

**Letter to Congressional Leaders
Reporting on Continued Operations
of United States Forces in Bosnia and
Herzegovina**

January 22, 2004

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

In my report to the Congress of July 22, 2003, I provided information on the deployment of combat-equipped U.S. Armed Forces to Bosnia and Herzegovina and other states in the region in order to participate in and support the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-led Stabilization Force (SFOR). The SFOR began its mission and assumed authority from the NATO-led Implementation Force on December 20, 1996. I am providing this supplemental report, prepared by my Administration and consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148), to help ensure that the Congress is kept fully informed on continued U.S. contributions in support of peacekeeping efforts in the former Yugoslavia.

The U.N. Security Council authorized Member States to continue SFOR for a period of 12 months in U.N. Security Council Resolution 1491 of July 11, 2003. The mission of SFOR is to provide a focused military presence in order to deter hostilities, stabilize and consolidate the peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, contribute to a secure environment, and provide, within its means and capabilities, selective support to key tasks and key civil implementation organizations.

The U.S. force contribution to SFOR in Bosnia and Herzegovina is approximately 1,800 personnel. United States personnel comprise approximately 15 percent of the total SFOR force of approximately 12,000 personnel. During the second half of 2003, 14 NATO nations and 11 others provided military personnel or other support to SFOR. Most U.S. forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina are assigned to Multinational Brigade, North, headquartered near the city of Tuzla. The U.S. forces continue to support SFOR efforts to apprehend persons indicted for war crimes and to conduct counterterrorism operations. In the last 6 months, U.S. forces have not sustained any combat-related fatalities.

I have directed the participation of U.S. Armed Forces in these operations pursuant

to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed about developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I will continue to consult closely with the Congress regarding our efforts to foster peace and stability in the former Yugoslavia.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to J. Dennis Hastert, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Ted Stevens, President pro tempore of the Senate.

**Remarks to the United States
Conference of Mayors**

January 23, 2004

Thanks for your kind words, Big Jim. [Laughter] I've known him for quite a while, and he's an honorable man who's doing a fine job for the mayors. And I appreciate you all giving me a chance to come by and visit. I've got some thoughts I'd like to share with you about how we can work together to make this country hopeful and safe and secure.

I want to, first, thank you for serving your communities. It's not easy to be a mayor. Probably a lot harder than being a President. After all, I don't have to fill potholes—[laughter]—or empty the trash. [Laughter] But I do really want to thank you. This country is a fabulous country because we've got good, honorable people who are willing to serve at all levels of government. And one of the key levels of government, of course, is running the city hall, and you're doing a fine job. And I look forward to working with you, and so does my administration.

I do want to thank you all for the invitation. I want to thank Mayor Plusquellic, who's going to be chairman next year. Is that done? Yes—okay, good. I didn't want to jump the gun. [Laughter] I look forward to working with you. Mayor O'Neill, thank you very much for having me.

Mayor Riley, it's good to see you, sir. You reminded me, my mother went to high school in the town he runs in South Carolina,

and I reminded him that she graduated—[*laughter*—like her son, barely.

Speaking about sons, there's nothing wrong with a guy following in his father's footsteps. In this case, this guy is doing it really well. Mayor Daley, I appreciate you. Great mayor.

I appreciate my temporary Mayor, Mayor Williams. He's a really good guy. He's the Mayor of Washington, DC. I notice you were over lobbying Laura the other day to handle a project. [*Laughter*] He knows where the power is in the White House. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you, Tony. He's a good fellow. We worked hard on an interesting education initiative. He took a bold leadership position on education, and we worked with the Congress to get some scholarship money to poor students in Washington, DC, who are going to schools that are failing, that will help liberate them and their parents to be able to choose new schools. And this is a landmark piece of legislation that's going to change people's lives for the better. And the Mayor showed strong leadership. He got out on front on a tough issue, and as a result, the children of this city are going to benefit. And I appreciate you, Mayor, a lot for taking that on.

I want to thank the mayors who are here from Texas. Yes. Behave yourselves. [*Laughter*] Go to bed early. [*Laughter*] Don't whoop and holler. [*Laughter*] But I'm glad you're here. I miss my home State. I love Texas. I love the people who represent our State, and thanks for coming today.

