

of the moment. We must work closely with our democratic friends and allies in Europe and Asia. We must engage Russia and China with patience and principle and consistency. We must build our trade relations across Africa and help nations that are adding to the freedom and stability of their continent.

And closer to home, we must work with our neighbors to build a Western Hemisphere of freedom and prosperity, a hemisphere bound together by shared ideals and free trade, from the Arctic to the Andes to Cape Horn. Building this hemisphere of freedom will be a fundamental commitment of my administration. Our future cannot be separated from the future of our neighbors in Canada and Latin America. Our bonds of language and family and travel and trade are strong, and they serve us all well.

Some look south and see problems; not me. I look south and see opportunities and potential. When I travel to Quebec in April and meet with other hemispheric leaders at the Summit of the Americas, I look forward to doing this: I look forward to discussing how we can build a century of the Americas. And I'll carry this message with me tomorrow when the Secretary and I go to Mexico for my first foreign trip as the President.

These are exciting times in Mexico, times of change and times of possibility. Mexico has seen a new birth of freedom, and trade is creating hope and economic progress. The door is open to a closer partnership with the United States. But nothing about this new relationship is inevitable. Only through hard work will we get it right.

President Fox and I will get started at his ranch tomorrow. I'm looking forward to hearing his ideas on expanding trade throughout the hemisphere, on safe and orderly migration, on expanding educational opportunity for all our children, and what we can do together to fight drug trafficking and other types of organized crime.

President Fox and I met as Governors, and I look forward to renewing and deepening our friendship. But I look forward even more to forging a deeper partnership between our two great nations, a partnership characterized by cooperation, creativity, and mutual respect.

I want to thank you all for welcoming me here today. I'm glad the Secretary invited me. I'm glad I responded positively. [*Laughter*] Oftentimes, those of us who hold high offices don't stop and say thank you as much as we should. So, today I'm doing just that. On behalf of the American people, thank you for the service to this great country, and God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. in the main lobby at the Harry S. Truman Building. In his remarks, he referred to President Vicente Fox of Mexico.

Remarks at the Swearing-In Ceremony for State Department Foreign Service Personnel

February 15, 2001

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much. I'm so honored that you invite me to your place of business. [*Laughter*] Ambassador Davis, you remind me of my mother. [*Laughter*]

Thank you, Director General Grossman, as well. Family members, it is my honor to be here with you as you watch your loved ones get sworn in. And on behalf of every American, congratulations. You have just become a part of the best diplomatic corps in the world.

In the months and years ahead, Secretary Powell and I will be counting on you, and so will your fellow citizens. Throughout the decades of your career, we'll all be counting on you, even as you go about your work with little fanfare. When you succeed, most Americans, most of the time, will never hear about it. A crisis that is averted just doesn't make a headline; a problem that is solved hardly ever leads the evening news. I have confidence—I have confidence—and so does the Secretary, that you will hold up the legacy of excellence found in this building.

As you take up your first assignments overseas, I want you to remember that you will be the image of America, the face and voice of her values. You will represent the strength of America, our compassion, and our humility. This is a high calling and a difficult one, and your country appreciates your work.

It is the duty of America to support you, as well. This room honors one of America's

greatest diplomats, Ben Franklin. Franklin once wrote, “Keep thy shop, and thy shop will keep thee.” Today you join America’s diplomatic shop. Our job is to support you as you support and sustain America’s interests and ideals around the world.

So once again, congratulations to you all. God bless you, and God bless our country.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:25 p.m. in the Benjamin Franklin Room of the Harry S. Truman Building. In his remarks, he referred to his mother, former First Lady Barbara Bush; and Ruth A. Davis, Director, Foreign Service Institute.

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

February 15, 2001

Federal Budget

The President. It’s my honor to welcome Members of the United States Senate and Members of the United States House up here in the Cabinet Room to discuss the budget.

I’ll be submitting a budget to the Congress in short order, and I wanted to brief the members of the budget-writing committees about our priorities, our intentions, and of course, get the feedback. I get to propose a budget, and these folks get to write the budget. And we look forward to having a good discussion on it.

Inherent in the budget, of course, is our desire to make sure we protect Social Security—I think there is unanimity around the table for that—that we set clear priorities, that we fund the priorities. In our budget, we’re going to prove to the American people that we can pay down debt, fund priorities, protect Social Security, and there will be money left over, which we strongly believe ought to be passed back to the taxpayers.

I look forward to the discussion with the chairman, near-chairman, and thank you all for coming.

I’ll be glad to answer a few questions. Yes, Jim.

Q. Mr. President, will you be telling the Members of Congress that you hope to hold spending to below 4 percent, the increase in spending?

The President. We’re not going to give a specific number today, but we are going to argue, make the case that we can slow the rate of spending down; that our spending will be based upon priorities, the priorities I campaigned on; that we will meet the objectives that I talked about in the campaign, which is protecting Social Security, funding public education, strengthening the military, paying down debt—and we’ll be paying down debt; but that we believe the right number for the tax relief package is \$1.6 trillion.

Tax Cut Plan

Q. Mr. President, if the Senate were to vote today on your tax package, the vote would probably be 51–49 against you, given that there are two Republicans who have said they’re not in favor of it as is. What can you say to Democrats to try to bring more of them on board in the Senate?

The President. I can say, wait until you see our budget. You’ll see that it’s well thought out, that we meet important priorities. And I—we’ve got a lot of work to do; I understand that. But this is a democracy; people have different opinions about the subjects.

The people I want to talk to, though—first, before there is any vote—is the American people. And I will; I’ll take my case to the American people about why I think tax relief makes sense. I’ll remind Members of both the Senate and the House that there is a lot of debt at the Federal level, but there is a lot of debt at the private level. We’ve got a lot of people struggling to pay off credit card consumer debt. I’ll tell people that if you’re a family of four making \$50,000, you get an additional \$2,000, so you can decide what to do with your money.

So I’ve got a lot of work to do, but I’m convinced that when the American people hear our plan, they will support it. I think we’ve got a very good chance of getting the tax package through.

Representative Cynthia McKinney

Q. Mr. President, Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, who serves on the Armed Services Committee in the House, feels that she was snubbed because she didn’t go with you during your defense tour this week.