

*May 19 / Administration of George W. Bush, 2003*

Madam President, it will be my pleasure to visit the Philippines later this year, with you as my host. And Laura and I and the American people are honored to have you and your husband as our guests here tonight. Would you please join me in a toast to the enduring friendship between the Philippines and the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:33 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jose Miguel Arroyo, husband of President Macapagal-Arroyo; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

## Message to the Congress Transmitting a Report on Trade and Investment Policy for Sub-Saharan Africa and Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act

*May 19, 2003*

*To the Congress of the United States:*

Consistent with title I of the Trade and Development Act of 2000, I am providing a report prepared by my Administration entitled “2003 Comprehensive Report on U.S. Trade and Investment Policy for Sub-Saha-

ran Africa and Implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act.”

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,  
May 19, 2003.

NOTE: This message was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 20.

## Remarks on the Healthy Forests Initiative

*May 20, 2003*

Thanks for coming, and good morning. I welcome you all to the White House, and I'm pleased all of you could be here to support the preservation of a great American treasure, our forests.

Nine months ago, I stood at the scene of Squires Peak fire in Oregon. On one side of a dirt road, where small trees and underbrush had been removed before the fire rolled through, the forest was green and alive. On the other side of the road, where a similar thinning project had been stalled by lawsuits, the landscape was charred, and the trees looked like matchsticks. The contrast between these two

sides of the forest was startling, and it was tragic.

Active forest management could have saved both areas. It could have saved millions more acres across America from the devastation of severe forest fires and insect damage. Yet, for too many years, bureaucratic tangles and bad forest policy have prevented foresters from keeping our woodlands healthy and safe. The cost to America has been high, in the loss of lives and property and in the destruction of woodlands and wildlife.

No region in America is immune to this problem. Wildfires, diseases, and insect infestations threaten the habitat of animals

and diminish the quality of our water. And problems on public lands hurt private lands as well. After all, the problems can leap across boundary lines to destroy homes and farms and ranches and, in some cases, towns.

The Healthy Forests Initiative that I announced last summer is making American woodlands more safe, acre by acre. As we approach the start of fire season, we have a responsibility to do even more to protect our forests, and we will meet that responsibility. People who understand the responsibility we assume when we take office are on the stage with me today, namely Secretary Gale Norton and Secretary Ann Veneman. And I want to thank them for their leadership. And I want to thank you for your work.

As well, I appreciate Jim Connaughton, who's the Chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality. That means he works in the White House and helps coordinate policy out of the White House. Jimmy is doing a fine job.

On stage with me today is Andrea Gilham. She's the fire management officer for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Who she represents are all the people on the front-line, the yellow shirts. She represents the people who put their lives at risk, sometimes because of bad forest policy. She represents the folks who I got to meet after touring some of the fire areas, who had worked themselves into complete exhaustion because they were serving their neighbors, because they were risking life to protect others. She represents the best of America, and I want to thank you all for coming here today.

I also want to thank Rex Mann, who's the area commander for the U.S. Forest Service. Rex is a well-organized fellow. He's a smart man. He understands sensible policy. After all, he's made a career of trying to make sure sensible policy came into being to prevent devastation of our forests. I met Rex at the site of a tragic fire. I saw how well-organized he was, and I saw

the fact that he commanded a group of great professionals, and those would be the U.S. Forest Service professionals. And so, Rex, thank you for coming. And I want to thank all the people who work for the U.S. Forest Service across our country.

We're lucky to have some Governors, particularly out West, who understand practical, sensible policy, people that are working hard to help the world realize that not all the smarts exist in Washington, DC, that there's plenty capable people outside of the Nation's Capital. And one such Governor is with us, and that's Judy Martz, who's the chairperson of the Western Governors' Association, the Governor of Montana. Thank you, Judy, for coming.

Plus, we've got some good people in the Congress who care about this issue, people who work in a bipartisan fashion to get the bill through. We've got Members of the United States Senate who are here, strong leaders on this issue, starting with Senator Pete Domenici from the State of New Mexico, Gordon Smith from the State of Oregon, Larry Craig from the State of Idaho, and the birthday boy, Senator Crapo—where are you? Congratulations, Mike, happy birthday.

