

that we are very grateful to all of you for taking the time to come. We hope that this is being a productive session. And I want to emphasize that all of you are at the frontlines of what is probably the most important task that we have in this country over the next couple of years, and that's getting the economy started again.

I think all of you in your respective roles are hearing stories of people who are going through extraordinary hardship in your respective States. And we passed this American Recovery and Reinvestment Act because we strongly believe that this is an opportunity not only to deal with the immediate crisis, but also to lay the foundations for long-term growth and prosperity in this country.

And, you know, the American people are behind what we're doing. And the question then becomes, are we going to be able to deliver for them? They are going to be watching very carefully. And there are those who believe that Government doesn't have a role to play in this recovery. There are those who believe that we should be focusing exclusively on Wall Street when it comes to this crisis, and that we don't have time to worry about infrastructure, and we don't have time to worry about our health systems, and we don't have time to think about how we're going to improve our educational systems.

And all of you, what you do in the coming weeks and coming months, over the next couple of years is going to make a huge difference in whether or not the trust that the American people have placed in us is justified.

So my main message to all of you is, I think you're up to the task; I think you guys will do extraordinary work with using these precious tax dollars that the American people have given up in order to deliver on the kind of economic growth—short-term and long-term—and job creation that's going to be so important.

But we're going to need to work really hard, and we're going to have to make sure that every single dollar is well spent. We've got to go above and beyond what I think is the typical ways of doing business in order to make sure that the American people get the help that they need and that our economy gets the boost that it needs.

And so I've said before—I know Joe emphasized this to you earlier—if we see money being misspent, we're going to put a stop to it, and we will call it out, and we will publicize it. On the other hand, if the money is being spent as it needs to be spent, to rebuild our roads and our bridges and our schools and making sure that we are putting in place the kinds of infrastructure foundations that are necessary for economic growth over the long term, then I think all of us will benefit and our voters and our constituents, the people we work for, are going to be extraordinarily grateful.

So you've got this wonderful mission, and, you know, it's rare where you get a chance to put your shoulder to the wheel of history and move it in a better direction. This is such an opportunity. I think—I hope all of you seize it. I know this is very tough work because you've got a lot of money coming out quickly, it's got to be spent wisely, you don't always have the infrastructure, the organizational structures to accommodate all this stuff right away, and you're going to have to build that and do so in record time.

But looking around, you guys look like pretty capable people. So I have great confidence in you, and I think you're going to do a wonderful job. We appreciate you. Good luck. And I'll be seeing you at some ribbon cuttings. All right. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:10 a.m. in Room 450 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Vice President Joe Biden.

Remarks at the National Defense University *March 12, 2009*

Thank you, General Wilson, for the wonderful introduction and your hospitality. Thank you

to Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen for the extraordinary service that they render to this

country. I want to acknowledge the other members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who are doing outstanding work and have been a great support to me, and Ambassador Ross.

To each of you who are here: for your service to our country and your commitment to our security, I want to say thank you on behalf of the American people. You know, I think so highly of NDU that I picked one of your alumni, General Jim Jones, to be my National Security Adviser.

And I know many of you have served in harm's way, and for that you have the respect of a grateful nation. And before I go any further, I want to acknowledge all of our troops now serving overseas. They have shouldered an awesome responsibility. They have performed brilliantly. And they have the full support of the American people.

Today it is my privilege to join you in dedicating this building to the memory of President Abraham Lincoln. We know, of course, that there are many monuments to Lincoln's memory across this country. His words are written into stately walls and his image is printed on our currency. His story is taught in our schools and his name is synonymous with freedom. You and I live in the Union that he saved, and we inherited the progress that he made possible.

Yet despite this far-reaching legacy, it is still—to quote the man himself—“altogether fitting and proper” that we should set aside this ground, and dedicate this hall, in his memory, because Lincoln's Presidency was characterized by war, even as his ambition was a just and lasting peace. Here, in this indispensable institution, we find a living legacy to that ambition. Here, at National Defense University, men and women come together to think, to learn, and to seek new strategies to defend our Union while pursuing the goal of a just and lasting peace.

