

Exchange With Reporters After Signing the Book of Condolence at the Indian Embassy

January 3, 2005

Q. Mr. President, you have come this far; are you planning to extend your visit someday to India? It could be before your Presidency——

The President. Well, I appreciate that very much. I was just telling the Ambassador, when I spoke to the Prime Minister I assured him that my intentions were to make it this year to India. In the meantime, though, our country stands with the people who have suffered. We want the Indian Government, the Indian people to know that we'll help in any way we can. I've asked President Clinton and President Bush to lead an effort to raise private contributions to go to the families of those who have suffered and to help provide food, medicine, water, shelter, whatever the Indian Government thinks is necessary.

I want to thank the Indian Government for taking a lead in this issue. One of the

first things that we did was to put together a core group of nations, nations that are capable of organizing relief efforts around the region. And the Indian Government has been especially strong as a part of this core group. And I told the Ambassador to thank the Prime Minister for his very strong leadership.

Our navies are coordinating together; our search and rescues are coordinating together. And now the American people and the American Government want to help where help is needed.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:01 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of India; and India's Ambassador to the U.S. Ranendra Sen.

Remarks at a Reception for Newly Elected Members of Congress and Their Spouses

January 3, 2005

The President. Thanks for coming. Welcome to the White House. Hope you're feeling pretty excited about what's about to take place. We are excited for you. After all, we ran together. [Laughter] And there's nothing like winning. [Laughter]

I want to welcome you all here. Laura and I are so thrilled you're here. We want to welcome your spouses. I particularly want to say a thanks to your spouse for having supported your run for the Congress or the Senate. Laura and I know how hard it is on a family to be in the political arena. It's the ultimate sacrifice, really—sacrifice your privacy, sacrifice time with your kids.

But you're going to find it's worthwhile. Serving this great country is an unbelievable honor, and both the elected official and the spouse are serving our great country.

The Vice President and I share something else in common with you, besides having run together in 2004, is that we've all run for the Congress. I'm the only one who never won. [Laughter] I ran in 1978, came in second in a two-man race. [Laughter] The Vice President won, as did Dan Lungren. Welcome back.

Representative Dan Lungren. Thank you.

The President. Thanks for agreeing to serve your great State and our country once again.

Also elected that year was a young attorney from Sacramento, California, named Bob Matsui. Bob went on to serve with distinction and integrity in the House of Representatives for more than 25 years. He was a principled advocate for the people of northern California, and he will be deeply missed.

We're also saddened to learn about the passing of former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm of New York. She was a fine lady, a pioneer in education and public service, and the first African American woman elected to the Congress. Laura and I send our condolences to both the Chisholm and the Matsui families. May God rest their souls.

One of Matsui's colleagues was Lungren, as I mentioned, and he is typical of what is a pretty interesting group of folks who've run and won in 2004. I mean, after all, there are former House Members who are coming back to the Capitol with a new job—that would be Senators Coburn and Thune—and two Members of the Congress, like Dan, who has served once and are now returning, Inglis and McKinney. Welcome back.

There are some familiar names. After all, four new Senators have moved over from their House seats, and Senator Martinez was in the Cabinet. Welcome, Mel. It's good to see you and Kitty.

There are new Members of the House who were preceded in Congress by their mom or dad. That would be four Members of the House. I get a little nervous when that son follows the father. *[Laughter]* The State of Colorado has sent two brothers. I know something about having a brother in politics too. *[Laughter]* In the 2004 class, we've got ranchers and farmers; we've got attorneys, physicians, educators, entrepreneurs, and a sheriff from King County, Washington. It's a diverse group, a widely talented group, and there's no doubt in my

mind, some of your finest achievements lie ahead of you.

You know, I've learned about Washington in 4 years. This town is sometimes too partisan and too political. People sometimes say, "What's more important than the country is my politics." And my hope is, is that we can show the Nation that we can come together to achieve big things for the good of the country. After all, we've—we did some of that in my first 4 years here. The election, obviously, is a political event, and so sometimes that obscures what did take place in the first 4 years of my time here.

I mean, we were able to find common ground. After all, I'll never forget signing the education bill at a high school in Boston because Ted Kennedy helped carry the bill in the United States Senate, along with George Miller in the House and Judd Gregg in the Senate and John Boehner in the House. And on big issues, it is possible—and not only possible, important for the Congress and the White House to work together, issues like war and peace, issues like homeland security, issues like making sure seniors are treated well.

I think it's important, as we head into a new session, to confront problems, to not pass them on to future Congresses or a future President. I don't know about what your timeframe is for the amount of time you anticipate spending here, but mine is about 4 more years, and then I'm going home. And so I want to confront problems, and I will. I'll call upon Congress to take on big issues. And I look forward to working with members of both parties to do just that.

The first order of business is going to be to provide disaster aid for the millions of people devastated by the tsunamis in the Indian Ocean. Today my dad and President Clinton and Laura and I went to the four embassies of the countries most affected. And I told them, I said, "This is a compassionate country, and we will help, and we will help in a way where the aid

makes a difference.” I know Presidents Clinton and Bush went on TV afterwards and called upon our fellow citizens to contribute in a wise way. The most effective way for U.S. citizens to contribute is to contribute cash dollars to agencies which are on the ground and are able to assess the needs and able to direct that money to make sure the people get help.

