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the same effect as if these amendments had not been prescribed.

George W. Bush

The White House,
April 18, 2007.

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Remarks at Tippecanoe High School and a Question-and-Answer Session in Tipp City, Ohio

April 19, 2007

The President. Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you. Sit down. Thanks for coming. I'm honored you're here. Steve, thank you for the invitation. It's a real pleasure to be with you. What I thought I would do is share some thoughts with you about a couple of subjects, primarily Iraq, and then I'd like to answer some of your questions, on any topic that you'd like to ask me about.

Before I do, I do want to thank Steve and the chamber of commerce for giving me a chance to dialog with you and, hopefully, giving the students here at this high school a chance to hear from the President firsthand. I know there are students who will be listening. My mission is to not only share with you what's on my mind and why I have made some of the decisions I have made, but another mission is to convince you that serving the public—that public service is worthwhile; that you can go into politics or you can feed the hungry or you can serve in the military, and it's a fulfilling part of a person's life and a necessary part, in my judgment, of a country that is a complete country.

So I want to thank the high school folks. I want to thank Chuck Wray, the principal, for greeting me. I appreciated you letting me come to this center of learning. I particularly want to thank the teachers for teaching. There is no more noble profession than to be a teacher, and I'm honored to be in your midst.

I want to thank the mayor, George Lovett—George L. [*Laughter*] Thank you, George—George W. [*Laughter*]

I'm traveling today with the leader in the House for the Republican Party, John Boehner. John is a—[*applause*]—I've found him to be a good, solid, honest person. I know he is providing strong leadership in the House of Representatives. And I know he cares a lot about this district. I've seen John work issues. I've heard him speak in depth about what he believes. And I appreciate his leadership, and I appreciate him joining me today.

I wish I was traveling here with Laura. The best thing about my family is my wife. She is a great First Lady. I know that sounds not very objective, but that's how I feel. And she's also patient. Putting up with me requires a lot of patience. But she sends her best; she's in New Orleans today.

And I will tell you, one reason—this may sound counterintuitive, but a good marriage is really good after serving together in Washington, DC. It's been an amazing experience to be a husband and then a dad as President of the United States. And I emphasize, that is the priority for me as the President. It's my faith, my family, and my country. And I am pleased to report that our family is doing great, particularly since my wife is such a fantastic person. And she sends her very best.

Let me say something about Virginia Tech, and I want to first thank Steve for the moment of silence. You know, it's a—there is—the President spends time at disasters. It's—part of the job of the Presidency is to help people heal from hurt. And the amazing thing is, though, when you go down to a scene like Virginia Tech, you can't help but be buoyed by the spirit, that out of the tragedy comes a certain sense of resolve.

One of the things I try to assure the families and the students and the faculty of that fine university was that there are a lot of people around our country who are praying for them. It's interesting, here in Tipp City, the first thing that happened was a moment of silence, a moment of prayer, to provide—at least my prayer was, please comfort and strengthen those whose lives were affected by this horrible incident. It really speaks to

the strength of this country, doesn't it, that total strangers here in Ohio are willing to hold up people in Virginia in prayer, and I thank you for that. And my message to the folks who still hurt in—at Virginia Tech is that a lot of people care about you, and a lot of people think about you, a lot of people grieve with you, and a lot of people hope you find sustenance in a power higher than yourself, and a lot of us believe you will.

My job is a job to make decisions. I'm a decision—if the job description were, what do you do, it's decisionmaker. And I make a lot of big ones, and I make a lot of little ones. Interestingly enough, the first decision I made happened right before I got sworn in as President. I was at the Blair House, which is across the street from the White House, getting ready to give my Inaugural Address. And the phone rang, and the head usher at the White House said, "President-elect Bush." I said, "Yes." He said, "What color rug do you want in the Oval Office?" [*Laughter*] I said, this is going to be a decisionmaking experience. [*Laughter*]

The first lesson about decisionmaking is, if you're short on a subject, ask for help. So if you're a student listening and you're not very good at math, ask for help. Don't be afraid to admit that you need help when it comes to life. I wasn't afraid to admit I wasn't sure how to design a rug, so I called Laura. [*Laughter*] I said, "They've asked me to design a rug in the Oval Office. I don't know anything about rug designing; will you help me?" She said, "Of course." But I said, "I want it to say something"—the President has got to be a strategic thinker—and I said to her, "Make sure the rug says, optimistic person comes to work." [*Laughter*] Because you can't make decisions unless you're optimistic that the decisions you make will lead to a better tomorrow. And so if you were to come in the Oval Office, what you would see is this fantastic rug that looks like the sun. And it just sets the tone for the Oval Office.

I share that with you because I make a lot of decisions, and I'm optimistic that the decisions I have made will yield a better tomorrow. The hardest decision you make is whether or not to commit troops into combat—people like this young man, people who've served our country with great distinction, people who volunteered to say, "I want to serve the United States." The hardest decision a President makes is to ask those men and women to go into harm's way.

My decisionmaking was deeply affected by the attack of September the 11th, 2001. It was a moment that defined a dangerous world to me with absolute clarity. I realized then that this country was no longer invulnerable to attack from what may be happening overseas.

I realized that there is an enemy of the United States that is active and is lethal. At further study of that enemy, I realized that they share an ideology, that these weren't—that the—and when you really think about it, the September the 11th attack was not the first attack. There was a 1993 World Trade Center attack; there was attacks on our Embassies in East Africa; there was an attack on the USS *Cole*; there have been other attacks on U.S. citizens. And that these attacks were instigated and carried out by cold-blooded killers who have a belief system. They are threatened by free societies. They can't stand the thought of freedom being the prevailing attitude in the world because their view is, if you don't believe in what I believe in, you probably shouldn't be around.

