

enriched our culture and influenced generations of musicians. An American original, his fans came from all walks of life and

backgrounds. James Brown's family and friends are in our thoughts and prayers this Christmas.

Statement on the Death of Former President Gerald R. Ford *December 26, 2006*

Laura and I are greatly saddened by the passing of former President Gerald R. Ford.

President Ford was a great American who gave many years of dedicated service to our country. On August 9, 1974, after a long career in the House of Representatives and service as Vice President, he assumed the Presidency in an hour of national turmoil and division. With his quiet integrity, common sense, and kind instincts, President Ford helped heal our land and restore public confidence in the Presidency.

The American people will always admire Gerald Ford's devotion to duty, his per-

sonal character, and the honorable conduct of his administration. We mourn the loss of such a leader, and our 38th President will always have a special place in our Nation's memory.

On behalf of all Americans, Laura and I offer our deepest sympathies to Betty Ford and all of President Ford's family. Our thoughts and prayers will be with them in the hours and days ahead.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.

Remarks on the Death of Former President Gerald R. Ford in Crawford, Texas *December 27, 2006*

My fellow Americans, all of us are saddened by the news that former President Gerald R. Ford passed away last night. I spoke with Betty Ford. On behalf of all Americans, Laura and I extend to Mrs. Ford and all President Ford's family our prayers and our condolences.

President Ford was a great man who devoted the best years of his life in serving the United States. He was a true gentleman who reflected the best in America's character. Before the world knew his name, he served with distinction in the United States Navy and in the United States Congress.

As a Congressman from Michigan and then as Vice President, he commanded the respect and earned the good will of all who had the privilege of knowing him. On August 9th, 1974, he stepped into the Presidency without ever having sought the office. He assumed power in a period of great division and turmoil. For a nation that needed healing and for an office that needed a calm and steady hand, Gerald Ford came along when we needed him most.

During his time in office, the American people came to know President Ford as a man of complete integrity who led our

country with common sense and kind instincts.

Americans will always admire Gerald Ford's unflinching performance of duty and the honorable conduct of his administration and the great rectitude of the man himself. We mourn the loss of such a leader, and our 38th President will always have a special place in our Nation's memory.

President Ford lived 93 years, and his life was a blessing to America. And now this fine man will be taken to his rest by a family that will love him always and by a nation that will be grateful to him forever.

May God bless Gerald Ford.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:56 a.m. at the Bush Ranch. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. The related proclamation of December 27 announcing the death of Gerald R. Ford, the proclamation of December 28 on the national day of mourning for Gerald R. Ford, and the Executive order of December 28 providing for the closing of Government Departments and Agencies on January 2, 2007, are listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the National Security Council in Crawford *December 28, 2006*

I just had a meeting with my national security team, and this is the first time we've had a chance to sit down with Secretary Gates since he came back from Iraq. General Pace went with the Secretary. They reported firsthand what they saw, what they found. It's an important part of coming to closure on a way forward in Iraq that will help us achieve our objective, which is a country that can govern itself, sustain itself, and defend itself. And, Mr. Secretary, thank you for your timely trip, and thank you for this important briefing.

I've got more consultation to do until I talk to the country about the plan. Obviously, we'll continue to work with the Iraqi Government. The key to success in Iraq is to have a government that's willing to deal with the elements there that are trying to prevent this young democracy from succeeding.

We want to help them succeed. And so we'll continue to consult with the Iraqis. I'm going to talk to Congress; not only will I continue to reach out to Congress, but members of my team will do so as well.

I fully understand it's important to have both Republicans and Democrats understanding the importance of this mission. It's important for the American people to understand success in Iraq is vital for our own security. If we were to not succeed in Iraq, the enemy—the extremists, the radicals—would have safe haven from which to launch further attacks, they would be emboldened, they would be in a position to threaten the United States of America. This is an important part of the war on terror.

I'm making good progress toward coming up with a plan that we think will help us achieve our objective. As I think about this plan, I'm always—have our troops in mind. There's nobody more important in this global war on terror than the men and women who wear the uniform and their families. And as we head into a new year, my thoughts are with them. My thoughts are with the families who have just gone through a holiday season with their loved one overseas. My thoughts are with the troops as we head into 2007.