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protect the environment. Bob Ehrlich has got a very, very strong record of conservation.

He signed the most important legislation to clean up the Chesapeake Bay—ever. That's leadership. Some of them talk a good game—I'm sure they're spouting all kinds of stuff about how—[*laughter*]. This man has delivered. The Chesapeake Bay Restoration Act—the Bob Ehrlich "I'm going to protect the Chesapeake Bay" Act—upgrades the State's 66 largest waste water treatment plants, upgrades sewage systems to increase nitrogen removal.

The Ehrlich-Steele administration has preserved nearly 60,000 acres of fields, forests, and open space and farmland. This man has got a record to run on. And if you care about the environment here in the State of Maryland, you need to put Bob Ehrlich back in as the Governor.

Finally, I proudly wear the label of compassionate conservative, and so does Bob Ehrlich. Let me tell you what I think that means. I think it means that government has got to recognize its limits in providing compassionate care. See, Government can hand out money, but it can't put hope in a person's heart or a sense of purpose in a person's life.

If you find somebody who hurts in society, it's best to rally a person who's heard a universal call to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. There's nothing better than somebody putting their arm around a lonely person and saying, "How can I help you, brother or sister?" There's nothing better than having a church or a synagogue or a mosque take up the cause of feeding the hungry and finding shelter for the homeless. Government should not fear the involvement of faith in our society; we ought to welcome faith in order to help solve some of society's most intractable problems.

Ehrlich's got the Office of Community Initiatives. He's got a way to make sure that bureaucracy gets out of the way of helping people who have heard a universal call to help. I oftentimes remind the American people that—who look at our country and say, "Well, our strengths are our military"—and it's part of our strength, but that's not the greatest strength for America. The size of our wallets, that's important. We're a wealthy nation, and we can do a lot with our wealth—which we're doing, by the way. We're leading the world when it comes to feeding the hungry. We're helping fight HIV/AIDS on the continent of Africa. This is a generous nation. We believe to whom much is given, much is required. But the greatest strength of this country lies in the hearts and souls of our citizens.

Alexis De Tocqueville recognized that when he came to America in 1832. He recognized that one of the really unusual things about our society, characteristics of our society, was the voluntary organizations all aimed at helping someone who is down and out. That's what he recognized. Our job is—my job as President and Bob's job as the Governor is to recognize that strength and to rally that strength and to call people to serve; is to help those who need help, by calling on a fellow citizen to love a neighbor like they'd like to be loved themselves.

You've got a good man as your Governor in the State of Maryland, and you need to put him back in office, for the good of the people. Thanks for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:25 p.m. at the BWI Airport Marriott. In his remarks, he referred to John M. Kane, chairman, Maryland Republican Party; Maryland senatorial candidate Michael S. Steele; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan.

Remarks to the United States Chamber of Commerce

June 1, 2006

Thank you all. I told Michael to keep it short—[*laughter*]—and he did. Thanks for having me. Speaking about short, it's a short commute from where I work and live to this place. Thanks for having me, Tom.

I'm honored to be back here at the Chamber. I'm proud to be with some of America's finest entrepreneurs, job creators, risk-takers. And I'm also proud to be with leaders from the national Citizen Corps. I thank you all for joining us today. I thank you for representing the true strength of America, which are those who are willing to volunteer in our communities to make the country a better place. We got people from the Citizen Corps

from all different backgrounds—from business associations to government agencies, to community groups, to schools, to non-profits, to advocates for the disabled, and emergency responders.

Citizen Corps is making a significant difference in our country. When the hurricanes hit our gulf coast last year, members of the Citizen Corps played a critical role in the relief efforts. I want to thank you for answering the call to service. Congress needs to provide the Citizen Corps with the funding you need to keep our communities safe and prepared for emergencies.

Today I want to talk about immigration, talk about the need for this country to have a comprehensive immigration reform. I'm going to spend a little time on making sure that workforce enforcement is effective and an integral part of making sure we have a comprehensive immigration reform.

Before I do, I want to thank the Chamber very much for your strong advocacy of comprehensive immigration reform. I want to thank you and I want to thank your members for being an articulate, rational voice in the immigration debate.

