

Remarks at a Dinner for the Nation's Governors February 22, 2004

Good evening. Welcome to the White House. Laura and I are honored to host so many of our friends and new acquaintances. The Nation's Governors were the guests at our first official state dinner almost 3 years ago today. It's great to see so many of those same Governors with us tonight. It's kind of like being with members of your family. Right, Jeb? *[Laughter]*

I appreciate the fact that the Vice President is with us. I oftentimes say Dick Cheney is the finest Vice President our country has ever had. Mother always says, "Wait a minute." *[Laughter]* I want to thank the former Governors who are in my Cabinet, Tommy Thompson and John Ashcroft, Tom Ridge, who is not with us tonight, and the newest member of my Cabinet, Mike Leavitt.

I want to welcome the Nation's new Governors, Barbour and Fletcher, Kernan, Blanco, Walker, Tulafono, and Schwarzenegger. *[Laughter]* Last time I was with Governor Schwarzenegger, it dawned on me that we have some things in common. We both married well. *[Laughter]* We both have trouble with the English language. *[Laughter]* We both have big biceps. *[Laughter]* Well, two out of the three. *[Laughter]*

In the past 3 years, our country has faced some great challenges. We're still at war. The war on terror is a new kind of war in which every American is threatened and every level of government must work to-

gether. We've taken vital steps to secure our homeland, and I want to thank the Governors for their hard work. I'm going to continue to work with you to fulfill our solemn duty to protect the American people.

We share responsibility as well to enhance the entrepreneurial spirit so that our economy continues to grow and people can find work; work together to make sure Americans can gain affordable access to health care; to make sure every child learns to read and write and add and subtract. We've made good progress. We'll continue to meet our obligations in future years.

I've got great confidence in America because I believe in the strength of the American people. I've got great confidence in our Nation's Governors because you represent your State's highest ideals and you hold your people's trust.

It's a pleasure to host you all here. And now I'd like you all to join me in a toast to the Governors of the United States.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:12 p.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Gov. Ernie Fletcher of Kentucky; Gov. Joseph E. Kernan of Indiana; Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Gov. Olene S. Walker of Utah; Gov. Togiola Tulafono of American Samoa; and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California.

Remarks to the National Governors Association Conference February 23, 2004

Well, that's it? Okay. *[Laughter]* Always love to get a short introduction. Hope you all cleaned the room up after last night.

[Laughter] Laura and I really enjoyed that. Thanks for coming. It was a lot of fun. Everybody seemed pretty well behaved. I

don't know about Coach, but yes, I know, it's hard to take him out.

I'm glad members of my Cabinet are here. Obviously, the more communications we can have about issues that worry you, the easier it is for us to solve problems. Governors are problem-solvers, and so is the President. Our jobs are to identify problems and deal with them, and the best way to do so is in the spirit of cooperation.

That's sometimes hard in Washington, I readily concede. This is not a town that thrives upon cooperation, like most State capitals. But we'll continue to work hard to help you, because by helping our Governors, we really help our people. That's the job of a President.

Yesterday in my toast, I said the war on terror goes on, and it does. I wish I could report otherwise, but that's not a true assessment of the world. We are chasing Al Qaida. We're dealing with rogue nations and proliferation, but the war still goes on. And as a fellow Commander in Chief, it's important for you to know that. And therefore, it's essential that we continue to cooperate on matters of homeland security.

We'll have a robust budget in front of the Congress, and we expect it to be passed. Tom, evidently, has met with you all to talk about ways to make sure that the flow of money is expedited from the Federal Government to the State governments to the local governments. And that's essential. And I appreciate that he has convened a conference of Governors and mayors and local responders to make sure that we all do our jobs well. That's the purpose of the meeting.

I will tell you, the response to emergency and/or threats has been, from my perspective, really good. Governor Easley and Governor Warner of Virginia had to suffer through a devastating act of nature. But the response between the Federal Government and the State governments and the local governments was more seamless than ever, and I want to thank the Governors

and their offices of emergency preparedness.

Ridge is doing a good job, from my perspective. He's taken on a tough assignment. I see Governor Rendell is nodding his head. You trained him well. But he's taken on a tough assignment, to bring together diverse agencies under one roof and have it function smoothly not only here in Washington but in the field. And we'll continue to work and make sure that the Office of Homeland Security enables you to do your job better.

There's talk about the PATRIOT Act. Let me just tell you it needs to be renewed, and I'll tell you why. Prior to the PATRIOT Act, the CIA and the FBI couldn't communicate on matters of intelligence. And yet, we're fighting a war against individuals and killers that can hide in our communities, hide in dark parts of the world, hide in caves, and we need to be able to communicate. It makes no sense not to have the tools available to chase these terrorists down. So you'll see me actively pursuing renewal of the PATRIOT Act, so not only can we do our job, the Federal Government, but people in the State and local level can too—do so as well.