The grounds that make up this campus tell us an interesting story about how America can pursue this goal. Fort McNair was built over two centuries ago to protect a young Capital against invasion. Its defenses were traditional: training for soldiers, stockpiles of arms, fortifications to hold advancing armies at bay. It was

overrun by a British attack in the War of 1812, and treated the wounded warriors of the Civil War in Lincoln's day.

And then, just over a century ago, President Theodore Roosevelt came here to lay the cornerstone of the Army War College. In dedicating the school, Roosevelt spoke words that resonate to this day. He said, “More and more, it has become evident in modern warfare that the efficiency of the unit, of the individual officer, and the individual enlisted man is going to be the prime factor in deciding the fate of fought fields.”

More than 100 years later, Roosevelt's insight remain the essential mission of this institution: the belief that even as our weapons have grown more powerful, individuals still determine the strength of our national security; the belief that individual Americans remain, as Roosevelt said, “the prime factor in deciding the fate of fought fields.”

The battlefields that we now face would be unfamiliar to Lincoln and Roosevelt. The days when President Lincoln would wander down to the War Department's telegraph office to get reports from the front are long past, but the threats to our Nation are real, and they are direct.

From this fort, which was founded to defend the city of Washington against invasion, you could stand on September 11, 2001, and watch the smoke from the Pentagon billowing up across the Potomac. The attacks of 9/11 signaled the new dangers of the 21st century. And today, our people are still threatened by violent extremists, and we're still at war with terrorists in Afghanistan and Pakistan who are plotting to do us harm.

Yet terrorism and extremism make up just one part of the many challenges that confront our Nation. In Iraq, we will surely face difficult days ahead as we responsibly end a war by transitioning to Iraqi control of their country. A historic economic downturn has put at stake the prosperity that underpins our strength, while putting at risk the stability of governments and the survival of people around the world. We're threatened by the spread of the world's deadliest weapons, by emerging cyber threats, and by a dependence on foreign oil

that endangers our security and our planet. Poverty, disease, the persistence of conflict and genocide in the 21st century challenge our international alliances, partnerships, and institutions, and must call on all of us to reexamine our assumptions.

These are the battlefields of the 21st century; these are the threats that we now face. And in these struggles, the United States of America must succeed, and we will succeed. We also know that the old approaches won't meet the challenges of our time. Threats now move freely across borders, and the ability to do great harm lies in the hands of individuals as well as nations. No technology, no matter how smart, can stop the spread of nuclear weapons. No army, no matter how strong, can eliminate every adversary. No weapon, no matter how powerful, can erase the hatred that lies in someone's heart.

So it falls to institutions like this and to individuals like you to help us understand the world as it is, to develop the capacities that we need to confront emerging danger, and to act with purpose and pragmatism to turn this moment of peril into one of promise. That's how we will find new pathways to peace and security. That is the work that we must do.

Now, make no mistake: This Nation will maintain our military dominance. We will have the strongest Armed Forces in the history of the world. And we will do whatever it takes to sustain our technological advantage, and to invest in the capabilities that we need to protect our interests, and to defeat and deter any conventional enemy. But we also need to look beyond this conventional advantage as we develop the new approaches and new capabilities of the 21st century, and in that effort, this university must play a critical role.

Our troops are faced with complex missions. Increasingly, they're called upon to defeat nimble enemies while keeping local populations on their side. And that's why my administration is committed to growing the size of our ground forces, and to investing in the skills that can help our troops succeed in the unconventional mission that they now face. We must understand different languages and different cultures; we must study determined adversaries

and developing tactics. That's the education that takes place within the walls of this university, and that is the work that must be done to keep our Nation safe.

