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The details of this request are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

Message on the Observance of New Year's Day, 2004

December 31, 2003

The past year has been a time of accomplishment and progress. Working together, our citizens have made America a safer, more prosperous, and better country. In the New Year, we will build on these successes, embracing the challenges and opportunities ahead.

We have seen our brave men and women in uniform defend America and liberate the oppressed. We pray for their safety, and we are grateful for their service and the support of their families.

In the past year, millions of people have answered the call to serve their neighbors in need. Americans from every walk of life are building a culture of compassion by devoting their time and talents to help others. In the New Year, I ask all Americans to answer the call to bring hope to those who are less fortunate.

I encourage every American to give thanks to God for His many blessings and to reaffirm our commitment to peace and freedom around the world. Laura joins me in wishing all Americans a Happy New Year. May God bless you, and may God continue to bless the United States of America.

George W. Bush

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

Remarks on New Year's Day and an Exchange With Reporters in Falfurrias, Texas

January 1, 2004

The President. Wish everybody a happy New Year. It's a good way to start the new year, outdoors—in my case, with my dad. And it's—I know this part of Texas real well. It's a spectacular part of our State. And we were just on a ranch with—owned by a lady who knows it's important to protect the environment by taking care of the land. And as a result of her taking care of the land, worrying about bird habitats, we happened to see a lot of birds today. But most importantly, I was with my dad. It's a great way to start 2004.

I'm looking forward to 2004. We'll continue to stay focused on our economy, so people can find work, and stay focused on working to keep the peace and—by spreading freedom and by holding people to account who are willing to harm innocent people around the world. But it's a—I think 2004 is going to be a great year.

And in the spirit of great years, I'll answer a few questions.

President's Hunting Trip

Q. How was the hunt?

The President. It was good fun. You know, when you hunt quail, you get a lot of exercise. As you know, I like exercise. And so my dad and I and Ms. Negley, whose ranch we were on, walked a lot of territory, watched the dogs work, and knocked down some birds.

Q. How many?

The President. I think I shot five. The limit in Texas, I believe, is 15. I'm not that good a shot, but it was a lot of fun.

Iraqi Debt Relief

Q. Did you talk to Mr. Baker?

The President. Pardon me?

Q. Did you talk to Secretary Baker?

The President. I did talk to Secretary Baker. He came by for lunch. First, I thanked him for spending as much time as he did on the road for our country. As you know, he went to Europe first and then recently went to the Far East. He reported on his visits with Prime Minister Koizumi and President Hu Jintao. And he was very positive about his meetings. He's going to come back up and brief Condi and me in a little bit of time.

Yes, ma'am.

Special Presidential Envoy James A. Baker III's Upcoming Travel

Q. Where's he going next?

The President. Where's he going next? He's yet to go to the Middle East, and he's going to let me know when he thinks the timing is good for that.

Iranian Earthquake

Q. Can I ask you about what you did for Iran, in terms of the easing restrictions for humanitarian aid?

The President. Yes.

Q. Does this ease—represent an easing of our relationship with Iran?

The President. What we're doing in Iran is we're showing the Iranian people the American people care, that we've got great compassion for human suffering. And I eased restrictions in order to be able to get humanitarian aid into the country. The Iranian Government must listen to the voices of those who long for freedom, must turn over Al Qaida that are in their custody, and must abandon their nuclear weapons program. In the meantime, we appreciate the fact the Iranian Government is willing to allow our humanitarian aid flights into their country. And it's a good thing to do. It's right to take care of people when they hurt, and we're doing that.

Iran-U.S. Relations

Q. Do you see any signs that the Iranian Government is doing any of the things that could lead to a stronger relationship?

The President. My hope is, is that they will hand over Al Qaida to their countries of origin, that they will get rid of their nuclear weapons program in a verifiable way, that they will listen to the IAEA and the United Nations and get rid of the programs they said that they're willing to do.