I want to thank Chertoff for his service to our country—excuse me—Secretary Chertoff. Sometimes if you're from west Texas, you get a little familiar. [*Laughter*] Still adjusting to the protocols here in Washington. [*Laughter*] Of course, he knew what I was talking about.

I want to thank Ralph Basham, the Commissioner of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. Thank you for being here, Ralph. Thanks for your service. Ralph ran the Secret Service so ably, did such a fine job, I asked him to serve in this capacity. And he'll do a fine job there.

I want to thank David Aguilar. He's the Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol. David, it's good to see you. David and I recently went down to the border, and we took a good look at this long border. It gave me a chance to see firsthand what's taking place down there. It also gave me a chance to thank the Border Patrol agents, men and women who are working every day to do our job. And I want to thank you for your leadership.

I thank Julie Myers, Assistant Secretary for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. I want to thank Tracy Henke, Assistant Secretary, Office of Grants and Training for DHS. She is the chair of the National Citizen Corps Council. And again, thank you all for letting me come by.

One of the jobs of the Government is to encourage entrepreneurship. We've done so in this administration, and as a result, America's risk-takers are—and businessowners, both small and large, are hiring people. If you want a job in America, you can find a job in America. This economy of ours is growing, at 3.5 percent last year, 5.3 percent in the first quarter of this year. The national unemployment rate is 4.7 percent; 5.2 million new jobs have been created since August of 2003. Small businesses are flourishing; productivity is high; after-tax income is up; homeownership is at an alltime level. This economy of the United States is strong, and we intend to keep it that way.

And the U.S. Chamber has been a strong supporter in making sure that Congress has sensible policies to keep this economy strong. And one of the most sensible things the United States Congress can do is to make the tax cuts we passed permanent. You'll hear talk in Washington that says, "Well, you've got to raise taxes on people in order to balance the budget." That's not how Washington works. They're going to raise your taxes, and they're going to figure out new ways to spend your money. The best way to balance this budget is to keep progrowth economic policies in place and be fiscally wise about how we spend your money.

Progrowth economic policies generate additional revenues for our Treasury. Last year, revenues exceeded expectations by about $100 billion. This July, we're going to find out whether it happened again. I hope it does. I think it might, because we're growing this economy. When the economy grows, people pay taxes. And so the fundamental question is not whether or not we're going to have more revenues; the fundamental question is if we're going to have rational spending in order to balance this budget.

I told the United States Congress to get a $92.2 billion supplemental to my desk. It's money needed to fund our troops. It's money needed to help the people down there in—that we're affected by the hurricanes. It's

money to do important other measures. But if they bust the 92.2, I'm going to veto it. It's important for Washington to have fiscal sanity in order to balance this budget.

The fundamental question facing this country is, do we fear the future or do we intend to shape it? I intend to shape the future so America remains the economic leader in the world, which means we've got to have a good legal policy. I want to thank the Chamber for being on the leading edge opposing—and enabling me to sign meaningful tort reform. We don't need junk lawsuits running good people out of business. We don't need junk lawsuits running good doctors out of practice. What this country needs is a rational legal system that is fair and balanced. So I'm going to continue to work for tort reform in the Halls of Congress.

We need a health care system that takes care of the elderly and the poor, but also recognizes that the best health care system is one in which the decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats right here in Washington, DC.

We need energy policy that's wise. We got a problem in America: We're too dependent on oil from parts of the world where people may not necessarily like us. So I proposed an Advanced Energy Initiative, and I want to thank the Chamber for supporting me on helping this country diversify away from hydrocarbons.

Today I want to talk about immigration, because the Chamber of Commerce understands that in order for this country to be an economic leader, in order for this country to be a country that upholds our values, we've got to have an immigration system that is secure and orderly and fair.

For decades, this country has not been in control of its borders. Yet we have an obligation to the American people to secure our borders. That's a solemn obligation of the Federal Government. And as a result of not securing our borders, many who want to work in this economy have been able to sneak across.

This is an issue I'm familiar with, since I was the Governor of Texas. You got to understand, there are people in our neighborhood who are desperate to put food on the table for their families. And if they, say, make $7 in America versus 50 cents where they live, and they want to support their families, guess what? They're going to try to sneak across the border. And many have been able to do so. And that illegal immigration has put pressure on our schools and hospitals; it's strained State and local budgets; and in some instances, bring crime to our neighborhood.

