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Statement on the Resignation of Liza Wright as Director of Presidential Personnel

July 18, 2007

Liza Wright has served as a valuable member of my team for over 4½ years. As Assistant to the President and Director of Presidential Personnel, she has been responsible for recruiting thousands of talented people to serve throughout the Federal Government. I value her judgment and appreciate her commitment to ensuring that we have the right individuals in place to serve the American people. Laura and I wish Liza, Karl, and their two daughters all the best.

Remarks on the Federal Budget and a Question-and-Answer Session in Nashville, Tennessee

July 19, 2007

The President. Thank you all. Please sit down. Thank you all for coming. I'm glad you're here. Thanks, Darrell. Are you sure you want the Federal Government moving to Nashville? [*Laughter*]

Thanks for the invitation. I've got some thoughts I'd like to share with you, and then if you've got some questions, I'd love to answer some. My job is the Commander in Chief, and my job is the educator in chief. And part of being the educator in chief is to help our fellow citizens understand why I've made some of the decisions I've made that have affected your lives. And so thanks for letting me come.

Here we are in the Presidential ballroom—smart move, Darrell, to pick a Presidential ballroom. [*Laughter*] I'm sorry Laura is not with me. She is, first of all, a fabulous woman. She is a patient woman. And she is doing a marvelous job as the First Lady.

I want to thank Ralph Schulz, the president and CEO of the Nashville Area Chamber. I thank the business leaders who have allowed me to come and visit with you. You do have an exciting city here. This, of course, is not my first time here. I can remember being here in the Opryland hotel complex when I was the owner of the Texas Rangers baseball team. And I can remember coming here for my mother and father's 50th wedding anniversary. They had a bunch of country and western singers sing to honor the 50th wedding anniversary, and it was a special time. And you're right; you've got a fabulous city here.

I have just come from the Harrington's company, a small business here, the Nashville Bun Company. And I know that some of the employees from the Nashville Bun Company are here. Thank you for being here today. It's quite an operation. I love going to small businesses because the small-business sector of our economy is really what drives new job growth. If the small businesses are doing well in America, America is doing well.

And so I went by to see this operation, and I want to spend a little time talking about small-business growth, if you don't mind. And so I want to thank the Harringtons; they're good, solid Tennessee citizens who are entrepreneurs, risk takers, dreamers.

I don't intend to talk about this war against radicals and extremism in my remarks. If you've got questions, I'll be glad to answer them. I do want to, though, pay homage to those who wear the uniform. I'm honored to be with you. Thanks for serving the country.

Cordia asked me in the limousine coming over here, "Have you had any amazing experiences as the President?" And, yes. [*Laughter*] I told her there's no more amazing experience than to meet those who have served in harm's way and to realize the strength of spirit of American citizens who volunteer during a time of danger. And one of the young men I have met during my Presidency—I did so in my home State of Texas—who is with us today, a man who is recovering from terrible injury but has never lost the spirit of life, Kevin Downs. He's a good man. We're going to get him some new legs, and if he hurries up, he can outrun me on the South Lawn of the White House. Proud that Kevin's mom and dad are here with us too.

I want to spend a little time on the economy and, more particularly, the budget. You've got to worry about your budgets; we've got to worry about your budget too, since you're paying for it. [*Laughter*] There's a philosophical debate in Washington, and

really it's kind of to calibrate how much money we need and how much money you need. Some say we need more of your money to expand the size and scope of government, or, they would argue, more of your money to balance the budget. Then there are those like me in Washington who say, there's ample money in Washington to meet priorities, and the more money you have in your pocket, the better off the economy is. In other words, let me put it bluntly: I think you can spend your money better than the Federal Government can spend your money.

Part of my job is to deal with problems. And I try to do so with a set of principles in mind. A principle is, you can spend your money better than the government can, but a further principle is, if you have more of your money in your pocket to save, invest, or spend, the economy is likely to—more likely to grow.

We were confronted—this administration has confronted some difficult economic times, particularly earlier in this administration. There was a recession. There were the terrorist attacks that affected the economy in a very direct way. There were corporate scandals which created some thousand—uncertainty about our system that needed to be corrected. And we responded to those problems by cutting taxes.

See, if you believe in the principle, the more money you have—and all of a sudden, you see some rough economic times, you act on the principle. So I worked with Congress, and we cut taxes on everybody who pays taxes. On one of these tax cuts, we said, okay, you deserve a tax cut, but you don't deserve a tax cut. It was the belief that everybody who pays taxes ought to get tax relief.

And as you can see from this chart here, this is what the tax cuts have meant in 2007. But ever since they have been enacted, it has got the same type of effect. So if you're a average taxpayer, you're receiving $2,200 of tax relief. Some receive more; some receive less; but the average for all taxpayers is $2,216.

See—and the fundamental question is, does it make sense to have the average taxpayer have that money in his or her pocket? I think it does for a lot of reasons. It encourages consumerism; it encourages investment; it enables people to be able to put money aside for a family's priorities. You don't want the government setting your priorities; you set your own priorities. And if college happens to be a priority of yours—if you want to save for your little guys coming up, here's some money for you to put aside. That's what the tax relief meant.

There's obviously more tax relief for married families with children because there's the child credit. I thought it makes sense to say, if you've got a child, you ought to get credit for that child when it comes to the Tax Code to help you raise the children. You know, we put the—did something on the marriage penalty. Imagine a Tax Code that penalizes marriage. That's what the code did early on, and we mitigated the marriage penalty and the Tax Code. We ought to be encouraging marriage not discouraging marriage through bad tax policy.

The Nashville Bun Company folks are organized so that they pay tax at the individual income tax level. A lot of small-business owners know what I'm talking about. If you're a LLC or a subchapter S, you don't pay corporate tax; you pay tax at the individual income tax rates so that when you cut taxes on all who paid income taxes, you're really cutting taxes on small-business owners as well. And if most new jobs are created by small businesses, it makes a lot of sense if you're dealing with economic problems to cut the taxes on those who are creating new jobs.

The more money in the small business's treasury, the more likely it is they'll be able to expand. And when they expand, the more likely it is they'll be hiring new people. We also put incentives in the Tax Code that said if you purchase equipment—you're a small-business owner and you purchase equipment, like the English muffin rolling deal or whatever you want to call it—[*laughter*]—getting out of my lane here—[*laughter*]—we provide an incentive in the Tax Code to encourage you to purchase equipment. That not only helps your business become more productive and more competitive; the more productive and competitive you become, the more likely it is you'll be able to sustain growth and, therefore, continue hiring.