The Joint Terrorism Task Force in your community require cooperation—inter-agency cooperation. It's essential they have the tools necessary to find these people and bring them to justice. That is our solemn call in this, the beginning of the 21st century. After all, the most important job of anybody in office is to protect the people of our country, which means we got to stay on the offense when it comes to dealing with Al Qaida, and we got to be wise about dealing with threats before they become imminent or fully materialize. That's the—to me, those are the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. It changed the calculation as to how you analyze and deal with threat.

We are on the hunt for Al Qaida. You just got to know that there's a lot of brave people searching them out. And I view the

hunt for Al Qaida as part of the war on terror. And it requires all assets, intelligence assets and military assets, to chase them down and bring them to justice. And we're doing pretty good—better than pretty good. If Al Qaida were a corporation, middle management has been brought to justice. And that's important for you to know. We can take comfort about the progress we're making. But we've got a lot more to do, and so we'll just stay on the hunt here in—out of Washington, DC.

As you know, I laid out some doctrine that said, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist." And it's very important for the administration to follow through when they say something. It makes diplomacy a little easier when your word means something, and in Al Qaida, our word meant something. The Taliban is no longer in power. We've still got work there to do, but the country is now more free than ever before.

You ought to see the movie "Osama." It's an interesting movie. It talks about what it was like to be a woman in Afghanistan during the Taliban era. It will give you a perspective about what it means to be a Governor in a nation which is willing to sacrifice not only for its own security but for the freedom of others. When you hear talk about being a liberator, that movie will bring home what it means to be liberated from the clutches of barbarism.

A lot of my foreign policy is driven by the fact that I truly believe that freedom is a gift from the Almighty to every person and that America has a responsibility to take a lead in the world, to help people be free. And we're making progress in Afghanistan. We really are. Just look at the fact that young girls are now going to school for the first time in a long period of time.

Secretary Rumsfeld's wife and Karen Hughes and Margaret Spellings, who is my Domestic Policy Adviser—they're on a plane right now heading to Afghanistan to

continue the progress toward a more free society.

And in Iraq, obviously, I made a tough choice. But my attitude is, is that the lessons of September the 11th mean that we must be clear-eyed and realistic and deal with threats before they fully materialize. I looked at the intelligence and came to the conclusion that Saddam was a threat. The Congress looked at the same intelligence, and it came to the conclusion that Saddam Hussein was a threat. The United Nations Security Council looked at the intelligence, and it concluded that Saddam Hussein was a threat. My predecessor and his administration looked at the same intelligence and concluded that Saddam Hussein was a threat, and that's why Congress passed a—resolved to remove Saddam from power, that regime change was a—was policy for the Government.

And there's a reason why not only did the intelligence say that he was a threat, his actions said he was a threat. He had used weapons of mass destruction on his own people. He hid weapons of mass destruction from inspectors. In other words, he wouldn't be open. The United Nations Security Council, at my request, took a look at the issue one last time and unanimously voted to have Saddam reveal, disclose, and destroy weapons of mass destruction and/or weapons of mass destruction programs and, if not, face serious consequences.

September the 11th affected my way of thinking when it came to the security of the country. We saw a danger, and so I gave him an ultimatum. The world, really, gave him an ultimatum. And he refused. And rather than take the word of a madman whose actions had proven unworthy of leadership, we acted, and we removed him. And the world is better off for it, in my judgment.

It is essential we succeed in Iraq, just like it's essential we succeed in Afghanistan. A free Iraq is an historic opportunity to help change the world. And I want to thank the Governors for going to Iraq. I want

to thank you for taking the risk to go and to say thanks to the troops on the ground, whether they be your Guard's troops or reservists or whether they be active duty personnel.

We can debate all day long about whether or not I made the right decision, but what is not in question is the bravery and skill of our troops. And I want to thank you for your support—support for people who are serving a cause greater than themselves, people who are willing to sacrifice not only for our own security but people who when, by and large, when you talk to them, understand that the long-term consequences of a free Iraq will make us more secure.

Some of the stories from Iraq are amazing stories. Just ask your Governors to account for what they saw and heard. It's important for you to know that we fully recognize there needs to be certainty in troop rotation, that we're asking families and troops to go serve the country, and there needs to be a certain timeframe. It's important for you to know that our troops will get the best equipment and best possible training.

I went to Fort Polk in Louisiana, and they showed me some of the training missions that our Guard units are going through, particularly the Guard unit out of Arkansas—Huckabee. And the training is very good. It is intense. It is realistic. It is preparing these souls for duty. And again, I want to thank you, as Commander in Chief, for understanding the mission.

See, the danger is, is that the Iraqi people think we'll cut and run. That's what they're worried about. I think if you ask the Governors, they'll tell you they heard that same sentiment. We're not going to cut and run. We've got to make it clear we're there to succeed, and we will.