Yet we have got to remember that the vast majority of illegal immigrants are decent people. They're hardworking people. They're people who love their families, people of faith, and people who lead responsible lives. They're part of American life, and they are vital to our economy, and yet they're beyond the reach and protection of American law.

This Nation is a nation of laws. And we're going to enforce our laws. That's what the American people expect. But we're also a nation of immigrants. And we must uphold that tradition, which has strengthened this Nation in so many ways. These aren't contradictory goals. America can be a lawful society and America can be a welcoming society at the same time.

Congress is moving forward on immigration reform. The House started this debate by passing a bill that focuses on border security and interior enforcement. Then the Senate had its debate, and it passed a comprehensive bill that also includes a temporary-worker program and a plan to resolve the status of illegal immigrants who are already in this country. And now the two versions must be worked out in a conference committee.

The House and Senate bills will require effort and compromise on both sides. It's a difficult task, yet the difficulty of this task is no excuse for avoiding it. The American people expect us to meet our responsibility and deliver immigration reform that fixes the problems in the current system, that upholds our ideals and provides a fair and practical way forward.

The United States Congress needs to pass a comprehensive bill, one that will accomplish five objectives. First, a comprehensive reform bill must help us secure our borders.

The border should be open to trade and lawful immigration and shut to illegal immigrants as well as criminals, drug dealers, and terrorists.

Since I became President, we've increased funding for border security by 66 percent. We've expanded the Border Patrol from about 9,000 to 12,000 agents. As I told the folks down there, David, in Yuma, I am proud of the Border Patrol, and so should the American people. Do you realize that over the past 5 years, the men and women of the Border Patrol, working under incredibly difficult circumstances, have apprehended and sent home about 6 million people entering this county illegally. There's some people working hard down there on our behalf.

Despite the progress, despite the fact that they've turned back 6 million people in 5 years, we don't have full control of this border. And I'm determined to change that. I called on Congress to provide funding for dramatic improvements in manpower and technology on the border. And so by the end of 2008, we'll increase the number of Border Patrol agents by an additional 6,000. In other words, we will have doubled the size of the Border Patrol during my Presidency.

That's not going to be enough to do our job of securing the border. That's what you've got to understand. And so these Border Patrol agents need help. And the best way to help the Border Patrol is to construct high-tech fences in urban areas, urban corridors, to build patrol roads and barriers in rural areas. We're going to create a virtual fence that employs motion detectors and infrared cameras and unmanned aerial vehicles to detect and prevent illegal crossings. What I'm telling you is that we're going to have a border that is smart and secure.

And the best way to do that is to have Border Patrol agents, and then give them the most advanced technology so they can do their job. Training thousands of new Border Patrol agents and deploying the most advanced technology is going to take time. Yet the need to secure this border is urgent. And so I'm acting. This month, National Guard units will deploy to the border to set up headquarters that will help coordinate Guard operations that will support the Border Patrol. In other words, we'll be training 6,000 additional agents, but in the meantime, I'm going to send 6,000 National Guard down there. These forces are the first of 6,000 members that are going to assist the Border Patrol. They're going to operate surveillance systems and analyze intelligence, and install fences and vehicle barriers, and build patrol roads, and provide training. In other words, they're going to be a complement to the Border Patrol.

The Guard units will not be involved in direct law enforcement activities. That's the job of the Border Patrol. The United States is not going to militarize our border. What we're going to do is support those who we hire to do the job of enforcing the border.

As new Border Patrol agents and technologies come on line, the Guard forces are going to be reduced. The Federal Government is working to conclude formal agreements with California and Arizona and New Mexico and Texas that will define the roles and responsibilities of National Guard units deploying to the southern border. We're going to work closely with the Governors of those States to secure this border. Also in touch with the chief of the National Guard Bureau, General Blum, to make sure that we get those 6,000 Guard down there to help the Border Patrol do their job.

I also recognize the role of local and State enforcement authorities to help David and his people do the job. And so we'll increase Federal funding for State and local authorities assisting our Border Patrol on targeted enforcement missions; as well, we're going to give specialized training to certain State and local folks so they can complement the Border Patrol.

