

is to continue to work for equality and justice for all.

It's now my honor to join Speaker Hastert and Senator Stevens, the Senate—the President pro tem of the Senate, in

presenting this high award, this important award, to a great American.

May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. in the Rotunda at the U.S. Capitol.

Remarks to the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce March 24, 2004

Thank you all. Thank you for that warm welcome. *Sientese, por favor. Bienvenidos.* I'm so glad you're here. Thanks for having me. [Laughter] I love to be in the presence of entrepreneurs, people who are willing to dream and to work to realize their dreams, which is really what America has been, is, and should be all about.

I appreciate the fact that it's the entrepreneurs here in America that take the risks and create the new jobs, do the hard work that's helping our economy go forward. You see, by pursuing your own dreams you're making the American Dream possible for more. You're helping to make sure that others can realize the potential of our country. Every day you show faith in what we stand for in America, and I'm here to tell you, the country is grateful to you. And I want to thank you for what you do.

What I want to do is talk about, today, the challenges facing our economy and how to put good policies in place to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit of America—that's what we're really here to talk about—and talk about the need for—to make sure we've got a small-business sector that is vibrant, strong, growing, confident, optimistic about the future. And there are some things Government can do. Government can't create wealth, but it can create an environment in which the entrepreneurial spirit can flourish. And that's what I'm here to talk about today.

I want to thank Hector—he's the Small Business Administration head—for joining me. I had the honor of meeting Hector, Sr., right before we came out here. Hector and I are lucky. We've both got good dads. [Laughter] So, Hector Barreto, Sr., I appreciate you here. He's the cofounder of the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

I appreciate my friend John Snow, who is the Secretary of Treasury. Mr. Secretary, thanks for coming to share some thoughts. I appreciate your wisdom. He's a smart guy. [Laughter] He knows what I know, that it's best not to be thinking about economic theory; it's best to be thinking how to unleash the great creativity of the American people. It's the best economic policy there is.

I appreciate so very much J.R. Gonzales, the chairman and acting president of the U.S. Chamber. I want to thank Tina Cordova, the vice chair, for having me here. I see my friend Massey Villarreal. He's an old friend from Texas. I don't know if there's any *Texanos* here. [Applause] Yes. Tell them hello back home. [Laughter] Tell them I remember where I came from, and I'm not going to change because of polls and focus groups. I'm going to take the—I'm bringing the principles that I was raised with here. I'm going to stand on principle. I'm going to work as hard as I can for the American people, and I'm not going to change what I believe just because some are trying to change me.

And one of the things I believe is, this country is a great country. That's what I believe. I believe it is a great country for a lot of reasons. You know what I believe? I believe it's a great country because if you're willing to work for a dream, you can own your own business. To me, that's great, when somebody can start with little and end up with a lot, and that's what we've got to encourage here in this country.

I want to remind you that we have reason to be optimistic about the economy, particularly when you realize what we have been through as a nation. Beginning in 2001, the economy headed into a recession. The definition of a recession, of course, is three quarters of negative growth. So in the first three quarters of 2001, we were going backwards. That made it hard. I'm sure many of you remember the period. If you're a small-business owner, it's difficult to survive in a recession. If you're a worker, there's a lot of uncertainty during a recession.

The stock market, by the way, had begun its decline in March of 2000, and that affects a lot of people. It affects people's confidence when they see their savings begin to dwindle.

As well—we began to recover, by the way, and then we got attacked. And the attack did a couple of things. Obviously, it changed how one must conduct foreign policy. In other words, we have to deal with threats early, before they materialize. Oceans no longer protect us like we used to think. And therefore, when we see a threat, we have to deal with it. But the other way it affected us, it hurt our economy. Make no mistake about it, we lost nearly a million jobs as a result of the attack. But we began to recover from that. We're a strong country. We said loud and clear to the enemy, "You can't intimidate us. We refuse to quit. We're determined to move forward as a nation."