I also want to thank Pat McCrory for meeting me. You might remember he is the mayor of Charlotte, North Carolina. We worked together on brownfield legislation, which, Tommy, I want to thank you and the organization for working on that important piece of legislation. It will change America for the better. It's a collaborative effort between the administration and the mayors to do some good environmental policy that will make communities a better place.

McCrory—I wanted to talk about brownfields—of course, he wanted to talk about football. [*Laughter*] And I bet Mayor Menino does too. [*Laughter*] So perhaps I can arrange a little bit of a friendly wager between you two, if it hasn't happened yet.

It has happened? Well, that's good. Be careful what you bet. [*Laughter*]

I wish I could report to you that the war on terror is over with and America is safe and secure, but I cannot. I can't tell you that in good conscience because I don't believe in it. The truth is that there's an enemy that still lurks out there. And we must continue to work together to protect our country. It is the most solemn duty of government, is to protect American people.

It's important for all of us in positions of responsibility never to forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. It is natural that we would, as distance passes, that we would kind of try to think for the best and hope for the best and think that time has maybe solved the problem of the first war of the 21st century. It's just not the case. It's not the case, and so we will continue to work with you on homeland security.

My '05 budget has got \$30 billion in there for homeland security. That's 3 times the amount spent prior to September the 11th. It's important that the money be spent wisely and focused on the protection of the American people.

Mayor Jim just told me, on the way in he said, "You know, one of the problems we face, we mayors face, is that the money is allocated and gets stuck." And I appreciated that recognition of the problem, and so we'll work with the mayors to make sure it gets unstuck. I understand sometimes it gets stuck not in Washington; it gets stuck at the State level, as I understand. Look I don't—hold on, I'm an ex-Governor, so I'm—[*laughter*—and we're hosting the Governors pretty soon. [*Laughter*] But it will provide an opportunity to work this out so that it works better.

Listen, I'm not interested in pointing fingers. I'm interested in making the system work better. Our most solemn duty is to work together to protect our people. That is the most important responsibility we have. And I want to thank you for the coordination that is taking place between the Federal Government, the State Government, and the local governments.

I've asked Tom Ridge often, how well are we doing communicating with each other, how good is the city response mechanism?

And the report is very good. And the mayors get the credit. The mayors get the credit for energizing Joint Terrorism Task Forces. The mayors get the credit for good communication. The mayors get credit for good response.

Recently, over the Christmas holidays, Los Angeles and Las Vegas and Washington, DC, and New York were put on especially high alert, and I'm telling you, the mayors and their offices did a fabulous job of coordinating information and activity. And I don't know if they're out there, but mayor, you deserve a lot of credit for doing the right thing and for responding.

I know there's some talk in your communities about the PATRIOT Act. Let me tell you about the PATRIOT Act right quick. We're in a new war, a different kind of war. We need to be able to share information across jurisdictional boundaries at the Federal level. Do you realize, prior to September the 11th, 2001, the CIA could not pass information to the FBI or vice versa? By law, they were prohibited from sharing information. How can you fight a war against terrorists who hide in dark corners of the world and maybe slide into our country if you can't share information? We need the CIA and the FBI to be able to talk to each other.

As I said in the State of the Union, many of the provisions in the law have been used to catch embezzlers or criminals. We need to make sure those provisions stay in the law. We're at war. We're trying to hunt terrorists. It's a different kind of war.

In the old days, you know, you could measure progress based upon tanks destroyed or airplanes brought down to Earth, you know, by missiles or air-to-air combat. It's no longer the way it is in the 21st century. We're on an international manhunt. We have to find these people before they come and get us. And in order to do so, we need the best intelligence and the capacity to share that intelligence across jurisdictional boundaries. The PATRIOT Act is vital for our security, and Congress needs to renew it.

We want to work with you on defending America. The best way to defend America, however, is to stay on the offensive and to find these killers, one by one, and bring them to justice. That's precisely what our Govern-

ment is doing and will continue to do. There are thousands of military personnel, with aid from intelligence personnel, on an international manhunt. Slowly but surely, we are dismantling the Al Qaida network that caused such great harm to America and still continues to plot, by the way.

