

people owning their own business. I love the idea of people saying to me, “Mr. President, I’m proud of my business. I started my own business.” And I think it makes sense to have people being able to own and manage their own money, a part of their own money in the Social Security system. After all, the payroll taxes are contributed. That’s not Government money. That’s your money. And the Government ought to give you—be wise enough to let you manage some of it.

I’m going to continue to discuss this issue around the country. It’s an important issue. Once the grandmoms and granddads understand that they’re going to get their check, a lot of them are going to start saying to the elected officials, “What are you going to do about my grandchildren?”

Franklin Roosevelt did a good thing when he created the Social Security system. It’s worked. But the math has changed. A

lot of people are getting ready to retire. They’re going to live longer, receive greater benefits, and fewer people paying in the system. The longer we wait, the more costly it’s going to be to a future generation of Americans. And now is the time to act, because your retirement security is a lot more important than partisan politics.

Thanks for letting me come by. God bless. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:14 a.m. at West Virginia University at Parkersburg. In his remarks, he referred to Van Zeck, Commissioner, D. Keith Rake, Deputy Assistant Commissioner for Public Debt, and Susan Chapman, Director of the Division of Federal Investments, Bureau of the Public Debt; West Virginia Secretary of State Betty Ireland; and Mayor Jimmy Colombo of Parkersburg, WV.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters *April 5, 2005*

The President. Just concluded our second Cabinet meeting of the second term. I want to thank my Cabinet officials for doing such a fine job. I appreciate your hard work, and thank you for your dedication to the country.

Tomorrow I will be leaving for Rome, leading a delegation to attend the services for His Holiness Pope John Paul II. What a great man. It will be my honor to represent our country at a ceremony marking a remarkable life, a person who stood for freedom and human dignity.

I also urge the Congress to successfully conclude budget negotiations. The House passed a budget resolution; the Senate has passed a resolution. We look forward to working with the leadership to successfully conclude those negotiations. It’s important we get a budget, a budget which will show

the American people that we will spend their money wisely, a budget that shows that we know how to set priorities—winning the war on terror, protecting our homeland—a budget that says we can cut the deficit in half in 5 years, and a budget that will encourage economic growth and vitality.

I appreciate the fact that it looks like that we’re going to get a solid cap on discretionary spending, one that we agree with. It’s also important for the Senators and the Members of the House of Representatives to understand that a good, solid budget that helps us meet objectives is one that deals with mandatory spending items. And we’ve presented some meaningful, realistic, commonsense reforms on the mandatory spending side.

And so, as Congress returns, I look forward to working with them to get a good, solid budget. It's important for the country.

Now I'll answer a few questions. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

Terrorist Attack at Abu Ghraib Prison in Iraq

Q. Yes, sir. Al Qaida has claimed—[inaudible]—responsibility for the attack on Abu Ghraib prison. Is this a sign that they're becoming more sophisticated in Iraq?

The President. No, I think it's a sign that they're still deadly, that these people will kill. They kill innocent life. Their strategy hasn't really changed. Their strategy has been one to kill as many innocent people as they possibly can, in the hopes that it shakes our confidence and shakes our will and, equally importantly, shakes the will and confidence of those brave souls who are helping lead this new country—or lead this new democracy.

And we are—we're after them. And equally importantly, the Iraqi citizens are after them now. More and more citizens understand that these terrorists like Al Qaida and Zarqawi don't have their interests at heart. They don't believe in democracy, these killers. They believe in a society in which people aren't going to be free to practice their religion or free to speak in the public square.

And so I think the American people ought to take heart to know that we have now more allies in defeating these few, and those allies are the Iraqi citizens. And perhaps the most notable step that the Iraqi citizens took toward complete defiance of the point of view of Zarqawi, who is an Al Qaida-type, was when they went to the polls.

Adam [Adam Entous, Reuters].

Israeli West Bank Settlements

Q. Mr. President, Prime Minister Sharon has said he intends to expand the largest Jewish settlement in the West Bank. Other

officials say no construction is imminent. Are you satisfied? And what will you tell Sharon when you see him, about the settlements?

The President. Our position is very clear that the roadmap is important, and the roadmap calls for no expansion of the settlements. I'm optimistic we can achieve a peace in the Holy Land. I'm optimistic because I firmly believe that Ariel Sharon wants to have a peaceful partner, wants there to be a democracy in the Palestinian Territories, and I believe President Abbas wants the same thing. And there's a lot of hard work to be done, but we're making progress. And I look forward to meeting the Prime Minister in Crawford to continue to work with the parties to advance peace.

Carl [Carl Cameron, FOX News].

Federal Deficit/Strengthening Social Security

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You mentioned the deficit. Insofar as the deficit has been going up, can you talk about how that affects both the budget resolution talks on the Hill and what it does to your pitch for Social Security reform in terms of complicating the message and the criticism you've gotten, particularly from Democrats?

The President. Well, one of the things that people must understand on Social Security is there is a huge unfunded liability of trillions of dollars. In other words, because baby boomers like me are getting ready to retire and we're living longer and we're getting greater benefits, there is a significant obligation by the Government. And the fundamental question is, will Congress have the will to take on this very important issue and solve this problem now, before that significant obligation becomes more significant?

Now, we're dealing with the deficit by presenting a good, lean budget that sets priorities. I want to thank Josh Bolten of the OMB, and I want to thank all my Cabinet Secretaries for having worked with the OMB to deliver to Congress a budget that

will work on behalf of the American people. And now it's up to Congress. It's up to Congress to show the American people that we have the capacity to de-fund programs which don't work and fund programs which do work.

And I'm looking forward to working with Members of both the House and the Senate. It's going to be an interesting set of negotiations. But we're firm in our belief that we can cut this deficit in half over a 5-year period of time, grow this economy,

and meet our primary objective, which is defending America.

Listen, thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:14 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of Israel; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on the Election of the Presidency Council of the Iraqi Transitional Government

April 6, 2005

Iraq's Transitional National Assembly took a momentous step forward in Iraq's transition to democracy today, voting by an overwhelming majority to elect the Presidency Council of the Iraqi Transitional Government.

I congratulate Iraq's next President, Jalal Talabani, and its next Deputy Presidents, Adil Abd al-Mahdi and Ghazi al-Ujayl al-Yawr, on this historic occasion. These individuals will be formally sworn in tomorrow and will move quickly to name a Prime Minister who will work during the coming

days to select a Council of Ministers. The new Iraqi Government will then begin its important work of writing a new constitution, continuing to train Iraqi security forces, delivering basic services, and advancing Iraq's transformation from dictatorship to democracy.

The Iraqi people have shown their commitment to democracy, and we, in turn, are committed to Iraq. We look forward to working with this new Government, and we congratulate all Iraqis on this historic day.

Statement on the Death of Prince Rainier III of Monaco

April 6, 2005

Laura and I join Americans across the country in mourning the loss of His Serene Highness Prince Rainier III of Monaco. He will be remembered as a respected leader who secured the prosperity of Monaco's people. Monaco and the United States have

long had a special bond of friendship. We extend our deepest condolences to His Serene Highness Prince Albert, to the Grimaldi family, and to all the people of Monaco.