But it also means that the English muffin manufacturing company—English muffin machine manufacturing company is more likely to have work. In other words, there's an effect; the Tax Code can affect commerce. And that's exactly what we did, and we cut the taxes, and it's worked. This economy is strong. Unemployment has dropped. Since April of—August of 2003 we've added over 8.2 million new jobs. Productivity is up. People are working.

People are working. And that's what we want. We want people to say, I'm making a living for my family, and I've got more money in my pocket so I can make decisions for the best of my family. And I'm going to spend a little time, if you've got any questions, on how to keep it going strong.

But I now want to talk about the budget. People say, you can't balance the budget if you cut taxes. That's one of the arguments in Washington, DC. I think all of us would like to balance the budget. But they're saying, "I'm going to raise your money—raise your taxes so we can balance the budget." There's a flaw in that argument, and that is, most of the time they raise taxes on you, they figure out new ways to spend the money, as opposed to reckon it to deficit reduction. I've got a better idea that I want to share with you and share with the American people, and that is, the best way to balance the budget is to keep taxes low, growing the economy, which will yield more tax revenue into the economy. And it works, so long as you hold spending down. And that's the most important thing, is to keep taxes low and spending down.

And I got a chart here I'm about to show you. Yes, there you go. And so I submitted a budget based upon no tax increases and being fiscally wise with your money. And here's the record of that plan. As you can see there, we had a deficit of $413 billion in 2004. This economy started picking up steam, kept the taxes low, and tax revenues started coming in, and then the deficit dropped to 318, and it dropped to 245, and it's anticipated it's going to be 205 in the year 2007. You can see the projection. We've done this without raising your taxes. We've done this by saying, keep taxes low; keep the economy growing; and be wise about how we spend your money.

I project—we project if we can continue to have fiscal sanity in Washington, DC, that we'll be in surplus by the year 2012. That's where we're headed. And I believe we can do so without penalizing the small-business sector—or the large-business sector, for that matter. And particularly, we can do so without penalizing the families and individual taxpayers in the country. But that's the argument.

Now, the Democrats have submitted their budget. Put up the next chart. Oops, that's my budget. This is non-defense discretionary spending. This is what we propose, see. We go to Congress and say, here's our budget proposals. We're going to make sure our troops have what it takes to win this war against these extremists and radicals. That's what the American people expect. But this is—[*applause*].

So this is my proposal, and I'd like to show you what the Democrats have proposed. Here's their proposal. They've added billions of dollars in new spending on the budget they submitted. The reason I'm—this is not a—I'm not bashing anybody. I'm just—what I'm here to do is educate you on the different approaches to how we're dealing with your money when it comes to the Federal budget. And as you notice, there is a—quite a disparity about the different approaches of how much money ought to be spent. You can't pay for the red lines unless you're willing to raise taxes on the American people. I would call that a return to the tax-and-spend days. I have showed you our budget to get to surplus, and it requires this level of increase in spending—the blue.

The people now in charge of the House and the Senate have submitted their own budgets, their own blueprint for how we should spend your money, and it's reflected in the red lines. Now, you can't grow the economy fast enough to get to the red lines. And therefore, the only way to do so is to run up your taxes.

I'd like you to see the next chart, if you don't mind. This is the tax increases inherent in a different approach. As you can see, will raise taxes 392 billion over 5 years and with a $1.8 trillion increase in taxes in order to

make the budget projections that they have spent. I would warn the Nashville Bun Company to be very careful with this kind of approach because you can't keep making buns if the Democrats take all your dough. [*Laughter*]

I don't disparage anybody; there's just a difference of opinion. Part of my job is to make it clear to people that there are choices to make. And people got to understand this budget process. You know, we're throwing around huge numbers in Washington, DC. And the reason I've come today is to clarify the difference of opinion so you can make your own choice about the right approach. I've obviously got my choice, but the American people need to know the facts so they can make up their mind as the best approach to dealing with the finances of the United States today and tomorrow and for the next decade to come. This is the tax increases that will be required under one vision of dealing with your money, and here's my view of what we ought to do on taxes—and, of course, the comparison. [*Laughter*]

We don't need to raise your taxes in order to balance the budget. We shouldn't raise your taxes in order to balance the budget. As a matter of fact, we ought to keep your taxes as low as possible to make sure this economy continues to grow. So you'll watch this budget process and the appropriations process unfold here. And it's really important for the leadership in Congress to pass the appropriations bills—that's the spending bills—as quickly as possible. There's 12 spending bills that are supposed to get to the President's desk.

And they need to be passing these things; they need to be doing the people's business in Washington, DC. They need to have an honest debate about the appropriations for the different Departments that they're dealing with—an open, honest debate. They ought not to be trying to slip special spending measures in there without full transparency and full debate; those are called entitlements. And they ought to be wise about how they spend your money. And they ought to get these appropriations bills to my desk as quickly as possible and not delay.

Now, I will tell you that there's an interesting relationship between the President and the Congress. The President [Congress] * has got the right to initiate spending bills, and they do; they've got the right to decide how much money is spent. And I've got the right to accept whether or not the amount of money they spend is the right amount. That's what's called the veto. If they overspend or if they try to raise your taxes, I'm going to veto their bills.

So I'd like—that's why I appreciate you letting me come and give you a little budget discussion. But I thought it would be appropriate, if you don't mind, to answer some of your questions, any question; I'd be glad to answer them. I've been there for 6½ years; if I can't answer them, I can figure out how not to answer them. [*Laughter*]

Yes, sir. Mr. Chairman.

Health Care Reform/Energy

Q. Your administration has been pro-small business. How do we continue that philosophy in Washington?

The President. Look, here's the thing that the country—first of all, tax policy helps small businesses. If a small-business owner has got certainty in the Tax Code that taxes will remain low, it causes people to be more interested in investment.

The biggest issue I hear facing small-business owners, however, is health care. We got—a lot of small-business owners are really having problems dealing with the rising cost of health care. When I talk to risk takers and entrepreneurs, I find that people have a lot of anxiety about how to deal with health care for two reasons: one, whether they can afford it; and two, they have this great sense of obligation to their employees. In other words, they want their employees—really good CEOs or owners of small businesses care deeply about the life of their employees.

There is a—as you can imagine, and this is the great thing about our democracy—there tends to be differences of opinion. And we got a big difference of opinion on health care. And I would like to tell you where I'm worried—my worries and my recommendations. I'm worried that there are people in Washington who want to expand the scope of the Federal Government in making health

* White House correction.

care decisions on behalf of businesses and individuals. There is a debate in Washington, DC, now taking place on whether or not to expand what's called SCHIP, which is a health care program designed primarily for poor children. I support the concept of providing health care to help poor children, just like I support the concept of Medicaid to help provide health care for the poor.