I said in the speech the other night that two-thirds of known leaders have been captured or killed. That's a significant number when you think about where we were prior to September the 11th. We're, slowly but surely, demolishing them. If you—if Al Qaida was a corporation in America, you'd have the board of directors somewhat intact, but the operators, the middle management, retired, no longer useful, no longer a part of the problem.

And we're going to stay on the hunt, which requires good intelligence, good cooperation, good participation with friends and allies around the world. As the world saw, there is no hole deep enough from the long arm of American justice.

We're making progress. It's important for America to speak clearly and, when America says something, to mean it. And so when I said right after September the 11th, "If you harbor a terrorist, you're just as guilty as the terrorist," I meant it. I meant it as clearly as I could say it. And the Taliban found out what we meant. Thanks to a coalition, a large coalition of freedom-loving nations, we removed the Taliban from power. And America is more secure for it, because remember, Afghanistan was a haven for training bases. This is where many of the Al Qaida fighters learned how to fight and kill.

And as importantly, the people of Afghanistan are free. They're free from the clutches of one of the most barbaric regimes in history. It is hard for the Western mind to fathom such a regime, a regime that refuses to allow young girls to go to school, but that's the way it was. And today, thanks to our coalition and our deep love for freedom and our intense desire to protect ourselves, young girls go to school in Afghanistan, and the world is better off for it.

And as you know, I made a tough decision to take out Saddam Hussein, and I did so for this reason: September the 11th made it

clear that America can no longer ignore gathering threats. Oceans no longer protected us from harm. We just couldn't say, "Okay, well, there's a gathering threat. Let's just hope it goes away." I'm never going to forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001.

And so, when we saw a threat—we saw a threat; we dealt with it. We dealt in this way: I went to the United Nations, and I said, "You've given this man warning after warning after warning, and he's totally ignored you. You've got to have credibility." We want international institutions to work, but he ignored them. And the more he ignored them, the weaker the United Nations became. So I said, "Let's pass a resolution," which was passed unanimously. "Now let's enact, enact the resolution. Let's be a credible body. Let's be people, when you say something, people believe it for the sake of peace and freedom."

And we moved. We moved against a man who had used weapons of mass destruction against his own people, attacked his neighbors, a man who we found out subsequently had murdered thousands of men, women, and children and buried them in mass graves, a person who when he found dissenters, tortured them, a person who ruled with utmost fear.

No, we acted in our own—for our own security. No one can say the world is not more safe with Saddam Hussein sitting in a jailhouse. It is more safe, and so is America.

Our most important duty is to protect America. But I also want you to know that something else drives me. And it's that my belief that freedom is not America's gift to the world, but freedom is the Almighty God's gift to each man and woman in this world. And it's the spread of freedom that will bring peace. Free societies are peaceful societies.

And yet, we're running against a pretty strong current, because some in the world say that certain people, evidently, can't be self-governing and can't be free. That's not what Americans believe. We believe that people—all people from all walks of life—have got freedom indelibly etched in their heart. And I believe this Nation has an obligation to lead the world to be more free and more peaceful.

I know many of you—you hear from families whose sons and daughters are in our mili-

tary. I try the best I can to thank them for their service. I hope you do as well. I know you do. I know you're just as proud of them as I am. But I want to assure you as leaders in your community, these troops will have the resources they need to be successful in the war against terror.

We're making good progress—we really are—in parts of the world. Afghanistan has now got a constitution which talks about freedom of religion and talks about women's rights. I don't think anybody would have dreamed that would have been possible prior to September the 11th, and now it's a reality. Democracy is flourishing. The world is better off because of that.

I met with some of the city council leaders in Baghdad when I snuck in over Thanksgiving. I hope someday that you're able to welcome them to your own cities. And these are people that are—you can imagine what their vision might be like. First of all, they're overwhelmed with the thought of being free. That makes sense, because they had been locked in this cell of a country by a brutal tyrant. And they're learning what it means to be a free country, and they're learning what it means to be able to get along with their neighbor that may have a different view of how to worship the Almighty. But it's happening.

Adnan Pachachi was with us the other day. He sat next to Laura at the State of the Union. He came to the Oval Office. He's a distinguished gentleman who believes in the possibilities of the Iraqi people. He sees a clear vision of a free country, and we're moving that way, moving toward a basic law that honors minority rights, a basic law that—based upon the principles of human dignity.