This enemy is smart, capable, and unpredictable. They have defined a war on the United States, and I believe we're at war. I believe the attack on America made it clear that we're at war. I wish that wasn't the case. Nobody ought to ever hope to be a war President or a Presidency—a President during war. But that's how I see the world. And I made a vow that I would do everything I could, and work with Members of Congress to do everything they could, to protect the United States. It is the most solemn duty of our country, is to protect our country from harm.

A lesson learned was that—at least in my opinion—that in order to protect us, we must aggressively pursue the enemy and defeat them elsewhere so we don't have to face them here. In other words, if what happens overseas matters to the United States, therefore, the best way to protect us is to deal with threats overseas. In other words, we just can't let a threat idle; we can't hope that a

threat doesn't come home to hurt us. A lesson of that terrible day was, threats overseas can come home to hurt us. And so the fundamental question—and this has led to constructive debate—it's, what do you do about it?

I've chosen a path that says, we will go overseas and defeat them there. I also know full well that it's important for us if we're facing an ideology, if we're facing ideologues, if we're confronting people who believe something, that we have got to defeat their belief system with a better belief system. Forms of government matter, in my opinion. It matters how—the nature of the government in which people live. And therefore, I have put as part of our foreign policy not only an aggressive plan to find extremists and radicals and bring them to justice before they hurt us but also to help people live in liberty—free societies as the great alternative to people living under a tyrant, for example.

And so my decisionmaking was based upon those principles. And now we're involved in a—I call it a global war against terror. You can call it a global war against extremists, a global war against radicals, a global war against people who want to hurt America; you can call it whatever you want, but it is a global effort. And by the way, the United States is not alone in this effort. We're helping lead an effort. And the major battlefield in this global war is Iraq, and I want to spend some time talking about Iraq.

Living under a tyrant must be just brutal, and living under the reign of Saddam Hussein was incredibly brutal. A lot of innocent people were killed; a lot of people were cowed by the state. There really wasn't much in terms of a civil structure that would enable people to have a kind of a form of a representative government. People were kept apart through violence, in many ways. People were pitted against each other. A lot of people were given favored treatment.

The decision to remove Saddam Hussein was a difficult decision, I think a necessary decision. If you want to talk about that later on, we can. And what has happened since then is that we are trying to help a young democracy survive in the heart of the Middle East and, at the same time, prevent our stated enemies from establishing safe haven from which to attack us again.

Now I say that—preventing our enemies from establishing a safe haven from which to attack us again—because that is their stated objective in Iraq. That's what Al Qaida says. Al Qaida is the same group of folks that attacked us on September the 11th. They have said their objective is to drive the United States out of Iraq in order to establish safe haven. And why would they need safe haven? They would need safe haven from which to plot and plan and train to attack again. They have an objective, and that is to spread their ideology throughout the Middle East. That is what they have stated. That's their objectives.

Our objective is to deny them safe haven, is to prevent Al Qaida from being able to do in Iraq that which they did in Afghanistan, which is where they trained thousands of young men to come and kill—to eventually kill innocent people.

Our objective also is to help a young democracy flourish in a part of the world that desperately needs liberty, in a part of the world where government—forms of government will provide hope so as eventually to discourage the type of mentality that says 19 kids should get on airplanes and kill 3,000 people.

And it's incredibly hard work, but I have come to the conclusion, obviously, that it's necessary work. It's necessary work for peace.

In 2005, the Iraqi people went to the polls; 12 million voted. I view that as a statement that says—by the way, I wasn't surprised that 12 million people, if given a chance to vote, voted. I was pleased, but I wasn't surprised. And the reason I wasn't surprised is because I believe in this principle: I believe liberty is universal. I don't believe freedom is just confined to America. I think there is a universal principle that all people desire and want and should be free, that it's not just an American ideal; it is universal.

I think back, for example, right after World War II—people might have argued after fighting the Japanese that they don't want to be free. They're the enemy; they killed a lot of people; they attacked the United States; why should we work to help them be

free? Except those people were—didn't quite understand, not only do people want to be free, that when free societies emerge, they're more likely to yield the peace.

And so it's a—this country began to evolve, and it started with elections. And it's easy to forget the elections because of all the violence. In 2006, I was convinced that we would be able to reposition our troops and have fewer troops in Iraq because the Iraqis want to take on the security themselves. This is a sovereign government. People got elected. They want to be—showing the people of Iraq that they can run their own Government. I don't know if you get that sense on your TV screens or not, but I certainly get that sense when I talk to the Prime Minister, with whom I speak quite frequently.

And yet they—and yet the enemy—and the enemy—when I say "enemy," these are enemies of free societies, primarily Al Qaida inspired—blew up the great religious shrine in '06, a year ago—all aiming to create a sense of sectarian violence, all aiming to exacerbate the religious tensions that sometimes were exacerbated under Saddam Hussein, all aiming at preventing this young democracy from succeeding. And they succeeded. The enemy succeeded in causing there to be sectarian strife. In other words, the Government wasn't ready to provide the security. People started taking matters into their own hands. "I'm going to protect myself, or I'm going to rely upon somebody else to protect me," they would say.

So I have a decision point to make, last fall. And the decision point was whether or not to either scale back or increase our presence in Iraq. And that was a difficult decision. It's difficult any time, as I told you, you put a soldier in harm's way. I understand the consequence of committing people into war. The interesting thing is, I'm the Commander in Chief of an incredibly amazing group of men and women who also understand that consequence and yet are willing to volunteer.