The problem, as I see it, is this: That the people—some in Washington want to expand the eligibility for those available for SCHIP, in some instances up to $80,000 per family, which really means, if you think about it, that there will be an incentive for people to switch from private health insurance to government health insurance. I view this as the beginning salvo of the encroachment of the Federal Government on the health care system. Now, the Federal Government has got a huge role in health care—as I say, Medicare, Veterans Affairs, Medicaid, poor children. But I am deeply worried about—further expansion will really lead to the undermining of the private health care system, which would take the greatest health care system in the world and convert it into a mediocre health care system.

Now, you can't—not only am I against what they're trying to do; I am for something else, and I'd like to share with you what it is. First, there is a common goal, and we all share the goal in Washington—is to make sure health care is available and affordable. If you're worried about available and affordable health care, there are some practical things you can do, like stopping these junk lawsuits that are running good doctors out of practice and forcing professionals to practice defensive medicine so they can defend themselves in a court of law.

Secondly, small businesses ought to have the right to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries. If you're a restaurant owner in Nashville, Tennessee, you ought to be allowed to pool risk. In other words, you ought to be allowed to put your employees in a larger risk pool with a restaurant, say, in Texas or in Minnesota. Part of the problem small businesses have is, they unable to get the economies of purchase that big businesses are able to get because they have got such a small number of employees. And so we ought to be—encourage the pooling of assets, the pooling of risk so small businesses can buy insurance at the same discounts that big businesses get to do.

Thirdly, I'm a strong proponent of health savings accounts. Health savings accounts is an insurance product that has got high-risk deductibles or high deductibles for catastrophic illness, plus the ability for an employee to be able to put money in—with employer's help—put money into the account tax-free, save tax-free, and withdraw money tax-free. And the reason I am is because I believe one of the real problems we have in health care is that there is no market, in essence. In other words, somebody else pays your bills; we have a third-party payer system. I think you know what I'm talking about. You submit your claims; somebody else pays the bills.

I don't know many of you have ever asked the doc, "What's your price?" Or, you know, "How good are you?" Or, "What's your neighbor's price?" You certainly do that in most aspects of your consumer decision-making; you think about price and you think about quality, but not in health care. And the reason why is, is that somebody else has been paying the bills under our traditional system. But what health savings accounts do—and products like it—is that it puts the consumer, the patient in charge in the decisionmaking. And in order to make that effective, there needs to be more price transparency and more quality transparency in the marketplace. In other words, when people shop, it helps affect the cost of a good, or a service in this case.

And so since we're such huge health care providers, one of the things we're working with is large corporations and entities to say, look, you've got to post your price to providers and hospitals. It creates some angst, but nevertheless, it is a much better alternative than the Federal Government making all decisions. So one of the things we're trying to do from a philosophical perspective is to encourage more consumerism in health care.

Another thing that needs to happen in health care is, there needs to be better information technology in health care. The way I like to make this point is that this is an

industry that still—where a lot of the paperwork is still filled out by hand. Most businesses have been able to use these fantastic new technologies to be able to make their companies more productive—but not health care. You got doctors writing prescriptions. They don't know how to write very well anyway, and secondly, it's easy to lose paperwork.

And so the health care industry lags behind when it comes to the modernization that a lot of other industries have been through by the advent of information technology. There's a role for the government. Remember, we're huge providers of health care. The Veterans Affairs Department, for example, now has got electronic medical records for each person covered through Veterans Affairs. So somebody can just take your chip, show it into the—run it into the computer, and out comes the medical records. And they estimate that as we help develop a common language so that IT can take hold in the health care system, that we can save up to 30 percent of the costs in the current system.

But finally, I want to share another idea with you. They've got—those folks up there who want to spread further government into health care have got their ideas—and you've got to beat a bad idea with a good idea, in my judgment. And I want to share with you another idea that seems to make sense.

If you work for a corporation, you get your health care free. There's a tax break for you. If you're an individual, you have to pay for your health care. People are not treated the same in the Tax Code. If you're working for a big company, you come out pretty good when it comes to health care. It's a tax-free benefit. If you're out there on your own, you got to purchase your health care. It's an after-tax purchase. If you're working for a small business that has trouble affording health care and they have copayments, for example, a lot of times the employee is not treated as fairly in the Tax Code as someone who works for a larger company.

And so I propose that we change the Tax Code; we treat everybody fairly. For example, if you're a married couple—a married couple, yes, you ought to get a $15,000 deduction, no matter where you get your health care, so long as you then use the savings to purchase health care. If you're single, you ought to get a $7,500 tax deduction. So it's like a mortgage deduction off your income tax. But it levels the playing field. And then what ends up happening is, the market starts to respond as more individual decision-makers are now able to use the fairness in the Tax Code to demand product.

Part of the problem we have is, there is no individual market that is developed. If you're out there trying to find your health care on your own, it's very difficult to find competitive—something that you can live with, something that's competitive. And we believe that changing the Tax Code will help. There are some in Congress who believe a better approach would be a tax credit. I happen to believe that deductions are a better way to go, but I know that either approach is better than the nationalization of health care. And so one of the real issues that we got—[*applause*]—anyway, thanks for the question.

Don't get me started on energy. If you're a small-business person, you better worry about the cost of energy. And that's why I have said that it is in our national interest to diversify away from oil. It's in our national interest to promote alternative fuels, and I believe we can do so with current technology and new technology. It's in our national security interests that we're not heavily dependent on oil. I think you know what I mean by that. I mean, there's a lot of parts of the world where we buy oil that don't like us. That's not in the national security interest of the country.

It's in our economic security interest to diversify because when the demand for crude oil goes up in a developing country, for example, it causes the price of crude oil to go up, unless there's a corresponding increase in supply. And when that price of crude goes up, it runs up the price of your gasoline. And therefore, it is in our interest to promote ethanol, for example, or biodiesel as ways to power our automobiles. It also happens to be good for the environment that we diversify away from crude oil.

On the electricity side, I'm a big proponent of nuclear power. I think if you're genuinely interested in dealing with climate change, you have to be a supporter of nuclear power

because nuclear power will enable us to grow our economy. And if we grow our economy, it'll mean we'll be able to afford new technologies, and at the same time, there are zero greenhouse gas emissions.