I want to thank the Members of the House. The House is going to take this bill up today, as I understand. I want to thank you all for working on this: Pombo, Goodlatte, McInnis; Walden of Oregon; Sherry Boehlert of New York has been a stalwart in bringing factions together on the floor of the House, and I want to thank you for that, Sherry, for your leadership; Gilchrest of Maryland, Taylor of North Carolina, Renzi of Arizona, and Mike Ross of Arkansas, thank you all for coming. I'm proud you all are here.

Last year, 23 firefighters died while battling disastrous forest fires. Our professional firefighters take risk. We need to mitigate those risks by sound policy. We need to be smart about how we manage our forests. Those fires last year scorched 7 million acres, more than double the average of the

last 10 years. Major blazes burned in 15 States across our country, destroyed 815 homes. It cost the taxpayers about \$1.6 billion of fire suppression. The economic impact of these wildfires and of mismanaged forests is widespread. Hard-working Americans and the communities that count on healthy forests are suffering.

Since 1989, five Western States, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and California, have lost 47,000 timber jobs. Four hundred mills have closed in those States. At present, this year's fire outlook seems less severe, and that's good news for the men and women who wear the yellow. Yet, the danger persists, and many of our forests are facing a higher than normal risk of costly and catastrophic fires. The communities from Georgia to California that are at significant risk for those fires need our help. And today we pledge it; we pledge our help.

Wildfires in unnaturally overgrown forest burn hotter and spread faster than normal fires. And their effects on the environment can be devastating. The fires sterilize soils and trigger soil erosion. They decimate our forests, killing even giant sequoias that have survived centuries of smaller fires. They destroy the habitats of endangered species. Last year, the fire in Hayman, Colorado, damaged the habitat of several species, for example, including the Mexican spotted owl.

One reason for these deadly fires is found in decades of well-intentioned but misguided forest policy which has allowed dangerous undergrowth to build up on the forest floor. During seasonal droughts, these small trees and underbrush act as ladders for fires to reach to the tops of our oldest and tallest trees. They make forests vulnerable to insect infestation and disease.

Sound science shows that we can prevent such fires by managing forests with controlled fire, cleaning out the underbrush, and thinning the areas that are vulnerable to intense fires and insect attacks. This is

common sense, and it is the consensus of scientists, wildlife biologists, forestry professionals, and firefighters, the very people who have dedicated their lives to keeping our forests healthy and our community safe.

This is policy that came from the grassroots to the White House. We've asked experts on how best to deal with the problem. See, we see a problem, and we want to deal with it for the good of the country.

Andrea Gilham is a fire management officer and a member of the Blackfeet Tribe in Browning, Montana. She has been fighting fires since she was 19 years old, 2 years ago. [Laughter] She has a degree in forest resource management. She's the kind of person that Congress needs to listen to. She knows the cost of doing too little to prevent extreme wildfires. In 1990, she was working the frontlines of the Dude fire in Arizona's Tonto National Forest on the day six firefighters died. Andrea says, "Everybody knows what we need to do. The longer we wait, the more likelihood a catastrophic wildfire is going to happen. Lives and property are at risk."

Everybody who's in the field knows what we need to do. Everybody whose job it is to protect America and the communities from wildfires know what we need to do. The Forest—many in the Forest Service know what we need to do. Enough on the House floor, I hope, know what we need to do. We've just got to make sure that enough Senators know what we need to do to propose and get through the Healthy Forests Initiative.

And the initiative I've laid out is beginning to make sense. We've begun to cut through the bureaucratic redtape, and there's a lot of redtape here, as the people on the frontline can tell you. Since 2000, the Federal Government has more than doubled the amount of money budgeted for firefighting—and that is good—for firefighting and fire prevention. For '04, we budgeted an 8-percent increase. And I want to thank the Members of the Congress and the Senate who are working with us on

that project, to make sure we've got enough money to let these good folks do what they're supposed to do, on behalf of communities all across the country.

This year, we've reduced the undergrowth that fuels fires on more than 1.3 million acres of forest and rangelands. That was nearly twice as many as were treated in the year 2001. We're moving at a record pace. We've still got a long way to go. There's a lot more work to do. One-hundred-and-ninety-five million acres are vulnerable to devastating forest fires. For the sake of our forests and for the sake the communities, we've got to act quickly, and that's why we've gathered here.