And then we found out that some of—corporate citizens or U.S. citizens who happen to be in corporate America didn't tell

the truth, and that hurt our confidence. See, the system counts on people being honest and open, particularly when it comes to cashflow numbers and earnings per share. And the dishonesty of some in corporate America cost people their jobs and cost a lot of savings, but we acted. We passed tough reforms. As you can see on your TV screens, wrongdoers are being held to account. The message is, we're not going to tolerate dishonesty in the boardrooms of America.

And then we overcame a significant hurdle as well. I just told you we had to deal with threats before they materialize. I made a tough but correct decision to join with the rest of the world—or the United Nations Security Council, and say, "Disarm, Saddam Hussein. For the sake of world security and world peace, you disarm. We've told you to do so for 12 years, and you haven't. Now you have one final chance to do so." And he wouldn't, of course, and so we led a coalition to remove Saddam Hussein. He was in defiance, and now he's in jail. And by the way, the world is better off for it, and America is more secure.

But that decision affected our economy. The decisionmaking process affected the economy. Remember turning on your TV screen and seeing "March to War." That's an incredibly negative thought. And in the world of finance and job creation, it's important to be hopeful and optimistic. People are more likely to invest if they're hopeful and optimistic about the future. And when you're looking on your TV screens and you are seeing "March to War," it made it difficult for people to see a better future. Now we're marching to peace. The march to war is over, and the march to peace has begun, and the world is becoming more peaceful.

My point to you is that we faced a lot of challenges in a brief period of time. In 3 years, we've overcome a lot because of the strength and the character of the American people and the strength of the entrepreneurial spirit. Think about where we are

today. Inflation is low. Interest rates are low. That's helpful, by the way, if you're a businessowner. Mortgage rates are low. Homeownership is at the highest rate ever. That's what we want. If we want people—we want people—more people to own their own business. We also want people to own their own home. It's part of the American experience, and it's happening here.

Manufacturing activity is on the rise. The unemployment rate today is lower than the average rate in the seventies, eighties, and nineties. Thanks to our productive workers—and we're very productive—and to the visionary business leaders, small and large, the United States is the fastest growing major industrialized economy in the world.

We have overcome a lot because of the strength of our country. And members of the Hispanic Chamber are playing an essential part in the progress, so I'm here to thank you for that. According to the most recent data, Hispanic-owned companies employ about 1.4 million Americans and carry a payroll of nearly \$30 billion. Our economy is stronger and society is better because Hispanic-owned businesses are thriving all across the country.

One of the main reasons why the recession that I described to you is the shortest in modern history is because we acted with tax relief. And I want to describe to you why I felt it was so strong to promote tax relief here in Washington. First, if a American has more of their own money in their pocket, they're more likely to demand a good or a service. And in our marketplace, when somebody demands a good or a service, somebody is going to produce the good or a service. And when somebody produces that good or a service, somebody is more likely to keep a job or find work. That's the economic theory behind the tax relief.

But there's really more to it than that. When you reduce taxes on everybody who pays individual income taxes, the way many small businesses are structured in America, you're really helping the small-business sector. If you're a sole proprietorship or a

Subchapter S corporation, you pay tax at the individual income-tax rate, and therefore, when you're cutting income taxes on the individual, you're really cutting taxes on small businesses. And when a small business gets tax relief, it means they've got more money in their company treasury in which to invest and/or expand. That's what tax relief does.

As well, as you may recall, we raised the amount of money you can deduct for capital purchases from 25,000 to \$100,000 for small businesses, all aimed at encouraging investment, all aimed at stimulating the economy. Because when you go out and invest, somebody has to make the product that you're purchasing, and when somebody makes that product, somebody is more likely to find work or keep a job.

As well we did some other things in the tax relief. We increased the child credit to \$1,000 per child. That means it makes it easier for moms and dads to raise their families. We reduced the marriage penalty. What kind of Tax Code is it that penalizes marriage? It's not a very wise Tax Code, so we reduced the marriage penalty.

We also did something else. And that is, we put the death tax on its way to extinction. I think that's important for—see, I think that's important to enhance the entrepreneurial spirit. Look, if you're a small-business owner, like many of you are, you know that when you're profitable you get to pay taxes to Uncle Sam. But the death tax means you not only pay him when you're living, you pay him when you die. And that makes it awfully hard for you, who've started your own business, who've built up your assets, to pass on your assets to whomever you want.