America must also balance and integrate all elements of our national power. We cannot continue to push the burden on to our military alone, nor leave dormant any aspect of the full arsenal of American capability. And that's why my administration is committed to renewing diplomacy as a tool of American power, and to developing our civilian national security capabilities. This effort takes place within the walls of this university, where civilians sit alongside soldiers in the classroom. And it must continue out in the field, where American civilians can advance opportunity, enhance governance and the rule of law, and attack the causes of war around the world. We have to enlist our civilians in the same way they—we enlist those members of the armed services in understanding this broad mission that we have.

And finally, we know that the United States cannot defeat global threats alone. There is no permanent American solution to the security challenges that we face within any foreign nation, nor can the world meet the tests of our time without strong American leadership. And that's why my administration is committed to comprehensive engagement with the world, including strengthened partnerships with the foreign militaries and security forces that can combat our common enemies. Those partnerships are advanced here, within the walls of this university, where we welcome men and women from around the world to study alongside Americans, to understand our values, to forge partnerships, and hopefully friendships, that contribute to a safer world.

The lesson of history is that peace and security do not come easily. Each person who passes through this university will play a different role. Some of you will serve in uniform abroad, or help train troops here at home. Some will be diplomats, intelligence officers, or congressional staffers; others will work in the private sector. Some will rise to be senior officers and top strategists, and some of you might even decide to run for public office, although I'd warn you about that. *[Laughter]*

Your story is your own and the education that you're receiving will help you advance it. But you're here because you've also accepted the responsibility of having your story as part of the larger American story. Your story is serving your fellow citizens in the wider world. And my message to you today is simple: Your individual service makes all of the difference. You will make the decisions, large and small, that will help shape our future.

So as we dedicate this building where you and future generations will be prepared to make those choices, remember that the true strength of our Nation comes not from the might of our arms or the scale of our wealth, it comes from the power of our ideals: democracy, liberty, equality, justice, and unyielding hope.

Those ideals are embedded in our national character because generations of Americans

have chosen to live them in their own lives, to advance them through their service and through their sacrifice. This is the truth that Lincoln understood, that pragmatism must serve a common purpose, a higher purpose. That's the legacy that we inherit. And that, in the end, is how government of the people, and by the people, and for the people, will endure in our time.

So thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. in Abraham Lincoln Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Lt. Gen. Frances C. Wilson, USMC, president, National Defense University, who introduced the president; and Dennis Ross, Special Adviser to the Secretary of State for The Gulf and Southwest Asia.

Remarks and a Discussion With the Business Roundtable

March 12, 2009

The President. Thank you. Thank you so much. Please, everybody have a seat. I want to get to Q&A as quickly as possible, so let me dive right in. First of all, thank you. It's a pleasure to be here this afternoon. I see a lot of friends in the room. It's especially important, I think, for us to be meeting today with the Business Roundtable, because the companies that you lead account for nearly 10 million jobs and generate trillions of dollars in revenue each year. Your companies have fueled the prosperity of communities across the country and the success stories of countless individuals. And they've enriched our Nation; they've served as a tribute to the enduring spirit of American capitalism.

But for over three decades, the Business Roundtable is also taking a broader view of your responsibilities as chief executives. You've looked beyond the bottom line and the next quarter to the long-term health of your company. You've not only served as accomplished leaders, but as engaged citizens, citizens who understand that it is in the interest of both your companies and your country to have a workforce that's highly educated, healthy,

and prosperous, to have a market that is free, but also fair, and to live in a nation that's willing to invest in its own future. You understand the public responsibility of private enterprise.

It's fitting, then, that we meet at this moment, because over the last few weeks a spirited debate has emerged in Washington, a debate over what it will take to ultimately break the back of this recession and strengthen our economy for the long run. It's a debate that centers on one key question: Does the greatest economic crisis in our lifetime warrant extraordinary action to deal with the array of challenges we face? Or should we limit our efforts and try to deal with them incrementally or one at a time?

Now, let me say that it was not my preference, believe it or not, to launch my administration by passing the largest economic recovery plan in the Nation's history or to face crises in the financial market and the automobile industry. It was not ideal to take office in the midst of the worst job and growth numbers in decades, particularly since we're still in the midst of two wars. But that's the duty I signed on for.