The question was, do we increase our—I call it reinforce; you can call it surge; there's all kind of words for it—or do we pull back? As you know, I made a decision to reinforce. And I did because I believe the Iraqis want to have a peaceful society. I believe Iraqi mothers want their children to grow up in peace, just like American mothers do. I think, if given a chance, that society can emerge into a free society. I felt strongly that if violence erupted, sectarian violence erupted in the capital, it would make it impossible to achieve the objective, and that is to help this free society. Listen, there are people—or let it emerge into a free society.

And the goal is a country that is stable enough for the Government to work, that can defend itself and serve as an ally in this war on terror, that won't be a safe haven, that will deny the extremists and the radicals. I happen to think there will be an additional dividend when we succeed. Remember the rug? I'm optimistic we can succeed. I wouldn't ask families to have their troops there if I didn't think, one, it was necessary, and two, we could succeed. I believe we're going to succeed, and I believe success will embolden other moderate people that said, they're going to reject extremists and radicals in their midst.

There's a good group of people in Washington, fair, decent, honorable people—and by the way, in this political discourse, we should never question anybody's patriotism if they don't happen to agree with the President. That's not the American way. The American way is, we ought to have a honest and open dialog. There are good people, patriotic people who didn't believe that additional troops would make that big a difference, and therefore, we should not increase but, in some cases, pull out, in some cases, pull back. Either case, having weighed the options, I didn't think it was viable, and I didn't think it would work.

A couple of points I want to make, and then I promise to stop talking and answer your questions. [*Laughter*] People often ask me, what are we seeing on TV? What's happening with the violence? Here's my best analysis: One, the spectaculars you see are Al Qaida inspired. They claim credit for a lot of the big bombings. The bombing of the Parliament was Al Qaida; the bombing of the Golden Samarra was Al Qaida. These are the Sunni extremists inspired by Usama bin Laden, who attacked the United States. I keep repeating that because I want you to understand, what matters overseas, in my

judgment, affects the security of the United States of America in this new era.

Their objective is twofold: One, shake the confidence of the average Iraqi that their Government is incapable of providing security, and therefore, people will turn to militias in order to protect themselves; their second objective is to shake our confidence. It's an interesting war, isn't it, where asymmetrical warfare is—and that means people being able to use suicide bombers—not only, obviously, kills a lot of innocent people, like which happened yesterday in Iraq, but also helps define whether or not we're successful.

If the definition of success in Iraq or anywhere is no suicide bombers, we'll never be successful. We will have handed Al Qaida "that's what it takes" in order to determine whether or not these young democracies, for example, can survive. Think about that. If our definition is no more suiciders, you've just basically said to the suiciders, go ahead.

Iran is influential inside of Iraq. They are influential by providing advanced weaponry. They are influential by dealing with some militias, tend to be Shi'a militias, all aiming to create discomfort, all aiming to kind of—according to some—to create enough discomfort for the United States, but in doing so, they're making it harder for this young democracy to emerge. Isn't it interesting, when you really take a step back and think about what I just said, that Al Qaida is making serious moves in Iraq, as is surrogates for Iran.

Two of the biggest issues we face for the security of this country today and tomorrow is Al Qaida and Iran. And yet their influence is being played out in Iraq. I believe that if we were to leave before this country had an opportunity to stabilize, to grow—and by the way, I fully understand and completely agree with those who say, this is not just a military mission alone. That is too much, to ask our military to be able to achieve objectives without there being a corresponding political avenue, political strategy being fulfilled by the Iraqis. I fully expect them to reconcile. I fully expect them—and I made it clear to the Prime Minister that they should pass different de-Ba'athification law, that they ought to have local elections, that they ought to share their oil wells so people feel a common—you know, a common bond to something bigger than provincialism.

They have to do work. They know they have to do work. I told that to Prime Minister Maliki this week on a secure video: You have an obligation to your people, and to our people, for that matter, to do the hard work necessary, to show people that you're capable of getting your Government to move forward with political reconciliation. There has to be reconstruction money spent, their reconstruction money. They've dedicated $10 billion out of their budget, and now they've got to spend that money wisely to show people that the Government can be for all the people.

But if we were to leave before that were to happen, I will share a scenario that I'm fearful of. One, that the very radicals and extremists who attack us would be emboldened. It would confirm their sense that the United States is incapable of long-term commitments, incapable of—it would confirm their commitment that they think we're soft, let me put it to you that way. That's what they think.

That doesn't necessarily mean that the United States has to kind of muscle up for the sake of muscling up. That's not what I'm trying to say. But I do believe it is risky to have an enemy that has attacked us before to not take the United States seriously for the long run.

Secondly, there would be a violence—level of violence that would spill out beyond just the capital, could spill out beyond Iraq. And then you would have ancient feuds fueled by extremists and radicals competing for power—radical Shi'a, radical, extreme Sunnis, all competing for power. They would happen to share two enemies: one, the United States and Israel, for starters, and every other moderate person in the Middle East.

Imagine a scenario where the oil wealth of certain countries became controlled—came under the control of a radical, extremist group. And then all of a sudden, you'd be dealing not only with safe haven for potential violent attack; you'd be dealing with the economic consequences of people who didn't share the values of the West, for example.

Iran wants to—they've stated they'd like to have—let me just say, we believe they would like to have a nuclear weapon. Part of our diplomacy is to prevent them from doing so. If the United States were to leave a chaotic Iraq, not only would the vacuum of our failure there to help this young Government enable extremists to move more freely and embolden them, but I also believe it would—it could cause the Middle East to enter into a nuclear arms race.

The scenario I'm beginning to describe to you, I believe, is a real scenario, a real possibility for a scenario. And I believe if this were to happen, people would look back 30 years from now or 20 years from now, and say, what happened to them in 2007; how come they couldn't see the threat?

