

of the Congress. I'm very serious about sitting down as often as possible with people from both parties to have frank discussions about issues that concern the country. I believe there is a very good opportunity for us to exceed expectations.

Expectations are that nothing will get done. I'm confident that the people here in Washington and Members of the Senate don't agree with that. We're going to talk about education, and we're going to talk about taxes. We'll talk about the patients' bill of rights—a variety of issues that are of concern, and what we call front burner issues, issues that should be making it through the Congress soon.

I want to thank the Members for coming. I'm honored that they would come down from the Hill to visit the Vice President and me. Thanks for coming.

Q. I have one question about—

The President. I'll catch you tomorrow. You missed your chance at the third press availability. [Laughter]

Q. When are you going to do your first news conference, Mr. President?

The President. These mini-news conferences count. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:32 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Transmitting the Blueprint for Assistance To Help Medicare Beneficiaries Buy Prescription Drugs

January 29, 2001

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

Enclosed please find the blueprint for my program to provide immediate assistance to help certain Medicare beneficiaries buy prescription drugs. I look forward to working with the Congress to enact these principles into law and to working together on comprehensive Medicare reform.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Republican Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

January 30, 2001

Legislative Agenda

The President. It's an honor for the Vice President and the Secretary of Treasury and myself, and OMB Director, to welcome the leadership in the House and the Senate on the Republican side. We've had a wide-ranging discussion; discussed tax relief and how we can pay down national debt and have tax relief, which all of us around this table firmly believe we can do.

We also discussed the fact that there's a lot of Americans who have got a lot of consumer debt, and we must be mindful of those hard-working Americans. And part of the tax relief package is to allow people to better manage their own finances with their own money. We had a discussion about education.

We discussed, particularly the leader and I and Members of the Senate, discussed the need to get our nominees through the Senate. And I hope, in the spirit of bipartisanship, there will be no further delays on the confirmation process for John Ashcroft and other nominees of ours. I certainly appreciate how fast the Senate worked, initially, but it's time for the delays to end. It's time for a vote on all our Cabinet officials.

This is—will be a series of conversations we'll have throughout my tenure, and I really enjoy this. It's been a good, frank discussion.

Interest Rates/Tax Cut Legislation

Q. Do you think the Fed should cut rates now, sort of stimulate the economy? And in the discussion of tax policy, there has been some disagreement between the White House and the Speaker and others over whether you should have one big package of tax cuts or to do it in pieces.

The President. First, Mr. Greenspan needs to make his decisions, independent of what I think. I learned a pretty good lesson

during the transition, and that was I had commented out loud about one of the actions he took. That's the last time I'm going to comment about the actions that Mr. Greenspan takes. He's an independent voice and needs to be an independent voice.

Secondly, we did discuss the timing of the tax relief package and how best to move it through the House, where to originate. And as I told the Speaker and the chairman and the leadership, that we are interested in success, that the most important—most important—criterion for how the tax package is handled is whether or not it will succeed. And these are the Members who are going to have to work to get it out of the House. So we're listening to their strategy.

Q. What is the best timing for presenting the tax proposal, sir?

The President. Again, that's going to be up to the leadership. Obviously, it depends upon—it's the middle of our budget. As you noticed, the head of the budget committees are here; we're talking budget. Taxes must fit into a budget, which they will.

The answer to any of our initiatives, of course, is, as soon as possible. [Laughter]

Earthquake Assistance to India

Q. Mr. President?

The President. Yes sir?

Q. Good morning, sir.

The President. How are you doing?

Q. Good. Thank you.

The President. I thought you had abandoned us for a while. [Laughter]

Q. Are you happy with the progress you're making in reaching out to world leaders, or do you plan to change the pace of that at all?

The President. I've got a steady pace. I'm calling as I can. I talked to the Prime Minister of India today. It was a phone call that I was going to make, regardless of the natural disaster that took place there. Obviously, a lot of the conversation today was about the aid that our country is sending: A 747 from AID has landed this morning; another one is on its way; we're sending some military planes over, as well. I assured him that our Nation was deeply concerned for the citizenry that had lost their lives. It was not the

appropriate time to discuss policy beyond that.

And I will be making other calls, touching base with world leaders. I'll do a lot of that, of course. Good diplomacy really depends upon good personal relations, whether or not we agree with each other on a lot of issues or not. And I'm going to continue the diplomacy that reaches out to people on a regular basis.

