan and Afghanistan. And we were working on an agreement with India to encourage India and help India develop its civilian nuclear power industry. And one—a couple of reasons why one would do that: One, when India's demand for fossil fuels goes up, it causes the price of our fossil

fuels to go up. And so, therefore, to encourage them to use a renewable source of energy that doesn't create greenhouse gas, this makes a lot of sense.

Secondly, India has been a—is a nonproliferator, has proven to be a nonproliferator for the past 30 years. In other words, they've got a record that, in my judgment, should cause the Congress to pass old law to treat them as a new partner. Thirdly, India wants to be a part of international agreements that will help deal with proliferation.

And so I thank you for your comments. I appreciate you saying that.

Yes, sir.

Pakistan

Q. It was particularly courageous, in view of the fact that Pakistan is one of our allies in the war on terrorism, and of course, it's going to affect their attitude to some extent.

The President. Well, I appreciate you saying that. The good news is that, as I said in the speech there in India, we now—I think Indians understand it's good for the United States to be friendly with Pakistan, and the Pakistanis understand it's good for the United States to be friendly with India—which is, as you know, a change of, kind of, the relationship of the United States with those two countries.

I had a good visit with President Musharraf, who is dedicated to routing out Al Qaida if they hide in his country, and we really appreciate his dedication. And at the same time, he's dedicated toward advancing democracy. So it was a great visit. Thanks for bringing it up.

Yes, ma'am—oop, you again. [*Laughter*]

Electronic Medical Records

Q. You mentioned about privacy, Mr. President.

The President. Yes.

Q. It's very well to say privacy on our electronics. You know there's no such a thing as real privacy. Something leaks out all the time somewhere.

The President. I'd say that. [*Laughter*]

Q. Did you ever think, or think in your bill some way that the insurance companies cannot use it against us? Because that's the

fear—that’s the fear, that an insurance company will say, “Uh-oh, we won’t touch you,” and you know——

The President. Preexisting conditions——

Q. That’s right—or something that you developed along the way.

The President. I think there’s laws that protect you on that. It’s a different issue from them looking at your records. One is to say, “Well, you’ve got a preexisting condition; therefore, we won’t insure you.” That’s different from them taking a look at your records.

Q. Because you get these conditions later on as you go along in life.

The President. Right. I understand. The good news about the current Medicare program is that they’ll take care of you as you are.

Q. Here’s an electronic card.

The President. Let’s see that card. I don’t see very well. [*Laughter*]

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. They did? Great. Thanks. That’s what—the card, yes.

Yes, sir. The mic disappeared on you. Sorry.

Energy/Environment

Q. Thank you. Since we’re talking about health care, I wonder if we couldn’t address the health care of the world—in particular, the issue of greenhouse gases.

The President. Sure.

Q. The entire—well, I’m one of the scientists who believes that—and many of us do—that the greenhouse gases have been caused by us, and that it’s about time that the United States took serious actions on the prevention of further greenhouse gases.

The President. I exactly agree with you, sir, and that’s exactly what we’re doing. I think you’re right. I thought the prescription to the Kyoto plan was the wrong way to go. On the other hand, I do know we can use technologies to achieve exactly that objective.

For example, second-generation nuclear power. It’s a renewable resource. It doesn’t emit, as you know, greenhouse gases. It’s one of the reasons why I work with India and trying to help China, as well, to be able to develop a civilian nuclear power industry

without—with guarantees against proliferation, in order to protect the environment.

The other day, in the State of the Union address, I said, we’re too addicted to oil, and we need to get off oil. There are alternative ways to do that. Plug-in hybrid batteries is a new technology that’s coming, and I think will help deal with emissions. The use of ethanol—ethanol made from sugar, of course, is a technology that works. But hopefully, we’ll be able to have some breakthroughs to be able to use saw grass or wood chips to manufacture ethanol in order to be able to not only make us less dependent on foreign sources of energy but also to be good stewards of the environment.

Ultimately, hydrogen-powered automobiles will help make a huge difference. We’re spending about a billion—\$200 million or so to research that. Solar technology is another area where there’s some great potential breakthroughs. I went to a plant in Michigan the other day and saw these new roofing materials that got photovoltaic cells, a part of them.

