

CAFTA nations last year. This treaty will eliminate key distribution barriers in those countries, opening markets to Utah companies in the telecommunications and e-commerce arenas. Utah's farmers will also enjoy access to new markets as CAFTA will immediately eliminate tariffs on wheat, barley, oats and rye. However, despite these advantages we must remain on guard that this agreement and previous agreements are adequately enforced to ensure that American products are fairly treated in these markets.

This is only the "tip of the iceberg" of the challenges that Representative PORTMAN will face. I do not believe that the President could have chosen a better person to create and enforce the extraordinary opportunities afforded by new and existing free trade agreements. Representative PORTMAN's nomination has my full support and confidence.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of ROBERT J. PORTMAN, of Ohio, to be United States Trade Representative, with the rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will now return to legislative session.

Mrs. LINCOLN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, Benjamin Franklin once said: He that would fish must venture his bait.

In America, we have millions of creative women and men and even teens who cast their reels every day in the hopes of catching the American dream. And fortunately we have the most vibrant economy in the world and the Small Business Administration to help them.

This week the Small Business Administration is hosting its annual celebration of America's entrepreneurs at the Washington Hilton. President Bush spoke to the group several days ago in recognition of their tremendous contributions. One of the topics that had been discussed over the course of the

week is just how important are small business owners. These innovators create 60 to 80 percent of new jobs nationwide. They generate more than 50 percent of the gross domestic product. Small business owners are the heart of the American marketplace, and their contributions to jobs and productivity are its lifeblood.

In my home State of Tennessee, over 97 percent of all businesses are small businesses. Women-owned businesses generate billions of dollars in revenue and employ tens of thousands of workers. Minority-owned firms, the fastest growing small business sector in America, account for nearly 33,000 small businesses in Tennessee. Elisa Comer, CEO of Eagle's Landing Transcription Service over in Johnson City, TN, has been chosen this year as one of the Small Business Administration's 50 small business people of the year. Elisa's company offers cutting edge electronic technology that improves medical recordkeeping.

This happens to be an issue that in my capacity as a Senator I have worked on very closely. Companies that provide up-to-the-minute medical records technology are crucial to improving patient care, to improving patient safety, and improving efficiency in the medical field. Workers and consumers depend on entrepreneurs such as Elisa to generate jobs and to provide higher quality products and services. And with the help of the Small Business Administration, America's entrepreneurs can get their ideas off the ground and into the neighborhood near you.

Take, for example, the restaurant chain Outback Steakhouse. It may come as a surprise to some, but Outback Steakhouse is not headquartered in Australia. It is headquartered right here in America, down in Tampa, FL. In a little over a decade, Outback Steakhouse has grown from a small restaurant operation into a nationwide phenomenon. In February of 1990, the 2½-year-old company employed approximately 300 people and had a net worth of less than \$2 million. That year it received a boost from the Small Business Administration. Ten years later, the restaurant chain employs more than 38,000 people and in 1999 posted revenues of a dizzying \$1.6 billion. Outback has restaurants in 48 States and 13 countries as far away as Seoul and Rio de Janeiro.

Another dazzling example of the Small Business Administration's catalytic effect is Staples. It started as a single office supply store in Brighton, MA, in 1986. The office supply store is now the country's largest operator of office superstores. Staples employs 58,000 people and has annual gross sales of \$11.6 billion. It even offers products and services to up-and-coming small businesses to help them cut costs.

The Small Business Administration has helped more than 22 million Ameri-

cans start, grow, and expand their businesses. It has become the Government's most effective instrument for economic development. With its help, small companies have grown from a handful of employees into thousands.

The SBA is just one part of our efforts to support job-creating policies. In 2003, the Jobs and Growth Tax Relief Act we passed provided more than 25 million small business owners with tax relief totaling \$75 billion. In fact, small businesses received 80 percent of the benefits of the reduction of the top marginal tax rate. The tax relief package quadrupled the amount small businesses can expense for new capital investments, which will lead, and has led, to new investment in technology and machinery and other equipment. It phases out the Federal death tax, ensuring that family business owners are able to leave their businesses to their families or key employees.