And so to answer your question—obviously, a little long-winded—[*laughter*]—is, good tax policy, good health care policy, and good energy policy will make it more likely that this small-business sector of ours will remain strong.

Yes, sir. Go ahead and scream. You don't have to——

Immigration Reform

Q. Sir, thank you very much for your service to our country so far.

The President. Thank you.

Q. We appreciate that very much.

The President. Appreciate it.

Q. My question is, in light of the immigration bill, I'm not understanding exactly how if, with the amnesty of this many people coming in and then with the still concern about the borders being somewhat porous, how do we really achieve your desired effect in this, which, you know, would be, I guess, for obviously taking care of them, but yet afford not to be a big bulk sort of expense and the lack of the safety of the border?

The President. Thank you for bringing that question up. It's a very important question that the Nation is confronting. You can sit down. [*Laughter*]

Here are the commonsense objectives that need to be addressed when it comes to immigration. First, we need to enforce the border. A sovereign state—[*applause*]—it is the job of a state, of a nation, to enforce its borders. That's not an easy task. I'm real familiar with the border. I was a border-State Governor. I understand how difficult it is to fully enforce a border. But nevertheless, as a result of congressional action and the administration working with the Congress, we're making substantial progress on modernizing the border.

Now, you go down to Arizona, for example; you can't find the border. Man, it's just desert. It is, like, wide open desert. And so what you're beginning to see is new infrastructure, new technologies, some fencing, berms to prevent automobiles from moving, all aimed at making the Border Patrol agency, which we are now doubling on the border, more effective. And we're making progress. The number of arrests over the last 12 months are down significantly. That is one way to measure whether or not people are making it into our country illegally. Last year, we arrested and sent back 1.1 million people on the southern border. Now, you divide that by 365. There is active participation on the border to do that which the American people expect us to do.

Secondly, you're about to find—I think the country is about to find out that we're going to need hard-working, decent people to do jobs that Americans aren't doing. And that is why, for the sake of the economy, I support a temporary-worker plan.

There are people who are coming—look, let me start over. There are people in our hemisphere whose families are really hungry, particularly compared to the lifestyle we have in America, and they want to work to feed their families. And they're willing to do jobs Americans don't want to do. That's just—that's reality. Some say, "Well, force Americans to do the jobs they're unwilling to do." Well, that's not the way the system works. And yet there are people willing to come, to get in the fields, the agricultural sector. There are people willing to pick apples in Washington, you know, hitting those vegetable fields in California. And they want to do so because they want to feed their families.

And the interesting problem we have, sir, is that because they're motivated by the same thing you're motivated by, I suspect—love of family and desire to provide for your family—they will go to great lengths to get in to the country. You think about somebody who's willing to get stuffed in the bottom of an 18-wheeler and pay one of these thugs that are smuggling them into the country to do work Americans aren't doing. So I've always felt like a temporary-worker program will be—recognize an economic reality and also help keep pressure off the border. It's a long, hard border to enforce.

By the way, in my State of Texas, when it comes to the fencing, I would strongly urge those who advocate it not to go down there and go face to face with some of these Texas

ranchers down there. They're really not interested in having the Federal Government on their property. See, most of our property down in Texas is private land. The farther you go west, it's Federal land.

And the reason I say that, it just shows how difficult it is to do what some assume can be done, which is, like, totally seal off the border. One way to make it easier for our Border Patrol is to have this temporary-worker program with verifiable identification and say, yes, you can come for a limited period of time, and then you're going home.

Now, the—I suspect I'm all right so far with some of those who worry about immigration reform. The other question is—I'm not trying to elicit applause—[*laughter*]—the other question is, there are about 11 million people who have been here over time who are working—some not working—but they're here. And what do we do with them? Now, some say that if you don't kick them out, that's called amnesty. I disagree.

First of all, I think it's impractical to kick somebody out. I feel like if you make a person pay a fine—in other words, a cost for having broken our law—I agree with those who say that if you're an automatic citizen, it undermines the rule of law; I agree with that argument. I have a little problem with the argument, though, that says, if you pay a fine, if you prove you're a good citizen, if you've paid your back taxes, if you go home and re-register and come back, that you ought to be allowed to get in the back of the line. I don't think that's amnesty, but that's a lot of where the argument came.

This is a difficult subject for a lot of folks. And I understand it's difficult. I was disappointed, of course, that the Senate bill didn't get moving. I think it's incumbent upon those of us in Washington, DC, to deal with hard problems now and not pass them on to future Congresses. And so, as you know, the bill failed, and I can't make a prediction to you at this point, sir, where it's going to head. I can make you a prediction, though, that pretty shortly, people are going to be knocking on people's doors saying, "Man, we're running out of workers." This economy is strong. Remember, we've got a national unemployment rate of 4.5 percent. A lot of Americans are working, and there are still jobs Americans don't want to do. And the fundamental question is, will we be able to figure out a way to deal with the problem?

Let me say one other point. I feel strongly about this issue. I do not like a system that has encouraged predators to treat people as chattel. We have a system that has encouraged the onset of *coyotes*—those are the smugglers—and they prey upon these poor people. And they charge them a lot of money to smuggle through routes. And as a result of that system, there is innkeepers that charge exorbitant fees. There are document forgers. You're a small-business guy out here in Tennessee, and you're trying to run your nursery or whatever it is, and somebody shows up—you're not a document checker; the government can't expect the small-business owners to be able to determine whether or not the Social Security card has been forged or not. We need a new system. The system we've got is broken. And therefore, the fundamental question is, are we going to be able to deal with it?

Let me say one other thing, and this is important for America to remember too. We have been a fabulous country when it comes to assimilating people. You know, ours is a country that has got such a fabulous spirit to it that the newcomer can come, work hard, obey law, and realize dreams. And that's what America has been about. And in my judgment, that's what America should always be about: the idea of people realizing dreams. And so the question people say is, "Well, certain people can't assimilate." But there has been that argument throughout our history, that certain people of certain ethnicity or certain backgrounds can't assimilate. We must never lose faith in our capacity for people to assimilate. It's what has made us great in the past and what will make us great in the future.

And so thank you for bringing up a tough subject for people in Washington.

Yes, sir.

Music Industry

Q. Mr. President, Al McCree with Altissimo Records representing the music industry. Music is one of our largest exports the country has. Currently, every country in the world—except China, Iran, North Korea,

Rwanda, and the United States—pay a statutory royalty to the performing artists for radio and television air play. Would your administration consider changing our laws to align it with the rest of the country—the world?