And so I agree with you. I think it’s very important for us to use technology to help protect the environment and, at the same time, achieve an important economic and national security objective, which is no dependence on oil.

It’s a—all right. Yes, sir.

Transparency of Health Costs

Q. Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. Glad to have you here.

The President. Thanks.

Q. Thank you very much. I have two questions. The first question deals with a resident that’s here—was unable to be here, but she’s having—the resident is having a problem trying to get enrolled in Medicare B. And all of the time that she’s had problems, the person has had a problem getting on the computer, getting anything resolved, and so on and so forth.

The President. Okay.

Q. And that’s——

Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt. I’ll get the name, and we’ll take care of it.

Q. Okay. The second question——

The President. That's easy. [Laughter]

Q. The second question deals with what are we doing at the Federal level to get some uniformity in terms of the billing in hospitals so that we don't have the wide dispersion between hospital billing as a result of someone having insurance and someone who does not have insurance and the whole bit. And that's been going on for years, because I was in a hospital, ran a part of it, and I know that there's a great dispersion in that.

The President. No, I appreciate that. Do you want to take that on, Mike?

Secretary Leavitt. Sure. Last night I was in a hotel, and on the back of the hotel door, there was a price: \$449 a night. Now, you'll be pleased to know, Mr. President, that I didn't pay that—[laughter]—and we didn't pay that because the Government had created a Government rate. It was only \$130 a night, and they slid the bill under the door.

A lot of insurance companies do the same thing and create special prices for the people that are insured with them. What the President has recently done is, he's told every insurance company, every employer, and every provider in the country, "You ought to tell people what you're charging." People deserve, people have a right to know what they're being charged and the kind of quality they're getting. And that's an initiative of the President. And very shortly, I believe you'll start to see that kind of disclosure.

Q. Thank you.

The President. This guy has got a great question because really what he's talking about is transparency in pricing. When you go buy a car, you know exactly what they're going to charge you. [Laughter] Well, sometimes you don't know. [Laughter] Well, you negotiate with them. [Laughter] Well, they put something on the window that says price. [Laughter] His point is, is that the more you know about price, the better you can make better decisions, and I appreciate that.

Listen, you're paying me a lot of money to work, and so I think I'm going to have to head back home. But I'm honored. Got any more questions, I'll be glad to answer them.

Electronic Medical Records

Q. I have one.

The President. Okay, yes, please. Thank you.

Q. I'd like to ask you about the medical records. They're not infallible, and we like to have paper backup. Recently had an experience here in Riderwood; went for a blood check. Records were down because the power was down, and they couldn't connect to the computer. They need—most places have paper backup, and I think if you don't have a complete record, it's not going to work as greatly as it does.

The President. No, that's really a kind of redundancy in the process to make sure that if there's a power outage, that there's not an emergency caused by that. No, that's a really good point. Thanks.

Q. Thank you.

The President. I guess, is there a—

Secretary Leavitt. Working on it. [Laughter]

The President. Working on it. [Laughter]
Yes, sir. Working on it. [Laughter]

India/Nuclear Technology

Q. Mr. President, there are some—and I guess I would include myself—who have different views about the Indian agreement, because they're concerned about the effect that the agreement will have on the capacity of India to stimulate its own production of nuclear weapons—

The President. No, I understand.

Q. —by helping them. But I would go beyond that and ask you, while you're still President, to consider one aspect of this whole nuclear question. I guess I'm one of the three standing—left standing Americans who helped—who did the negotiation of the nonproliferation treaty. And the basic bargain there was that other countries would give up their nuclear weapons if we, the nuclear powers, would engage in a program of nuclear disarmament.

Now, I'm aware of all of the agreements that have taken place. I'm aware of the negotiations that you had with Mr. Putin. The point is that we cannot expect that agreement, that basic agreement to hold if the United States, particularly, goes on acting as—and has the position that we might initiate a nuclear war if it is necessary.

And I would ask you just to think about the time—while you're still President, taking the one position that only one American President has taken, and that is President Johnson, to consider a "no first-use" policy to help the prospect of nuclear proliferation in the long run.

The President. Well, thank you. Thank you very much. Thanks for your contribution, by the way. I appreciate it.

