

## Remarks on the Picturing America Initiative February 26, 2008

Thank you all for coming. Please be seated. Thank you. Welcome to the White House. Looks like we have a distinguished crowd here today. Most of you are renowned scholars, intellectuals, and writers. You've earned reputations for expressing man's noblest deeds and thoughts in pristine, eloquent English, just like me. [Laughter]

Justice, thanks for coming. Appreciate you being here. I thank members of the Cabinet who have joined us. Ambassador, glad you're here.

I want to say a word about Bruce Cole. Bruce is an accomplished art historian, a good man, and he's been a great Chairman of the National Endowment of the Humanities.

Bruce understands what all of you understand: At their best, the arts and humanities express the ideals that define our Nation. The United States is a country defined not by bloodline, race, or creed, but by our character and convictions. We are united by an unyielding principle, and that is, all men are created equal. We firmly believe that each man and woman has the right to make the most of their God-given talents. And we believe that all are endowed with the divine gift of freedom.

These ideals have sustained us throughout the centuries, and as a new generation is called to defend the principles of our democracy, they must understand why these principles are worthy of effort and sacrifice.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is at the forefront of this vital educational mission. One way the endowment fulfills this mission is through the "We the People" program, which we established in 2002 to address gaps in our children's knowledge of history and civics.

In just 5 years, the program has awarded nearly 1,400 grants to projects that preserve

historical sites, documents, and artifacts and train future historians. In partnership with the American Library Association, "We the People" has produced an annual bookshelf on enduring American themes such as courage and freedom. More than 6,000 sets of these books have been provided to schools and public libraries across the country.

"We the People" teacher workshops have allowed thousands of educators to discover American history in places where history was made: Ellis Island or the waters of Pearl Harbor. The initiative's National Digital Newspaper Program is making millions of pages of historic American newspapers accessible online. Countless students and teachers and historians will benefit from these important first drafts of history.

In all these ways, "We the People" does an outstanding job of passing America's rich heritage on to future generations. Today I'm pleased to unveil a new project under this program, the Picturing America Initiative. This initiative will educate children about the great people and places and moments in our history using American art and masterpieces that depict them.

It's much better for us to hear about educational programs from someone who's probably more qualified than me—[laughter]—like a former teacher or a librarian. [Laughter] And so it's my honor to welcome Laura, the First Lady.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:47 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Supreme Court Associate Justice Antonin Scalia; and Italy's Ambassador to the U.S. Giovanni Castellaneta. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek of the Czech Republic and an Exchange With Reporters  
February 27, 2008

*President Bush.* We'll have opening statements, and then we'll accept two questions a side. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. We value our friendship and our partnership with the people of the Czech Republic. I remember well my visit to your beautiful country.

We've had a significant discussion today. It turns out, the year 8 is an important number in Czech history. And we're determined to make the year 2008 a strong chapter in our relationship. We view the Czech Republic as a strategic partner. We've discussed a variety of issues. I want to talk about two issues.

First, visa waiver, I've always felt our visa laws needed to change. I didn't like the idea that we treated our friends in the Czech Republic differently than other friends in Europe. There's new law in place, which requires leadership from the countries, such as the Czech Republic. And, Mr. Prime Minister, you and your Government are providing that leadership.

We signed an important memorandum of understanding. We were able to do so because your negotiators were very smart. They represented your people very well. We still have more work to do, but I'm confident we can get it done. And I hope the people of the Czech Republic understand that your Government and your country is ahead of the line of anybody else when it comes to a visa waiver program. And I congratulate you on your leadership.

Missile defense, it's in our interest to put defenses in place to deal with the true threats of the 21st century. Russia is not a threat to peace. Regimes that adhere to extremist ideologies who—which may have the capability of launching weapons to those of us who love freedom, they're the threats to peace. And a missile defense system is aimed to deal with those threats.

And of course, we want it in the context not only of a bilateral relationship but in the context of NATO. We're both strong partners of NATO. NATO has got to be in a position to deal with the true threats of the 21st century. And so we had a good discussion on this important issue.

In our discussions, I strongly respect the sovereignty of the Government of the Czech Republic. Where they have concerns, of course, we'll listen. And so I want to thank you for that. And at the same time, of course, we discussed very important research and development opportunities, defense cooperation activities.

And finally, I thank the Prime Minister for the courage and sacrifice of the troops that are in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Prime Minister said that there will be a reduction in troops in Iraq, and I fully understand that. After all, we're reducing our troops based upon success. And I thank your willingness to send troops into Afghanistan. It makes sense to help young democracies thrive. They will look back at these decisions, Mr. Prime Minister, and say, thank goodness for the peace that prevailed as a result of the hard decisions we made today.

And I welcome you. You're welcome. Thank you for coming.

*Prime Minister Topolánek.* Okay. Well, I think that President Bush already mentioned everything that I wanted to mention originally. However, let me revisit or come back to the issue of number 8 and its importance in our history. Number 8 played a very important, nay, a key role in the history of the Czech nation.

In 1918, when the first Czechoslovak republic was founded, it was founded with help and assistance from the American President, Woodrow Wilson. Unfortunately, 1938, which was the time of the Munich