

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders *January 27, 2004*

Legislative Agenda

I want to thank the Members from the Senate and the House who are here, both Republicans and Democrat leaders who are here to discuss the upcoming session. We've got a lot of common interests this year, interests of continuing to fight and win the war against terror. We need to protect our homeland. We need to put policies in place that help people find work. We'll work together on the health needs of our fellow citizens. We've got to be wise with the people's money. I look forward to constructive conversation today and

working together constructively throughout the year. This is an election year. It's a year where people say, "Nothing can get done." We need to prove them wrong. We need to continue to do the people's business in a sound way.

I want to thank the Members for coming. I appreciate the chance to visit with you, and I look forward to a good relationship here in 2004.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:34 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks on Access to Health Care *January 28, 2004*

The President. Thank you for being here. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. If you're wondering who these characters are behind me, these are people who have just shared their stories about what it means to be an employer or employee and facing rising costs of health care. The cost of health care is an issue in our country, and we must deal with it in a rational way. And that's what I want to discuss with you today.

I want to thank those folks who are standing behind me for sharing their stories. I will try to do my best to share some of their stories with you. They come from all parts of our country. George Akers, for example, is from Naples. He's here with his boss, who owns the company, a small-business entrepreneur. That would be Naples, Florida. Joe is from Horizon Builders in Maryland. Pam Wimbish is from Illinois. She's self-employed. Rick Bezet is the pastor of the New Life Church in Little

Rock, Arkansas. These are people who are working for a living, people who are employing people, people who are worried about health care.

Phil Hadley is, as I told you, is George's boss. He's an entrepreneur. He's a—one of the great parts of America is the entrepreneurial spirit of our country. The fact that small businesses are vibrant and alive is an important part of the economic recovery of our country. After all, most new jobs are created by small-business owners, people who are dreamers and hard workers. But Phil told me he's worried about making sure his employees are covered by good health care.

Lynn Martins is with us. She's a restaurant owner. She is selling food and, at the same time, worried about whether or not the people that are waiting the tables can get insurance.

The Sameses are with us, Krista and Ted. They're self-employed. By the way, Kris is