Part of the Indian deal is to actually get them to formally join some of the institutions that you helped—your work created. And you're right. I did do an agreement with President Putin—thanks for noticing—where we're—both of us are reducing nuclear stockpiles. But I'll take your words to heart and think about it. Thank you. No commitment standing right here, of course. [*Laughter*]

Well, I'm thrilled to be here. Thank you all for your time. I would hope that people would take a look—just take a look. And if you need help, there are people here who will help you. And if you're watching on TV, ask your son or daughter or ask your neighbor or ask a person that has signed up whether or not it's worthwhile. And I think you'll find this is a program that's—it's a good program.

I appreciate you letting me have a chance to come by and visit with you. Thanks for the town hall meeting. Thanks for the good questions. God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:50 p.m. at Riderwood retirement community. In his remarks, he referred to Richard S. Foster, Chief Actuary, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan; and President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

Remarks at a Celebration of Hungarian Contributions to Democracy

March 15, 2006

Thank you all. Please be seated. Mr. Speaker, thank you for having me here in this beautiful Capitol to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution.

I appreciate being here with the mayor of our city, Mayor Williams. Good to see you, Mr. Mayor. I appreciate Chairman Hyde.

Mr. Chairman, it's good to see you. I thank the members of the diplomatic corps, most particularly, Ambassador Walker. I've heard of him before. [*Laughter*] Ambassador Simonyi—thank you all. Members of Congress, most particularly a beacon for—a steadfast beacon for liberty is how I'd like to define my friend Tom Lantos.

I've come today to—not only to thank our strong ally, the Government of Hungary and the people of Hungary, but I've come to thank my friend Tom Lantos, and his wife, Annette, for never letting anybody forget that freedom is precious and necessary in our world.

The Hungarian example is an example of patience and an example of the fact that freedom exists in everybody's soul. It's an example that tyranny can never stamp out the desire to be free. It's an example that—of a country that, once becomes free, joins with other freedom-loving countries to keep the peace.

I've come to remind the people of Hungary, they've got a great friend in America. I want to thank, by the way, the Hungarian Americans who are here with us today. You've made a significant contribution to our country.

You know, it's an interesting world in which we live. There's an argument about—in some places—about whether or not freedom is universal, whether or not freedom is okay for some parts of the world but not others. I believe freedom is universal. I believe the example of Hungary proves that freedom is universal. I believe everybody desires to live in freedom. I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe the Almighty God's gift to each person in this world is liberty. And I believe the United States, and I believe Hungary, and I believe other free nations have the responsibility to help other people realize their freedom as well.

You know, one of the interesting examples of Europe that I try to explain to our people is that for 100 years, there were war, where a lot of people lost their lives and a lot of Americans lost their life. But today, Europe is at peace. Europe is whole, free, and at

peace. And I believe the reason why is because democracy has taken hold on that continent. And one of the leading lights of democracy has been Hungary.

We thank the Hungarian people for their example. We thank them for their contribution in helping the newly free in Afghanistan and Iraq realize the blessings of liberty. We thank them for being allies in keeping the peace.

Mr. Speaker, thanks for letting me come by and pay my respects to a strong ally and a good friend but also pay my respects to Congressman Tom Lantos, a person who understands the difference between freedom and tyranny, and a person who is willing to speak his mind all times, all places, everywhere.

God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:45 p.m. in Statutory Hall at the United States Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; U.S. Ambassador to Hungary George H. Walker III; and Hungary's Ambassador to the U.S. Andras Simonyi.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Members of Congress

March 16, 2006

It's been my pleasure to host Republicans and Democrats from both the House and the Senate here to talk about budget reform. We're talking about the way to—for the executive branch and the legislative branch to work in a cooperative fashion to help make sure that the appropriations bills we pass are—meet priorities, that they are—that the process is transparent, that we're able to say to the American people, "We care about how we spend your money."

Part of the budget reform process is a line-item veto. I want to thank the Members here who have come, who have offered not only constructive advice but practical applications of the line-item veto so that it becomes law. And I listened carefully to some constructive suggestions from both Republicans and Democrats as to how to get a piece of legislation passed. The American people expect all of us from both parties to work diligently as to how we spend their money. And one way

that we can earn the confidence of the people is to pass a line-item veto.