Most small businesses know what I'm talking about. You know, you can't—you have to sell the business just to pay the inheritance taxes. And that dims the entrepreneurial spirit. It doesn't increase the entrepreneurial spirit. It makes it more difficult for the entrepreneur to realize his or her dream, because part of the dream

of the entrepreneur is to leave his or her business to whomever he or she wants. That's part of the experience, and the death tax gets in the way. It's a lousy tax. And we passed good policy to get rid of it, for the sake of the entrepreneurial spirit.

What I'm telling you is, these are—this is what we—when you hear the word “progrowth,” these are progrowth policies, all aimed at growing not the Government but all aimed at growing the private sector. Seventy percent of most new jobs are—70 percent of new jobs are created by small businesses. And so when you hear me talk progrowth, we're talking about progrowth in the small-business sector.

What's interesting about the economy today, and you know this as well as I do, that the economy is experiencing some change, some fundamental changes. Take, for example, productivity. Productivity has grown faster over the last 2 years than at any time in more than 50 years, because of new technologies, technologies that are changing the way we do business. Productivity means one worker can produce 10 widgets today, when it took—one worker could produce 2 widgets in the same amount of time in years past. It's kind of a simple definition. We call that a Texas definition. *[Laughter]*

Higher productivity is good, by the way. It's a good thing for the economy. It's good for your business. It helps you—when you become more productive, it means you're better at competing. You can make a product that satisfies consumer demand in a more efficient and, sometimes, less costly way. And that's good.

Productive businesses are more likely to grow, and that's good. That's what we want. We want growth in order for people to work. Productive workers receive better wages. If you're working in America and you become more productive, you get paid better. That's just a fact of life. The quality of your life goes up. The more—the better worker you are, the more productive you

are, the more likely you're going to make more money for your family.

A more productive economy leads to greater national wealth. In other words, it helps the individual, but it also helps the Nation. We become a wealthier nation.

But there's some challenges with an economy that is more productive. Think of it this way: Companies fill new orders and expand operations without needing to hire new workers. If you're more productive, you can expand your business to meet expanding demand, and you may not need to hire an additional worker to do so. And that creates a problem for somebody looking for work. And that's what I'm interested in, by the way. You know, the unemployment rate is low, but so long as anybody is looking for work and can't find a job, it says to me, we've got an issue here in America.

The other thing that productivity requires is an acknowledgment that new jobs require new skills. If you think about it, things are changing in the workplace, and we better have an education system that encourages—that allows workers to find the new skills necessary to be able to meet the challenges and new jobs of the 21st century.

There's workers who are concerned here in the country. I hear it all the time. There are workers concerned about jobs going overseas. They're worried about changes in the economy. They wonder whether or not, as the economy changes, he or she will have the skills necessary to survive. They're worried about whether their children can find a good job close to home. They're worried about whether or not their health care and their benefits, retirement benefits, will exist.

Here in Washington, you hear the economists say we're in a time of transition. I just want people to understand—know that I know that transition is not easy for people in our country. Transition unsettles the nerves. And so there's some things we've got to do to help, to help our workers and

to help our entrepreneurs. And that—and I'm talking about something more than just unemployment insurance. There's some strategies that need to be in place, progrowth, proworker strategies to make sure that the American experience is reached all throughout the country.

One thing we can't do is go back to the old policies of tax and spend in Washington. I think you're going to find the old tax-and-spend philosophy will drain the entrepreneurial spirit, because when you hear "tax and spend," it means somebody has got to pay more taxes. And guess who gets stuck with them? Small-business owners, people who are beginning to realize their dreams.

And the other thing we've got to do is reject economic isolationism. We can't isolate ourself from the world and expect to have a growing economy. There are some here—I'm just going to tell you what you're going to hear, when you hear this, "We're going to raise taxes on the rich." Just remember, most small businesses are sole proprietorships and Subchapter S corporations. And guess what? If you're one of those, you're rich, according to the definition here in Washington, DC. Raising taxes on small businesses would be a disaster for our economy.