These policies are helping to create new jobs and increase productivity and make every consumer's dollar go farther. Remington's electric shaver magnate Victor Kiam once observed:

Entrepreneurs are simply those who understand there is little difference between obstacle and opportunity and are able to turn both to their advantage.

I commend my fellow citizens who possess this talent to turn obstacles into opportunity, not only to their advantage, but also to the advantage of us all. Their risk-taking and creativity help keep America moving forward.

#### THE PAST MONTH

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, there are a few comments I will now make on the past month. Indeed, it has been a productive month in the Senate and I do want to thank all of my colleagues for their hard work and diligence over the course of the last several weeks. It has been an almost unbelievably eventful time on the world stage, first and foremost with the passing of Pope John Paul II. None of us will ever forget hearing the news of his death and feeling that we were in some way fortunate to be witnesses to a moment and to an era that will change and instruct history for generations. Nor will we ever forget our pilgrimage to the Vatican to pay our respects to the Pope and his extraordinary life. Millions of Catholics and non-Catholics alike were touched by this great man. He influenced more lives than kings and Presidents before him.

I believe I speak for all in welcoming his successor, Pope Benedict XVI, the new leader of the Catholic Church. He is a man of great compassion and integrity, and I believe that, like John Paul before him, Pope Benedict will spread God's message of peace and be an inspiration to millions.

We also witnessed on the world stage the historic withdrawal of Syrian

troops from Lebanon. Next week, I will be traveling there to see firsthand the changes that are being brought. Democracy is on the march. We are witnessing history in the making. After some months of difficult negotiation, the Iraqis have formed a new transitional government from the fruits of their first true elections. This is tremendous news. Prime Minister al-Jaafari deserves great credit for including a cabinet consisting of the great diversity of Iraq's population.

The Iraqis are a brave and determined people. January 30 proved that truism vividly and beyond a doubt. My heart goes out to the Iraqi people as they give shape to that first true democracy in the heart of Arab Middle East. They are an inspiration to their brethren and to all of us who strive for freedom. These are perilous times, but they are hopeful times. The United States can stand proudly before the world for our efforts to spread freedom, our ideals, our principles, our efforts, and our blood to free millions of people the world over. And this body, the Senate, has been instrumental in advancing America's interests in a myriad of ways, concrete and symbolic, empowering and inspiring.

This week, after 2 weeks of debate, we passed legislation to fund our men and women in uniform who are fighting for freedom, and to fund our humanitarian outreach to the December tsunami victims. We will continue to supply all necessary resources to keep our military strong.

During this session, we also confirmed Ambassador John Negroponte as Director of National Intelligence. Mr. Negroponte will be responsible for overseeing the entire intelligence community. It will be his job to keep America safe by bridging the gap between our 15 intelligence agencies and improving information sharing between agencies. I am confident that, as our new Director of Intelligence, Mr. Negroponte will work hard to make the reforms necessary to help keep America safe.

Tonight, we have approved the final two members of the President's Cabinet, ROBERT PORTMAN to be USTR and Steve Johnson to the EPA. The President's Cabinet, as of a few minutes ago, is now complete.

Of course, tonight we had the budget. I congratulate Chairman JUDD GREGG. This, as I mentioned earlier this evening, is the fifth quickest conference report on the budget in history. The budget addresses spending head on. It is a strict budget from a fiscal standpoint. It addresses the short-term deficit by holding down discretionary spending, cutting the deficit in half in about 4 years. It addresses the outyear deficits driven by entitlements. It re-institutes the enforcement mechanism that will discipline spending. It is a fully transparent budget that accounts

for the true war costs over the next year.

I look forward to returning to our work when we return from the recess. I am confident that with bipartisan determination we will get further work done. It has been an eventful month—a month of global and history-changing events. I am proud that under the leadership of President Bush, America has been at the forefront of freedom.

