

May 1 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2001

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:05 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Jacques

Chirac of France; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada; Chancellor Gerhard Schröder of Germany; and NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson.

Statement on the Retirement of Federal Bureau of Investigation Director
Louis J. Freeh
May 1, 2001

Louis Freeh is a dedicated public servant who has served his country and the FBI with honor and distinction. I regret the Di-

rector is leaving Government. We are fortunate to have had a man of his caliber serve our country, and we will miss him.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Proposed Legislation To Extend the
Filing Deadline for Undocumented Immigrants
May 1, 2001

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. Leader:)

I am a strong proponent of government policies that recognize the importance of families and that help to strengthen them. To the extent possible, I believe that our immigration policies should reflect that philosophy. That is why I support legislation to extend the window created under section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act during which qualified immigrants may obtain legal residence in the United States without being forced to first leave the country and their families for several years.

According to agency estimates, there are more than 500,000 undocumented immigrants in the country who are eligible to become legal permanent residents, primarily because of their family relationship with a citizen or legal permanent resident. However, the law generally requires them to go back to their home country to obtain a visa, and once they do so, they are barred from returning to the United States for up to 10 years. Many choose to risk remaining here illegally rather than to be separated

from their families for those many years. This issue has been the subject of discussion in the Working Group that Attorney General Ashcroft and Secretary of State Powell co-chair with officials of the Mexican government, and should be addressed to ensure a more orderly, legal, and humane migration flow between our countries.

I encourage the Congress to consider whether there was adequate time for persons eligible under section 245(i) to apply for adjustment of status before the filing deadline expired yesterday. Information indicates an estimated 200,000 were eligible to file but did not meet the deadline. Preliminary reports suggest that many applicants were unable to complete their paperwork in time, due in part to the fact that the rules explaining how the provision would be applied were not issued until late March. It remains in our national interest to legitimize those resident immigrants, eligible for legal status, and to welcome them as full participants of our society. But we

will only be able to do this if the path to legalization encourages family reunification. For this reason, I would support legislation that temporarily extends the recently expired April 30, 2001, filing deadline, while maintaining the requirement that the applicant was physically present in the United States on December 21, 2000.

I look forward to working with you on this important legislation.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives; Richard A. Gephardt, House minority leader; Trent Lott, Senate majority leader; and Thomas A. Daschle, Senate minority leader.

Remarks on Establishing the President's Commission To Strengthen Social Security May 2, 2001

The President. Please be seated. Mr. Secretary, thank you for coming. Members of the newly formed Social Security Commission, I want to thank you all for being here. And I want to thank your family members who are here, as well.

Social Security is one of the greatest achievements of the American Government and one of the deepest commitments to the American people. For more than six decades, it has protected our elderly against poverty and assured young people of a more secure future. It must continue to do this important work for decades to come.

Yet, it has been apparent for many years that Social Security, itself, is becoming insecure. Social Security was designed for an era when few Americans lived much past the age of 65 and when families of three or four children were more than the exception. When Social Security was created, there was about 40 workers paying Social Security taxes for every one retiree receiving benefits. Today, there are three workers for every retiree; soon, there will be two. Long life is a blessing. Smaller families are an individual choice. But the consequence of this blessing and this choice is that the Social Security payroll tax, which was once 2 percent, has now passed 12 percent.

Economists calculate that it will have to rise past 18 percent if the baby boomers are to receive the same benefits that Social Security has promised, unless we take steps soon to reform the way Social Security is financed.

The threat to the stability of Social Security has been apparent for decades. For years, political leaders have agreed that something must be done, but nothing has been done. We can postpone action no longer. Social Security is a challenge now. If we fail to act, it will become a crisis. We must save Social Security, and we now have the opportunity to do so. Our Government will run large budget surpluses over the next 10 years. These surpluses provide an opportunity to move to a stronger Social Security system.

Two months ago, in my address to Congress, I described the principles that must guide any reform of Social Security. First, Social Security reform must preserve the benefits of all current retirees and those nearing retirement. Second, Social Security reform must return the Social Security system to sound financial footing. Third, Social Security reform must offer personal savings accounts to younger workers who want them. Today, young workers who pay into Social Security might as well be saving their