And again, I want to thank the Members for being here. It means a lot that people from both parties are here. I particularly want to thank my opponent in the 2004 campaign, Senator Kerry, for being here. I can remember on the campaign trail, he said that he supported a line-item veto, and he is following through on his word by being here at the table. I'm proud you're here, Senator.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Remarks on Signing the Stop Counterfeiting in Manufactured Goods Act

March 16, 2006

Thank you. Welcome. Thanks for coming. In a few moments, I will sign a bill that protects the hard work of American innovators, strengthens the rule of law, and helps keep our families and consumers safe. The Stop Counterfeiting in Manufactured Goods Act has earned broad support, and I want to thank all those who helped get this bill passed for being here today. I want to thank the lawmakers from both political parties for getting this piece of legislation to this desk. I want to thank the consumer protection groups who have joined us as well. Thanks for your hard work on this important piece of legislation.

I want to thank the Attorney General, Al Gonzales, who has joined us; the Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez; my Secretary of Labor, Elaine Chao. Thank you all for being here. I appreciate the chairman of the Judiciary—House Judiciary, Jim Sensenbrenner, for joining us today. I also want to thank the bill's sponsor, Joe Knollenberg from Michigan, as well as Bobby Scott from Virginia. Thank you three Members for being here. The Senators claim they're voting on important legislation; otherwise they would have been here too. *[Laughter]*

This economy of ours is strong; it's getting stronger. We grew at 3.5 percent last year. The national unemployment rate is 4.8 percent. People are buying homes. The small-

business sector is strong. Productivity is up. Our country is productive; it's innovative; it's entrepreneurial. And we've got to keep it that way.

One of the problems we have is that people feel comfortable, at times, in trying to take a shortcut to success in the business world. They feel like they can copy existing products instead of designing their own. In order to keep this economy innovative and entrepreneurial, it's important for us to enforce law, and if the laws are weak, pass new laws to make sure that the problem of counterfeiting, which has been growing rapidly, is arrested, is held in check.

Counterfeiting costs our country hundreds of billion dollars a year. It has got a lot of harmful effects in our economy. Counterfeiting hurts businesses. They lose the right to profit from their innovation. Counterfeiting hurts workers because counterfeiting undercuts honest competition, rewards illegal competitors. Counterfeiting hurts our—counterfeiting hurts consumers because fake products expose our people to serious health and safety risks. Counterfeiting hurts the Government. We lose out on tax revenue. We have to use our resources for law—of law enforcement to stop counterfeiting. Counterfeiting hurts national security because terrorist networks use counterfeit sales to, sometimes, finance their operations.

This administration and Congress have worked together to confront the illegal threat—the real threat of illegal activity such as counterfeiting. And the bill I'm signing today is an important step forward.

The bill helps us defeat counterfeiting in two key ways. First, the bill strengthens our laws against trading counterfeit labels and packaging. In the past, the law prohibited the manufacturing, shipping, and—or selling of counterfeit goods, but it did not make it a crime to ship falsified labels or packaging, which counterfeiters could then attach to fake products.

This loophole helped counterfeiters cheat consumers by passing off poorly-made items as brandname goods. By closing the loophole, we're going to keep honest Americans from losing business to scam artists.

Secondly, the bill strengthens penalties for counterfeiters and gives prosecutors new

tools to stop those who defraud American consumers. The bill requires courts to order the destruction of all counterfeit products seized as a part of a criminal investigation. The bill requires convicted counterfeiters to turn over their profits as well as any equipment used in their operations, so it can't be used to cheat our people again. The bill requires those convicted of counterfeiting to reimburse the legitimate businesses they exploited. These commonsense reforms will help law enforcement to crack down on this serious crime. We've got to get the counterfeiters and their products off the streets.

