

bill—and I emphasize “bipartisan bill”—builds on the success of the Healthy Forests Initiative. It sets the goal of thinning trees and cleaning out underbrush and restoring the health to 20 million acres. I hope Congress says, when we’re successful in the 20 million, we need to get after the 175 million more acres.

This bill sets priorities for forest management by authorizing work in the areas that are closest to rural communities and work where there’s the greatest risk for environmental damage. It’s a practical piece of legislation. It’s good, commonsense environmental policy, is what we’re talking about.

The “Healthy Forests Restoration Act” helps the people closest to the problem by allowing local citizens to help plan projects for nonprofit, for profit, and for stewardship groups. And these citizens can benefit economically from selling the smaller trees that are cleared out from the forests.

Local citizens can be great allies in the effort to protect our forests. Ron Bell is with us today—where are you, Ron? There he is. Hi, Ron—thought you would have gotten a better seat. [*Laughter*] He spent 22 years in the Army before coming home to manage his family cattle and tree farm near Batesville, Arkansas. About 6 years ago, when Ron noticed the health of the forest in his area deteriorating from insect infestation, he decided to do something about it. Ron, his wife, and their two sons spent an entire winter cleaning out the diseased and lower-quality trees that were crowding out the taller trees in his 40-acre forest.

When he was finished, the forest was healthier. The bugs were gone, and he had made about \$15,000 from the sale of the undergrowth that he cleared away. Today he belongs to a group of nearly 200 landowners in central Arkansas who are working to manage their woodlands and to keep the bugs out. Ron says some of the landowners who live near national forest areas are worried because the Government moves too slowly in treating our own forests. Here’s what he says: “The conditions are preventable with a little bit of management. You don’t just have to throw up your hands. There are times you need to get in there quickly, when the situation is dire.”

And the situation is dire across America. We need to listen to the voices of reasoned people. We need to get the politics out of this, and we need to focus on what’s best for America, is what we need to do. We need to bring people together, for the sake of our forests, for the sake of those who work to see that our forests are healthy, for the sake of those who sacrifice to fight the fires. That’s what we need to do here in Washington, DC. We need less bickering, less politics, and more sound, commonsense policy. And that’s what we’re talking about right here today.

And the reason why that is necessary is because our forests are a treasure, and we are their stewards. We must preserve them. We must protect the people and communities who depend on them. We must fulfill our promise to the next generation—that’s what we must do—and leave behind a world as blessed and as beautiful as the one our parents left us.

Thank you for your interest in this important subject. May God bless your work, and may God continue to bless the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Jacqueline Kennedy Garden at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

### **Statement on House of Representatives Action on the Proposed “Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003”**

*May 20, 2003*

Today’s action by the House on the “Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003” is an important step toward implementing the kind of active forest management that is good for both the environment and our economy. It will save lives and the national treasure of our great forests, with their wildlife, trees, waters, habitat, and other natural resources.

I urge the Senate to act quickly on this much needed legislation. As this year’s fire season progresses, we must equip Federal land managers with the tools they need to protect lives and communities, restore forest

health, and safeguard habitat and watersheds.

### **Radio Remarks to the People of Cuba on Cuban Independence Day**

*May 20, 2003*

Today, Cubans around the world celebrate May 20th, Cuban Independence Day. On behalf of the people of the United States, I send greetings to the Cuban community. My hope is for the Cuban people to soon enjoy the same freedoms and rights that we do. Dictatorships have no place in the Americas. May God bless the Cuban people who are struggling for freedom. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's remarks were recorded in Spanish at 9:50 a.m. on May 16 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for later broadcast on Radio Marti. The Spanish language transcript and an English translation were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 20. This text follows the English translation.

### **Commencement Address at the United States Coast Guard Academy in New London, Connecticut**

*May 21, 2003*

Thank you very much. Thanks for the warm welcome. Admiral Collins and Admiral Olsen, Secretary Ridge, Lieutenant Governor Rell, Mr. President—I'm glad you're here; thank you for coming, sir—Congressman Simmons, the fine professors of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, distinguished guests, proud family members, and the graduates, thank you for your welcome, and thank you for the honor of speaking to the newest officers of the United States Coast Guard.

You know, I was born in this State, just down the road. [Laughter] I've still got relatives living here. [Laughter] And it looks like some of them were up late last night painting Pride Rock. [Laughter]

This is a proud day for the Class of 2003. I know you've worked hard to get here. You've persevered through the rigors of Swab Summer. You've faced difficult trials in the classroom, aboard *Eagle*. And now, with silver dollars in your pockets, you're

ready to become officers in our Nation's oldest continuous seagoing service. You have shown each day that you "revere honor" and that you "honor duty." You have made your families, your professors, and your country proud. On behalf of the American people, thank you for choosing a life of service, and congratulations on a great achievement.

I bring with me a small graduation present. Pursuant to the longstanding tradition, I hereby grant amnesty to all cadets on restriction for minor conduct offenses. [Laughter] I leave it up to Admiral Olsen to determine the definition of "minor." [Laughter]

Coast Guard Academy life is demanding, and it should be because you are entrusted with solemn responsibilities in peace and in war. America counts on the Coast Guard to enforce maritime law, to secure our waterways and ports, to rescue those in distress, and to intercept illegal drugs. In this new century, we will count on you even more. The men and women of this class are the first ever to graduate into the Department of Homeland Security, which is charged with protecting the American people against terrorist attacks. You are bringing a long tradition of duty to this new and urgent tasks. Terrorists who seek to harm our country now face your "Shield of Freedom." Every citizen can be grateful that the Coast Guard stands watch for America.

The Coast Guard is also playing a vital role in America's strategy to confront terror before it comes to our shores. In the Iraqi theater, Coast Guard cutters and patrol boats and buoy tenders and over a thousand of your finest active duty and reserve members protected key ports and oil platforms, detained Iraqi prisoners of war, and helped speed the delivery of relief supplies to the Iraqi people. Many have returned safely to port, and many remain on duty in the Persian Gulf. All have helped to liberate a great people, and all have brought a great credit to the uniform of the United States Coast Guard.

In Iraq, America's military and our allies carried out every mission and exceeded every expectation. Heavy units of armor and infantry moved with speed and agility that kept the enemy in a state of constant surprise and