And so I want to share that with you because—these thoughts with you, because as a person whose job it is to make decisions, you've got to understand that I'm making them on what I believe is solid ground. These are necessary decisions for the country.

We're having an interesting debate in Washington. John and I spent some time talking about it, and that is this supplemental funding. In other words, I sent up a request to make sure our troops had the money necessary to do the missions that they have been asked to do. I want to share a couple thoughts with you on that, and then I'll answer some questions.

First, I think it's a mistake—and I've made it clear that the Congress should not have artificial timetables for withdrawal in a funding mission—funding statement. I'll tell you why. [*Applause*] Thank you. Thank you. The reason why is, if you're a young commander on the ground or an Iraqi soldier and you've been tasked with a mission to help provide security for a city and an enemy hears that you're leaving soon, it affects your capacity to do your job. It sends a signal to a dangerous part of the world that it's just a matter of time, things will happen.

I think it's a mistake for Congress to tell the military how to do its job. We've got fantastic generals and colonels and captains who are trained to carry on military missions; that's their responsibility. And it's very important that they be given the resources and the flexibility necessary to carry out that which the Commander in Chief has asked them to do.

I fully understand the debate, and again, I repeat to you. It's an important debate. I would hope it would be conducted with civil tone to bring honor to the process. Sometimes it gets a little out of hand there in Washington, I admit. But my message to the Congress has been, don't put our troops in between the debate; let's get them the money, let's get the commanders the flexibility, and we can debate Iraq policy without shorting the capacity for these troops to do their jobs.

These are—I would call these times consequential times. I believe we're in a long, ideological struggle. And I believe the struggle will determine whether or not this country is secure. People ask me—you know, I've been reading a lot of history. People ask me, "Can you think of any historical parallels?" Well, clearly the cold war is an interesting parallel. There's a—by the way, every new phase of history has its own unique features to it. For example, you've got a kid in the battlefield, and he's e-mailing home every day, or 24-hour news cycles. I mean, there's a lot of war—asymmetrical warfare, or $50 weapons are sometimes used to defeat expensive vehicles. In other words, these are different times.

But there are some parallels. One is, of course, the ideological standoff during the cold war, eventually won by freedom, the forces of freedom. For some, that sounds, maybe, corny. But it's true. It's an historical truth. And in my judgment, it requires people to have faith in that universal principle of liberty.

I like to remind people that my dad was a 18-year-old kid when he signed up to—for the United States Navy in World War II and went off to combat in a really bloody war. And yet his son becomes the President, and one of his best friends in the international scene was the Prime Minister of Japan. Prime Minister Koizumi was a partner in peace. Isn't it interesting? I think there's a historical lesson there, that liberty has got the capacity to transform enemies to allies.

I think there's a lesson in Korea. I think if you were to ask somebody to predict in 1953 what the world would look like in the

Far East, I don't think they would have said, China would have a marketplace that was growing; Korea would be our sixth largest trading partner—I think it's the sixth largest trading partner, but certainly a partner in peace; and Japan would have been an ally, a strong ally that would have committed troops to the young democracy of Iraq to help this democracy. I don't think people would have predicted that, but, in fact, it happened. It happened because the United States provided enough stability so that societies were able to evolve toward free societies, or freer societies.

We've got—we face this—we face a unique set of challenges, but I think we can learn something from history when we think about those challenges. And I guess my conclusion is, I believe the decisions I have made were not only necessary to protect the country but are laying a foundation of peace, the beginnings of laying that foundation of peace, so that generations will look back and say, "Thank goodness—thank goodness America didn't lose sight of basic principles, and thank goodness America stayed true to her beliefs, and thank goodness America led."

So thanks for letting me share some thoughts with you. And now I'll be glad to answer some questions. [*Applause*] Okay, thank you. Probably a nerve-wracking experience to think about asking—it's not a nerve-wracking experience. Go ahead.

Emergency Supplemental Appropriations

Q. Mr. President, what is your view of those who—in the opposing party who've you've advised to come to the White House to discuss solutions to the Iraq war and its funding who have expressed a reluctance to come and talk because of the perception that you would have a precondition or a no-negotiation on any points regarding the war?

The President. No, thanks. He asked the question about—prior to the meeting yesterday, there was some concern that I wouldn't listen, that I'd made up my mind, and therefore, discussions weren't necessary. And I will tell you, we had a very cordial meeting. The Speaker and the leader and minority leader and Senator McConnell all came down, along with others.

Clearly, there's different points of view, and that's fine. That's the greatness about our society. In my discussions with the leaders, I said, "You have the authority to pass the funding legislation. That's your authority, not mine." I submitted what the Pentagon thinks it needs. In other words, the process works where I ask the Pentagon, how much do you need? What do you need to do the job? And they submitted their request, and then we, on behalf of the Pentagon, sent it up to Congress. And they had the authority to pass that—pass the bill any way they see fit.

I have the authority, in our Constitution, to veto the bill if I don't think it meets certain criteria. They, then, have the authority to say, "Well, we don't agree with the President's veto, and now we're going to override the veto," so that that which they passed becomes law. And here's where we are. I said, "Get a bill to me as quickly as you can." And I believe they committed to a bill late next week, or a week from next Monday, I think is what they're aiming for. And therefore, we will sit back and hope they get it done quickly. Time is of the essence. We need to get money to the troops. It's important for them to get the money.

However, I did make it clear that in exercising your authority, if you put timetables, or if you micromanage—or artificial deadlines or micromanage the war or insist upon using a war supplemental to load up with items that are not related to the global war on terror, I will exercise my constitutional authority, and then you will have the opportunity to override my veto if you so choose.

