

give its advice and consent to ratification at an early date.

George W. Bush

The White House,
June 16, 2004.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

June 17, 2004

The President. I've just met with my Cabinet. We discussed primarily the economy, and I was pleased with the report I got. The U.S. economy is strong, and it's getting stronger. People are going back to work. There's a sense of optimism around this table, because these people have been out in the field and talking to people, talking to small-business owners and entrepreneurs. I'm pleased with the progress we're making.

There's more to do to make sure this growth is sustained throughout the decade. Primarily it requires a proper understanding of the role of Government to the economy. The role of Government is not to try to manage the economy; the role of Government is to create an environment in which the capital flows and entrepreneurs feel emboldened to take risk and to make sure workers are trained for the jobs of the 21st century. I will continue to talk to the American people about our progrowth strategy that I'm confident will work.

The other thing we talked about was our firm resolve to spread freedom and, therefore, peace around the world. We fully understand terrorists will try to shake our will, to try to shake our confidence, to try to get us to withdraw from commitments we have made in places like Afghanistan and Iraq, and they won't succeed. Iraq will be free, and a free Iraq is in our Nation's interest. A free Iraq will make the world more peaceful. A free Iraq will be an ally of those nations who honor human rights and human dignity and the aspirations of men and women everywhere. A free Iraq will make America more secure.

And we're making progress toward that goal. We've been there—it's been 14 months

since the fall of Baghdad, and the work has been hard and difficult. Yet our military on the ground has done an excellent job of making sure the conditions are such that an Iraqi government can emerge and lead their nation to the better days.

I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press], why don't you lead it off?

Al Qaida-Saddam Hussein Relationship

Q. Mr. President, why does the administration continue to insist that Saddam had a relationship with Al Qaida, when even you have denied any connection between Saddam and September 11th? And now the September 11th Commission says that there was no collaborative relationship at all.

The President. The reason I keep insisting that there was a relationship between Iraq and Saddam and Al Qaida, because there was a relationship between Iraq and Al Qaida. This administration never said that the 9/11 attacks were orchestrated between Saddam and Al Qaida. We did say there were numerous contacts between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida. For example, Iraqi intelligence officers met with bin Laden, the head of Al Qaida, in the Sudan. There's numerous contacts between the two.

I always said that Saddam Hussein was a threat. He was a threat because he had used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. He was a threat because he was a sworn enemy to the United States of America, just like Al Qaida. He was a threat because he had terrorist connections, not only Al Qaida connections but other connections to terrorist organizations. Abu Nidal was one. He was a threat because he provided safe haven for a terrorist like Zarqawi, who is still killing innocent inside of Iraq.

No, he was a threat, and the world is better off, and America is more secure without Saddam Hussein in power.

Let's see—Morgan [David Morgan, Reuters].

Defense Secretary Rumsfeld

Q. Mr. President, given your administration's assertions that it works closely with the

International Red Cross, are you disappointed that Secretary Rumsfeld instructed military officials in Iraq to hold a member of Ansar Al Islam without telling Red Cross officials?

The President. The Secretary and I discussed that for the first time this morning, and he's going to hold a press conference today to discuss that with you. I'm never disappointed in my Secretary of Defense. He's doing a fabulous job, and America is lucky to have him in the position he's in. But the Secretary will hold a press conference today, and you might want to ask him that question at his press conference.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:57 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; Palestinian terrorist Abu Nidal, who was found dead in Baghdad, Iraq, on August 19, 2002; and senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks to the National Federation of Independent Businesses

June 17, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Go ahead and be seated. Thanks for coming. Please be seated. I'm honored you're here. Thanks for coming. Welcome to the Nation's Capital. I'm honored to follow Denny Hastert. He is a fabulous Speaker of the House of Representatives. I enjoy—he is a good friend and a really good leader, and I've enjoyed working with him.

And I've enjoyed working with the members of the NFIB as well. I love to be in the presence of entrepreneurs. Wait, who's minding the store? *[Laughter]* I think if you look back on your record, you'll find I was an NFIB member in Midland, Texas, way back when. You're 600,000 strong. You have a good voice here in Washington. I want you to know that, and you need to make sure you continue to speak it clearly, because the policymakers need to hear from you about the need for less regulation, good taxation,

and less litigation in order for you to be able to do your job.

I know you know this: You've got friends on Capitol Hill. You have a friend in the White House too. There is a practical reason why I'm your friend. One of the practical reasons is, most new jobs—by far, the vast majority of new jobs are started by small businesses in America. See, I'm interested in our people working. I want the American people to be at work so they can fulfill their responsibilities as mothers and dads. And during a time of slowdowns, which we have been through, it's really important to make sure the small-business sector of the American economy is strong.

And so I'm about to talk about some policies we put in place to help you do your job better. The way I look at it is: What is good for small business is good for America. We're here at a time of great promise and great opportunity.

The economy is shifted into high gear, and that's good news. It's good news if you're trying to make a living. It's good news if you're trying to make a living, and it's good news if you're trying to meet a payroll. *[Laughter]* Factories are busier. Families are earning more. Homeownership rates—the homeownership rate is the highest ever in America. See, that is good news if you're interested in promoting an ownership society in our country. We want people owning their own business. We want people owning their own homes. You and I know this, that if you own something, you have a vital stake in the future of our country. The more ownership there is in America, the more vitality there is in America, and the more people have a vital stake in the future of this country.

We've got economic challenges. We've got economic momentum, and that's good. Because of the good policies, but more importantly, because of your hard work, because of working to realize your dreams, because of the spirit of the small-business owner in the country, the economy is strong, and it is getting stronger.

I want to thank Jack Faris for inviting me here. I'm honored to come right around the corner. I appreciate Tom Musser, the chairman of the board. I want to thank Dan Danner. He does all the work. *[Laughter]* But