And they're making progress on the ground. I don't think it's all that bad that people are arguing about the nature of government. It's a pretty good sign. We argue about government all the time here. As a

matter of fact, later on this year, we'll be having a pretty good argument about government. [*Laughter*] But it's a good sign in Iraq. That's part of the process of heading for a society in which minority rights are recognized and human dignity is paramount. Again, I'll repeat to you, I view this as an historic moment. I truly believe that a free Iraq is going to change the world for the better.

I had a dinner with Koizumi—Prime Minister Koizumi in Tokyo, and we were eating Kobe beef, which is quite good, I might add. And we were talking about, of all things, North Korea, how best, as friends, to deal with North Korea. It dawned on me in the midst of that conversation, what would it have been like if we'd blown the peace with Japan. Would I have ever—or any American President ever been sitting down with a Prime Minister talking about how to deal with the current threat, for the common good?

During the course of the conversation, I also realized that 50 years from now, when we get it right in Iraq, some American President will be sitting down with the leader of Iraq, talking about the common good, how to maintain the peace, how to create a more hopeful society. This is an historic opportunity, and this country will not flinch from the hard duty ahead of us.

At home, obviously, the economy and jobs are on my mind. I know they're on yours as well. I'm pleased that the economy is growing; 5.6 percent unemployment is a good national number. It's not good enough, but it's a good number, particularly since what we've been through, which has been a recession, an emergency, and corporate scandal and war. And yet, the economy is growing, which is a good sign.

My view of government is to create an environment that is good for the entrepreneur, that encourages capital formation, particularly among small businesses. The tax relief we passed not only put more money into the pockets of individuals,

which I believe is good when you're trying to come out of a recession, but it also helps small businesses. Remember, most small businesses in your States are sole proprietorships or Subchapter S corporations. That's a fact, and when you cut income taxes—all taxes, not a few but all—you're providing additional capital for Subchapter S and sole proprietorships.

And if you're worried about job growth, it seems like it makes sense to give a little fuel to those who create jobs, the small-business sector. So I'll vigorously defend the permanency of the tax cuts, not only for the sake of the economy but for the sake of the entrepreneurial spirit, which is important in your States. It's important that people have got incentive to create jobs. Not only is it good for those people looking for work, it's good for the soul of the country for people to own something. We want us to be an ownership society in America.

There's more to do. We need an energy bill. We'll try to get one out of the Congress here. We need tort reform, it seems like to me. We need tort reform for class action; we need tort reform for asbestos. We need medical—national medical liability reform in order to help control the rising cost of health care, associated health care plans. I hope you support these. These are opportunities for small businesses to pool risk in order to better control the cost of health. That's where the focus ought to be, how best to address the rising cost of health care. And this administration will continue to do so for the sake of jobs—less regulations, obviously.

We won't back off our desire to open up markets for U.S. products—farm products, ranch products, manufacturing products. It's pretty easy to trade into America. What's hard is for Americans to trade into other countries. And so it's important for the administration to continue to focus on trade and the benefits of trade here at home.

And I mentioned the permanency of the tax cuts. It's very important for people who

are planning for the future to have—wonder about tax relief, whether it will be there. It's essential that there be certainty in the Tax Code.

We also recognize that these are changing times. The economy is changing. People go to work in different ways. And therefore, the policy ought to reflect that. The policy ought to reflect it through health care, where people have got more control over their health care decisions. Health savings accounts are one such way to do that.

The education system is vital. However, as the economy changes, people have got to be prepared to work in the changing economy. I'm going to vigorously defend No Child Left Behind because I know in my heart of hearts it's the absolute right role for the Federal Government to provide money but insist upon results, to say for the first time, "Would you please show us whether or not the children are learning to read and write and add and subtract." And if not, there will be special help to make sure they do. And if so, there will be ample praise.

You design the accountability. I know Rod talked to you about flexibility and how we get to the numbers, which is good. Accountability isn't meant to punish anybody. Accountability systems are meant to help determine whether curriculum are working, whether or not the strategy is working, and whether or not people are being just shuffled through from grade to grade without concern as to whether or not they can read or write. That's what this is all about, and I look forward to working with you to make sure the system works well. And I just can assure you this is—there will be a vigorous defense of what I think is the one of the most constructive reforms in education policy at the Federal Government ever.

We have put out some policies to encourage reading and math, a program for high school students who are falling behind, additional money for advanced placement for low-income schools, increasing—larger Pell grants for students who prepare for

college by taking more rigorous courses. And of course, I've always felt that the community college system provides a great opportunity for job training. Elaine will talk about that to you. Community colleges are available, affordable; they're flexible. We don't need to be training 500 hairdressers for 50 jobs which exist. The system ought to be designed toward meeting the demand of your employers, and a good community college system will make it much easier for Governors and mayors to attract jobs to your communities. And I know a lot of you have used your community college system wisely.

