

it—most of the time. [Laughter] But I appreciate your involvement. It means a lot.

Lastly, I want to thank the Congress for sending a bill called the Crayola Credit, which reimburses teachers for up to \$250 of out-of-pocket classroom expenses. It's an important signal that we care about our teachers. It's a proper use of Federal legislation.

We also passed a good piece of legislation that expanded loan forgiveness from \$5,000 to \$17,500 for talented math, science, and special ed teachers who teach at low-income schools. I thought that was a good piece of legislation. Unfortunately, it's about to expire. So I would hope the Congress—we can work with the Congress to make loan forgiveness permanent. It sends the right signals to our teachers and helps school districts that are looking for good teachers to attract those teachers.

And finally, I believe the Federal Government can put a program together to help reward success for our teachers. I proposed a new \$500 million incentive fund to reward teachers who get results. Teachers could qualify for an award by raising student performance or closing the achievement gap or volunteering to teach in low-income schools. That will be up to the local districts, to decide how to disburse the money. But I think it makes sense to encourage excellence by providing a \$5,000 bonus to nearly 100,000 outstanding teachers across the country. The program won't be administered at the Federal level. It will

be administered at the State and local level. But it's a way to help say to teachers, "Thanks for a job well done. Here's a little extra because of merit. Here's our way of saying thanks for doing what you want to do, which is provide excellence."

And so here's some practical ideas for the Congress to consider as we head into a new session, to make sure that the good folks of this country understand that we're committed to education reform at all levels. We're making great progress because of the No Child Left Behind Act. I will vigorously defend the No Child Left Behind Act. We will not accept rolling back the accountability systems in the No Child Left Behind Act, because I believe the accountability systems are beginning to make a huge difference in the lives of children from all walks of life across this country.

Here's some ideas to help ninth graders when they're coming into high school, so we can assess their problems and meet their needs before they lose hope, so the 68 percent graduation number soars. Here's a way to help reward teachers. Here's a way to provide good incentives. Here's a way to make sure that we achieve what we all want, the best school system in the world.

Thank you for letting me come by to visit. May God bless you all. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. in the school's main gymnasium.

Remarks to Reporters Following Briefings in Arlington, Virginia January 13, 2005

War on Terror/Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunamis Disaster Relief

The President. Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for the briefing that we just had. The Secretary arranged for a briefing

from Admiral Fargo and our commanders on the ground who are providing organization and handling the relief effort for the victims of the tsunamis. I got to tell you, our military is making a significant difference in providing relief and aid and help

and compassion for those who have suffered. I am very impressed, Mr. Secretary, by how quickly we have responded and the assets that you have ordered deployed to help these people. And there's a lot of talk about how some in the world don't appreciate America. Well, I can assure you that those who have been helped by our military appreciate America.

We also talked about the war on terror. We're constantly reviewing our strategy as to how to defeat the enemy—fully recognize that the war on terror will require a coordinated effort within our own Government as well as a coordinated effort with the countries around the world which understand the stakes of this war. I am pleased with the response from around the

world, appreciate so many nations understanding that we must work together to defeat these killers. I'm mindful of the fact that we have—constantly have got to review our plans and never lose our will.

So, Mr. Secretary, thanks for the briefing. It was a very good briefing, and you're doing a fine job on behalf of the American people.

Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld. Thank you, sir.

The President. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:21 a.m. at the Pentagon. In his remarks, he referred to Adm. Thomas B. Fargo, USN, commander, U.S. Pacific Command.

Letter to Congressional Leaders on Review of Title III of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996 *January 13, 2005*

Dear _____ :

Consistent with section 306(c)(2) of the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity (LIBERTAD) Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-114) (the "Act"), I hereby determine and report to the Congress that suspension for 6 months beyond February 1, 2005, of the right to bring an action under title III of the Act is necessary to the national interests of the United States and will expedite a transition to democracy in Cuba.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Richard G. Lugar, chairman, and Joseph R. Biden, Jr., ranking member, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations; Ted Stevens, chairman, and Robert C. Byrd, ranking member, Senate Committee on Appropriations; Henry J. Hyde, chairman, and Tom Lantos, ranking member, House Committee on International Relations; and Jerry Lewis, chairman, and David R. Obey, ranking member, House Committee on Appropriations. This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on January 14. An original was not available for verification of the content of this letter.