The President. Help. [*Laughter*] Maybe you've never had a President say this—I have, like, no earthly idea what you're talking about. [*Laughter*] Sounds like we're keeping interesting company, you know? [*Laughter*]

Look, I'll give you the old classic: Contact my office, will you? [*Laughter*] I really don't—I'm totally out of my lane. I like listening to country music, if that helps. [*Laughter*]

You've got a question? Yes. You can yell at this thing.

War on Terror/Progress in Iraq/Spread of Democracy

Q. Mr. President, I appreciate your position on the war in Iraq. We've got a debate that's going on as much about should we stay or should we come home. Is there a way to change the tenor of the debate to determine how we win in Iraq?

The President. Thank you. The hardest decision a President makes are the decisions of war and peace, are putting kids, men and women in harm's way. And I have made two such decisions after we were attacked. And I did so because I firmly believe we're at war with ideologues who use murder as a tool to achieve political objectives, and that the most important responsibility is to protect—for the government is to protect the American people from harm, and therefore, went on the offense against these radicals and extremists.

We went on the offense wherever we can find them; we are on the offense wherever we can find them. And of course, in two theaters in this global war, we have sent troops—a lot of troops into harm's way.

Afghanistan still is a part of this war on terror, and a lot of the debate in Washington, of course, is focused on Iraq, as it should be. But I do want our fellow citizens to understand we've still got men and women in uniform sacrificing in Afghanistan, and their families are just as worried about them as the families of those in Iraq.

The short-term solution against this enemy is to keep the pressure on them, keep them on the move, and bring them to justice overseas so we don't have to face them here. In other words, no quarter—[*applause*].

I would just tell you, you can't hope for the best with these people. You can't assume that if we keep the pressure off, everything will be fine. Quite the contrary. When there wasn't enough pressure on, they were able to bunch up in safe haven and plot and plan attacks that killed 3,000 of our citizens. And they have been active ever since—not here on our soil, but they've got a global reach. They have been trying to kill the innocent.

Of course, I made the decision to go in to remove Saddam Hussein. I firmly believe that this world is better off without Saddam Hussein in power, and I believe America is more secure.

The long-term solution for your grandkids' sake is to defeat their ideology of hate with an ideology of light, and that's called liberty and democracy. The fight in Iraq is evolving. We've been through several stages in this difficult theater. First was the liberation stage. Secondly was a—the nascent political movement, reflected in the fact that 12 million Iraqis went to the polls under a modern Constitution. And then a thinking enemy, primarily Al Qaida, blew up, used their violent tactics, to blow up holy sites of religious people trying to incent—incite sectarian violence, and they succeeded. In other words, at the end of 2005, when the 12 million people voted, and we were training the Iraqis to take more responsibility, I felt like we would be in a much different force posture as the year went on. That's what I felt.

But the Commander in Chief always, one, listens to the military commanders on the ground, and two, remains flexible in the decisionmaking. The enemy succeeded in causing there to be murderous outrage. And so I had a decision to make, and that was, do we step back from this capital of this new democracy—remember, forums of government will ultimately determine the peace, and that a government based upon the principles of democracy and liberty is the best way to defeat those killers who incited this sectarian violence in Iraq, the same ones—people ask me, "Are these really Al Qaida?"

Well, they have sworn allegiance to Usama bin Laden; what else are they? They are cold-blooded killers who have declared publicly that they would like to drive us out of Iraq to develop a safe haven from which to launch further attacks. And I believe we better be taking their word seriously in order to do our duty to defend.

And so we're now watching this democracy unfold. The decision I had to make was, do we continue to stand and help this democracy grow, or do we stand back and hope that the violence that was happening in the capital doesn't spread anywhere else? I made the decision that it was in our interest, the Nation's security interest, instead of stepping back from the capital, to actually send more troops into the capital to help this young democracy have time to grow and to make hard decisions so it can become an ally in the war on terror not a safe haven from which Al Qaida could launch further attacks.

And it's hard work, and it's tough work. And it's tough work because there are ruthless people who have declared their intent to attack us again, trying to prevent success.

And I can understand why the American people are tired of this. Nobody likes war. Nobody likes to turn on their TV set and see needless death at the hands of these extremists. But I want to remind our fellow citizens that much of the violence they're seeing on their TV screens in Iraq is perpetuated by the very same people that came and killed 3,000 of our citizens. People sworn—not the exact same person; those are dead who got on the airplanes—but they have sworn allegiance to Usama, just like the killers in Iraq have sworn allegiance to Usama bin Laden. And so I listen to David Petraeus and, of course, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense have made the recommendation to send more in.

Victory is—I remember a guy asking me at one of these town halls, he said, "Well, when are you going to, like—when are they going to surrender," or "When is this thing going to end?" He looked like an older fellow, I think, and it was like he was remembering the USS *Missouri*. This is an ideological struggle, more akin to the cold war. What makes it different is, is that we have an enemy that is murderous and is willing to use asymmetrical warfare.

And so there is not a moment of ending. But there will be a moment in Afghanistan and Iraq where these Governments will be more able to support their people, more able to provide basic services, more able to defend their neighborhoods against radical killers. It's going to be a while though. And there's a lot of debate in Washington—yes, so how do you change the debate? Just keep talking about it. Today David Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, who is our Ambassador in Iraq, are briefing Congress about the difficulties we face and the progress we're making.

Let me give you one example. I'm optimistic. We'll succeed unless we lose our nerve. We will succeed. Liberty has got the capacity to conquer tyranny every time. Every time we've tried, it has worked. It takes a while—[*applause*]—here's the definition of success. The enemy, by the way, defines success as, can they pull off a car bombing. If we ever allow ourselves to get in a position where it's "no car bombings, therefore we're successful," we've just handed these killers a great victory.

So there's a Province called Anbar Province, and this is the Province out in western Iraq, where it's mainly Sunni and where Al Qaida had declared its intention to really drive us out and establish a safe haven, with the declared intention of spreading—using it as a base to spread their ideology throughout the Middle East, as well as a safe haven from which to make sure that they inflicted enough pain on us that we actually help them by leaving. I know this is farfetched for some Americans to think that people think this way; this is the nature of the enemy. And they are an enemy, and they're real, and they're active.

So Anbar Province was declared lost by some last November. And literally, we were—there was an intel report that came out, and the person was not very encouraging, and some of the press, it was the beginning of the end for the policy in Iraq. And we started working the issue hard. That's why I sent some more marines into Anbar Province. It turns out that people were sick and tired of Al Qaida. Al Qaida had no vision. You see, our citizens have got to remember

that most mothers want their children to grow up in peace; that's universal. Most mothers want something—it's just something instinctive when it comes to motherhood and children, where they want a child to have a chance to succeed in life, to have a chance to grow up in a peaceful world.

