

So it's great to see you again, Command Sergeant Major. I want to thank Mary Jo Myers, the wife of my friend General Richard Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Most of all, I want to thank all the volunteers who are here. I want to thank your spirit.

So, Scott asked me what's—what are we doing? I said, "We're sending packages to our troops overseas, a package full of all different goodies, you know, a little gum, playing cards." But you can't ever thank the troops enough. This is one way of saying America appreciates your service to freedom and peace and our security. You can't put enough playing cards in there; you can't put enough sticks of gum.

But I hope our troops understand that with this package comes a lot of support and a lot of affection from not only a husband or a wife or a mom or a dad but, equally important, an average citizen who you never met, somebody who deeply appreciates your service, somebody who understands the mission, and somebody who stands solidly with you as you work to make the world a better place.

I know it's hard for our families—military families to be separated from a loved one during any time but, in particular, during the holiday season. And so we ask for God's blessings, not only on our troops who are overseas, but we ask for the Lord's blessings on our family members.

This is—this whole operation here is cranking out a lot of care packages. So far,

480,000 soldiers overseas have received a care package. And with it, as I said, is a message of good will and hope. We're—this is an historic time we live in. The world is changing. And as it changes, as the world becomes more free, America becomes more secure and the peace we all long for becomes more real.

And so during these holiday seasons, we thank our blessings, and one of the greatest blessings of all is the United States military and their families. Thank you for having us. I look forward to coming by to thank each of you.

Our intention here is not to stop progress but to encourage progress. [Laughter] Thanks for your hard work. If any of our fellow citizens are interested to know how you can help, there's a web page set up at the Defense Department and/or at the USA Freedom Corps for ways to help the USO or any other organization that supports our United States military.

God bless you all, and thanks for letting us come by.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:08 p.m. in the USO warehouse. In his remarks, he referred to Edward A. Powell, Jr., president and chief executive officer, United Service Organizations, Inc.; and Cheryl Laaker Hall, director, Operation USO Care Package. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on Signing the Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004 *December 10, 2004*

Today, I have signed into law S. 2486, the "Veterans Benefits Improvement Act of 2004." The Act modifies and extends housing, education, and other benefits for the Nation's veterans.

Section 3677(d)(2)(B) of title 38, United States Code, as enacted by section 108 of the Act, purports to require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to make a recommendation to the Congress on whether to continue a specified pilot project beyond its

statutory expiration date, which would require enactment of legislation. Section 4332 of title 38, as amended by section 202 of the Act, purports to require officials in the executive branch to submit recommendations for legislative action in certain circumstances. The executive branch shall implement these provisions in a manner consistent with the President's constitutional authority to supervise the unitary executive

branch and to recommend for the consideration of the Congress such measures as the President judges necessary and expedient.

GEORGE W. BUSH

The White House,
December 10, 2004.

NOTE: S. 2486, approved December 10, was assigned Public Law No. 108-454.

The President's Radio Address *December 11, 2004*

Good morning. Social Security is one of the great moral achievements of American Government. For almost 70 years, it has kept millions of elderly citizens out of poverty and assured young Americans of a more secure future.

The Social Security system is essential, yet it faces a deepening long-term problem. While benefits for today's seniors are secure, the system is headed towards bankruptcy down the road. If we do not act soon, Social Security will not be there for our children and grandchildren.

So this week I met with the bipartisan leadership of Congress and asked them to join me in a great cause, preserving the essential promise of Social Security for future generations. We must begin by recognizing an essential fact, the current Social Security system was created for the needs of a different era. Back in 1935, most women did not work outside the home and the average life expectancy for American workers was less than 60 years. Today, more moms are working and most Americans are blessed with longer lives and longer retirements. The world has changed, and our Social Security system must change with it.

Today, Social Security is not a personal savings plan. There is no account where your money goes to earn interest. Benefits

paid to today's retirees come directly from the taxes paid by today's workers. And each year there are more retirees taking money out of the system and not enough additional workers to support them.

In the 1950s, there were about 16 workers paying for every Social Security beneficiary. Today, there are about three. And eventually, there will only be two workers per beneficiary. These changes single a looming danger. In the year 2018, for the first time ever, Social Security will pay out more in benefits than the Government collects in payroll taxes. And once that line into the red has been crossed, the shortfalls will grow larger with each passing year. By the time today's workers in their mid twenties begin to retire, the system will be bankrupt, unless we act to save it.

A crisis in Social Security can be averted if we in Government take our responsibilities seriously and work together today. I came to Washington to solve problems, not to pass them on to future Presidents and future generations. I campaigned on a promise to reform and preserve Social Security, and I intend to keep that promise.

I have set forth several broad principles to guide our reforms. First, nothing will change for those who are receiving Social