We’ll help, and you’ll hear us call upon—I see my OMB man, Josh Bolten, here—we’ll call upon the Congress to contribute, to help make good on our pledges of \$350 million in cash grants, to help make whole our military, which is providing a lot of important relief efforts right now. But the American people are generous and compassionate people. And I know they want to step forward and help. And we’ve now got a mechanism for them to be able to do so.

We’ve got to make sure that we win the war. We’ve got to make sure we support our troops. We’ve got to make sure we simplify the Tax Code. I don’t know whether that’s an issue in your district or in your State; I suspect it might be. It’s a complicated mess. It takes millions of man-hours to fill out the Tax Code. I think we ought to work to simplify it, to make it easier to understand.

We’ve got to make sure health care is more accessible and affordable for our families, got to make sure we reform the legal systems. We’ve got to make sure we raise standards for schools, including high schools, in America. I look forward to working with you to pass a budget that fits our times.

And I look forward to working with you to make the Social Security system work for future generations. I know you’ve heard a lot of discussions about Social Security. I ask you to keep an open mind as we

move forward to make sure the system works. Seniors have nothing to fear when they hear talk about reforming the Social Security system. Every senior in America will get their check. And the fundamental question is: Do we have the will necessary to make sure the Social Security system is sound and available for future generations of Americans, for younger generations of Americans? I’m going to call upon Congress to take this issue on, and I look forward to working with you to modernize the system.

I look forward to your energy and your ideas. I’m ready to work with you. And there’s no doubt in my mind we can accomplish big things for our country. The work begins tomorrow for you. And when you’re sworn in, I hope you’ll take a moment to appreciate that you’re a part of our history, that when you made a decision to put your name on the ballot and ask people for the vote and became successful, that you’re a part of a small, distinguished group of men and women who’ve had the honor of serving the United States of America in the Congress.

So I want to congratulate you on your victory. I wish you great success in your career. If you’re so interested, Laura and I are willing to—would love to have a picture with you in the Blue Room, and then we’d like to share some of our food with you.

Good luck tomorrow, congratulations, and may God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:39 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Kathryn “Kitty” Martinez, wife of Senator Mel R. Martinez; and Senator Ken Salazar and Representative John T. Salazar of Colorado.

Remarks Following a Discussion on Medical Liability Reform in Collinsville, Illinois

January 5, 2005

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming out to say hello. It's great to be in southern Illinois. I appreciate the chance to come to Madison County. I'm honored to be the first sitting President to visit the city of Collinsville. I'm sorry Laura is not with me.

Audience members. Aw-w-w! [*Laughter*]

The President. That is generally the reaction. [*Laughter*] I was hoping she and I could go look at the Catsup Bottle. [*Laughter*]

Thanks for waiting on me. I had a visit with some of the—some folks from the area here, a neurosurgeon, a cardiologist, the administrator of a hospital, ob-gyn, a patient, all about the health care crisis that exists here in this part of the world. And that's what I'm here to talk about. I'm here to talk about how we need to fix a broken medical liability system.

I want to thank all the good folks who provide health care for the folks in this part of the world, the nurses, the docs, the administrators. Thank you all for coming. Thanks for your compassion. Thanks for your care. Thanks for taking an active interest in an important issue that faces not only this part of the world but the country. But really what I'm here to do is to make—say as clearly as I can, the United States Congress needs to pass real medical liability reform this year.

And there's no doubt in my mind we have a strong ally in this issue in the great Speaker of the House of Representatives from the great State of Illinois, Denny Hastert.

And I want to thank Congressman John Shimkus for his leadership not only on this issue but on other issues. It's good to be with his wife, Karen, again, sons, David, Joshua, and Daniel. Nice to see you boys. And you brought Mom and Dad. Your

mom is probably telling you what to do, just like mine is. [*Laughter*] You're probably listening about half the time, just like I am. [*Laughter*] Welcome.

I'm also proud to be traveling today with a great Congressman from Peoria, Illinois, Ray LaHood. Thank you, sir. Appreciate you coming.

The State Treasurer of Illinois has joined us, Judy Baar Topinka. Appreciate you. Tom Cross is here. He's the minority leader in the house. I'll tell you what he's doing in the house of representatives for the State of Illinois: He is leading the medical liability reform effort. And I want to thank you, Tom, for taking a strong role. Appreciate you coming.

I know the mayor is here. Mr. Mayor—yes, he's here, Stan Schaeffer. I appreciate you coming, Mr. Mayor. Appreciate you being here. I usually like to give mayors unsolicited advice: Fill the potholes. [*Laughter*] You've probably got some advice for me: Pass the highway bill. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank those of you who are working on this medical liability issue here in the State of Illinois. I appreciate your efforts. Look, it's about time the medical profession gets involved. It's about time you let people know what's on your mind. It's time to make sure that the issue comes to the forefront not only at the Federal level but at the local level as well.

I want to thank Connie Bergmann. I met Connie. She came out to the airport—airbase, and—kind of airbase-airport combo, I guess it is. She is a volunteer for the American Red Cross. The reason I bring her up is, every stop I make in America I like to herald a citizen who's taken time out of his or her life to volunteer to make the country a better place. See, the great strength of America is not our military