My point to the leaders—and it was a very cordial meeting yesterday, by the way, and people—the positive news is that we don't—the negative thing is we don't agree 100 percent. That's not—you shouldn't be surprised. The positive news is that there was a cordial discussion. The discussion was dignified, like you would hope it would be, and people were free to express their minds.

And so my attitude is, if they feel like they've got to send this up there with their strings, like they said, please do it in a hurry so I can veto it, and then we can get down to the business of getting the troops funded. [*Laughter*]

Sir.

Public Opinion on Iraq

Q. Mr. President, how would you respond to the rather mistaken idea that the war in Iraq is becoming a war—in Vietnam?

The President. Yes, thank you. There's a lot of differences. First, the Iraqi people voted for a modern constitution, and then set up a Government under that Constitution. Secondly, the—that's as opposed to two divided countries, north and south. In my judgment, the vast majority of people want to live underneath that Constitution they passed. They want to live in peace. And what you're seeing is radical on the fringe creating chaos in order to either get the people to lose confidence in their Government or for us to leave.

A major difference as far as here at home is concerned is that our military is an all-volunteer army, and we need to keep it that way. By the way, the way you keep it that way is to make sure our troops have all they need to do their job and to make sure their families are happy.

There are some similarities, of course; death is terrible. Another similarity, of course, is that Vietnam was the first time a war was brought onto our TV screens here in America on a regular basis. I'm looking around looking for baby boomers; I see a few of us here. It's a different—it was the first time that the violence and horror of war was brought home. That's the way it is today.

Americans, rightly so, are concerned about whether or not we can succeed in Iraq. Nobody wants to be there if we can't succeed, especially me. And these—violence on our TV screens affects our frame of mind, probably more so today than what took place in Vietnam. I want to remind you that after Vietnam, after we left, the—millions of people lost their life—the Khmer Rouge, for example, in Cambodia. And my concern is, there would be a parallel there; that if we didn't help this Government get going, stay on its feet, be able to defend itself, the same thing would happen. There would be the slaughter of a lot of innocent life. The difference, of course, is that this time around the enemy wouldn't just be content to stay in the Middle East; they'd follow us here.

It's interesting, I met with some Congressmen today, and one person challenged that. He said, "I don't necessarily agree with that." In other words, I have told people that this is a unique war, where an enemy will follow us home, because I believe that. But if you give Al Qaida a safe haven and enough time to plan and plot, I believe the risk is, they will come and get us. And I freely admit that much of my thinking was affected on September the 11th, 2001, and the aftermath of September the 11th, 2001. And I wanted to share that with you and the American people so that they understand that when I make decisions, why I'm making decisions. I can assure you, I'm not going to make any decisions in regard to anybody's life based upon a poll or a focus group.

Sir. They don't want you to ask the question. [*Laughter*] They silenced you. Go ahead and yell. [*Laughter*]

International Support for Iraq/Iran and Syria

Q. Would you speak, please, a little bit about——

The President. Now you can use it.

Q. Would you speak a little bit about the support or lack of support that we're getting from other countries, particularly those countries surrounding Iraq——

The President. Sure.

Q. ——Saudi Arabia, so forth?

The President. Thank you, sir. First, our mission is getting a lot of support from the Iraqis. That's the place to first look. Are the Iraqis willing to make sacrifices necessary for their own country? I think there's a lot of Americans who wonder whether or not the Iraqis want to live in a free society and are willing to do that which is necessary to help their country succeed. If I felt they weren't, I would not have our troops in harm's way, just so you know.

I believe they are. They have suffered unbelievable death and destruction. Yesterday's bombing—I don't—we don't have the intel on it; I suspect it's Al Qaida. Al Qaida convinces the suiciders to show up. Al Qaida understands the effects of this kind of warfare on the minds of not only people in Iraq but here and elsewhere in the world. And yet the Iraqis continue to recruit for their army and their police force. I thought it was interesting that the Sunni Speaker of the House,

the day that the council chambers were bombed, said, "We're going to meet." These folks have gone through unbelievable horrors—they really have—and yet they continue to show courage in the face of this kind of violence.

Secondly, there is—there are nations who are concerned about whether or not a Shi'a government in Iraq will end up being a surrogate for Iran, for example. I think there are some Sunni nations—Sunni-governed nations, like Saudi and Jordan, that are concerned about a shift in the Middle East toward Iran, and that they are—wonder whether or not this Government of Iraq, which is a Shi'a government as a result of the fact that most people in Iraq—or the majority, the largest plurality of people in Iraq are Shi'a—you wouldn't be surprised if people voted that; that's what happened as a result of the elections. And they wonder whether or not the Government is going to be of and by and for the Iraqi people. And that concerns them.

And so one of the reasons we were working with the Iraqis on this neighborhood conference is for people to hear firsthand that the Iraqi Government is, first and foremost, Iraqi. They're not interested in being anybody else's surrogate.

We've got a lot of work to do there, and it's an interesting question you asked. I was pleased, and I thank His Majesty, that 80 percent of the debt in Saudi—I'll get you in a minute—is—80 percent of the Saudi debt in Iraq was forgiven. I appreciated that. It's a strong gesture. But we have a lot—not we, the Iraqi Government has a lot of work to do to convince skeptical nations that, in fact, they're going to be a pluralistic society, that they're not going to hold one group above another when it comes to their society.

Iran—I mentioned Iran. Iran is a serious problem. This is a nation that has said they want to have a nuclear—or we believe wants to have a nuclear weapon. And to what end? They don't need a nuclear weapon. And it's really important for the free world to work together to prevent them from having a nuclear weapon.

