

Kendrick opened his home to family members in need, and he returned to school as soon as possible. Today this good man is graduating at the top of his class, and he hopes to attend law school one day. Here is what Kendrick said: "I'd be doggoned if I was going to let Hurricane Katrina stop me. I thought, 'You started school when you were blind, and you can overcome this hurricane.'" Kendrick is right, and today we honor his inspiring example.

That same optimism is present in many of the graduates today, and so many others across the gulf coast. And optimism is justified. There is going to be a day when communities across Mississippi sparkle with new homes and businesses bustle with customers and this college is filled with more students than ever before. I plan to return one day to the Biloxi neighborhood I visited on my first trip and see beautiful homes with children playing in the yards. Across this entire region devastated by the storm, new vitality will emerge from the rubble,

and cities from Mobile to Biloxi to New Orleans will be whole again.

It's going to take time for that vision to be realized, and it will demand the skill and knowledge and character of all of you. Yet you can leave this college with confidence in your future and with certainty that you're not going to work alone. In these trying months, we have been aided by a Power that lightens our struggles, reveals our hidden strength, and helps conquer all suffering and loss. We can never know God's plan, but we can trust in His wisdom and in His grace. And we can be certain that with His help, the great State of Mississippi will rise again.

Congratulations to the class of 2006. May God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:29 p.m. in Mississippi Coast Coliseum. In his remarks, he referred to Willis Lott, president, Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; and Mayor A.J. Holloway of Biloxi, MS.

## Statement on Senate Passage of Tax Legislation

*May 11, 2006*

I applaud the Senate for passing important tax relief that will help keep our economy strong and growing. This legislation prevents an enormous tax hike that the American people do not want and would not welcome. The bill will extend policies that have helped our economy flourish. We have had 18 straight quarters of growth,

including 4.8 percent growth in the last quarter, and the unemployment rate is 4.7 percent. I appreciate the Senate leadership and Chairman Grassley for their hard work on behalf of American taxpayers and small businesses, and I look forward to signing this important legislation into law.

## Remarks Following a Meeting With Military and Diplomatic Leaders

*May 12, 2006*

I've just completed a second meeting with former Secretaries of State and former

Secretaries of Defense on Iraq. We also discussed the broader Middle East as well.

I want to thank you all very much for sharing your thoughts not only with me but with the Vice President and Secretary Rice and Secretary Rumsfeld. It really means a lot to hear your thoughts and your concerns and your suggestions about the way forward in Iraq. We've had our disagreements in this country about whether or not we should be there in the first place. Now the fundamental question is, how do we achieve our objectives, which is a democracy which can defend itself, sustain itself, a country which is an ally in the war on terror, and a country which serves as a powerful example for others who desire to be free.

Since we last met, there has—a unity government is now in the process of becoming formed. I've got great hopes about this unity Government. We've got a Shi'a as the Prime Minister-designee, a Sunni as the Speaker, a Kurd as the President, all of whom have dedicated themselves to a country moving forward that meets the hopes and aspirations of the Iraqi people.

There are certainly challenges, and the Secretaries here discussed those challenges with us. Perhaps the main challenge is the militia that tend to take the law into their own hands. And it's going to be up for the Government to step up and take care of that militia so that the Iraqi people are confident in the security of their country. It's important to have a secure Iraq in

order for people to go about their daily lives. And we understand that.

I also assured the Secretaries here that this Government is committed to success. They've got good people on the ground. We've got brave troops that are working every day to help this country succeed and, at the same time, deny safe haven to Al Qaida.

And again, I want to thank the members for coming—the former Secretaries for coming. I think it's very useful for those of us who are helping to plot the strategies and the tactics to help secure this country, to hear from you. I'm optimistic about our successes. I know this: The only way we will not succeed is if we lose our nerve, we don't have faith in our values, and that we're constantly changing tactics on the ground to achieve our objectives.

So thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:30 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister-designate Nuri al-Maliki, Speaker of the Parliament Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, and President Jalal Talabani of Iraq. Participating in the meeting were former Secretaries of State Colin L. Powell, Madeleine K. Albright, Warren Christopher, James A. Baker III, and Alexander M. Haig, Jr.; and former Secretaries of Defense William S. Cohen, Frank C. Carlucci, James R. Schlesinger, Melvin R. Laird, and Robert S. McNamara.

## Remarks on the Observance of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month and a Presentation of the President's Volunteer Service Awards *May 12, 2006*

Thank you all. Welcome. Please be seated. Welcome to the White House. I like to call it the People's House. I'm glad you could join us today to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. This is the month we recognize the many accomplish-

ments of Americans who trace their origins to the Asian-Pacific region, and we honor the contributions they make to our great land.

Across our country, Asian Pacific Americans are making their mark in all walks