Attorney-General-Designate John Ashcroft

Q. On Senator Ashcroft, are you worried that there are going to be more—do you feel he's going to be confirmed, still?

The President. I do believe he's going to be confirmed. But one of my charges is to run the executive branch of Government. And it's important for our Cabinet officers to be confirmed so they can start doing their job of organizing their departments. Once we get our Cabinet officials through, I'm sure I'll be speaking to the Senate about moving the number twos and threes through, as well, so that we can take hold of this Government.

And one of the things I'll be doing when our Cabinet meets is talking about the need for each Cabinet member to be fiscally sound with the taxpayers' money. It's hard to deliver that message when somebody hasn't been confirmed. So I would just hope there are no further delays. There's been a lot of discussion, a lot of debate; there's been a lot of questionnaires presented and answers filled out; and it's now time for the vote, it seems like to me.

Q. Did you get the Vice President a birthday present?

The Vice President. Not yet. [Laughter]

The President. As a matter of fact—[laughter]—some used coffee cake, perhaps, Mr. Vice President? [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:35 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Treasury Secretary-designate Paul H. O'Neill; Office of Management and Budget Director Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr.; and Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of India. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for Paul H. O'Neill as Secretary of the Treasury
January 30, 2001

The President. Well, I'm pleased to welcome Nancy O'Neill and the O'Neill family here. Thank you all for coming. It's an honor for both the Vice President and I to say some words about the Secretary of Treasury. With Paul over at the Treasury, he is literally a next door neighbor. And I'm going to see a lot of him right here in this office. He'll be a valued adviser and a steady hand.

Secretary O'Neill has served in this office before, at the Office of Management and Budget. He understands the workings and responsibilities of the executive branch. More than that, he understands the private sector, where he and others like him have been driving our country's economic boom.

In a distinguished career, Paul has earned a reputation as a straight shooter and an innovator. And I'm proud to welcome him as the chief financial officer of this Nation. Paul and I share a great goal: to make sure that all Americans can find high paying, high quality jobs. And we share a vision of how to get there. Our prosperity depends on free trade, less regulation, and America's strong place in our global economy. More than ever, American jobs depend on America's standing in the world.

I value Paul's vast experience in the world economy. I value his background in employing American workers, and I value his steadiness, his conviction, and his authority. We also share a belief that broad, responsible tax cuts are an important step we can take to regain the momentum of our economy. When we reduce the income tax burden, we must do so for everybody who pays taxes.

When we have a Government surplus, we must prioritize and spend responsibly and return some of that surplus to the people who worked for it. Because our Government has a surplus does not mean that every American family has a surplus. In fact, many families are feeling squeezed by high energy prices and credit card debt. We need to give them their own money back, to help families manage their own account, to pay down their own personal debts.

Our tax cut will give the biggest percentage reductions to people who struggle to get into the middle class and American families who struggle to stay there.

I believe in leaving more dollars with the people who earned them, and so does Secretary O'Neill. And I'm proud that those dollars will soon bear the signature of Secretary Paul O'Neill.

Congratulations, Mr. Secretary.

[At this point, Treasury Secretary O'Neill made brief remarks.]

The President. Mr. Secretary, thank you.

Why don't we have a family picture, too, if you'd like one. Come on up.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:06 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Nancy O'Neill, wife of Secretary O'Neill. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary O'Neill.

Remarks at the Fishing School

January 30, 2001

Thank you, Tom, very much for having us. And it's such an honor to have John DiJulio on my staff. For those of you who don't know John, he's a pioneer in working with Republicans and Democrats and people who really care about political parties to revitalize neighborhoods and places where hope may have been lost, by rallying faith-based organizations. And so, John, I'm so honored that you've sacrificed for the country.

It's good to see Steve Goldsmith here, who is a partner as well.

A little over a week ago, a few miles from here, I was honored to be inaugurated your President. I'm here today to repeat the promise I made on the steps of the Capitol: I will work to build a single nation of justice and opportunity. I'm going to need some help to do that. And so I'm so honored four Members of the United States Congress are here: Senator Joe Lieberman from the great State of Connecticut; Senator Rick Santorum from Pennsylvania; Congressman Mark Souder of Indiana; Congressman Tony Hall of Ohio.