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Statement on Senate Passage of Legislation To Implement Project BioShield

May 19, 2004

I commend the Senate for passing legislation that will bolster the Nation's defenses against biological, chemical, radiological, and nuclear threats. Project BioShield will speed the development of new vaccines and treatments that would help prevent harm to Americans in a terrorist attack. This legislation carries out my proposal to encourage accelerated research and development of medical countermeasures based on the latest scientific discoveries, provides for rapid stockpiling of critical new drugs and vaccines, and makes these treatments available quickly in emergency situations. America is more secure today because we have placed a strong emphasis on homeland defense, and initiatives like Project BioShield are another important step in winning the war on terror.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi of Italy

May 19, 2004

President Bush. Thank you for coming. You just interrupted a conversation about how we're working on a strategy to help the Iraqis become a free nation.

First, I want to thank my friend Silvio Berlusconi for being here this evening. He's a man of good judgment, good advice, and he's a good friend. And after we have dinner, we're going to go to the Sons of Italy banquet tonight.

I also want to thank the Italian people for the great humanitarian mission that they're undertaking in Iraq. I appreciate their contribution to a free society in a part of the world that is desperate for freedom.

The Prime Minister and I have spent time working on a strategy that's based upon the following points: One, there will be a full transfer of sovereignty to an interim Iraqi government on June the 30th. That will be accompanied by a United Nations Security Council resolution. He had some very good ideas about what should be in that resolution. I, of course, listened to his good ideas.

We also talked about the need to make sure there is a security force to help the Iraqis move toward elections. It's tough work there now, because killers want to stop progress. It will be tough work after sovereignty is transferred, because there will still be people there trying to derail the election process. And that's why one of the discussion points we had was how to continue to broaden the coalition. And finally, we talked about how to make sure that Iraq does have free elections, as Mr. Brahimi has scheduled.

It's an easy conversation to have with Silvio, because we share values. We believe in human rights, human dignity, rule of law, and the right for people to self-govern.

And so I'm proud my friend is here. I appreciate your leadership.

Prime Minister Berlusconi. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you for your advice.

Prime Minister Berlusconi. As far as I'm concerned, I'm very happy to be here, and I'm very happy to have had this discussion with my friend President Bush, discussion on this plan, which is very detailed in terms of the date and is a very convincing plan.

As the President already said, within 2 weeks or even probably before, by the end of this month, the envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations will indicate the names of the members of the interim government.

And something else that President Bush did not mention right now, but we discussed, is the possibility, opportunity of convening a meeting in New York, where your President should be invited and he should meet the members of the Security Council of the United Nations and the top representatives of the countries—members of the coalition. And this in order to provide this government with an international legitimization which is not only useful for the international community but mostly for domestic purposes for this government in Iraq.

And by month—the end of July, there would be the possibility of setting up an electoral commission which will be formed and

made up of—also of celebrities and personalities from United Nations which will help preparing the elections to be held in January.

And we have discussed also other issues, and over dinner we'll have the possibility of discussing additional initiatives which I think should be taken. Since I have the possibility and chance of talking to the President of the Russian Federation, Putin, and to Tony Blair and other leaders, I also submitted to President Bush the possibility of organizing an international conference on Iraq, which could be held before the elections in Iraq in January.

And I can say that we agreed on all of these future possibilities, and we fully share the strategy which needs to be followed. The West must defend itself against international terror. We can think—we are winning this battle if we remain united. Should we leave, abandon Iraq before a democracy takes hold, should we abandon it before this takes place, then we would leave this country to chaos and to a lengthy—to many, many years of civil war, with thousands and thousands of casualties and victims, and this country would probably be a authoritarian country, a fundamentalist country, and certainly an exporter of terror.

I think we've started the work which cannot be left halfway. We have to complete it and until we are sure that we can guarantee the unlucky Iraqi people democracy and freedom, founded in democracy and freedom.

President Bush. Good job. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:18 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Lakhdar Brahimi, Special Adviser to the U.N. Secretary-General. Prime Minister Berlusconi referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom. The Prime Minister spoke in Italian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at the Sons of Italy Foundation Gala

May 19, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated.

Audience member. Mr. President!

The President. I promised the Prime Minister you'd behave yourselves. [*Laughter*] It's great for the son of Barbara to be here with the Sons of Italy. [*Laughter*] Thank you for having me. I'm honored.

It's a privilege for me to join you all as we celebrate the achievements and contributions of Italian Americans. I'm especially pleased to join you in welcoming our great friend the Prime Minister of Italy, Silvio Berlusconi. At this crucial moment in history, America and Italy are standing together as proud friends and strong allies in the cause of freedom. Our two peoples are bound together by affection and respect, and today, Americans feel respect and gratitude for the leadership of the Prime Minister.

I appreciate Charlie; thank you for being the honorary chairman of this event. I thank Phil as well for being the host. I want to thank Joe Sciame, who is the chairman of the Sons of Italy Foundation, Paul Polo, who is the president. Our Ambassador to Italy is with us, Mel Sembler. I appreciate the job he is doing on behalf of the American people. Sergio Vento is with us, who is the Italian Ambassador to the United States. And Sergio, I appreciate your leadership.

I know there are some Members of Congress and the Senate here. I see Santorum and Lieberman, and I appreciate you both being here. Thanks for coming. I would recognize the other Members of Congress by name, but you evidently are not here or have lousy seats. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the fact that we've got scholarship and award recipients who are with us, and I appreciate the distinguished guests who are here as well.

This annual event is an opportunity to express well justified pride in the Italian ancestry of millions of Americans. The immigrant journey to America could be difficult. Families were often separated, and life in a new country brought its hardships. But this country, the United States, is fortunate that generations of Italian families made the journey. They brought to our country strength of character, a deep faith in God, love of family, and an appreciation of freedom. Without question, America is a better place for the influence of the sons and daughters of Italy.