I know some who want to build barriers to trade. You hear a lot of talk about trade and the way to deal with certain problems is to wall us off from the world. I think it's wrong. I think it's bad policy, and I think a lot of Hispanic-owned businesses know what I'm talking about. Rather than building barriers, we need to break down barriers so that the American entrepreneur and American companies can sell American products on every continent in the world. The best policy to make sure jobs stay here at home and somebody can find a job is to open up markets for U.S. products. See, pessimistic people say, "We can't compete. Therefore, let's throw up walls." Optimistic folks say, "We can compete with anybody just so long as the playing field is level."

And good policy says, "Let's make the playing field level."

Look at it this way: Five percent of the world's population is right here in America—means 95 percent of potential customers are elsewhere. Ninety-seven percent of all U.S. exporters are small or medium-sized businesses. It's a pretty interesting statistic, isn't it? A lot of people in America think "export"; they think "big guys." The facts are that small businesses export a lot. Companies with fewer than 20 employees—employees—make up nearly 70 percent of all exporting firms. Of all the businesses that sell overseas, sell a product in demand overseas, 70 percent are U.S. companies with less than 20 employees. That's small business.

If we allow ourselves to fall into the trap of trade wars and throwing up barriers and walls between America and other markets, those small businesses will have little chance to survive. When you hear people talk about trade, I want you to remember this: Hispanic-owned businesses are selling car and truck parts, food, construction equipment, financial services, manufactured goods, and products all over the globe.

I know my friends from Texas have realized and seen the benefits of NAFTA. Our trade with our friend Mexico has tripled over the past decade. When you triple trade, it means there's opportunity on both sides of the border for people to realize their dreams. We must not allow people to raise economic barriers.

Look what it would do to companies like Ruiz Foods in Dinuba, California, where I went. The Ruiz family started in the kitchen. The story, by the way, may sound familiar to many of you here. It may not have started in the kitchen. It may start—your business may have started in a garage, or it may have started sitting around a dining room table. In this case, they started in a kitchen using Grandma Rosie's pots and pans to make enchiladas. They now produce 3.5 million burritos a day. And I want you to know, they are selling some

of their frozen foods into Mexico. That's a pretty darn good burrito. [*Laughter*]

Kim Ruiz Beck, the company's vice chairman—I think Kim is the daughter of the founder—said it was tough to break into the Mexican market. “At first, there was some skepticism about how authentic we are. But there's a lot of trust in products that are made in the United States of America.” What she said is darn wise. There is a lot of trust in the products that say “Made in the USA.” And therefore, it makes sense from a policy perspective to encourage more products to be sold that say “Made in the USA.”

If you're a person looking for work, you want the United States of America selling products and services from our country. It's good for job creation. Presidents of both parties have agreed that trade is good for the American economy. For over 50 years, that's been the case. In other words, we've opened up our markets. And it's been good for consumers, frankly, that people are able to sell into the markets. It's been good for small business when you're trying to buy something.

But the real challenge is to make sure other countries open up their markets. That's the challenge. As opposed to saying, “We're going to close our market, and we don't care about you,” we ought to be saying the opposite: “Our markets are open, and if you expect to trade with us, we want you to open yours.” And so when you hear about trade agreements, that's what we're doing. We're making sure the playing field is level. We've done a trade agreement with Singapore and Chile. We recently completed negotiations with Morocco, Australia, and our friends in Central America.

What's that mean? You hear “trade agreement”—let me see if I can shed some light on what it means. There are 6,000 small and medium-sized businesses in America that export to Chile. When we opened up an agreement with Chile, it made it easier for 6,000 small and medium-sized businesses to sell product. When peo-

ple are able to sell product into Chile, it means they're going to—likely somebody—they're more likely to hire somebody. That's why it's easy to connect jobs and trade. That's what I'm trying to explain. When you're selling into markets, it makes it more likely somebody is going to find work.

There are 4,000 medium and small business that export to Costa Rica; 3,000 export to Honduras. By making the playing field more level, there is a greater opportunity that the small businesses around the United States will be able to find new markets and sell additional products and goods and services, which means somebody is more likely to find a job.