I appreciate the Congress' hard work on the "Healthy Forests Restoration Act." I appreciate the House moving the bill today. I urge Congress to get it done, to get it to my desk as quickly as possible. The bipartisan bill—and I emphasize "bipartisan bill"—builds on the success of the Healthy Forests Initiative. It sets the goal of thinning trees and cleaning out underbrush and restoring the health to 20 million acres. I hope Congress says, when we're successful in the 20 million, we need to get after the 175 million more acres.

This bill sets priorities for forest management by authorizing work in the areas that are closest to rural communities and work where there's the greatest risk for environmental damage. It's a practical piece of legislation. It's good, commonsense environmental policy, is what we're talking about.

The "Healthy Forests Restoration Act" helps the people closest to the problem by allowing local citizens to help plan projects for nonprofit, for profit, and for stewardship groups. And these citizens can benefit economically from selling the smaller trees that are cleared out from the forests.

Local citizens can be great allies in the effort to protect our forests. Ron Bell is with us today—where are you, Ron? There he is. Hi, Ron—thought you would have gotten a better seat. [*Laughter*] He spent

22 years in the Army before coming home to manage his family cattle and tree farm near Batesville, Arkansas. About 6 years ago, when Ron noticed the health of the forest in his area deteriorating from insect infestation, he decided to do something about it. Ron, his wife, and their two sons spent an entire winter cleaning out the diseased and lower-quality trees that were crowding out the taller trees in his 40-acre forest.

When he was finished, the forest was healthier. The bugs were gone, and he had made about \$15,000 from the sale of the undergrowth that he cleared away. Today he belongs to a group of nearly 200 landowners in central Arkansas who are working to manage their woodlands and to keep the bugs out. Ron says some of the landowners who live near national forest areas are worried because the Government moves too slowly in treating our own forests. Here's what he says: "The conditions are preventable with a little bit of management. You don't just have to throw up your hands. There are times you need to get in there quickly, when the situation is dire."

And the situation is dire across America. We need to listen to the voices of reasoned people. We need to get the politics out of this, and we need to focus on what's best for America, is what we need to do. We need to bring people together, for the sake of our forests, for the sake of those who work to see that our forests are healthy, for the sake of those who sacrifice to fight the fires. That's what we need to do here in Washington, DC. We need less bickering, less politics, and more sound, commonsense policy. And that's what we're talking about right here today.

And the reason why that is necessary is because our forests are a treasure, and we are their stewards. We must preserve them. We must protect the people and communities who depend on them. We must fulfill our promise to the next generation—that's what we must do—and leave behind a

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world as blessed and as beautiful as the one our parents left us.

Thank you for your interest in this important subject. May God bless your work, and may God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Statement on House of Representatives Action on Healthy Forests Restoration Legislation

*May 20, 2003*

Today's action by the House on the "Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003" is an important step toward implementing the kind of active forest management that is good for both the environment and our economy. It will save lives and the national treasure of our great forests, with their wildlife, trees, waters, habitat, and other natural resources.

I urge the Senate to act quickly on this much-needed legislation. As this year's fire season progresses, we must equip Federal land managers with the tools they need to protect lives and communities, restore forest health, and safeguard habitat and watersheds.

## Radio Remarks to the People of Cuba on Cuban Independence Day

*May 20, 2003*

Today, Cubans around the world celebrate May 20th, Cuban Independence Day. On behalf of the people of the United States, I send greetings to the Cuban community. My hope is for the Cuban people to soon enjoy the same freedoms and rights that we do. Dictatorships have no place in the Americas. May God bless the Cuban people who are struggling for freedom. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded in Spanish at 9:50 a.m. on May 16 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for later broadcast on Radio Marti. The Spanish language transcript and an English translation were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 20. This text follows the English translation.

## Commencement Address at the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut

*May 21, 2003*

Thank you very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. Admiral Collins and Admi-

ral Olsen, Secretary Ridge, Lieutenant Governor Rell, Mr. President—I'm glad you're