Over the recess, I will have the opportunity to travel to the Middle East to witness many events and learn firsthand the challenges facing the region—more specifically, the progress of the Israeli and Palestinian peace process. We will meet with key Israeli leaders in Israel and travel to Ramallah in the West Bank to meet with President Abbas and members of his Government.

We will also meet and listen to other voices in order to hear a wide range of views. Our goal is to listen and explore how we can help move the process forward and advance the cause of democracy.

We will also be visiting Jordan and Egypt, two important players in the Middle East peace process. They have endorsed the roadmap to peace and have shown by example that Arab peoples can live side by side with Israelis. They are also close friends of the U.S. and are allies of the global war on terrorism. Both countries are also pursuing much needed reforms. More needs to be done, not just because it is in our national security interest, but because it is in their people's interest. Transparency, continued movement toward democracy, economic freedom, and prosperity should be the goals of all governments in the region.

In all of these stops, we will meet with real, everyday people and see these cities and countries in action, whether it be visiting hospitals in Jerusalem or shopowners and business people in the West Bank.

Finally, we will also travel to Beirut to meet with key opposition leaders and current government leaders. Our goal is to underscore our unwavering position that all Syrian intelligence and military personnel must leave Lebanon. Elections must be held on time and the Lebanese people must determine their own future through free and fair elections. The United States stands firmly behind the Lebanese people.

In closing, I wish my colleagues a safe and productive recess and look forward to resuming our work when we return.

#### FREEDOM

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, this past weekend millions of Jews around the world celebrated the beginning of the Passover holiday. Gathered at Seder tables with family and friends, they commemorated the Israelites' exodus from Egypt almost 4,000 years ago.

Jewish law dictates, however, that the Jewish people must do more on Passover than merely remember their ancestors' time in bondage. They must strive to reenact the experience.

Using matzah and bitter herbs, the Seder is an endeavor to recreate the past. To literally taste the bitterness of slavery and the sweetness of freedom.

It is also an opportunity to sharpen awareness of an alarming yet oft-overlooked truth: that millions of men, women and children around the world are still enslaved and have yet to know freedom.

Ultimately the Passover Seder is a modern call to action. It reminds that until all people know the joy of freedom, none of us is truly free.

Many Jews use the Seder not only to celebrate the value of freedom, but to call attention to regions of the world where the spirit of slavery lives on in places like Darfur, Sudan.

For over 2 years now, the Darfur people have been terrorized by violence. Millions have been oppressed by threats of death and destruction. Meanwhile, untold numbers of refugees have fled across the scorched earth, seeking refuge from their taskmasters.

The genocide that rages on in Darfur is a modern derivative of slavery. With the support of the Khartoum Government, Janjaweed militia groups commit mass looting, raping and violence inspired by ethnic hatred.

A recent analysis by the coalition for International Justice indicates that nearly 400,000 civilians have died since the conflict began 2 years ago. Over 140,000 have been killed by Sudanese Government forces. And an estimated 250,000 Darfur civilians have perished from disease and starvation stemming from displacement.

Recently, there has also been a disturbing trend of intimidation directed at aid workers in the region. The Red Cross reports that attacks on aid convoys in Darfur have increased in recent weeks. And last month, a USAID worker was intentionally shot point blank in an attempt to thwart humanitarian efforts and spread fear and intimidation.

Having personally visited the refugee camps on the Chad-Sudan border and met with survivors, I know that millions of our brothers and sisters are still crushed under the yoke of slavery and fear. Millions of them still do not know what it means to be free.

Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel recently commented that "All are entitled to live with dignity and hope. All are entitled to live without fear and pain. Not to assist Sudan's victims today would for me be unworthy of what I have learned from my teachers, my ancestors and my friends, namely that God alone is alone: His creatures must *not* be."

We must reject this form of slavery by oppression. We must stop the