I'm very worried about a nuclear arms race in the Middle East. It's not in the interests of our children that that happens, for the sake of peace. They have been unhelpful in Iraq, intentionally unhelpful in Iraq. And so I obviously sent out the orders to our troops, commanders, that they will protect themselves against Iranian influence—or let me just say this—threats to their lives based—because of what Iran has done.

We have no beef with the Iranian people, which is really important for the people of Iran to understand. We value the history of Iran. We respect the traditions of Iran. It's the Iranian Government that is making the decisions that is causing you to be isolated. You're missing a opportunity to be a great nation because your Government has made decisions that is causing the world to put economic sanctions on you and to isolate you. I would hope the Iranian Government would change their attitude. And the Iranian people must understand that if they do—if they don't—if they stop their enrichment process, that they can have a better relationship with countries such as the United States. If they aren't meddling in Iraq, they can have a better relationship with a country that wishes them no harm.

Syria—I don't know if I'm going too much or not, but you asked. [*Laughter*] We have made it very clear to President Asad that there are a series of gestures we'd like to see him make for the sake of peace. One such gesture is to leave Lebanon alone; let the Lebanese democracy flourish; stop interfering in this young democracy.

Isn't it interesting that it's the democracies of the Middle East that are having the most problem with the extremists? I think it is. We have said to the Syrians, "Stop harboring Hamas and Hizballah"—violent, radical organizations aimed at causing harm in the Middle East. And we have said to President Asad, "Stop allowing the flow of suicide bombers through your country into Iraq."

You know, some have suggested that the United States start diplomatic relations with Syria. My message is, the Syrian has got the choice to make; the Syrian President must make the choice that will stop isolating his regime. And the United States will continue to make it clear to Syria, and work with other nations to make it clear to Syria, that their behavior is unacceptable if we want peace in the Middle East.

And so that's a—there will be meetings. I think the Iraq Compact group will be meeting as will an Iraq neighbor group. And it's there that the neighborhood can come together, all—and Condi is going to—Condi, Secretary Rice will be representing us there—all aiming to make it clear that we hope that we can encourage nations to help this young democracy to not only survive but to thrive. And it's an interesting challenge given the history of the region.

Yes, sir.

Immigration Reform/Border Security

Q. Mr. President, to kind of switch directions a little bit, illegal aliens in this country apparently are putting a lot of pressure on our social services. Could you comment on what the plans are in the future to take care of that?

The President. Yes, sir. They are not apparently putting pressure on the social services; they are putting pressure on the social services. [*Laughter*]

I believe it's in the interest of the United States to have a comprehensive immigration plan that meets certain objectives: one, helps us better secure our border; two, recognizes that people are doing work here that Americans are not doing; three, that recognizes that we are a nation of immigrants, and we ought to uphold that tradition in a way that honors the rule of law; four, that it's in the interest of the country that people who are here be assimilated in a way that—with our traditions and history—in other words, those who eventually become citizens be assimilated. In other words, one of the great things about America is, we've been able to assimilate people from different backgrounds and different countries. I suspect some of your relatives might be the kind of people I'm talking about.

Four, that we do not grant amnesty. I am very worried about automatic citizenship being granted to people who have been here illegally. I think it undermines the rule of law. I also think it would create a condition or, indeed, send the signal that it's okay for another X millions of people to come.

Five, you can't kick people out. You may think you can kick people out, but you can't. It's not going to work. It's impractical to think that you can find 10 million people who have been here for a long period of time and boot them out of the country.

Six, if you hire somebody who is an illegal alien, you ought to be held to account. Now, those are the principles—[*applause*]—wait a minute. Those are the principles. And we're working in Congress. The first step was to make it clear to the American people that we would change our border policy. This is a subject I'm real familiar with. As you might recall, I was the Governor of the great State of Texas, and we've been dealing with immigration—[*applause*]—there you go. Always one in every crowd. [*Laughter*]

A lot of Americans did not believe that this country was intent upon enforcing our border. And a couple of years ago, working with John and other Members of Congress, we began a border modernization program. And that meant, for example, more Border Patrol agents, and we will have doubled them, I think—I can't remember; I don't want to throw out facts; I may get them wrong, but we're doubling the number of Border Patrol agents by 2008.

It means some barriers, whether they be vehicle barriers or fencing, different roads to make our enforcement folks be able to travel easier on the border, UAVs—unmanned aerial vehicles—infrared detection devices. In other words, this border is becoming modernized.

It's interesting, I went down to Yuma, Arizona, right after Easter. And when I first went down there, there was a fence next to Mexico, and that was it; kind of a rickety fence, it looked like. And one of the tactics was for people to storm over the fence and rush the neighborhood on the other side, and the Border Patrol may pick up two or three of them, and however many else got in. Now there is double fencing in this area, with a wide area in between that our Border Patrol are able to travel on. In other words, we're beginning to get a modernization program that's pretty effective. As a matter of fact, the number of arrests are down.

Another problem we had—it's a long answer because it's a really important topic. Another problem we had was catch-and-release. We would—the Border Patrol would catch

somebody, say, from Mexico; they'd send them right back, but, say, from—a lot of folks are coming from Central America. But by the way, the reason why is because they want to put food on the table, and there are jobs Americans aren't doing. You know what I'm talking about. Some of you—if you're running a nursery, you know what I'm talking about. If you've got a chicken factory, a chicken-plucking factory, or whatever you call them, you know what I'm talking about. People have got starving families, and they want to come and work.

By the way, if I were a leader of a country where people were willing to take risks like these people were, I'd be worried that I'd be losing an incredibly good part of my workforce—hard-working people.

