

Remarks on the National President's Challenge March 20, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. I'm honored to be joined by members of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. And today I've got an announcement to make as to how to encourage our fellow citizens to exercise more.

First, I do want to thank the Chairman of this Council, John Burke. His business is to make mountain bikes, Trek mountain bikes. [Laughter] I use Trek mountain bikes. [Laughter] That's not why he's the Chairman. [Laughter] But I like to exercise a lot. And I hope my fellow citizens learn to love exercise as well. It's good for your mind, exercise is good for your body, and it's good for your soul. If you ride mountain bikes, make sure you keep your eyes on the road—[laughter]—because sometimes you can go over the handlebars—[laughter]—which I have done.

I want to thank the members of the Council for their good work to promote physical fitness. I believe physical fitness is a vital issue for our country. Nearly two-thirds of American adults are overweight or obese. That's too many. More than half of American adults do not get enough physical activity to realize the health benefits. Not enough people are exercising. The benefits include lower risk for many serious conditions, ranging from heart disease to diabetes to depression.

America's young people are three times more likely to be overweight than they were three decades ago. Lack of physical fitness places a huge financial burden on our Nation. Diseases linked to unhealthy habits drive up the price of health care for all Americans.

So we're encouraging Americans to take personal responsibility for their own health. And one way we're doing so is through the HealthierUS Initiative. Now this is an initiative I announced in 2002. And the key—program had four key components.

First, be physically active every day. People say, "I don't have time to be physically active every day." Well, my suggestion is, make time. Secondly, eat well. Thirdly, get preventive screenings. And fourthly, you know, don't do stupid things to your body—like drugs and tobacco and excessive alcohol.

Today we're unveiling a new way to encourage people across the United States to boost their physical activity, and to have some fun doing it. It's called the National President's Challenge. I appreciate very much the Acting Surgeon General Steve Galson is with us, and the person who went to the Press Club and kind of lent a little extra stuff to the announcement, and that would be Eli Manning. You know, he helped kick off this initiative, and he probably thought he'd be—not having to deal with kickoffs anytime after the Super Bowl. [Laughter] But I want to thank you all very much for helping to highlight an interesting and exciting and a fun way for people to realize the benefits of physical activity.

So here's how it works. First, you can go online at www.presidentschallenge.org—www.presidentschallenge.org—and you can sign up to participate. You can sign up as an individual, or you can sign up as a group, which would be kind of a fun way to work out together. The deadline, by the way, for signing up is April the third. So get on your web page there and sign up.

Secondly, you get to decide how you're going to meet your physical fitness goal. In other words, you set a goal, and then you pick the exercise or activity. And there's about 100 different activities to choose from, ranging from gardening or skydiving. [Laughter] So I suspect my father will be signing up for skydiving. [Laughter] Mother wants him to sign up for gardening. [Laughter]

Thirdly, start exercising. If you're an adult—and that means 30 minutes of activity a day, 5 days a week; or if you're a kid, 60 minutes. That's—it's not that hard to do if you prioritize and discipline yourself. You've got 6 weeks of activity to meet the challenge; in other words, this ends on May the 15th.

Fourth, you keep track of your activities. In other words, there's the—on the web site there's an activity log that will help make it easier to track whether or not you're accumulating enough points to get an award.

And that's the fifth step. Individuals who meet their fitness goals can receive certificates and medals. Schools that meet their goals will be honored. And when you register, be sure to include the State you're from, because all of us here—up here on the stage will be watching to see which State has the highest percentage of partici-

pants. And of course, there will be proper recognition for the State that does the best. I suspect Texas will do very well. [Laughter] I certainly hope so.

I want to thank the members of the President's Physical—Council on Physical Fitness and Sports for leading the effort. I really appreciate your care about the country. I want to thank you for thinking innovatively about how to, you know, encourage our fellow citizens to become active. I wish my citizens the fellow best as they sign up for this exciting new challenge. Have good exercise, have fun, and remember, you'll have a healthy tomorrow when you do so. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:09 p.m. in the East Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Eli Manning, quarterback, National Football League's New York Giants.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham of the Bahamas, Prime Minister David Thompson of Barbados, and Prime Minister Dean Barrow of Belize

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President Bush. Secretary Rice and I have had the pleasure of welcoming three of our neighbors—neighborhood's strong leaders: Prime Ministers of the Bahamas, Barbados, and Belize.

And we had a discussion like you would expect neighbors to have: How do we work together for our mutual benefit? We talked about trade and tourism. We talked about how to make sure that our security needs are met without interrupting the ability for our people to travel as freely as possible, and for the ability of people to be able to make a good living as a result of tourism.

We talked about the region. I assured the leaders that the neighborhood is important to the United States of America. We oftentimes are talked about in dealing with

the Middle East or dealing on the continent of Africa. But it was important for these leaders to know that we believe that a good, strong, healthy, vibrant neighborhood is in the interests of the United States. And so we had a good, friendly, important discussion, and I can't thank the leaders enough for coming. I appreciate very much for you being here—two of whom have just recently won elections—good, fair, clean elections.

And I reminded them that there's no stronger advocate for democracy than my administration. And I admire the fact that you agreed to run, had the courage of your convictions, and took your message to the people. And then, of course, there's the old senior man here who's been around