

terrorists. We've uncovered large caches of weapons and destroyed two major car bomb factories that were located on the outskirts of Baghdad.

I want to stress that this operation is still in the early stages; it's still in the beginning stages. Fewer than half of the troop reinforcements we are sending have arrived in Baghdad. The new strategy will need more time to take effect. And there will be good days, and there will be bad days ahead as it—as the security plan unfolds.

As we help the Iraqis secure their capital, their leaders are also beginning to meet the benchmarks they have laid out for political reconciliation. Last month, Iraq's Council of Ministers approved a law that would share oil revenues among Iraqi people. The Iraqi legislature passed a \$41 billion budget that includes \$10 billion for reconstruction and capital improvements. And last week, Prime Minister Maliki visited Ramadi, a city in the Sunni heartland, to reach out to local Sunni tribal leaders.

There's been good progress. There's a lot more work to be done. And Iraq's leaders must continue to work to meet the benchmarks they have set forward.

As Iraqis work to keep their commitments, we have important commitments of our own. Members of Congress are now considering an emergency war spending bill. They have a responsibility to ensure that this bill provides the funds and the flexibility that our troops need to accomplish their mission. They have a responsibility to pass a clean bill that does not use funding for our troops as leverage to get special interest spending for their districts. And they have a responsibility to get this bill to my desk, without strings and without delay.

It can be tempting to look at the challenges in Iraq and conclude our best option is to pack up and go home. That may be satisfying in the short run, but I believe the consequences for American security would be devastating. If American forces were to step back from Baghdad before it is more secure, a contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country. In time, this violence could engulf the region. The terrorists could emerge from the chaos with a safe haven in Iraq to replace the one they had in Afghani-

stan, which they used to plan the attacks of September the 11th, 2001. For the safety of the American people, we cannot allow this to happen.

Prevailing in Iraq is not going to be easy. General Petraeus says that the environment in Iraq is the most challenging that he has seen in his more than 32 years of service. He also says that he has been impressed by the professionalism and the skill and determination of our men and women in uniform. He sees in our troops, quote, "a true will to win and a sincere desire to help our Iraqi partners achieve success."

Four years after this war began, the fight is difficult, but it can be won. It will be won if we have the courage and resolve to see it through. I'm grateful to our service men and women for all they've done and for the honor they've brought to their uniform and their country. I'm grateful to our military families and for all the sacrifices they have made for our country. We also hold in our hearts the good men and women who've given their lives in this struggle. We pray for the loved ones they have left behind.

The United States military is the most capable and courageous fighting force in the world. And whatever our differences in Washington, our troops and their families deserve the appreciation and the support of our entire Nation.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Honoring the 2006 NCAA Football Champion University of Florida Gators

March 19, 2007

Please be seated. This isn't exactly "The Swamp." [Laughter] This weekend, it would have been "The Ice Rink." Today it is the White House that welcomes the National Champion Florida Gators.

So you might remember, one of my family members held elected office in Florida. Yes, that was—[*applause*—I hope he's found work. [*Laughter*] And so I said, "You know, I had the privilege of welcoming the Texas Longhorns to the White House." He said, "One of these days, you're going to be welcoming a Florida team." And he's right. One year after the Longhorns came, here comes the mighty Gators. And we welcome you, and we're glad you're here.

So you might call it Gator country. This is the 100th anniversary of college football at the University of Florida. It's a pretty fine way to celebrate the 100th year.

I want to thank Coach Urban Meyer and Shelley for joining us. I appreciate Dr. Machen, the president of the University of Florida, and his wife, Chris. Manny Fernandez, thanks for coming—he's a chairman. Members of the Boards of Trustees, we're glad you all are here. Thank you for serving.

Carolyn Roberts, who is the chair of the board of governors, is with us. I presume the athletic director is here. If not, he's probably done—it's amazing, isn't it—so, like, the basketball team and now the football team. Like, what are you doing down there? [*Laughter*] Yes, Gatorade. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the members of my administration who are here, but I particularly want to thank the Members of Congress, starting with Senator Bill Nelson. Thank you for coming, Senator. Appreciate you being here. Adam Putnam—all he talks about is Gator football. Cliff Stearns—appreciate you being here, Cliff. Corrine Brown, thank you for coming. John Mica, Ander Crenshaw, Jeff Miller, and Gus Bilirakis, thank you all for joining us. Thanks for serving.

So the Florida Gators had the Nation's toughest schedule, and instead of wearing them down, it made them tougher; instead of, like, discouraging them that they got the bad deal when it came to the schedule, all that did was cause them to play harder. And it put them in pretty good stead going into the championship game. Like, you might remember, all the pregame polls said you couldn't win. [*Laughter*] So much for polls.