Governor Napolitano—I was in Arizona, went to the Mesa Community College System. It's a fine community college system. One of the interesting stories there, a lady who worked for 15 years as a graphic design artist, and she went to the community college system to help get the skills necessary to become a viable employee in the high-tech world. And her starting pay—I believe it's called Cable One—was higher than her 15th year as a graphic artist because she took time, with Government help—I think a Pell grant in her case—to become reeducated. So we've got money in our budget to help invigorate the community college system.

Another issue that I think we need to work on—I know we need to work on is welfare. They need to reauthorize welfare. I hope the Congress will reauthorize welfare. Welfare reform had worked. You need to have certainty as you plan your—on how to help people become less dependent on government, and we need a welfare reform bill. And we'll push it here in Washington.

And finally, the Faith-Based Initiative—I want to talk a little bit about that. My attitude is, if a program works, let's use it. If a program can help save somebody's life, it seems like to me that program ought to be allowed to access monies aimed at helping people help themselves. And yet, that's not the way it was here in Washington. Faith-based programs were dis-

criminated against. There was a process argument, and Governors are results-oriented people, and so am I. And it seems like to me, you ought have the flexibility and people at your grassroots level ought to have the flexibility to access taxpayers' money if they're able to meet common objectives. Now—and so—well, I couldn't get the bill out of the Congress, so I just signed an Executive order which opened up Federal grant money to faith-based groups on a competitive basis.

We're also making sure that our bureaucracies don't say to faith-based groups, "You can't be a faith-based group." If faith is part of being an effective program, it doesn't make sense to say to somebody, you can't practice your faith. And so we recognize, here in Washington, faith-based programs are a two-way street—one, there's a Federal interface, and two, that sometimes can be frightening to people of faith. And by the way, I'm talking about all faiths. This isn't just a single faith. It's Christian, Jewish, Muslim faiths, all of which exist because they've heard the universal admonition to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself.

And so I want to applaud those of you who have set up faith-based offices and encourage you, if you haven't, to do so. There is a lot of Federal money available to effective providers of social services. One such program is going to be the \$100 million drug treatment programs, where now vouchers can be issued to people where they can choose where they go, whether it be kind of a clinical program or a program designed to help change somebody's heart. By the way, if your heart gets changed, it's a lot easier to quit drinking. I know. And so it's—so this is an opportunity that I think is a viable opportunity for Governors and States to really help people. And that's why we're in office, isn't it, is to do the best—[*applause*].

So regardless of your party, I hope you have this sense of optimism I do. You see the people in your States—we are lucky

to be leaders in such a fabulous country. We really are—good, honest, decent, honorable people. We’ve overcome a lot. There’s more to do. There’s a lot we can do together. So thanks for coming by the White House.

That’s my pledge. This is going to be a year in which a lot of people are probably going to think nothing can get done, right, because we’re all out campaigning. Well, that’s not my attitude. I fully understand it’s going to be the year of the sharp elbow and the quick tongue. But my pledge to you is, we’ll continue to work with you. You’ve got what you—you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do in your home States, in terms of politics. But surely we can shuffle that aside sometimes and focus on our people, do what you were elected to do and what I was elected to do to make this country hopeful.

So thanks for coming by. I’ll be glad to answer a couple of questions.

You’re out of here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the State Dining Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Raymond “Coach” Blanco, husband of Gov. Kathleen Babineaux Blanco of Louisiana; Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge; Gov. Michael F. Easley of North Carolina; Gov. Mark R. Warner of Virginia; Joyce Rumsfeld, wife of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld; Karen Hughes, former Counselor to the President; Margaret Spellings, Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Gov. Mike Huckabee of Arkansas; Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; Secretary of Labor Elaine L. Chao; and Gov. Janet Napolitano of Arizona. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Message to the Senate Transmitting the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime and Two Supplementary Protocols *February 23, 2004*

To the Senate of the United States:

With a view to receiving the advice and consent of the Senate to ratification, I transmit herewith the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (the “Convention”), as well as two supplementary protocols: (1) the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and (2) the Protocol Against Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air, which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on November 15, 2000. The Convention and Protocols were signed by the United States on December 13, 2000, at Palermo, Italy.

Accompanying the Convention and Protocols are interpretative notes for the offi-

cial records (or “travaux préparatoires”) that were prepared by the Secretariat of the Ad Hoc Committee that conducted the negotiations, based on discussions that took place throughout the process of negotiations. These notes are being submitted to the Senate for information purposes. I also transmit the report of the Department of State with respect to the Convention and Protocols.

The Convention and Protocols are the first multilateral treaties to address the phenomenon of transnational organized crime. Their provisions are explained in the accompanying report of the Department of State. The report also sets forth proposed reservations and understandings that would be deposited by the United States with its