I hope to have the sovereignty passed over, and I think we will, by June the 30th. But there's still work to do—you read about it in your newspapers—because people are trying to shake our will. That's what you've got to understand is happening. They're willing to kill innocent life to shake our will, but thugs and assassins will not intimidate America. We will stay the course until the job is done, because a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will make the world more peaceful. These are historic times. This is an

historic opportunity to change the world, and America will continue to lead.

At home, I'm optimistic as well. I'm optimistic because I see the economy is growing. That's important for the health of our cities. And it's getting better, and statistics say it's getting better. One aspect about the growing economy that I believe speaks to why it's growing is the tax cuts we passed. We'll have a philosophical argument about that here in Washington, DC, of course. I look forward to it. But I will tell you that one of the things in the tax relief plan that I hope you find inspirational for your cities is it is aimed at the entrepreneur. Much of the tax relief is aimed at the small-business owner. And the truth of the matter is the vibrancy of the inner cities of our country depend upon ownership.

When more people own a small business, when people are starting their own business, when people are creating small businesses, they're creating jobs. They're not only creating a more vibrant and hopeful community; more jobs are being created. And the tax relief we passed was, in part, aimed at small businesses for this reason: Most small businesses are sole proprietorships or Subchapter S corporations, and they, therefore, pay tax at the individual income tax rate. And so, therefore, when you reduce individual income taxes, you're injecting capital into the small business-sectors of America's cities.

The entrepreneurial spirit is strong in America. You know it as well as I do. The desire for some to own their business is strong, and the tax relief we passed helped invigorate that spirit.

So this economy is growing, and we've got to make sure people are prepared to meet the jobs of the 21st century. It starts with making sure there's a literate America, which—make sure that the schools work well. No Child Left Behind Act—let me tell you my view of that important piece of legislation, since I was the person that asked Congress to pass it. I said, first of all, "We'll increase the budgets," which we have done by 49 percent since 2001. But I've also said, "In return for additional money, primarily aimed at Title I students, we should expect results." You see, some people aren't interested—well, I'm sure they're interested in results.

They just don't want to measure results, and I think that's a shame. If you believe that every child can learn, then you want to know whether or not that's happening. It seems like to me that if the expectation is for excellence, we ought to measure.

We ought to measure in a way that is open, measure in a way that puts the results out for everybody to see, including the mayors. So you know for a fact whether or not the obligations of our society are being met to the youngest of our children. In the bill, in the No Child Left Behind Act, not only do we insist upon local control of schools, an accountability system designed at the State or local level, we also say that when you see failure early, there's additional money to make sure children aren't left behind. This is an important piece of legislation, and I will resist any attempt to undermine it.

I laid out the other night a Jobs for the 21st Century program. A part of that is to make sure there's additional money to help junior high and high school students who have been just simply shuffled through the system. And that's what's happened, as you know. If you want to be blunt about what has taken place, sometimes when you don't measure, you just shuffle kids through. Then you wake up at the high school level and find out that the literacy level of our children are appalling. I expect you, as mayors, to challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations. I challenge you to keep raising that bar and standards.

And we want to help here. We've got money for that. We've got money for additional grants for Pell grants for low-income kids who are taking a good, strong curriculum. I told you what the Mayor did. He's challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. It might not have been the most politically popular thing in certain editorial pages or around the city, but he's taken the lead. He's not afraid to lead, and that's what we expect from people at the local level when it comes to insisting that every child learn and no child be left behind in America.

I also hope you work with your community colleges. The community college system provides a great opportunity to make sure you match willing workers with the skills necessary to occupy the jobs of the 21st century.

Some of you who have been around long enough may remember the old days when they had workforce training requirements that said, "Just go train people." So they'd go out and train 1,000 hairdressers for 50 jobs. You'd have 950 well-trained hairdressers, but they weren't working.

We've got to make sure the workforce training programs focus on the needs of the employers. And I know many of you are doing that in your communities and many of you are working with your local chambers. I went to Phoenix, and if the mayor is here, thank you, Mr. Mayor, for your hospitality. But there is a really interesting collaboration between the high-tech community and the community college system, all aimed at providing people with the skills so that when the job base expands, and as it is in many communities, they've got the skills necessary to fill the work.