The tools in the bill I sign today will become a part of our broad effort to protect the creativity and innovation of our entrepreneurs. This administration is leading an initiative called STOP—Strategy Targeting Organized Piracy. Nine Federal agencies are coming together in this initiative, including the Department of Justice, which has launched the most aggressive effort in American history to prevent intellectual property violations. We've expanded computer hacking and intellectual property units in U.S. Attorney's offices all across the country. We're posting specially trained prosecutors and FBI agents at American embassies in Asia and Eastern Europe. We're working with other nations and the World Trade Organization to promote strong intellectual property laws around the globe. We're cooperating with the private sector to raise awareness of counterfeiting so we can help stop fraud before it starts.

These efforts are getting some results. Last year, we dismantled a piracy ring in Massachusetts that was planning to sell more than 30,000 counterfeit hand bags and shoes and necklaces and other items. With partners overseas, we broke up a prescription drug counterfeiting network and seized more than \$4 million in phony medicine. With the help of 16 countries on 5 continents, we removed more than a \$100 million worth of illegal online software, games, movies, and music. This is a really important effort, and as we call upon folks to send a message to the counterfeiters, "We're not going to tolerate your way of life," that we need to give them all the tools necessary to do their jobs. And this bill

I'm going to sign here in 30 seconds does just that.

Again, I want to thank you all for being here to help honor these legislators that crossed the partisan divide to help protect this country from those who feel like they can sell illegal products and counterfeit and steal our—steal intellectual property. Good work. Thanks for coming. Now let's 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. 32, approved March 16, was assigned Public Law No. 109–181.

Remarks on the Nomination of Dirk Kempthorne To Be Secretary of the Interior

March 16, 2006

The President. Good afternoon. I'm pleased to announce my nomination of Governor Dirk Kempthorne to be the Secretary of the Interior. The Department of Interior is responsible for managing our national parks and public lands, conserving our natural resources, and pursuing environmentally responsible energy development on Federal lands and waters.

I've nominated Dirk to succeed an outstanding public servant, Gale Norton. As the Secretary of the Interior for the past 5 years, she was instrumental in establishing the Healthy Forests Initiative to protect communities from catastrophic wildfire and to improve the habitat. When Hurricane Katrina devastated the gulf coast region, she helped lead the efforts to restore offshore energy production so that Americans would not suffer further supply disruptions and price increases.

Future generations of Americans will be able to enjoy our great national parks and wildlife refugees because of Gale's untiring work. Gale was one of the original members of my Cabinet and the first woman in American history to hold the post of Secretary of the Interior. I appreciate her dedicated service, and Laura and I wish Gale and John all the best.

Dirk Kempthorne is the right man to build on this progress. As Governor of Idaho, he

worked closely with Gale on a variety of important initiatives. They worked together to resolve a longstanding water rights issue, to return responsibility to Idaho for managing the local wolf population, and to make the Healthy Forests Initiative a reality in Idaho.

As Governor, Dirk has been a responsible steward of Idaho's 30 State parks and recreational trailways that serve millions of visitors each year. He has launched the state-wide Experience Idaho Initiative, which will fund needed improvements within Idaho's State parks to preserve public spaces and expand recreational opportunities for visitors. Last August, I had a chance to enjoy those recreational opportunities firsthand when Dirk and I biked some of Idaho's trails together.

As Secretary of the Interior, Dirk will continue my administration's efforts to conserve our land, water, and air resources; reduce the maintenance backlog of our national parks; support historic and cultural sites through our Preserve America Initiative; and develop the energy potential of Federal lands and waters in environmentally sensitive ways.

Dirk brings wide experience to these important tasks. He has served at every level of government: as mayor of Boise, as Governor of Idaho, and as a United States Senator. While in the Senate, he chaired the Subcommittee on Drinking Water, Fisheries, and Wildlife, and he chaired the Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee.

He built bipartisan support to enact comprehensive reforms to the Safe Drinking Water Act. Dirk understands that those who live closest to the land know how to manage it best, and he will work closely with State and local leaders to ensure wise stewardship of our resources.

Dirk has had a long and abiding love for nature. When he and his wife, Patricia, were married, they chose to hold the ceremony atop Idaho's Moscow Mountain at sunrise. Dirk said, "I don't think there's a more beautiful cathedral than the outdoors."

I appreciate his willingness to take on this important post, and I ask the Senate to confirm him promptly as the 49th Secretary of the Interior.

Thanks for agreeing to serve.

[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 har-

bor 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 leader-

ship 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.

