

speaking directly with each other about how best to deal with keeping the peace and making sure that health care initiatives are robust and effective. I also shared with her some of my thoughts about the world beyond the continent of Africa. And so I—we really had a good discussion.

And so, Madam President, thank you. I want to thank your delegation. Laura and I look forward to having you for lunch here in a little bit. But all in all, I think it was a very good first visit.

**President Johnson Sirleaf.** Mr. President, as I mentioned to you, on behalf of the Liberian people, I would like to thank you—thank you, thank your administration, thank the American people, thank the U.S. Congress, for all the support that our country has received in making this important transition from war to peace.

Our people have new hope. They have new promise in the future as a result of the strong position you took that enabled us to get this opportunity for national renewal. We have taken the necessary first steps to restoring dignity to our people, starting to fix our economy, to get our international credibility and reputation back. And we're confident that Liberian people are ready to do what it takes. They're back at work; our country is open for business. We're beginning to put in all the processes that will enable us to manage our resources that God has been so good to us in giving us, for the good of our people.

We want you to know that Liberia is going to do all it can to justify the confidence that you have given to us. Liberia, we think, has the potential to become the U.S. success story in Africa. We'll be working within our own borders; we'll be working with our neighboring states to bring peace, stability, and development to our subregion. We'll be working with our African leaders to ensure that the example we set on this transition will be one that can fuse many of our—many of other countries and other people in Africa.

As the first democratic-elected woman, I represent the expectations and aspirations of women in Liberia, in Africa, and I dare say, the world. And I must be able to deliver for them. My performance must justify.

Again, we just want to thank you for the encouragement and the support that you have given us to enable us to meet these enormous challenges of development.

**President Bush.** Thank you, Madam President. Thank you. Good job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

### **Remarks Following a Meeting With Iraq and Afghanistan Nongovernmental Organizations** *March 21, 2006*

I want to thank you all for coming. Laura and I have really enjoyed our visit.

We're talking today to people who have decided to try to help improve the lives of folks in Afghanistan and Iraq. And I just marvel at the fact that Americans from around our country have heard a call to help somebody realize the benefits of freedom. And you know, governments can help, and we will help. And obviously, we've got a brave military trying to secure freedom in Afghanistan and Iraq. But one of the real powerful parts of developing civil societies in these two countries is the fact that fellow citizens are willing to interface with citizens in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We've heard stories about Afghan women education programs and Iraqi Fulbright programs and programs to help hospitals and programs to welcome intellectuals—all aimed at helping these societies that were once brutalized by tyrants realize the great benefits and blessings of liberty. And we've got—I'm sure a lot of our citizens don't realize this, but there are thousands of—I would call them social entrepreneurs, who are figuring out ways to help improve the human condition in these two liberated countries.

And I want to thank you all very much. It's heartening to hear your stories, and it makes me—give me—once again gives me great reason to be proud of our country and the people who live here. So thank you all for coming. God bless your work.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:56 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

**Remarks on the War on Terror and a Question-and-Answer Session in Wheeling, West Virginia**

March 22, 2006

**The President.** Thank you all very much. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. First of all, Terry, thanks for the invitation. My purpose is to share with you what's on my mind, and then I look forward to hearing what's on yours.

I regret only one thing, Terry, and that's that Laura didn't come with me. No, I know, most people generally say, "You should have brought her, and you should have stayed at home." [Laughter] They love Laura, and so do I. And she is a fantastic First Lady. She is a great—[applause]. And she is a great source of comfort and strength for me, and I wish she were here.

I want to thank the Chamber and the Board of Directors of the Chamber for allowing me to come. You know, I'm—as Terry said, I'm the Commander in Chief; I'm also the Educator in Chief. And I have a duty to explain how and why I make decisions, and that's part of the reason I'm here.

I want to thank your Governor for being here. Joe Manchin is a—he's a good, decent man. He showed his heart during the mine tragedies. He asked the country—[applause]. He represented the best of West Virginia. He showed great compassion, great concern. He asked the Nation to pray on behalf of the families. We still must continue to pray for those who lost their loved ones. Joe is a problem-solver, see. He said, "We're going to deal with this issue head on." And I appreciate you working closely with the Federal Government to make sure that there are safety regulations that work, that the inspection process works so that the miners here in this important State are able to do their job and their families can be secure in them doing their job.

So, Joe, thank you very much for your leadership. Thanks for bringing Gayle. Like you, I married well too. [Laughter]

I appreciate Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito. Thanks for being here. I appreciate working with you. She's a good one, as we say in Texas. [Laughter] I probably shouldn't bring up Texas too much today,

given the fact—yeah, I know—[laughter]. Never mind. [Laughter] I'm a little worried for my Longhorns, though, I tell you that. I'm fully informed that they're going to play a fine team.

I want to thank the mayor for being here. Mr. Mayor, I'm honored that you were at the airport. I appreciate you coming. Thanks for serving your great community. God bless you, sir.

Members of the statehouse greeted me. I appreciate Senator Mike Oliverio. He's here. Mike, I think, did the country a great service when he worked on behalf of Judge Sam Alito to get him approved by the United States Senate. I appreciate you—I want to thank you for that, Mike. I want to thank—Mike said, "Don't hold it against me; I'm a Democrat." I said, "Mike, what we—first and foremost, we're all Americans."

I thank Chris Wakim. He also was out at the airport. It's a little chilly for you all standing out there without your overcoats on, but it's all right. Thanks for being here, Chris. Thanks to all the members of the statehouse and local officials who've joined us today. Thank you for serving your State and your community.

I want to thank John Anderson and Janis LaFont. They're from the—Valley National Gases employees. They presented me with a check for \$100,000 for the Katrina Relief Fund. They represent—[applause]. I want to thank you all for doing that, and I want to thank the folks you work with for doing that.

It's an amazing country, isn't it, when you think about it, that folks right here in this part of West Virginia care enough about folks in the southern part of our country that they would take some of their hard-earned money and contribute to a relief fund so people can get their lives back together. It means a lot to the people in Louisiana and Mississippi to know that there is love and compassion for their—and concern for their lives, here in West Virginia.

Ours is an incredible nation. And you're going to hear me talk about our military. And if you ask questions about the economy, you'll hear me talk about our economy. But I want to remind everybody that the true strength of America lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens. That's where America