

learn from the foundations that care about our Park System how best to spend this money, how best to honor the centennial that we'll be celebrating in 2016. In other words, we really do want individuals to feel that they own a piece of this strategy. After all, the parks do belong to the people.

We believe that we've got a fantastic chance to enhance habitats in the Park System. Laura, for example, really cares about the bird population of the country, and the Park System has a fantastic—as do I, by the way, not as much as you do. [*Laughter*] But it's a chance to make sure our Park System enhances bird migratory patterns, for example.

We want to spend time making sure that we enhance educational opportunities in our Park System through new technologies. The iPod is hip amongst some of the younger citizens here in the country, people we want to encourage to come to the parks, so we need to make sure that we can combine that technology with educational opportunities, as somebody goes walking through our parks. We want to talk about—and we will continue to talk about expanding park accessibility through a junior ranger program that Laura has been very much involved with.

We're going to hire 3,000 seasonal park rangers, and that's going to make the job of the folks who, for example, run the Shenandoah Park much easier, and more importantly, make the customer service—in other words, the citizen service—richer for somebody who comes and uses our parks.

We want to upgrade our facilities and historic buildings. We're going to add and—ask people in their different Park Systems to become recruiters of volunteers so that more and more people get involved with this fantastic national resource of ours.

So, Mr. Secretary, I want to thank you very much for the hard work you've done leading up to the budget proposal we've made. I want to thank you in advance for the hard work you're going to do, to travel our country to get input from our fellow citizens. And I thank all the people in our country who care about our Park System for your direct involvement and your sincere concerns about making sure the Park System is modern and restored and rehabilitated.

I urge our fellow citizens to use the parks. I urge you to bring your families to the parks. I think you'll find that the people who work in our Park System are genuinely decent, kind people who want you to enjoy the great beauty of the National Park System.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:10 p.m. in the Harry F. Byrd, Sr., Visitor Center.

Remarks Following a Briefing at the Department of Homeland Security

February 8, 2007

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for the hospitality. I appreciate you inviting me over to hear what has been a substantive briefing by your different operating entities.

First of all, I'm very proud of the hard work of the men and women of the Homeland Security Department. This vital Department is actively engaged in the war on terror. We are still a nation at risk. Part of our strategy, of course, is to stay on the offense against terrorists who would do us harm. In other words, it is important to defeat them overseas so we never have to face them here. Nevertheless, we recognize that we've got to be fully prepared here at the homeland.

Part of that preparation requires a robust budget. And we submitted the budget; you testified on the budget. It's about an 8-percent increase in the budgets of the Homeland Security Department.

This Department works to secure our borders. And I appreciate very much, Ralph, you and your Department's hard work of doing a difficult job, and that is doing what the American people expect, and that is to have secure borders. But we're making good progress. We're modernizing a border that needed to be modernized, whether it be through fencing or the different types of high-tech investments.

I firmly believe that in order for your Border Patrol agents to be able to do their job, we need a guest-worker program, so that people don't have to sneak in our country, and therefore, we can really enable your good folks to be able to focus on terrorism, drug runners, gun runners.

I appreciate so very much the fact that we've got a wise strategy to effect the security of our ports, cargo. We've got a lot of good people working hard overseas. In other words, we're inspecting cargo before it leaves a port—a foreign port—so that the first line of defense is away from our shores or away from our ports. And we've got a lot of good people working hard to achieve that.

I appreciate so very much the effort of TSA. You've got a hard job. It's a job that really was a response to 9/11, and that is, we don't want people getting on our airplanes that will terrorize our fellow citizens again. And I fully recognize that there are thousands of hard-working people that are trying to do their best to, on the one hand, accommodate our fellow citizens as they travel—on the other hand, protect our country from attack.

We also talked about the need to have effective response if there is a emergency, if there is a catastrophe. And one Agency that has been under fire and that needed to be reorganized was FEMA, and I asked David Paulison to do just that. We took the lessons learned from Katrina and applied it to this vital Agency. And this Agency was recently tested through the tornadoes there in central Florida. And I want to thank you, Dave, and your team for a quick response to help the poor citizens who were affected by that natural disaster.

The Department of Homeland Security was initially melded together by organizations that tended to be stovepiped—independently run organizations that we felt needed to be brought under the central planning, the central organizing principle of a single department.

The organization of such a vast enterprise has been difficult and complicated. Nevertheless, there is noticeable and substantial and measurable progress. And I appreciate all the hard-working folks for putting together an institute, part of our Government, all aiming to protect the American people.

And so, Secretary, thank you for the invitation. I appreciate the hard work of the people of this Department. I oftentimes say to the American people that you can go about your business, you can run your enterprises, you can send your children to school knowing full well that there are thousands of our fellow citizens who work every day, 24 hours, to help you by protecting this homeland. And this is where it all starts. And I thank you for your hard work.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:20 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to W. Ralph Basham, Commissioner, Customs and Border Protection.

Statement on Senate Confirmation of National Security Leaders

February 8, 2007

I am pleased that the Senate, with strong bipartisan support, has confirmed several key members of my national security team. America will benefit from the leadership of Mike McConnell as Director of National Intelligence, General George Casey as Chief of Staff of the United States Army, and Admiral William Fallon as commander of U.S. Central Command.

Mike McConnell is an experienced and proven leader who will continue implementing historic reforms of America's intelligence community designed to ensure we receive timely, accurate information on threats to our country. General Casey's extensive knowledge of our military challenges and capabilities will enable him to lead our soldiers in successful pursuit of their mission. Admiral Fallon is an innovative thinker who will skillfully guide our military commanders as we confront our enemies in the war on terror.

I look forward to working with each of these strong leaders in combating terrorism and protecting the American people.