A second way to make sure that jobs stay at home and that somebody is likely to find a job is to make sure that America is the best place in the world to do business, is to make sure the environment is right for capital formation, for business expansion, to make it easier, not harder, for our small businesses to exist and thrive and grow.

There are some things we can do. One, there needs to be less regulations at the Federal, State, and local level on businesses and small businesses. It just doesn't make any sense for you to feel like—I see people nodding their heads. I mean, you fill out a lot of forms. I can't guarantee whether the form has ever been read, much less looked at. [*Laughter*] But nevertheless, endless regulations make it harder to be competitive and make it harder for businesses to stay at home.

We've got legal problems in our country. Too many small-business owners get sued. There are too many frivolous and junk lawsuits. We need tort reform in America in order to make sure the job base can grow and expand. We're taking on some tort reform here in Washington. We've got a good class-action bill moving through the Congress. We've got some asbestos reform moving through the Congress. The trial lawyers here are awfully tough. I hope the small-business community is even tougher

and works with Members of the United States Senate to make sure we can get meaningful tort reform out of the United States Congress, which will make it more likely somebody will be able to find a job.

We need to make sure we help small businesses control health care costs. I've spent a lot of time talking to small businesses in forums around the country. I hear—a lot—people saying, "I can't afford health care anymore." It's hard to be a compassionate employer if you can't provide health care to your employees. There are some practical things we can do.

One, Congress needs to pass what's called associated health care plans, to allow small businesses to pool across jurisdictional boundary—pool risk across jurisdictional boundary, which will give small businesses in the aggregate the same purchasing power that big businesses have in order to drive down the cost of health care.

I hope you all look into what's called health savings account—it's a part of the new Medicare law that I've signed—that will allow employees to save tax-free for routine medical expenses. You'll be able to contribute tax-free into your account, save tax-free in the account, withdraw money tax-free out of the account to pay for routine medical expenses. And their employers can provide coverage for major medical issues or major illnesses or injuries. It's a reasonable way to control costs. It's an interesting new product that's now being developed that I think you—small businesses will benefit, and so will your employees, most importantly.

And finally, one of the reasons why health care costs are on the rise is there are—again, there's too many frivolous and junk lawsuits. There's a lot of docs who practice defensive medicine. Why? Because they're getting sued all the time. It's kind of like a giant lottery. Medicare liability lawsuits are like lotteries. The only problem is there's only one winner, and those are the people who take 40 percent of the win. That would be your lawyers, the trial law-

yers. And we need to have national medical liability reform now. It passed the Congress. It is stuck in the Senate—passed the House, stuck in the Senate.

To control health care costs, we need to have a reasonable legal system. If people get hurt, they ought to be able to sue a doc, but the rewards need to be reasonable. And we need to do things to cut down on these massive amounts of frivolous lawsuits. Frivolous lawsuits affect your business. They affect your business when you get sued, and they affect the cost of doing business.

We also got to make sure we have affordable and reliable supplies of energy. If you're a small business in the manufacturing world, and you're wondering whether or not your gas bill is going to be—spikes or you're wondering whether or not—whether you're going to get electricity at all, it makes it awfully hard to plan and to grow. So we need a reasonable energy policy. We need to encourage conservation, of course. We need to work on alternative sources of energy. We need clean coal technology. We need to explore for more natural gas. But one thing is for certain: In order for our economic security and national security, we need to be less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

I think something that will benefit our economy and help the small-business sector is to reform our immigration laws to help—I proposed a worker program here that says we can match a willing foreign worker with an employer in America so long as an American is not willing to do the job. Look, I know a lot of you are wondering whether or not you're hiring somebody who you should be hiring. And that's because the system is broken down. That's why you wonder that. My attitude is, rather than have people live in the shadows of our society, let's have an honest system. Let's say that if you're—if you need a worker, there's a way to help expedite your search for somebody in our country. But if you can't find anybody, you ought to be able to hire

anybody you want, and therefore, we ought to have a temporary-worker card for people.

And it will help rout out the corruption and the fraud. You know what I'm talking about. The paperwork, you don't know where it comes from if you're hiring in the construction world. It doesn't make sense to have a system where Border Patrol is kind of searching for workers simply coming to our—people coming to our country to make a living for their families. They ought to be looking for terrorists and narcotraffickers, smugglers. And so a worker system would take the burden off of many at our borders.