And as well it's very important for them to listen to those voices in their country who are demanding freedom. And we stand strongly with those who demand freedom.

Yes, Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Assassination Attempts on Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf

Q. Mr. President, how worried are you about the attempts on the life of President Musharraf, and what does it mean for the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons?

The President. Well, I appreciated talking to President Musharraf. I told him how much I was hopeful that he continued to join us in the war on terror. Obviously, terrorists are after him. And he sounded very confident that his security forces would be able to deal with the threat.

President Musharraf has been a friend of the United States. He's been a standup guy when it comes to dealing with the terrorists. We are making progress against the Al Qaida because of his cooperation. We need to do more, particularly on the Pakistan-Afghan border. He sounded confident, and therefore I feel confident about his security situation.

Pakistan-India Relations

Q. And what about Pakistan's nuclear weapons? Are they secure?

The President. Yes, they are secure. He is—and that's important. It's also important that India as well have a secure nuclear weapons program. We're hopeful that the Indians and the Pakistanis in upcoming meetings will be able to begin a dialog on a variety of issues. It looks like they're making progress toward reconciling differences. Slowly but surely, positive things are taking place, and I commend the leaders of both countries for taking steps toward a peaceful reconciliation of major issues that have divided them.

CIA Employee Identity Disclosure Investigation

Q. Did Attorney General Ashcroft take too long to recuse himself from the leak investigation?

The President. Did he take too long?

Q. Why did he take so long to recuse himself?

The President. You're going to have to ask him. I mean, I don't know the details which caused him to recuse himself. That's up to people inside of DC to tell you what's going on with the case. He doesn't talk to me about it; he doesn't brief me on it. My only point is, is that I'd like to find out the truth as quickly as possible.

Q. Are you concerned that it's taking as long as it is?

The President. I'm not involved with the investigation in any way, shape, or form. I've told the members of the White House to totally cooperate. I think you'll find that there has been total cooperation. And the Justice Department and the investigative team—which, by the way, is a team comprised of professionals who have done this in the past—will proceed at a pace necessary to find out the truth. And the sooner they find out the truth, the better, as far as I'm concerned.

Last question, and then we've got to go back to Crawford.

Mad Cow Disease

Q. Your administration has announced some measures with regard to mad cow.

The President. Did we do what?

Q. With regard to mad cow, do you think there is more that needs to be done, and——

The President. Well, I've talked to Secretary Veneman about this issue. I told her that I want her to take the steps necessary to make sure that the food supply is safe and that the American consumer can be confident. And she is looking at different ways to do that. As a matter of fact, she announced some measures the other day.

Q. How much time do you think Americans can feel safe eating beef?

The President. I think they should be. As a matter of fact, I ate beef today and will continue to eat beef.

Thank you all very much.

President's New Year's Resolution

Q. What are you going to do for your New Year's resolution?

The President. Oh, my New Year's resolution this year is to work—stay physically fit to the point where I can run—in other words, rehab my knee. I miss running. The elliptical machine is good, but it just doesn't have that same sense of—that running gave me. So that's one of my resolutions, which may require eating less desserts, kind of getting a little trimmer, to take the pressure off the knee.

I wish everybody a happy New Year, and 2004 is going to be a great year for this country. It's going to be a year in which the world will become more peaceful and more people will be able to find work, and that's important.

Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:32 p.m. at the Brooks County Airport. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; and President Hu Jintao of China. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

December 27

In the morning, at the Bush Ranch in Crawford, TX, the President had an intelligence briefing.

December 28

During the day, the President had a telephone conversation with Secretary of Agriculture Ann M. Veneman concerning the recent incidence of bovine spongiform encephalitis (also known as mad cow disease) in Washington State.

December 29

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

December 30

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

During the day, the President participated in an interview with author Ken Walsh.

December 31

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

January 1

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

Also in the morning, the President traveled to Falfurrias, TX, where he had lunch with