Anyway, they're coming across—and from Central America; they're paying exorbitant sums, by the way. There's a whole industry based upon using people as chattel. They're commodities to be exploited, frankly. And they're coming up, and so we would catch them, but we didn't have enough beds on the border. So they catch a fellow from El Salvador trying to sneak in, and they say, "Check back in with us, you know; we don't have any room to hold you. Come back in, and we'll have the immigration judge." Well, guess what happened? A guy wants to work; he's not interested in seeing the immigration judge; off he goes; you'll never find him.

And so we've ended that practice by increasing the number of beds now on the border. So when we get somebody from other than Mexico, we hold them, and then send them back to their country. And the message is getting out that the border is becoming more secure.

However, I think it's very important—I'm getting to the meat here—very important for us to have a temporary-worker program if you really want to enforce the border. Our border is long. It is hard to enforce to begin with. It seems like to me that it's in our national interest to let people come on a temporary basis to do jobs Americans are not doing, on a temporary, verifiable basis, with a tamper-proof card, to let people come and do jobs Americans aren't doing and let them go home after that so that they don't have to sneak across the border. In other words, if there's a way for people to come in an orderly way, they won't have to try to get in the bottom of the 18-wheeler and pay a person thousands of dollars to smuggle them into the United States of America.

There are a lot of employers who are worried about losing labor here in the United States. They don't know whether they're legal or illegal, by the way, because not only is there a smuggling operation; there's a document forging operation. In other words, the law that we have in place has created an entire underground system of smugglers, inn keepers, and document forgers. And that's not the American way, by the way.

And so these guys don't know what they're getting—some card, it looks legal; "Sure, let's go; you can work in my nursery or go pick my—help me pick my lettuce." And they don't know whether they're looking at somebody legal or illegal. We need a tamper-proof card that will enable an employer to verify whether or not this person is here legally or not. Otherwise, it's unfair to hold somebody to account. In other words, if we're enforcing the law, saying you're employing somebody here illegally, we better make sure that that employer is able to verify with certainty whether the person is here legal or not.

Finally, the fundamental question is, what do you do with the—you right there; everybody nervous up front—[*laughter*]—the question is, what about the 10 to 12 million people who are already here? It's a tough issue. As I've told you, my position is, not legal automatically. I'm also realistic enough to know that you're just—it may sound attractive in the political sound-bite world—just kick them out. It is not going to work. It's just not going to work.

And so we're working with the Senate and the House to devise a plan that, in essence, says that you have broken the law and that you have an obligation to pay a fine for having broken the law if you want to stay in the United States; that there is a line for citizenship—there are a lot of people in that line right now—and that after paying a penalty for breaking the law, that you can get at the back of the line, not the front of the line; that if you want to become a citizen, you've got to prove that you can speak the language, that you can assimilate, that you have paid

your taxes, that you haven't broken the law—[*applause*]—that you haven't broken the law, and then, if you choose, you have an opportunity to apply for citizenship, but you don't get to jump ahead of people who have played by the rules.

And this is a tough debate, and I appreciate John's leadership on this issue. It's an emotional debate. I just ask our fellow citizens not to forget that we are a nation of law, but we are also a humane country that breaks our heart when we see people being abused and mistreated, and that I believe that—I know we need to have a civil debate on the subject. We're immigrants. We're a nation of immigrants. And I happen to personally believe as well, that there's nothing better for society than to have it renewed. When newcomers who come here legally realize the great benefits that one can achieve through hard work, it renews our spirit and renews our soul, when people are given a chance to realize the great blessings of the United States of America.

And so we're working on it. Thank you for bringing it up. It's going to be an interesting, interesting legislative issue. I'm—there's—a lot of good people in the Senate are working hard to reach accord. And we're right in the middle of them trying to help them. And then if we can get a bill out of the Senate, we'll take it to the House and see where we go. Good question.

Yes, sir.

U.S. Armed Forces/Iraq Study Group/ Health Care of Wounded Soldiers and Veterans

Q. Thank you, Mr. President——

The President. About time you asked a question. [*Laughter*]

Q. This is truly an honor. Thank you for coming today. My question is about the U.S. military preparedness. I'm actually of a small manufacturing company in Dayton where we manufacture a lot of parts for the up-armored Humvees, gun turrets, and things like that——

The President. This isn't, like, one of these self-interest questions, is it? [*Laughter*]

Q. No, no, no. There's my—I'll get right to it. There's—currently the law is that only 50 percent of the military components have to be U.S.-made. When we went into Afghanistan, there was a gentleman in Switzerland who refused to give us part of something for the NORDAM bomb that we had—he refused to make it because it was made over there. And my question is about increasing that percentage and keeping a prepared military, that we don't have to rely on other countries to defend ourselves.

The President. Right. My answer is, I'm really not sure what you're talking about, and I'll look into it. [*Laughter*] But I can tell you, we're going to spend a lot of money on this military because we're worried about whether or not this military will have the supplies necessary, the equipment necessary after multiple rotations.

I want to assure parents whose loved one may be in the military, we're not going to put your son or daughter over there unless they're ready. And no question, multiple rotations have been hard on our families. And as you know, recently, Secretary Gates recommended to me, and I accepted, saying with certainty to our troops, "Your tours will be up to 15 months, and you'll be home for a guaranteed 12 months." And the reason why he did that is that we had some people deployed for what they thought might be 12 months and were asked to stay in theater. And what's the most important thing we can do for this volunteer army is to provide certainty for our families.

In other words, you sign—you volunteer to be in the military, and you're deployed—we want to make sure there's certainty so that families can prepare. The worst thing that can happen, according to our military experts there, is for somebody's hopes to be dashed, that there's not clarity about what's expected of our troops. And so we did that.