People often ask me, "Do you support amnesty?" I don't. You see—and the reason I don't is because I'm afraid it would further illegal immigration as well as reward those who haven't lived to the law. We've got a lot of honest people who are trying to become citizens of the United States of America, who have stood in line for a long period of time, and it doesn't seem that we ought to have a worker system that allows somebody to cut in line. That's not fair. One of the things we are in America is we're fair. And people should—people who have been in line shouldn't be penalized for having taken the legal route up to now.

But one thing is for certain: We've got to respect people who are in our country. We've got to treat them with decency, and when the system is broke, we need to reform it.

Finally, in the Tax Code—you probably know this, but all the tax cuts I've described are set to expire. It's kind of hard to explain it, but that's just the way it is here in Washington. *[Laughter]* Child credit is going down next year, unless Congress acts. The marriage penalty goes up next year, unless Congress acts. The 10-percent bracket that had been expanded to include more people will go back to its original form, unless Congress acts. All tax rates go up in 2011, and the death tax comes—

the death tax doesn't expire after 2011. So it expires, and then in 2011 it shows back up. By the way, in 2010, that's going to make a lot of interesting choices for people. *[Laughter]* Anyway, it's hard to explain any rationale behind it. *[Laughter]*

There's uncertainty in the Tax Code. If you're somebody thinking about investing and you've got an investment plan, a capital investment plan scheduled out, and you're uncertain whether or not you're going to get \$100,000 worth of deduction or \$25,000 worth of deduction, it makes you less bold when it comes to expanding your business.

Uncertainty in the Tax Code creates indecision amongst people that we want to feel comfortable making decisions, particularly when it comes to buying capital goods or expanding the job base. And so rather than increasing taxes to pay for new programs, I've got a better idea for Congress. To keep the economy expanding, they need to make the tax cuts permanent.

Finally, I do want to talk about how to make sure workers are better prepared—workers are prepared for the jobs that you're able to offer. There are some new jobs being created, quite a few, as a matter of fact. They're just in different sectors. I remember going down to North Carolina and hearing a textile worker talk about getting skills necessary to become a health worker. And in this particular case, the person was doing great. But you notice there had to be a transition. There are new jobs being created in fields in which some people don't have the skills necessary to fill the jobs. And that's of concern to governments at all levels. It should be.

The place to start with making sure workers have got the skills is in early grades. I worked with Congress to pass the No Child Left Behind Act. Let me tell you the theory behind the act. I believe every child can learn. I know there are some circumstances when certain children are just shuffled through the school system, the "hard to educate." Those are generally kids, by the way, whose parents don't speak

English as a first language or inner-city kids. And we had a system in some school districts where—"Just shuffle through, please. Let's just get them out of the system." And as a result, too many of our children ended up not being able to read at grade level, and that's really sad.

So we passed a new law called the No Child Left Behind Act that said, "We're going to increase Federal money for Title I students." Those are the poorest students. But now we're going to ask the question whether or not the children can read and write and add and subtract. For the first time, the Federal Government is saying, "In return for Federal money, measure. Measure because we believe every child can learn. We believe every child has worth, and we want to know. And we want to know early, before it's too late."

By measuring, we're able to determine whether a curriculum works. By measuring, we're able to determine whether a child needs extra help. There's money in the Federal budget to provide the extra help. By measuring, we can find out whether or not society is doing its duty to make sure every child gets a quality education. The No Child Left Behind Act is a great piece of legislation, and I will defend it with every fiber in my body.

There are other things we need to do. There needs to be remedial education for high school kids. Listen, because we're late in the accountability process, we didn't know for a while whether or not kids were getting shuffled through, and there's probably some in high school that can't read. And now is the time to find those souls and make sure they read.

Laura went down to a program in Florida the other day, a remedial education program, where they're able to take 10th graders, with intense education in a 6-month period, to get them up to—nearly to grade level or at grade level. There's some great things that are happening in education. The Federal Government has a responsibility to help State and local gov-

ernments focus resources to make sure people aren't left behind.