There is a health care shortage of workers in America. You need to work with your community colleges to make sure that those colleges are able to provide the skills in the health care industry so that people who want to work can do so. And that's what we're talking about when you hear about this community college initiative of \$250 million. I certainly hope the Congress listens as well, because it makes sense to use the community college system wisely.

Speaking about workers, I want to talk about illegal immigrants who are working in your cities. I believe strongly that this Nation is a nation of rule of law, and therefore, we must be open about what's taking place. And as you know, there's a lot of people here on false papers who have been smuggled in by "coyotes," who have risked their lives to come and do what many of us—many of our citizens do, which is to work hard to put food on the table for their families. And they're here, and they're working, and they're making a contribution to the economy. And yet we don't have a system to deal with them, do we? We have a system that's underground, that's in the shadows of society. And in my judgment, that's not right.

So what I think we need to do is have what I call a temporary-worker program, to issue a card, a temporary-worker card that's legitimate and real, that says, if you're a willing

American employer, you can hire a willing foreign employee that has a temporary-worker card, so long as there's not an American worker available. In other words, people are doing jobs Americans aren't doing. And they're coming to our country, and they're taking great risk. And we've got a lot of Border Patrol agents trying to chase the good, hard-working people down. If we make the system work right, if we make it legitimate, then our Border Patrol will be able to chase down true threats to our national security. They'll be able to focus on the threats. We won't be putting our employers in a position where they're hoping the documentation that's presented to them is real.

Now, this isn't an amnesty program. Let me be clear about this. This is a temporary-worker program to be registered and above-board. I oppose amnesty because amnesty—amnesty would encourage further illegal immigration. And I oppose amnesty because amnesty would reward those who have broken the laws of the United States. We've had people in line trying to become a citizen of our country. They've been waiting in line for a long period of time, and this program will not allow people to jump ahead in the line of those who have been here legally.

I think this is a realistic approach to make sure the employer-employee relationship is honest in this country. And I also think it's necessary. I think it's necessary because I don't like the thought of hard-working citizens, no matter where they may be from, not willing to report abuse, for example, because they'd then get shipped home and wouldn't be able to do their job as a mom or a dad. This is a humane country, and we need to treat people humanely, with good, reasonable, commonsense law. I look forward to Congress to getting it passed. I thank you for giving me a chance to explain that piece of policy.

I'm winding down. I'm sure Daley is wondering when he's going to quit. [*Laughter*] Being from the Windy City he's—[*laughter*]*—he sees the President is a little windy, himself. [Laughter]*

Let me talk about housing right quick. I know housing is important for the mayors. We want people owning their own home in

America. This administration has been consistent about promoting what I call an ownership society. You heard me talk about creating environments for the entrepreneur to flourish. I want people owning their own home. Homeownership is high in America. I think it's the highest ever, which is really positive. It's positive for our country. We understand, when somebody owns something, he or she has a vital stake in the future of this country.

But we've got more work to do. There's still a minority homeownership gap in America. I think here at the mayors', I laid out some initiatives that, in the past, one of which just recently passed the Congress, which is the downpayment assistance program. I'm asking Congress for \$200 million to help people with their downpayment. As you know better than me, many citizens have the desire to own a home, but they don't have the dough to make the downpayment. And therefore, they balk at making the decision. So we want to help families with downpayments, and we've now got a plan to do so. Congress needs to fund it. It's authorized. It now needs to be funded.

The print on these contracts is a little too fine for first-time homebuyers. And frankly, it's a little too fine for multiple-time home buyers. It's hard to understand the contracts. And I know HUD is working to simplify the contracts and to make it easier and less expensive for people to enter the process of buying a home, by simplifying the forms.

I don't know if you felt it yet. We're expanding counseling services around the country, many times run by faith-based groups, by the way, to help people understand what it means to buy a home. First-time homebuyers are sometimes confused by not only the regulations but the obligations. And we've got counseling services being expanded out of HUD. And if you haven't had one in your neighborhood, call HUD. Get them to show up. It's a useful service. It's a helpful service to close the homeownership gap.