Well, it turns out that many people in Anbar hate violence. They want something better. They may not—they may distrust their central Government because it's new. Remember, Saddam Hussein sowed great seeds of distrust during his time as a tyrant. It takes time to get over distrust and to develop trust with a citizen.

But there's something instinctive involved with people when it comes to normal life. And they got sick of this Al Qaida threat and bullying and torturing. These people don't remain in power because they're loved; they remain in power because they're feared. And all of a sudden, tribal sheikhs begin to turn on them. And Al Qaida is now on the run in Anbar Province. What's happening is there's two types of political reconciliation, one from the bottom up, where grassroots people just get sick of something, and with our help, they're dealing with the problem. And then there's reconciliation from the top down, as you watch government wrestle with the different factions inside their legislature. And we expect progress on both fronts because the military can't do it alone. But the decision I made was that neither front will work, neither aspect of reconciliation will work if there was violence in the country's capital. And that's what you're seeing unfold.

And so you'll see a debate in Washington, DC, here about troop levels and funding those troop levels. First, whatever the troop level is, it needs to be funded by the United States Congress. Our troops need all the support they can get when they're in harm's way. And secondly, most Americans, I hope, understand that the best way to make decisions on troop levels is based upon the sound advice of people in the field, not based upon the latest focus group or political poll.

I'd like to share a story with you, and then I'll answer some questions. I'm not attempting to have just a few questions by giving you really long answers. It's called the filibuster. [*Laughter*] You know what's interesting about my Presidency, another interesting aspect of the Presidency, is the friendship I had with Prime Minister Koizumi of Japan, and his successor, a man named Prime Minister Abe. What makes it interesting, to me at least, is the fact that my dad fought the Japanese as a young guy. I think he—I know he went in right after high school, became a Navy fighter pilot, went overseas, and fought them. They were the sworn enemy. He was willing to risk his life, like thousands of others did, because the Japanese were our bitter enemy.

And here we are, 60 years later or so, that I am at the table with the leader of the former enemy, working to keep the peace, whether it be in North Korea, or—[*applause*]—let me finish here—or thanking the—or working with the Japanese who committed self-defense forces to help the young democracy in Iraq because they understand the power of liberty to be transformative. Liberty has got the ability to change an enemy into an ally. Liberty has got a powerful ability to transform regions from hostility and hopelessness to regions of hope. And it's hard work, and it takes a long time, but it has been repeated throughout modern history, whether it be on the continent of Europe or in the Far East. And it can happen again if Americans don't lose faith in the great power of freedom.

And so this is an interesting time. We're in the beginning—trying to get to your question—we're in the beginning of a long ideological struggle that's going to take patience, perseverance, and faith in certain basic values. I'm a big believer in the universality of liberty. I believe deep in everybody's soul—I'll take it a step further—I believe in an Almighty, and I believe a gift from that Almighty to each man, woman, and child is the desire to be free. And I believe that exists in everybody's soul is the desire to be free. I wasn't surprised when the 12 million people showed up; I was pleased. But I wasn't surprised because I believe, if given a chance, people will take a—will choose liberty. Now, having a form of government that reflects that is hard work, and it takes time. And not every democracy, of course, will look like us, nor should it. But there's just some basic principles inherent in free governments that

will enable us to be more likely to be secure and peaceful over the next years. And that's what I've been thinking about.

Yes, sir.

Border Security/War on Terror

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Thank you, sir.

Q. ——the last, I'd say about 15 or 20 minutes about terrorism and Al Qaida, and I expect—[*inaudible*]—feel very bullish when it comes to that subject. But what I want to know is, this is an open society, right? It's supposed to be open society. People come from every which way, most of them very decent and stuff, but like you say, Al Qaida and the terrorists. What about the borders? I always see on TV they jumping the borders, Spanish people jumping at borders, and could it be some time—it could be Al Qaida jumping the borders, with—[*inaudible*]—or anything. Our borders are not secure, like they should be, I don't think. It's up to you; you're my President. I'm supposed to ask you.

The President. Okay, you are. [*Laughter*] Well, listen, thank you very much for that. Listen, the reason—a reason to have a verifiable temporary-worker card is to make it more likely that if Al Qaida does try to come across the border illegally, that we can catch them.

You ask a very good question. The other half of the equation, by the way, in securing the homeland, is to take measures necessary to catch people—know who's coming in and why, and catch them before they come in. It's a very legitimate question. On one hand, we stay on the offense, in the long run defeat their ideology with a better ideology, but we got to secure the homeland, and we're working hard to do so. One of the interesting management challenges was when we merged these different Departments all into the Department of Homeland Security, and I must say, it's gone pretty well. It's hard to take separate cultures and merge them into a common culture, working for a common purpose, but—it takes time again—but we're making good progress on that; we really are. Are we perfect? No. Are there flaws? Yes. But we're making—can I say, the country is more secure than it was before 9/11? Absolutely.

Now it's interesting, sir. I have made some—I made one—a couple controversial decisions about how to better find information about who might be coming to our country so that we can anticipate. The best way to be able to protect ourselves from Al Qaida—no question, good border control, but it's the good intelligence as well. I mean, if we can learn intention before somebody begins to make a move, we're more likely to be able to say we're a lot more—we'll be able to say we're a lot more secure.

And that's why one of the controversial programs that I suggested was that we take a known phone number from one of these Al Qaida types or affiliates—and you can find them. We get them all kinds of ways. We're picking people up off the battlefield, for example, in one of these theaters I just describe to you. They may have a laptop. On the laptop might be some phone numbers. Off the phone numbers may be somebody else's. I mean, there's ways to get information as a result of some of the operations we have taken overseas. And my attitude is, if we do have a number of a suspected Al Qaida and/or affiliate and that person is making a phone call to someone in the United States, we ought to understand why; we ought to know.

And so the reason I bring this up to you is that, yes, enforcing the border and being wise about how we enforce the border is an important of trying to detect—find out whether terrorists are coming into our country to inflict harm. Same with airports. You got to take off the shoes? Well, there's a reason. It's because we're doing our job that you expect us to do about—trying to affect the security of all ports of entry. But as well, we're beefing up our intelligence and trying to get a better handle on the actions somebody may be taking before they do so.