By the way, we need to do the same thing with math. It's hard, if you're an employer, to hire somebody who doesn't have math skills. I guess, maybe there's some businesses where it's not needed, but a lot of businesses, it's important to have the basic skills in math.

I tell you, another interesting opportunity is community colleges. Everybody can identify with the community college in the community in which they live, and there's some great community colleges. The interesting thing about community colleges is, is that the curriculum should be flexible. And when you can find a place of higher learning that's got a flexible curriculum, it means if you're an employer or a group of employers, you can go to your community college and say, "Look, we need nurses. Help us train nurses. Adjust your education system for the jobs which actually exist."

We've got a bold initiative coming out of Washington here to help the community colleges help people find jobs. And the other day, I was in Mesa Community College in the Phoenix area. I met with a lady who had worked as a graphic artist. I think she told me she had been there as a graphic artist for, like, 13, 15 years, something like that. Anyway, she goes back to the community college and takes a 6-month course, if I'm not mistaken, that enabled her to become hired by Cable One Company. She made more money in her first year at Cable One than she had made in her last year as a graphic artist.

And it's important for us to provide those opportunities for as many people as possible. People are going to have to want to do this, by the way. Government—we can't say, "Be ambitious." We can't say, "It's—you must change your habits." But we can say, "Here's an opportunity for you, and we encourage you to gain the skills necessary so you can become an employable person," because this economy is generating jobs. And we want to be able to

match the jobs with the skills needed for the job with the people who are looking for work, and that's a challenge. And that's something that I'm committed to doing.

A couple of other things that I want to say, now that I got you. *[Laughter]* There was a period of time in the seventies and eighties—I don't know if you remember this or not—when a lot of people doubted America, doubted whether we can compete. Do you remember that? The Japanese were going to be the predominate economy in the world, some would say, or the Germans would be. It was claimed that we weren't flexible enough. Our companies were—we had rigid rules, that the workers were not disciplined enough, that the American products really weren't good enough to compete. That's what a lot of people thought. Those were what we called the pessimists. And they were wrong. They were just flat wrong, obviously. I mean, America—we improved. We changed. We're flexible. Our education systems began to work better. The entrepreneurial spirit remained strong. We're the greatest economy in the world now, and it's important that we keep it that way with good policies.

The economy is vibrant today. There are still people who hurt and looking for work,

and that's why we've got to think about pro-growth, pro-entrepreneurial policies. We've got to be confident. But think about this. We sell computer chips to Japan. We produce BMWs in Greer, South Carolina, for export to Germany. We're exporting California wine to France. *[Laughter]* And we're selling Mexican food to Mexico.

The role of Government is to get policies in place that encourage growth, that enhance the spirit of ownership and rely upon the American people. It's a safe bet, when we get the policies right, things will be great here in America, because you know why? The American people are great. This country is full of people—our country is full of people who can rise to the challenge. Many people want to own something and, therefore, are willing to work for it—responsible, honorable, decent citizens who love their family, love their communities, and love their country. And it's a privilege to be the President of such a grand nation.

Thank you for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. at the Renaissance Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Massey Villarreal, member, board of directors, U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq.

Remarks at the Radio and Television Correspondents' Association Dinner March 24, 2004

Thank you. Thanks for inviting me—finally. *[Laughter]* And thank you for honoring David Bloom. It was a fantastic speech you gave for a man you loved.

I am sorry Laura couldn't be here, and I'm sorry Secretary Rumsfeld is not here either. The guy constantly surprises me. Do you know what Rummy's favorite TV show is? "Queer Eye for the Straight Guy." *[Laughter]* My Cabinet could take some pointers from watching that show. In fact,

I'm going to have the Fab Five do a make over on Ashcroft. *[Laughter]*

Anyway, it's nice to be with you. A couple of years ago when I was here, I read from my book of "Misarticalations." *[Laughter]* Fortunately, my verbal phonation and electrocution—*[laughter]*—have improved. So tonight I'm going to do one of my slide shows. These are actual, unstaged photos pulled from the files of the White House Photo Office. So, ladies