One of the problems we have down there is, we got people working hard to find people, and in some instances, they apprehend somebody; then they head right into our society. That's frustrating for the Border Patrol agents. We got people working long, long hours down there, and they catch somebody sneaking into our country, and they say, "Hey, go over here to this legal proceeding, and since the courts are full, just check back with us in 45 days." The problem is, a lot of people who want to put food on the table

or want to do other things don't check back. That's a program that needs to end.

See, most of the people we catch at the border trying to enter illegally are Mexicans, and 85 percent of them are sent right back home within 24 hours. But the real problem we've had is when we catch illegal immigrants from other countries trying to come in. It's easy to send people back into Mexico; it's hard to send somebody to a country south of Mexico, for example.

One of the problems we've had, is, we didn't have enough detention space. So we've got the Border Patrol agents working hard; they catch somebody from a country other than Mexico coming into our country, and there's no place to put them. And so part of our strategy is to end catch-and-release by expanding the number of beds in detention facilities along the border. We've added some, and we're going to add more. We're going to add enough to be able to end catch-and-release.

We've also expedited the legal process to cut the average deportation time. I've been in touch, as has my administration, with foreign Governments, where we tell them, "You got to take your citizens back. When we catch one of your citizens coming in, you have an obligation to take that person back into your society." We've ended catch-and-release for illegal immigrants from the key Central American countries; now Congress needs to provide additional funding and legal authority so we can end catch-and-release at the southern border once and for all.

The strategy is this: We're going to enforce our border. When we catch you, we're going to send you home—so that the message is very clear, and that is, you're going to be sent home if we catch you, illegally, which means don't try to come in in the first place, illegally.

Second, in order to have a comprehensive reform bill, we have to have a temporary-worker program. Part of securing this border is a temporary-worker program. You see, there are people who will do anything to come into this country to work. That's what you got to understand. People are motivated by a desire, in many cases—in most cases, to support the family. I used to tell people in Texas, family values do not stop at the Rio Grande. And so, therefore, it shouldn't surprise you when people hike across the hot desert to—and risking their lives to come and work or are willing to get stuffed in the back of an 18-wheeler to come and do a job others won't do here in America.

The fact that people are willing to take those risks puts enormous pressure on our border, so much pressure that walls and patrols aren't going to stop it. In other words, you got people saying, "I'll do anything to come and work; just give me a chance." And we can put up—we can have a lot of patrols and a lot of walls, and it's not going to stop that flow. It will put a dent in it. But if the job is to secure this border, it seems like to me, we got to stop the number of people who are trying to sneak across in the first place. And the best way to do that is to make a temporary-worker program a part of immigration reform. Program would create a legal path for foreign workers to enter this country in an orderly way for a limited period of time. It would match willing foreign workers with willing American employers for jobs Americans are not doing.

Every worker who applies for the program would be required to pass a criminal background check. Temporary workers must return to their homes at the conclusion of their stay. A temporary-worker program would meet the legitimate needs of American employers, and it would give an honest immigrant a chance to contribute to our economy and, at the same time, provide for their families. A temporary-worker program would reduce the appeal of human smugglers and make it less likely people would have to risk their lives to cross this border. A temporary-worker program would ease the financial burden on State and local Governments by replacing illegal workers with lawful taxpayers. And above all, the temporary-worker program would add to the security of this country by making certain we know who is coming into this country and why they're here.

Third, a comprehensive reform bill must hold employers to account for the workers they hire. It is against the law to hire someone who is in this country illegally. Those are the laws of the United States of America, and they must be upheld.

To ensure our laws are enforced, we've increased funding for immigration enforcement inside this country by 42 percent since I took office. Last year, I signed a bill that doubled Federal resources for worksite enforcement. We've launched law enforcement task forces in 11 major cities to dismantle criminal rings that are producing fake documents. Not only do we have a whole industry that's evolved to smuggle people in—you ever hear of the word *coyote*, these are these folks that are willing to use human life as a commodity, to make money off of somebody. We've also got document forgers too. See, there's a whole industry that's sprung up as a result of enforcement—an immigration system that isn't working. And so we're out to bust those document forgers.

Most American businesses want to abide by the law. Many are unable to determine whether their workers are legal, however, because of this document fraud. Today, there's an industry that's making these IDs and fraudulent Social Security numbers. See, American employers who check these documents often discover that the names of their workers don't match their Social Security numbers. So then we've got people trying to verify, doing what they're expected to do under the law. But when this happens, the employer receives a "no match" letter from the Social Security Administration, yet under current law, the immigration enforcement agents at the Department of Homeland Security are not informed of these mismatches. The system isn't working.