It requires enormous cooperation. We spend a lot of time in your Government working with other nations. Curiously enough, as a result of Al Qaida's activities in other countries, it's caused people to say, "I think we better work together more closely." And we do. There's a lot of information sharing that goes on between governments; a lot of intelligence sharing that goes on. And

there's better communication now between the intelligence services and the law enforcement services. One of the reasons why we had to pass the PATRIOT Act was because there was a prohibition about people sharing information between intel and law, and that made no sense in this new world in which we live.

I just want to assure you that I fully understand the need to make sure assets are deployed properly to protect you, and I fully understand the need to safeguard the civil liberties of the United States of America. One of the worst things that would happen is this enemy, in trying to respond to them, would force us to lose part of our very soul. And I believe we're able to achieve—take the necessary steps to protect you, and at the same time, protect the civil liberties that Americans hold so dearly to their heart.

Yes, ma'am.

U.S. Foreign Aid/Situation in Darfur

Q. Okay, thank you.

The President. The price is right. [*Laughter*]

Q. Come on down. [*Laughter*] I am here representing—Nashville is a strong city of lots of communities of faith, and as a part of that, there are lots of people going back and forth and caring about the people of Africa. And I want to first thank you; I know that your administration has taken lots of initiative on AIDS and malaria nets, and we really appreciate that. And then I—my hard question is, what we can we do to stop the genocide in Darfur?

The President. Thank you very much. For starters, the fact that Americans care about people in faraway lands is a great testimony to our compassion. I believe—good foreign—you've heard about one aspect of our foreign policy—two aspects, really, when you think about it. One is the combination of military and diplomatic assets trying to achieve objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan and elsewhere. Another is the working coalitions. And by the way, there are a lot of other countries in Afghanistan and Iraq. They don't get nearly the credit they deserve, but a lot of other people besides us understand that this is the beginning of a long ideological struggle, and now is the time to make the hard decisions so little guys in the future don't have to deal with the consequences of that.

The other aspect of foreign policy is, I believe to whom much is given, much is required. And people say, "Well, we got plenty of problems in America; why do you worry about something going on overseas?" First of all, we're wealthy. We're spending enormous sums of money. If we set proper priorities, we can not only help our own citizens, but I believe it helps our soul and our conscience, and I believe we have a moral obligation to help others.

And so when it comes to—let met talk about HIV/AIDS. A lot of people don't know what we're doing. The United States has really taken the lead in saying to other nations, here is a problem that we can help solve, and therefore, follow us. We picked 17 of the most deeply affected nations, most of which are on the continent of Africa, and you provided $15 billion to get antiretroviral drugs in the hands of faith givers, community givers, nurses, to save lives. And in 3 short years, the United States of America has taken the lead to getting antiretroviral to people, and it's gone from 50,000 people to over 1.1 million people receiving antiretroviral drugs.

It is—conditions of life matter in this struggle, by the way, against extremists and radicals. Where you find repressive forms of government, you're likely to find somebody who's frustrated so they can become recruited by these cynical murderers and then become suiciders. Or where you find disease and pestilence or hunger, the conditions of life matter at whether or not the future of the world is going to be stable.

We're very much involved in a Malaria Initiative—Laura is really active in that—where the Government is spending $1.6 billion aiming to get mosquito nets and sprays and information to save lives. There are too many young babies around the world dying from something that we can prevent, and it's in the national interest to do that.

Interestingly enough, a lot of the deliverers, those who are delivering the help are from the faith community, people who are volunteering their time saying, what can I do, how can I love my neighbor? And it's really heartwarming.

She asked about Darfur. First we—as this administration has proven, it's possible to achieve some success in Sudan with the north-south agreement that we were able to achieve with Ambassador Danforth at the time. We are now working to make sure that holds by insisting that the revenue-sharing agreement of the oil on Sudan is effective. She's referring to Darfur.

I made the decision not to send U.S. troops unilaterally into Darfur. The threshold question was: If there is a problem, why don't you just go take care of it? And I made the decision, in consultation with allies, as well as consultation with Members of Congress and activists, that—and I came to the conclusion that it would—it just wasn't the right decision.

Therefore, what do you do? And if one is unwilling to take on action individually, then that requires international collaboration, and so we're now in the United Nations. And it doesn't seem—I talked to Ban Ki-moon about this, and this is a slow, tedious process, to hold a regime accountable for what only one nation in the world has called a "genocide," and that is us.

Now we have taken unilateral moves other than military moves. I have—we have put serious economic sanctions on three individuals that are involved with—two with the government, one with one of the rebel groups. We have sanctioned 29 companies that are involved in Sudan. In other words, we're trying to be consequential. We're trying to say that, you know, change, or there's consequences.

By the way, the same approach we're dealing with Iran on: We are going to continue to press you hard until you change your behavior. And so my challenge is to convince others to have that same sense of anxiety that you have and that I have about the genocide that's taking place.

Ban Ki-moon actually gave a pretty encouraging report when he talked about—see, the idea is that if countries aren't going to—willing to do it unilaterally, in our case, or other cases, then we try to get the AU force that's in place to get complemented by further peacekeepers to the U.N. And that's what we're working on. Good question on a tough, tough issue.

Yes, sir. There you go. Don't mean—you can sit down or stand up.

Border Security

Q. I personally admire the way you've conducted the Government, and I admire your backbone, where you just stand and take a position. I'm not happy about the influx from Mexico. Seems that far too many came over in waves. I know that during the days of San Jacinto that they were fighting, using rifles and everything, but this is the first time I've ever seen an influx like this to try to take over our country. Now then, thirdly, when they do these polls to determine how you're rated, how come, if they have 1,000 people, they call 750 Democrats and only 25 Republicans? [*Laughter*]

The President. Thank you. I thought when you started talking about Texas history, that you were going to say we couldn't have existed without Tennessee. That's where I thought you were headed, you know. [*Laughter*] You're a Texan? Where are you from?

Q. Waco.

The President. There you go. Right at Waco, Texas.

Q. This young lady in the red dress over here—[*inaudible*].

The President. There you go. Your daddy. Well, as you know, Crawford is not very far from Waco, same county.

Let's see, yes, ma'am. You guys got—one of them uniformed guys got a question? No. Okay. I'm proud to be in there with you.

Q. Mr. President, welcome to Nashville.

The President. Thank you.

Q. And I want to thank you for the appointments or the nominations for our Supreme Court. That will be a wonderful legacy for you.

The President. Thank you.