I'm going to talk to the Congress about allowing the Federal home administration to permit zero-percent downpayment loans to low-income Americans. That needs to happen in order to encourage more homeowner-

ship. And Congress also, by the way—and they need to pass the single family housing credit to help people who are building these homes, these affordable homes inside America's cities.

And we're making progress, by the way. The gap is narrowing. There's more work to do. I look forward to working with the mayors to close the minority homeownership gap in America, for the good of the country—for the good of your cities, but for the good of the country as well.

Let me conclude by talking about a really important domestic initiative, at least as far as I'm concerned, and that's the Faith-Based Initiative—see if I can explain it properly to you. First of all, we strongly believe in the separation of church and state here in Washington, DC, and that's the way it's going to be. Secondly, I love the fact that people are able to worship freely in our country, and if you choose not to worship, you're just as patriotic as your neighbor. Freedom of religion means freedom to practice any religion you choose or the freedom not to practice.

Thirdly, there has been discrimination against faith-based programs in Washington, DC. Sure, you can receive a Federal grant, but you have to take the cross off the wall in order to do so or the Star of David down or the crescent. Well, how can you be a faith-based program if you can't practice your faith? All of a sudden, you become just another program.

Fourthly, I want you to know that out of frustration with Congress, I've asked them to pass a Faith-Based Initiative. I just decided through Executive order to open up as much Federal money as we possibly could, the grantmaking process, to faith-based programs, to let them apply. We want people of faith involved in solving people's lives.

I know that you have opened an office to expedite Federal monies or the process or the grantmaking progress—process—for your faith-based programs in your communities. I urge you to take advantage of it. I urge you to take advantage of it. You know as well as I do that many of the problems your citizens face are problems of the heart—addiction—and programs sometimes work. Government programs sometimes work, but sometimes they don't work. And

sometimes it requires a higher power than a government program to help change a person's life. You've got armies of compassion in your communities that I'm confident, by working together, we can unleash, for the betterment of the people we serve.

You know, I was down in New Orleans. Ray Nagin is the fine mayor of that city. And we had a Faith-Based Initiative there, and he has got a faith-based coordinating group to not only work in the city but with the State of Louisiana. I also urge you—kind of like the grant problem we got in other areas, sometimes the money goes to the States, and if the State is not anxious to be involved with the faith programs, it gets stuck and doesn't make it to you. And so I urge you to work with your Governors to make sure that their faith-based offices are up and running and that they help cut through the inherent prejudice toward faith programs, the inherent prejudice in government.

And I'm talking about all faiths, by the way. There's fantastic Jewish charities in America that are helping change this country, one soul at a time. You ought to look at those and welcome them and encourage them. Same with the Muslim charities and, of course, the Christian charities that are strong. This Government is—will continue to work hard to make sure this vision becomes reality.

Jim Towey—raise your hand, Towey; right over there—he runs the faith-based office in the White House. We've got faith-based offices throughout bureaucracies. I see that the Deputy Secretary of HUD designee is with us. We've got a faith office at HUD that can be used by mayors and community groups to access Federal money. Billions of dollars are now available. I encourage you—I encourage you to use this source of fund and empower one of the greatest strengths we have in our country, the faith community.

There are other initiatives. I laid out the prison initiative, \$300 million to help on the prison reentry program. This will make a big difference in your communities. It will make a big difference in people's lives. Call upon your faith-based programs to help with these souls that are looking for help. You know, the clinical probation program sometimes works. But oftentimes, it's helpful to have

somebody with their arms out there saying, "I love you, brother," or "I love you, sister. What can I do to help you reenter our society?"

That's not exactly the traditional approach, I readily concede, to prison—to rehabilitation programs. I know that. But sometimes traditional rehabilitation programs have fallen short of the mark. Sometimes, it's that extra ingredient called love that will make a fundamental difference in somebody's future. And our houses of worship are houses of love. That's what they exist for. The universal call, love your neighbor just like you'd like to be loved yourself, is a important part of the soul of your community. Use it. And the Federal Government want to help you.

Towey's job is to make sure that we cut through the strings, to make sure your faith groups are able to access the money without losing their faith. You're going to hear people say, "Why do I want to interface with the Government? They're going to call me to have to do something I don't want to do." Towey's job—and by the way, just to show you what kind of society we have, before he came, he was Mother Teresa's lawyer. [Laughter] I'm not going to get into lawsuit abuse—[laughter]—but he's doing a good job. And his job is to make sure that the armies of compassion are unleashed.