See, we need to address problems and ensure that agents can enforce the law. Businessowners should not have to act as detectives to verify the legal status of their workers. And so the Federal Government has the responsibility to ensure that businesses have a clear and reliable way to check work documents. We have that responsibility. If we expect people to adhere to the law that you're not supposed to hire somebody illegally, we have a responsibility here in Washington, DC, to help you verify documents.

One thing we've done is, we've launched what's called Basic Pilot. Basic Pilot is a voluntary online verification system that allows employers to confirm the eligibility of new hires by checking the information they provide against Federal databases. If there's a mismatch, the applicant then has 8 working days to contest the finding. By giving employers a quick and practical way to verify Social Security numbers, Basic Pilot gives employers confidence that their workers are legal, improves the accuracy of wage and tax reporting, and helps ensure that those who obey our laws are not undercut by illegal workers.

Basic Pilot, just a while ago, was only available in six States; now it's nationwide. As I told you, the program is optional. And the truth of the matter is, most employers do not participate. Now, the House and the Senate immigration bills would require employers to use Basic Pilot. I think this is sensible. I think if we want to enforce our laws, people ought to be required to check to see whether or not names and numbers match. Homeland Security, by the way, in order for it to work, needs more money to make sure that the program is up and running.

Now, the other thing we need to do besides good verification procedures is to develop a new identification card for every legal foreign worker. The card should be tamper-proof. It ought to use biometric technology such as digital fingerprints. We got the technology to do this. It makes sense to have somebody who's going to be here legally, working on a temporary basis, to have a card that will allow American employers to know that the foreign job applicant is who he or she says she is, or he is. A tamper-proof card is going to be a vital tool to enforce the law, and it's got to be a part of a comprehensive immigration reform package.

Improving enforcement for immigration laws also requires stiffening the penalties for those violating the laws. Today, the fine for a business that fails to check an employee's ID can be as low as $100. You might as well pay a speeding ticket. A penalty for knowingly hiring an illegal immigrant can be as low as $250 and can't exceed $2,000. These low penalties, frankly, provide little incentive for dishonest businesses to obey the law. And so we're going to increase the penalties. If we want to be smart about worksite enforcement, we got to say to somebody who's breaking the law, "There's going to be a cost,

and it's more than $250." And so the fines need to be larger.

The whole point and purpose of what I've just described to you is to assure the American people that we've got a plan in place that says to the employers, this is going to help you determine whether or not who you're hiring should be here in the first place. Secondly, it's going to help get rid of document fraud. I repeat, we don't want our employers becoming document experts. That's not their—they're trying to get a job done.

And thirdly, we want to make sure that when we catch you, there's a consequence. You know, most American businesses are law-abiding. They really do want to uphold the law. They understand there's a responsibility to be an American, and that is, to uphold the laws of the land. And yet we've got to recognize there are some unscrupulous folks who want to take advantage of low-cost labor. Illegal workers can be paid less than the market rate, see. And guess what? When you're illegal and you're worried about being detected, you can be exploited. And that's not the American way. We don't like people living in the shadows of our society. We're a nation of the rule of law, and we want people to be treated with respect. And so people who—businesses that knowingly employ illegal workers undermine this law and undermine the spirit of America. And we're not going to tolerate it in this country.

Fourthly, a comprehensive reform bill has got to address the reality that millions of illegal immigrants are here already. Now, these folks should not be given an automatic path to citizenship. That is called amnesty. I oppose amnesty. I opposed amnesty because it would be unfair to those people who are here lawfully, and I oppose amnesty because it would invite further waves of illegal immigrants.

One of the difficult tasks before the House and the Senate is deciding how American law will treat the illegal immigrants now in our country. Some Members of Congress argue that no one who came to this country illegally should be allowed to continue living and working in our country and that any plan that allows them to stay equals amnesty, no matter how many conditions we impose. Listen, I appreciate the Members are acting on deeply felt principles; I understand that. Yet I also believe that the approach they suggest is wrong and unrealistic. There's a rational middle ground between granting an automatic path to citizenship for every illegal immigrant and a program that requires every illegal immigrant to leave. The middle ground recognizes there are differences between an illegal immigrant who crossed the border recently, and someone who has worked here for many years who's got a home, a family, and a clean record.

