

committee chairmen, but only one Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs. Candi Wolff has done a remarkable job of working with Congress and advancing my legislative agenda.

As my chief adviser on congressional affairs, Candi has helped bring about many significant accomplishments, including energy legislation, trade agreements, tax relief, vital national security measures, and the confirmation of two Supreme Court Justices. Her dedication and enthusiasm have resulted in policies that protect the American people, hold the line on spending, strengthen our economy, and support our troops. Candi has earned the respect of Members of Congress and her colleagues.

I have relied upon Candi's sound judgment, extensive experience, and thorough understanding of Capitol Hill as I have made decisions that affect the lives of all

Americans. As Candi's service at the White House comes to an end, I appreciate her years of hard work and friendship. Laura and I wish Candi, her husband Mark, and their two daughters Veronica and Claire, all the best.

I am pleased to announce that Dan Meyer will succeed Candi as Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs. After serving as a House and Senate staffer for more than 15 years, including as chief of staff to the Speaker of the House, Dan knows how to help get things done in Congress. As a member of the legislative affairs office at the White House, he has been a capable leader who is well-respected by Members on both sides of the aisle and committed to reaching solutions on important issues. I am confident he will perform well in this new position. I look forward to continuing to work with him.

Statement on the Resignation of William McGurn and the Appointment of Marc Thiessen as Assistant to the President for Speechwriting *December 14, 2007*

As Assistant to the President for Speechwriting, Bill McGurn has worked tirelessly to help communicate my agenda to the American people and the world. Bill is a serious thinker and a gifted writer whose command of language and knowledge of history have helped shape a wide variety of my speeches. I have counted on Bill to help me prepare State of the Union Addresses, policy announcements, and speeches to the Nation. In all our work together, I have valued Bill's creativity, insight, and sound judgment. And I have appreciated his friendship, generous spirit, and sense of humor.

As he moves on to the next stage of his career, Bill can be proud of his service

at the White House. The son of a marine, Bill loves his country and has served it well. Laura and I have come to know Bill's wife Julie and their daughters Grace, Maisie, and Lucy, and we wish Bill and his family all the best.

I am pleased to announce that Bill's deputy, Marc Thiessen, will succeed him as Assistant to the President for Speechwriting. Marc has done superb work in the speechwriting office for more than 3 years. Before coming to the White House, he served as chief speechwriter to Secretary Rumsfeld. Marc is a talented writer and experienced communicator who will do an outstanding job in his new position. I look forward to continuing to work with him.

Statement on the Formation of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration

December 14, 2007

I applaud the recent formation of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration in Damascus, Syria. The brave men and women who formed this council reflect the desires of the majority of Syrian people to live in freedom, democracy, and peace, both at home and alongside their neighbors in the region.

The Syrian regime continues to hold hundreds of prisoners of conscience and has arrested more than 30 national council members in the past few days. All those detained should be released immediately.

The Syrian regime continues to deny its citizens fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and the right to elect a representative government responsive to their needs. The formation of the national council is an encouraging sign to all people who support freedom and democracy. We support the national council's principles of nonviolent struggle and open membership to all the people of Syria who believe the time has come for change.

Statement on Senate Confirmation of James B. Peake as Secretary of Veterans Affairs

December 14, 2007

I am pleased that the Senate unanimously confirmed Dr. James Peake to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Dr. Peake is a decorated veteran, highly skilled physician, and proven leader who has devoted his career to serving America's men and women in uniform. His decades of expertise in combat medicine and health care management have provided him with a thorough understanding of the Department's responsibility to care for America's veterans.

One of his first tasks as Secretary will be to ensure that my administration con-

tinues to swiftly implement the recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commission on Wounded Warriors. I am confident that he will build upon our record of improving care, reducing bureaucracy, and ensuring that our veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

NOTE: The statement referred to former Sen. Robert J. Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, Cochairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.