

percent in January 2003, GS locality-based comparability payments under 5 U.S.C. 5304 must remain at current levels. While my Administration remains committed to the principle of adjusting civilian Federal pay rates in keeping with changes in local labor market rates, our national situation precludes granting larger pay increases to GS employees at this time.

Accordingly, I have determined that:

(1) Under the authority of section 5303(a) of title 5, United States Code, the pay rates for each statutory pay system will be increased by 3.1 percent, effective on the first day of the first applicable pay period beginning on or after January 1, 2003; and

(2) Under the authority of section 5304a of title 5, United States Code, locality-based comparability payments in the percentages set forth in the attached table will remain in effect in 2003.

Finally, the law requires that I include in this report an assessment of the impact of my decision on the Government's ability to recruit and retain well-qualified employ-

ees. I do not believe this decision will materially affect our ability to continue to attract and retain a quality Federal workforce. Inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index, is at 2.1 percent, well below the 3.1 percent across-the-board pay increase already mandated by current law, and Federal quit rates are at an all-time low of 2.1 percent per year, well below the overall average quit rate in private enterprise. Should the need arise, the Government has many compensation tools, such as recruitment bonuses, retention allowances, and special salary rates, to maintain the high-quality workforce that serves our Nation so very well.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 29.

The President's Radio Address *November 30, 2002*

Good morning. This week, all across America, we gather with the people we love to give thanks for the blessings in our lives. Each family has its own traditions, yet we are united as a nation in setting aside a day of gratitude. We are grateful for the freedoms we enjoy, grateful for the loved ones who give meaning to our lives, and grateful for the many gifts of this prosperous land. On Thanksgiving we acknowledge that all of these things, and life itself, come not from the hand of man but from Almighty God.

The blessings we have received take on special meaning in this time of challenge for our country. Over the last year, millions

of Americans have found renewed appreciation for our liberty and for the men and women who serve in its defense. We have held our family and our friends closer, spending more time together, and letting them know we love them.

Taking time to count our own blessings reminds us that many people struggle every day—men, women, and children facing hunger, homelessness, illness, addiction, or despair. These are not strangers. They are fellow Americans needing comfort, love, and compassion. I ask all Americans to consider how you can give someone in need a reason to be thankful in this holiday season and throughout the year.

It's easy to get started and to have an immediate impact. Volunteering your time at a soup kitchen, teaching a child to read, visiting a patient in the hospital, or taking a meal to an elderly neighbor or a shut-in are all simple acts of compassion that can brighten someone's life. Every act of love and generosity, however small it may seem, is significant. Every time you reach out to a neighbor in need, you touch a life, you improve your community, and you strengthen our Nation.

Earlier this year, I created the USA Freedom Corps office in the White House to harness the power of millions of acts of charity, compassion, and love to make America a better place. I hope you'll consider joining the armies of compassion and dedicating time and energy and service to others. I'm so proud of the millions of Americans who have answered the call to service, enriching the lives of others with acts of kindness. It is a testament to the good heart and the giving spirit of the American people.

There's no better time than this season of Thanksgiving to renew our commitment to helping those in need. The USA Freedom Corps web site—usafreedomcorps.gov—is a wonderful place to get started. This resource offers valuable information about service opportunities in your hometown, across America, and around the world. You can also get information by calling 1-877-USA-CORPS.

Take the time to find out how you can help your fellow Americans and make this holiday season a season of service.

Happy Thanksgiving, and thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 3:15 p.m. on November 26 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on November 30. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 29 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Signing the North American Wetlands Conservation Reauthorization Act

December 2, 2002

The President. Please be seated. Thank you. Glad you're here. Welcome to the White House.

Today we're taking important action to conserve North America's wetlands, which will help keep our water clean and help provide habitat for hundreds of species of wildlife. Through this legislation, the Federal Government will continue its partnership with landowners, conservation groups, and States to save and improve millions of acres of wetlands. The North American Wetlands Conservation Reauthorization Act shows our concern for the environment and our respect for future generations of Americans.

I appreciate two members of my Cabinet who are here today. I'm honored the Secretary of the Interior, Gale Norton, is with us, the Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman. Thank you both for coming.

I appreciate the Ambassador, Ambassador Kergin from Canada, for being here as well. Mr. Ambassador, glad you're here. Thanks for coming.

I want to thank Bob Smith, Senator from New Hampshire, for being here and for his work on this bill. I want to thank Wayne Gilchrest from Maryland—he's got a big interest in wetlands as well as the Chesapeake Bay—for coming here. I appreciate so very much Robert Underwood, ranking