My position is clear: I believe that illegal immigrants who have roots in our country and who want to stay should have to pay a meaningful penalty for breaking the law, to pay their taxes, to learn English, and to work in a job for a number of years. People who meet these conditions should be eventually permitted to apply for citizenship like other foreign workers. But approval would not be automatic. They would have to wait in line behind those who played by the rules and followed the law. This isn't amnesty. It is a practical and reasonable way for those who have broken the law to pay their debt to society and demonstrate the character that makes a good citizen.

Fifth, a comprehensive bill must honor the great American tradition of the melting pot, which has made us one Nation out of many peoples. This debate is an interesting debate. It gets quite emotional, and sometimes, an emotion—in all the emotions, we forget we are a land of immigrants. Success of this country has depended and will depend upon helping newcomers assimilate into our society, and help folks embrace our common identity as Americans.

Americans are bound together by our shared ideals: an appreciation of our history; respect for the flag we fly; and an ability to speak and write the English language. As businessowners and community leaders, you know that English is the key to unlocking the opportunity of America. See, English allows a newcomer to go from picking crops to opening a grocery store. English allows a newcomer from sweeping an office floor to running that office. English allows someone to go from a low-paying job to a diploma, a career, and homeownership. When immigrants assimilate and advance in our society,

they realize their dreams. And as they do, they renew our spirit, and they add to the unity of our country.

As the Chamber, you appreciate the great contributions immigrants have made to America's freedom and prosperity, and you know their importance for the future of this Nation. And so you're helping this country reach consensus by conducting the debate on immigration in a reasoned and respectful tone. And I appreciate that a lot.

I urge our fellow citizens to understand that harsh language, unnecessary politics, sends the wrong message about who we are as a nation. I appreciate the fact you're working for an immigration bill that is comprehensive. That makes a lot of sense, because you know that all the elements of this problem must be addressed together or none of them will be solved at all.

Throughout our long history, America has prospered because we welcome people who abided by our laws and worked hard and raised their families and trusted in the Almighty. I believe we must be guided by that history as we reform our immigration system. I trust in our country's genius for making us all Americans, one Nation under God. And I'm confident that the United States Congress will do its duty and pass an immigration bill that secures our borders, strengthens our laws, and upholds the promise of the United States of America.

May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:50 a.m. at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff, who introduced him; Thomas J. Donohue, president and chief executive officer, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; and Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum, chief, National Guard Bureau. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters

June 1, 2006

The President. I want to thank the members of my Cabinet who came today. We had a really good discussion about a variety of important issues. We talked about the war against terror, and I reminded our Cabinet Secretaries that we all have a responsibility to help us win this war, including sending members of our administration to Iraq, to help this new democracy succeed.

We talked about the hurricane season that's upon us, and the work we're doing to help local governments and State governments prepare for the hurricane season.

I talked about the immigration issue. I talked about how strongly I feel for this country to have comprehensive immigration reform.

And then we heard from Secretary Snow about the strength of this economy and what we intend to do to keep it strong. One thing we intend to do is to continue to work with the United States Congress to make sure the tax cuts we passed are permanent. It turns out our progrowth economic policies have worked, and the best way to make sure that the recovery we have is sustainable is to keep those taxes low. The Secretary briefed us on the fact that revenues coming into our Treasury look very robust. The best way to balance the budget is to keep progrowth economic policies in place, and at the same time, work with our Cabinet Secretaries to keep spending down.

And so I'm very pleased with the progress on our economy, and I want to, again, thank my Cabinet Secretaries for being here.

And now I'll answer a couple of questions. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

Iran

Q. Thank you, sir. Do you have either China or Russia on board with Iran?

The President. Yesterday, Secretary Rice, at my instructions, said to the world that we want to solve the problem of the Iranian nuclear issue diplomatically. And we made it very clear publicly that we're willing to come to the table, so long as the Iranians verifiably suspend their program. In other words, we said to the Iranians, the United States of America wants to work with our partners to solve the problem.

I spoke to the President of Russia and explained my position clearly to him, and that is, the choice is up to the Iranians whether or not they're going to listen to the world