President Bush. Laura and I are delighted to welcome you here to the White House. I'm proud to accept the bowl of shamrocks as a symbol of our friendship.

The friendship between Ireland and the United States has deep roots. Few people fought as hard for American independence as the sons of Erin. At the end of the Revolutionary War, Lord Mountjoy told the House of Commons that, "We've lost America through the Irish." The Irish played a key role in Washington's army. And in the two centuries since, the ties between Ireland and America have only strengthened.

The ties between Ireland and America are reflected in this great house. This house was designed by an Irish architect, and he used as his model the grandest building he knew, Leinster House in Ireland. The affinities between the two buildings are more than just architectural; the White House, built by James Hoban, has been home to every American President since John Q. Adams' father, John. The Dublin building that inspired him now serves as a free parliament in a free and independent Ireland.

The ties between Ireland and America are also reflected in our people. Ireland has one of the fastest growing economies in Europe, and its growth is attracting immigrants. For more than a century, that was a different story. Millions of Irish came to our shores because of war and poverty and famine. Often they arrived with nothing but the faith of their fathers and a willingness to work. These men and women who built our cities were also the soldiers who defended our freedom in every one of our wars. They're the priests and they're the nuns who built a system of parochial schools that provided a decent education for millions of poor immigrants. And they're now doing the same thing for a new generation of African Americans and Latino Americans in our inner cities.

Like Saint Patrick, the Irish in America began their life in their new land as exiles, but came to love it as home. Finally, the ties between Ireland and America are reflected in our common commitment to bring the blessings of liberty to every man and woman and child on this Earth.

In the 20th century, Ireland won its independence and raised up a democracy that of-

fered its people a just and better life. In the 21st century, Ireland is now helping other nations who share the same aspirations for peace and prosperity by fighting hunger and the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa, by supporting relief efforts for victims of the tsunami in Asia, and by helping the Afghan people rebuild their lives and their country. Ireland is independent when it comes to foreign policy, but Ireland is not neutral when it comes to the global challenges like hunger and disease and human rights.

Taoiseach, you're making a big contribution to our world, and we appreciate it. The United States appreciates all of Ireland's efforts for peace and freedom. Americans are grateful to our Irish friends, and we are proud of our Irish heritage.

The Census Bureau tells us there are more than 34 million Americans that claim Irish ancestry. On Saint Patrick's Day, I suspect that number jumps a little bit. [Laughter] On this special day, we honor the saint who brought the gospel of peace to the Green Isle, and we count ourselves blessed by the warm friendship between his adopted land and our own.

Thanks for coming. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.

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.

March 11

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the evening, at the Capital Hilton Hotel, the President and Mrs. Bush attended the Gridiron Club dinner.

March 13

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the Old Indian Treaty Room at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building, the President participated in a photo opportunity with the Intel Science Talent Search finalists.

In the afternoon, the President received diplomatic credentials from newly appointed Ambassadors to the United States.

The President announced his intention to nominate Kenneth L. Wainstein to be an Assistant Attorney General and upon appointment to designate him as Assistant Attorney General for National Security.

The President announced his intention to nominate Jonann E. Chiles to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation.

The President announced his intention to nominate J.C.A. Stagg to be a member of the Board of Trustees of the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation (Academic).

The President announced his intention to appoint John Cornyn and Edward M. Kennedy as members of the Board of Trustees of the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation.

March 14

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he traveled to Rochester, NY, where, upon arrival, he met with USA Freedom Corps volunteer Father Joseph Champlin.

In the afternoon, in a hangar at the Greater Rochester International Airport, the President met with family members of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Later, he returned to Washington, DC. Then, in the Roosevelt Room, he met with members of organizations involved in educating and enrolling seniors in Medicare prescription drug benefit plans.

March 15

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld. He then met with Republican congressional leaders to discuss legislative priorities.

In the afternoon, the President traveled to Silver Spring, MD. Later, he returned to Washington, DC. He then met with Republican Members of Congress to discuss legislative priorities.

The President announced his intention to nominate Andrew C. von Eschenbach to be Commissioner of Food and Drugs at the Department of Health and Human Services.