Texas Border Patrol Agents

Q. My question to you is this: There are two border guards presently in jail. The Tennessee General Assembly passed a resolution, with 91 votes in the house and 30 in the senate, asking our Tennessee delegation to support—to go to you asking for a pardon for these two men that were tried, where information was left not with—was kept back from their trial. And there's also a resolution

in the house, H.R. 40, with a number of our Tennessee delegation signed on to that. Will you pardon these men that are unjustly imprisoned?

The President. I'm not going to make that kind of promise in a forum like this. Obviously I am interested in facts. I know the prosecutor very well, Johnny Sutton. He's a dear friend of mine from Texas. He's a fair guy. He is an even-handed guy. And I can't imagine—you've got a nice smile, but you can't entice me into making a public statement—[*laughter*]—on something that requires a very—I know this is an emotional issue, but people need to look at the facts. These men were convicted by a jury of their peers after listening to the facts as my friend, Johnny Sutton, presented them. But anyway, no, I won't make you that promise.

Yes, ma'am.

President's Legacy

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. [*Inaudible*] As the mother of a 6-month-old named after Sam Houston, a great person——

The President. You've got to be kidding me, awesome, yes. Is it Houston or Sam?

Q. It's Houston——

The President. There you go.

Q. ——because we wanted somebody that was a great representative of both Tennessee and Texas within our family. But while your Presidency has been important to me, personally, I want to know about your legacy, and I want to know what one policy would you hope would affect your predecessor and he would continue on what maybe you might not be able to finish by the time your term ends.

The President. Thank you. Freedom agenda. The only way to secure America in the long term is to have great faith in the spread of liberty. And it's—I really view it as the calling of our time. People have—some people have said, "Well, he is a hopeless idealist to believe that liberty is transformative in a part of the world that just seems so difficult." But I would like to remind fellow citizens that we have had this sense of difficulty in parts of the world before, where liberty has been transformative.

And so it's—look, first of all, let me talk about Presidential legacies. I'll be dead before—long gone before people fully are able to capture the essence of—the full essence of a Presidency. I'm still reading books about George Washington. My attitude is, is they're writing about 1, 43 doesn't need to worry about it. [*Laughter*] And so you know what the lesson is in life? Just do what you think is right. Make decisions based upon principle. And that's the only way I know to do it. I've disappointed this lady in the red, I'm confident, because I won't tell her—but I can only tell you what I think is the right thing to do. It's the only way I know how to live my life. And it's—for youngsters here, it's just like—it's really important not to sacrifice principle to try to be the popular person. It's important to—[*applause*].

Yes, sir. Semper Fi, there you go.

Media/War on Terror

Q. Semper Fi. First of all, Mr. President, I want to thank you, personally, for your support for our veterans. My son was lost in Iraq, and I want to thank you very much for your strength.

The President. Thanks. Thanks for sharing that.

Q. I also wish that there was some way that, as the press make so much to do about what goes on in areas around—pretty much a 50-mile area around Baghdad, which is pretty much where everything is going on, if there was some way to offset that with all of the great things that are going on. I have had communication with a gentleman by the name of Azzam Alwash, who is from Nasiriyah area, and what's going on there, the building of water sheds and the building of new items and the fact that they're building colleges in the Kurd area.

I wish that there was some way that your administration could offset the negative press by a consistent influx of very positive press that's going on in the majority of that country. Is there some way that could be done?

The President. Well, thanks. I'm asked that a lot by people. The interesting thing about this fight in Iraq is that the families and the troops have got a really different view, in many ways, than a lot of other folks do, because they're firsthand; they see what's happening. And it's—I hear from—I talk to our people in the field a lot, talk to people

who have been to the field a lot, and these stories of just incremental change that add up to something different over time, they're prevalent. The best messengers are the people who are actually there.

What's interesting about the world in which we live is, there's no question there's the electronic media that people watch, but there's also the blogosphere. You're on it, I know; you're hearing from people, your son's comrades that are constantly e-mailing you. There's a lot of information that's taking place that is causing people to have a different picture of what they may be seeing on TV screens. See, this enemy of ours is very effective; they're smart people. They're effective about getting explosions and death on TV screens, and they know it affects Americans because we're good people; we're compassionate; we care about human life. Every life matters. And therefore, when human life is taken through a car bomb, it causes people to say, is it worth it? Does it matter what happens over there?

See, one of the interesting things about this war I forgot to tell you is, unlike, say, the Vietnam war, that if we fail in Iraq, the enemy won't be content to stay there. They will follow us here. That's what different about this struggle than some of the others we're had. What happens overseas matters.

We ask this question a lot about how we can do a better job. As I say, Ryan Crocker and David Petraeus are briefing today. It's good to have them on TV, on these talk shows and stuff like that, but they've also got a job to do. And they're very credible people because they see firsthand what's going on. But they've got a lot of work to do over there as they command these troops.

I hope you're doing okay. I'll tell you something interesting in meeting with the families of the fallen. I get all kinds of opinions, of course. But one of the most universal opinions I get is one, I'm proud of my son; two, he was a volunteer; and three, do not let his life be in vain, Mr. President, you complete the mission. [*Applause*] Thank you, brother.

All right, guess what? You got to get to work. [*Laughter*] And so do I. Thank you all for giving me a chance to come and visit with you. I found this to be an interesting exchange. I appreciate your questions. I hope you have a better sense for why and how I have made decisions that have affected the individual lives of our citizens, as well as the life of our Nation. I'm an optimistic person. I believe that those decisions were not only necessary, but I firmly believe they will yield the peace that we all want; peace of mind and peace of heart. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:35 a.m. at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Darrell Freeman, Sr., executive committee chairman, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce; Cordia Harrington, chief executive officer, the Bun Companies; Al McCree, owner and chief executive officer, Altissimo! Recordings; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John C. Danforth; Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of the United Nations; and Johnny Sutton, U.S. District Attorney for the Western District of Texas. A participant referred to Azzam Alwash, director, Eden Again Project. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Members of Military Support Organizations

July 20, 2007

Good morning. Thank you all for coming. I'm joined by veterans and military families who are here to express support for our troops and their mission in Iraq, and I want to thank you all for being here today.

We've just finished a really good meeting. In our discussions, these folks had a message that all of us in Washington need to hear: It is time to rise above partisanship, stand behind our troops in the field, and give them everything they need to succeed.

In February, I submitted to Congress a Defense Department spending bill for the upcoming fiscal year that will provide funds to upgrade our equipment for our troops in Iraq and provides a pay raise for our military. It's a comprehensive spending request that Congress has failed to act on. Instead, the Democratic leaders chose to have a political