

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Republican Congressional Leaders and
an Exchange With Reporters
January 30, 2001

The President. It's an honor for the Vice President and the Secretary of Treasury and myself and OMB Director to welcome the leadership in the House and the Senate on the Republican side.

We've had a wide-ranging discussion, discussed tax relief and how we can pay down national debt and have tax relief, which all of us around this table firmly believe we can do. We also discussed the fact that there's a lot of Americans who have got a lot of consumer debt, and we must be mindful of those hard-working Americans. And part of the tax relief package is to allow people to better manage their own finances with their own money. We had a discussion about education.

We discussed, particularly the leader and I and Members of the Senate, discussed the need to get our nominees through the Senate. And I hope, in the spirit of bipartisanship, there will be no further delays on the confirmation process for John Ashcroft and other nominees of ours. I certainly appreciate how fast the Senate worked initially, but it's time for the delays to end. It's time for a vote on all our Cabinet officials.

This is—will be a series of conversations we'll have throughout my tenure, and I really enjoy this. It's been a good, frank discussion.

Interest Rates/Tax Relief Legislation

Q. Do you think the Fed should cut rates now, sort of stimulate the economy? And in the discussion of tax policy, there has been some disagreement between the White House and the Speaker and others over whether you should have one big package of tax cuts or to do it in pieces.

The President. First, Mr. Greenspan needs to make his decisions, independent of what I think. I learned a pretty good

lesson during the transition, and that was I had commented out loud about one of the actions he took. That's the last time I'm going to comment about the actions that Mr. Greenspan takes. He's an independent voice and needs to be an independent voice.

Secondly, we did discuss the timing of the tax relief package and how best to move it through the House, where to originate. And as I told the Speaker and the chairman and the leadership, that we are interested in success, that the most important—most important—criterion for how the tax package is handled is whether or not it will succeed. And these are the Members who are going to have to work to get it out of the House, so we're listening to their strategy.

Q. What is the best timing for presenting the tax proposal, sir?

The President. Again, that's going to be up to the leadership. Obviously, it depends upon—it's the middle of our budget. As you noticed, the head of the budget committees are here; we're talking budget. Taxes must fit into a budget, which they will.

The answer to any of our initiatives, of course, is, as soon as possible. [*Laughter*]

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes, sir?

Q. Good morning, sir.

The President. How are you doing?

Q. Good. Thank you.

The President. I thought you had abandoned us for a while. [*Laughter*]

Diplomacy/Earthquake in India

Q. Are you happy with the progress you're making in reaching out to world leaders, or do you plan to change the pace of that at all?

The President. I've got a steady pace. I'm calling as I can. I talked to the Prime Minister of India today. It was a phone call that I was going to make, regardless of the natural disaster that took place there. Obviously, a lot of the conversation today was about the aid that our country is sending. A 747 from AID has landed this morning; another one is on its way. We're sending some military planes over, as well. I assured him that our Nation was deeply concerned for the citizenry that had lost their lives. It was not the appropriate time to discuss policy beyond that.

And I will be making other calls, touching base with world leaders. I'll do a lot of that, of course. Good diplomacy really depends upon good personal relations, whether or not we agree with each other on a lot of issues or not. And I'm going to continue the diplomacy that reaches out to people on a regular basis.

Attorney-General-Designate John Ashcroft

Q. On Senator Ashcroft, are you worried that there are going to be more—do you feel he's going to be confirmed, still?

The President. I do believe he's going to be confirmed. But one of my charges is to run the executive branch of Government. And it's important for our Cabinet officers to be confirmed so they can start

doing their job of organizing their departments. Once we get our Cabinet officials through, I'm sure I'll be speaking to the Senate about moving the number twos and threes through, as well, so that we can take hold of this Government. And one of the things I'll be doing when our Cabinet meets is talking about the need for each Cabinet member to be fiscally sound with the taxpayers' money. It's hard to deliver that message when somebody hasn't been confirmed.

So I would just hope there are no further delays. There's been a lot of discussion, a lot of debate. There's been a lot of questionnaires presented and answers filled out. And it's now time for the vote, it seems like to me.

Q. Did you get the Vice President a birthday present?

The Vice President. Not yet. [Laughter]

The President. As a matter of fact—[laughter]—some used coffeecake, perhaps, Mr. Vice President? [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:35 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of India. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for Paul H. O'Neill as Secretary of the Treasury January 30, 2001

The President. Well, I'm pleased to welcome Nancy O'Neill and the O'Neill family here. Thank you all for coming. It's an honor for both the Vice President and I to say some words about the Secretary of Treasury. With Paul over at the Treasury, he is literally a next-door neighbor. And I'm going to see a lot of him right here

in this office. He'll be a valued adviser and a steady hand.

Secretary O'Neill has served in this office before, at the Office of Management and Budget. He understands the workings and responsibilities of the executive branch. More than that, he understands the private sector, where he and others like him have been driving our country's economic boom.