The President announced his intention to nominate Mark C. Minton to be Ambassador to Mongolia.

The President announced his intention to nominate John A. Rizzo to be General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The President announced his intention to designate Thomas E. McNamara as Program Manager of the Information Sharing Environment.

March 16

In the morning, the President met with Members of Congress who had recently visited the Darfur region of Sudan. Later, he had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, at the U.S. Capitol, the President attended a St. Patrick's Day luncheon. Later, in the Oval Office, the President participated in a photo opportunity with recipients of the Public Safety Officer Medal of Valor.

The White House announced that the President will welcome President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia to the White House on March 21.

The President declared a major disaster in Missouri and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe storms, tornados, and flooding during the period of March 11–13.

March 17

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the Oval Office, he met with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland. Then, he and Prime Minister Ahern met with community leaders from Northern Ireland and attended a St. Patrick's Day reception.

In the afternoon, the President participated in a briefing on avian influenza. Later, he and Mrs. Bush traveled to Camp David, MD.

The White House announced that the President will host NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the White House on March 20.

The President announced his intention to nominate Michael D. Kirby to be Ambassador to Moldova.

The President announced his intention to appoint Floyd E. Bloom and Nicholas Eberstadt as members of the President's Council on Bioethics.

The President announced his intention to appoint Raymond Jardine, Jr., Samuel Metters, and William Gregory Rothman as members of the National Veterans Business Development Corporation.

The President announced his intention to designate Thomas E. Harvey as Acting Assistant Secretary of Veterans Affairs (Congressional Affairs).

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

The following list does not include promotions of members of the Uniformed Services, nominations to the Service Academies, or nominations of Foreign Service officers.

Submitted March 13

Jonann E. Chiles,
of Arkansas, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the Legal Services Corporation for a term expiring July 13, 2008, vice Robert J. Dieter, resigned.

Robert D. McCallum, Jr.,
of Georgia, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Australia.

J. C. A. Stagg,
of Virginia, to be a member of the Board of Trustees of the James Madison Memorial Fellowship Foundation for a term expiring November 17, 2011, vice Jay Phillip Greene, term expired.

Kenneth L. Wainstein,
of Virginia, to be an Assistant Attorney General (new position).

Submitted March 15

Mark C. Minton,
of Florida, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to Mongolia.

John A. Rizzo,
of the District of Columbia, to be General Counsel of the Central Intelligence Agency, vice Scott W. Muller, resigned.

Warren W. Tichenor,
of Texas, to be Representative of the United States of America to the Office of the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Geneva, with the rank of Ambassador, vice Kevin E. Moley.

Andrew von Eschenbach,
of Texas, to be Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Department of Health and Human Services, vice Lester M. Crawford, resigned.

Checklist of White House Press Releases

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released March 13

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed S. 449

Fact sheet: Strategy for Victory: Defeating the Terrorists and Training Iraqi Security Forces

Released March 14

Transcript of a press gaggle by Press Secretary Scott McClellan and Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services Administrator Mark B. McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed S. 4515

Statement by the Press Secretary: Death of Former President of Estonia Lennart Meri

Fact sheet: The Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit: Helping Seniors and Reducing Costs

Released March 15

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Released March 16

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Transcript of a press briefing by Deputy National Security Adviser Jack D. Crouch III on the National Security Strategy

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Republic of Liberia

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Missouri

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 32

Fact sheet: President Bush Signs the Stop Counterfeiting in Manufactured Goods Act

Fact sheet: The President's National Security Strategy

Released March 17

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Scott McClellan

Statement by the Press Secretary: Visit of NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

**Acts Approved
by the President**

Approved March 13

S. 449 / Public Law 109–179

To facilitate shareholder consideration of proposals to make Settlement Common Stock under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act available to missed enrollees, eligible elders, and eligible persons born after December 18, 1971, and for other purposes

Approved March 14

H.R. 4515 / Public Law 109–180

To designate the facility of the United States Postal Service located at 4422 West Sciota Street in Scio, New York, as the “Corporal Jason L. Dunham Post Office”

Approved March 16

H.R. 32 / Public Law 109–181

To amend title 18, United States Code, to provide criminal penalties for trafficking in counterfeit marks