

of Israel. I want to thank you for your warm hospitality today. May God bless America. May God bless Israel. Thank you for coming. Thank you all for your time. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:53 a.m. at the Washington Convention Center. In his remarks, he referred to Amy Friedkin, president, board of directors, Bernice Manocherian, president-elect, and Howard Kohr, executive director, American Israel

Public Affairs Committee; Acting Prime Minister and Minister of Industry and Trade Ehud Olmert, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Yosef “Tommy” Lapid, and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; American hostage Nicholas Berg, who was killed in Iraq in early May by senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarkawi; President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan; and Iraqi Governing Council President Izz al-Din al-Salim, who was killed in a suicide car bomb attack on May 17 in Baghdad.

### Statement on Establishing the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force *May 18, 2004*

The Great Lakes are a national treasure that represents 20 percent of the world’s fresh water. The Great Lakes region is an economic engine and recreational haven, and we are making great progress in protecting and restoring this vital natural resource.

To build on that progress, today I am establishing the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, chaired by EPA Administrator Mike Leavitt. The Task Force will address environmental and natural resource issues of national concern and better coordinate the region’s sustainable development and

restoration. It will harness the collective efforts of the Federal Government, Governors, mayors, Members of Congress, tribes, and citizen stewards to ensure that the greatness of the lakes endures for generations. The Task Force will also consult with the Government of Canada on the most effective way forward on addressing past and current environmental impacts to the Great Lakes ecology.

NOTE: The Executive order on establishment of the Task Force is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

### Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters *May 19, 2004*

*The President.* Thank you for coming. I’ve just met with my Cabinet to discuss a variety of issues. We spent a lot of time talking about the situation in Iraq. I detailed our plan and our strategy to transfer full sovereignty to the Iraqi people on June the 30th. I reminded them that a lot of progress has been made already toward that transfer. Eleven ministries are now run by

Iraqi citizens—I might add, capably run by Iraqi citizens.

I discussed with the Cabinet the plans of Mr. Brahimi, the U.N. representative who is consulting with Iraqi leadership and Iraqi citizenry, as well as our own Government officials there, about the interim government and who will occupy the positions of responsibility in that government. I

anticipate in the next couple of weeks decisions will be made toward who will be the President and the Vice Presidents as well as the Prime Minister and other ministers.

Thirdly, we talked about the U.N. Security Council resolution, which is—the Secretary is moving forward. He's in consultations with Security Council members—a Security Council resolution which will embrace the new interim government and the need to provide security so that free elections will happen as promised to the Iraqi people.

We've got hard work to do. I told my Cabinet we've got hard work to do. After all, we saw the vivid savagery of the enemy. The decapitation of a U.S. citizen reminds us all about the barbaric nature of those who are trying to stop progress toward freedom. We understand the nature of that enemy. We also understand the nature of our brave troops. They're motivated. They're skilled. They're well trained. They will accomplish the mission.

Then I talked about the economy. We're pleased with the economic progress here in America. After all, the growth rates are high. New jobs are being created; 1.1 million new jobs since last August have been created by the entrepreneurs and small-business owners and risktakers of America. And that's positive.

I am concerned about the price of gasoline at the pump. I fully understand how that affects American consumers, how it crimps the budgets of moms and dads who are trying to provide for their families, how it affects the truck driver, how it affects the small-business owner.

I anticipated this 3 years ago. I asked my team to put together a strategy to make us less dependent upon foreign sources of energy. I submitted that plan to the United States Congress. Now we want people to have it both ways, just like they've tried to have it both ways over the last couple of years. On the one hand, they decry the price at the pump, and on the other hand, they won't do anything about it. They won't

take action. Congress needs to pass the energy plan.

We had a very interesting discussion about capacity. For example, had ANWR been passed—had it not been vetoed in the past, we anticipate an additional million barrels of oil would have been coming out of that part of the world, which would obviously have a positive impact for today's consumers.

And so it's time for some action here to get us less dependent. They need to pass that which I have submitted to Congress, so this country will become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

All in all, we're upbeat about the spread of freedom and peace and the ability for our fellow citizens to find work.

Let me answer two questions, starting with Lindlaw [Scott Lindlaw, Associated Press].

#### *Israeli Action Against Demonstrators*

Q. Thanks, Mr. President. You've called for maximum restraint from both sides in the Middle East. Today Israel's military acknowledged they fired four tank shells, machine guns, a missile into a crowd of demonstrators. One, was it justified? Two, what are you telling them, and what are you hearing?

*The President.* I continue to urge restraint. It is essential that people respect innocent life, in order for us to achieve peace. And we'll get clarification from the Government. I haven't had a chance to speak to the Government or be briefed. But I am—I will continue to speak out about the need for all parties to respect innocent life in the Middle East.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

#### *Gasoline Prices/Strategic Petroleum Reserve*

Q. Sir, Senator Kerry has suggested halting shipments to the emergency oil reserves. Your energy bill is a long-term strategy. What are some short-term steps that can be taken?

*The President.* If people had acted on my energy bill when I submitted it 3 years ago, we would be in a much better situation today.

Secondly, we will not play politics with the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. That Petroleum Reserve is in place in case of major disruptions of energy supplies to the United States. The idea of emptying the Strategic Petroleum Reserve plays—would put America in a dangerous position in the war on terror. We're at war. We face a tough and determined enemy on all fronts, and we must not put ourselves in a worse position in this war. And playing politics with the

Strategic Petroleum Reserve would do just that.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:04 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General; and American hostage Nicholas Berg, who was killed in Iraq in early May by senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zargawi. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Remarks Honoring NCAA Winter Champion Teams May 19, 2004

*The President.* Thanks for coming.

*Audience member.* We'll be back. [Laughter]

*The President.* Whoever said, "We'll be back," it sounds like the Connecticut women's basketball team.

I'm glad you all are here. This is what we call Champions Day. It is my high honor to welcome champions to the White House. I appreciate—I notice we've got a lot of folks from Connecticut here. [Laughter] Yes. We've got two fine United States Senators in Chris Dodd and Joe Lieberman. We're proud you're here. Nancy Johnson is here with us today. Chris Shays, you made it. Very good. And Rob Simmons is with us as well. Yes, there you go. [Laughter]

They're here because Connecticut—University of Connecticut has done something really unusual. They have a women's champion and a men's champion in the same year, and we're proud to welcome them here. Maybe now is the moment that I should admit that I was born in Connecticut. [Laughter]

I want to thank Phil Austin for being here. Geno, welcome back. Geno is—he's obviously a great coach. And he is a fellow who—I've watched the games, and I've watched his attitude, and no wonder Connecticut women's basketball does so well, because he knows how to win. And I'm proud to have him back. This is the third year that the Connecticut ladies have been here since I've been the President.

And Jim Calhoun is also a great coach and a fine man as well. Coach Calhoun looked at me and said, "I wonder if you're a point guard." I said, "I couldn't even touch the net." [Laughter] But he's got some people that can touch the net on his team. And both these champs really worked hard to get here—both these teams worked hard to get here, with great coaches. And I'm proud to welcome them here to the White House.

University of Denver—one of your—well, you've got a couple of alumni who work for me. One is Gale Norton, who is the Secretary of the Interior. Welcome, Gale. I'm glad you're here. The other one