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For centuries, patient men and women listened to the words of prophets and lived in joyful expectation of the coming Messiah. Their patience was rewarded when a young virgin named Mary welcomed God's plan with great faith, and a quiet birth in a little town brought hope to the world. For more than two millennia, Christians around the world have celebrated Christmas to mark the birth of Jesus and to thank the Almighty for His grace and blessings.

In this season of giving, we also remember the universal call to love our neighbors. Millions of compassionate souls take time during the holidays to help people who are hurt, feed those who are hungry, and shelter those who need homes. Our Nation also thinks of the men and women of our military who are spending Christmas at posts and bases around the world and of the loved ones who pray for their safe return. America owes a debt of gratitude to our service members and their families.

The simple story of Christmas speaks to every generation and holds a sense of wonder and surprise. During this time of joy and peace, may we be surrounded by the love of family and friends and take time to reflect on the year ahead. Laura and I pray that this season will be a time of happiness in every home and a time of peace throughout the world. Merry Christmas.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Statement on Signing the Combating Autism Act of 2006

December 19, 2006

For the millions of Americans whose lives are affected by autism, today is a day of hope. The "Combating Autism Act of 2006" will increase public awareness about this disorder and provide enhanced Federal support for autism research and treatment. By creating a national education program for doctors and the public about autism, this legislation will help more people recognize the symptoms of autism. This will lead to early identification and intervention, which is critical for children with autism. I am proud to sign this bill into law and confident that it will serve as an important foundation for our Nation's efforts to find a cure for autism.

NOTE: S. 843, approved December 19, was assigned Public Law No. 109–416. An original was not available for verification of the content of this statement.

The President's News Conference

December 20, 2006

The President. Thank you all. Good morning. This week I went to the Pentagon for the swearing-in of our Nation's new Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates. Secretary Gates is going to bring a fresh perspective to the Pentagon, and America is fortunate that he has agreed to serve our country once again. I'm looking forward to working with him.

Secretary Gates is going to be an important voice in the Iraq strategy review that's underway. As you know, I've been consulting closely with our commanders and the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the strategy in Iraq and on the broader war on terror. One of my top priorities during this war is to ensure that our men and women wearing the uniform have everything they need to do their job.

This war on terror is the calling of a new generation; it is the calling of our generation. Success is essential to securing a future of peace for our children and grandchildren, and securing this peace for the future is going to require a sustained commitment from the American people and our military.

We have an obligation to ensure our military is capable of sustaining this war over the long haul and performing the many tasks that we ask of them. I'm inclined to believe that we need to increase in the permanent size of both the United States Army and the United States Marines. I've asked Secretary Gates to determine how such an increase could take place and report back to me as quickly as possible.

I know many Members of Congress are interested in this issue, and I appreciate their input. As we develop the specifics of the proposals over the coming weeks, I will not only