I don't know how you felt when the guy ran the kickoff back—looked like a rough

start—but didn't let you—it get you down. And you showed an unbelievable offense and a swarming defense. And we really congratulate you; you're a well-coached team of highly disciplined athletes.

I particularly like the story of the two quarterbacks, Chris Leak and Tim Tebow. First of all—[*applause*]. Where's Tebow? There he is. It's like the guy is trying to bring the single wing back, you know? [*Laughter*] And so Tebow takes a look at Florida and sees the fact that they've got a 4-year starter, but loves the school more than anything else and helps Chris Leak be a better quarterback. That's what we call teammates, people playing together for the common good. And we thank you both for the leadership you've shown. Of course, you wouldn't be half the players that you are without the huge offensive line and the receivers and backs you've got behind you; I know you would say that.

I appreciate your defense. I clearly remember linebacker Earl Everett. I've seen that face before. [*Laughter*] So has the whole country. You might remember, Everett lost his headgear. He didn't lose his head—[*laughter*]—but he lost his headgear; he went on to make a great tackle in a key moment. That's called tough defense, hard-nosed defense.

Where's Ray McDonald? Can I say what Ray McDonald said? Can I quote you, Ray? Okay, I will. [*Laughter*] Here's what he said: "We don't really believe in destiny. We believe when your number is called, you make the play." What he's saying is, is that there's no chance—"We win because we do what we're coached to do, and we're good at it." And I appreciate the spirit, and I appreciate the caliber of people on this team.

It didn't take Urban Meyer long. Like, the guy shows up; the next thing he knows, he's at the White House. [*Laughter*] Whoever hired him, good choice. He's an amazing coach, with a good coaching staff. And so I congratulate not only the players, but I congratulate the coaching staff. I congratulate all those who pick up the towels and make the program run. I thank those who help sell the tickets and the unsung heroes of any athletic program. If you're here, we welcome you to the White House, and we appreciate what you've done for the national champs.

I do want to say another thing about this program, Mr. President. I was very pleased to see that the graduation success rate of Florida's athletic programs are 15 percent higher than the national average. After all, you are representing a great university. And I appreciate the fact that people can be student athletes. I appreciate it because at some point in time, you're not going to be an athlete. At some point in time, you're going to have to use the skills you learned as a student to be a constructive citizen of the United States. And so, Coach, I appreciate the fact that you work hard with these players to make sure that they take advantage of this fantastic opportunity, and that is to be a student at the University of Florida.

I also appreciate the spirit of giving that's a part of this football program. I don't know if you know this or not, but Coach Meyer hosts the annual Urban Meyer Golf Scramble for Kids. This year, the event raised a record \$300,000, all aiming at helping youth organizations buy equipment, all aiming at touching a soul, trying to make somebody's life better.

Coach, I appreciate the example you set, and I also appreciate the fact that 32 of your football players volunteered for community organizations; 32 souls said, "I'm more than a football player; I'm a leader when it comes to helping the community in which I live."

Jemalle Cornelius just so happens to be captain. Here's what he said, he said, "If everyone took a small leadership role in whatever it is they do, we can help eliminate some of the problems that are in our society." I love the spirit. I love the fact that champions understand you've got to be a champ on the field as well as a champ off the field. And I believe one of the reasons this program is successful is because not only you're good football players, but you're good people.

And I want to say one other thing about—now that I've got the mike—[laughter]—I want to say something at Cam Brewer. Where's Cam? There he is, right there—United States marine. I appreciate the fact

that you wore the uniform of the United States of America. I appreciate the fact that you put self—something larger than yourself as an important part of your life. It's a good example, isn't it? And now I appreciate the fact that you've taken advantage of the educational opportunities offered to those who have worn the uniform and gotten yourself an education at a fine university.

Again, I want to welcome you all to the White House. It's an honor to welcome you here. More importantly, it's an honor to welcome the National Football Champion Florida Gators.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:03 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; J. Bernard Machen, president, Manny A. Fernandez, chairman of the board of trustees, and Jeremy N. Foley, athletic director, University of Florida; Carolyn K. Roberts, chairman of the board of governors, State University System of Florida; and Ray McDonald, defensive end, and Jemalle Cornelius and Cam Brewer, wide receivers, University of Florida football team.

Statement on the Death of Ray Nasher

March 19, 2007

Ray Nasher was a brilliant businessman, diplomat, and philanthropist. Through his service at the United Nations, he represented the best of his country and his home State of Texas. Through his patronage of the arts, he shared his magnificent collection of modern and contemporary sculpture in countless office spaces and the world-class museums he created in Dallas and at Duke University. Ray served the last three Presidents as a member of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities and served his country by giving all Americans greater access to the arts. Laura and I send our deepest condolences to Ray Nasher's family and friends.