So those are the things that are on my mind. I thank you for giving me a chance to come by and share them with you. I'll tell you what else is on my mind. I understand '04 is going to be a difficult year for some. But I want you to know this—[laughter]—I want you to know this. I don't want—I don't want politics to get in the way of me doing my job and you doing your job for the people. I want you to know, I assure you—I understand it, and so do you. But let us not let the elections get in the way of our solemn responsibility. I don't care what your party is. I don't care who you're for, for President. I have a job to do, and so do you. And by working together, by working together on key initiatives in a way that respects our differences, honors our values, we can do our job for America.

And that's what I expect of you, and I know that's what you expect of me. And together,

we're going to make this country continue to be great. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. at the Capital Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor James A. Garner of Hempstead, NY, president, U.S. Conference of Mayors, who introduced the President; Mayor Donald L. Plusquellic of Akron, OH, vice president, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Mayor Beverly O'Neill of Long Beach, CA, advisory board chair, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr., of Charleston, SC; Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL; Mayor Anthony A. Williams of Washington, DC; Mayor Thomas M. Menino of Boston, MA; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Adnan Pachachi, Acting President, Iraqi Governing Council; Mayor Phil Gordon of Phoenix, AZ; and Roy A. Bernardi, Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Remarks Honoring the 2003 World Series Champion Florida Marlins

January 23, 2004

The President. Thank you for coming. Please be seated. *Bienvenidos a la Casa Blanca.* [Laughter] Thanks for coming to the White House. I'm honored to be here to welcome the world champs, the Florida Marlins. Maybe this will cause one of your biggest fans to stop bragging, the Governor of Florida—[laughter]—my brother. I appreciate you being here, Jeb. Thanks for coming. It's good to see you. [Laughter]

I don't know if you know this or not, but I've had the fortune of being a part of baseball, and I've never been so impressed by a club that came together and played together as the Marlins. It speaks a lot to the ownership and the manager and the support personnel and the players, that they were willing to play together to win. And they won when a lot of people said they weren't supposed to win, which is the way we kind of like it here in Washington, DC. [Laughter]

I remember when my friend Pudge Rodriguez stood up to the world and said, "2003 is going to be the year of the Marlin." And a lot of people said, "I'm not so sure he knows what he's talking about." Turns out he did know what he's talking about, and I want to congratulate Pudge. I've known

him—I'll never forget when he first came up. I think it's true that he got married on the same day that he got a hit—is that right, Isabel? The same day he got his first big league hit?

Mrs. Rodriguez. Yes.

The President. Yes, that's right; yes. [Laughter] The same day he got his first big-league hit—I think it was against the Chicago White Sox—

Audience member. It was.

The President. —he got married. And here he sits as a member of the great world champs. Pudge, congratulations for being a good friend and a great player.

You're so good about predicting victories, you got any suggestions for, like, '04? [Laughter]

Audience member. [Inaudible].

The President. I hope so.

I do want to thank Porter Goss and Tom Feeney, Congressmen from the great State of Florida, great supporters of the Marlins, for coming. I appreciate you boys being here. They left—they let an interloper in here, Howard Coble, he's the Congressman from North Carolina. You're wondering why a guy from North Carolina is here. It's because he and the manager are members of the Old Geezers Club—[laughter]—and they're friends. Howard is a good one, isn't he?

Mr. Jack McKeon. That was nice, and for that compliment, here you go. [Laughter]

[At this point, Mr. McKeon presented the President with a cigar.]

The President. Thank you, sir. But Howard is a good one. Howard is a good one. Appreciate you coming.

Mayor, I'm glad you're here. Manny—Mayor Diaz is here. Congratulations for being the mayor of a great city. Jeffrey Loria and Sivia have been friends of mine for a long time. And one of the most joyous phone calls I have made since I was the President was to call Jeffrey and congratulate him on being the owner of the world champs. And gosh, the joy in his voice was just worth the phone call.

See, what you don't know is when I was fortunate enough to be with the Rangers, he was the owner of the AAA Oklahoma City club, our AAA affiliate. So we got to know