There is—the term of art is called reset—that is to make sure that we reset our military. And there is an area where there is good common ground with Members of Congress—the Democrat leadership understands that reset is an important part of keeping this military ready and active.

Let me say one thing I forgot to tell you before. I don't know if you remember the Baker-Hamilton report. James A. Baker, the Secretary of State, Lee Hamilton—two distinguished people, real good people; the kind

of Americans that have served with distinction and are still serving. They proposed an interesting idea, which was for the United States to be postured at some point in time with the following force posture: one, embedded with Iraqi troops, not only as a training mission but to help them understand chain of command issues and the issues of a modern military; that our troops be stationed in a over-the-horizon position so we could respond to a particular situation, so it didn't get out of control; that we helped defend the territorial integrity of Iraq; and that we chase down Al Qaida.

It's an interesting force posture to be in. Frankly, I was hopeful, as I mentioned to you, that we could be in that kind of force posture a year ago. I really thought we were going to be there until the sectarian violence got out of control. They also said that the United States may have to increase troops in order to be able to get there. And that's what you're seeing happen. And that's where I'd like to be. And I'd like to be in a position so that the certainty of our troop deployments, like we've come, is just etched in everybody's mind.

I'm watching our military very carefully. I love our military, for starters. And I want to make sure that during these difficult times, that we help them on their needs. One of my concerns is that the health care not be as good as it can possibly be.

I will tell you that we had a bureaucracy problem at Walter Reed. What we didn't have is a compassion problem at Walter Reed. We've got some unbelievably good docs and nurses who work around the clock to help the trooper—troops and their families. But our bureaucracy, that sometimes can be large and cumbersome at the Federal level, didn't respond. And I appreciate the way Secretary Gates got control of the situation.

Just so you know, I am concerned that a soldier getting out of—or a marine getting out of uniform and stays in the Defense—is transferred seamlessly from the Defense health system to the Veterans health system. In other words, one of my concerns is that there is a gap. And we owe it to these families and these soldiers and marines to make sure that that service is seamless. And that's why I asked Bob Dole and Donna Shalala to make sure that those two bureaucracies don't create the conditions where somebody isn't getting the help they need.

I know that's on people's minds. One of the areas where we do agree is that we got to make sure our veterans are treated as good as we can possibly treat them. We've asked a lot of these troops, and we will do the best to make sure the Veterans Administration and the Defense health systems work well.

Yes, sir.

President's Principles

Q. Mr. President, I admire your stay-to-it-iveness. You mentioned earlier about not using polls and focus groups. But I have to ask you personally, with respect to economics, with respect to the war, with respect to the war on terror and Iraq and immigration, when you go to bed at night and you see these polls—everybody and their brother does a poll now—how does it make you feel?

The President. That's an interesting question. You know, I'm—I've been in politics long enough to know that polls just go poof at times. I mean, they're a moment; that they are—let me put it to you this way: When it's all said and done, when Laura and I head back home—which at this moment will be Crawford, Texas—I will get there and look in the mirror, and I will say, "I came with a set of principles, and I didn't try to change my principles to make me popular." You can't make good decisions—[*applause*].

As I mentioned to you, this is a decision-making experience, and you cannot make good decisions if you're not making decisions on a consistent set of principles. It's impossible. Oh, you can make decisions, all right, but they're inconsistent. What I think is important is consistency during difficult and troubled times, so that people—they may not agree, but they know where I'm coming from.

And I'll share some of the principles. You've heard one—I believe freedom is universal. I believe that. Let me put it another way: I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe a gift from the Almighty to every man and woman and child on this Earth is freedom. That's what I believe.

Secondly, I believe you can spend your money better than the government can spend your money. Oh, I know that sounds like a sound bite, but it's a principle by which you set budgets. For example, I believe that cutting taxes helped this country overcome a recession and a war. And the reason why is, is that markets flourish when people have more money. Employers, small businesses do better when you have more money. When your treasury is more likely to have money, you're more likely to take risk. And that's what tax cuts do.

And by the way, it's another issue that we're facing. In all due respect to the Democrats, if you look at their budget, they want to raise your taxes. I believe Congress needs to keep your taxes low. I believe, by the way—let me—[*applause*]. Thank you. I'm not trying to rally; I'm just trying to explain. [*Laughter*]

I believe we have proven that the best way to balance the budget—and I know many of you are concerned about a balanced budget—is to grow the economy through low taxes, which means enhanced revenues, and be wise about spending your money. In other words, progrowth economic policies have proven to work. And it turns out that when the economy grows, taxes increase. And therefore, the corollary is to make sure we don't overspend.

The temptation in Washington is to spend; it just is, and—every idea sounds like a great idea. But we are proving that you can balance the budget by keeping taxes low. As a matter of fact, I think it was 167 billion—the deficit was 167 billion less than anticipated because of—over the last 2 years—because of low taxes. I said we'd cut the deficit in half by 5 years or 4 years, and we've done it 3 years quicker. Now we've submitted a new budget that shows we can balance the budget without raising taxes. That's a principle.

I believe, for example, that the government ought to trust people to make decisions. And so how does that—like health care; that's a big issue for all of us. One of the ways that I think—was that your question? Good, okay. I'll ask it for you—what are you going to do on health care? Anyway—[*laughter*]. The Tax Code discriminates against an individual on health care decisions. And I believe that we ought to change the Tax Code so an employee of a corporation is treated equally as somebody who is self-employed. In other words, the tax treatment ought to be the same, all aimed at encouraging individual decisionmaking in the marketplace. I'm a big believer in health savings accounts, because health savings accounts means you are the decisionmaker, along with your doc.

Health care—like Medicare, we changed Medicare for the better. Medicare—I remind people, Medicare had changed—medicine had changed; Medicare hadn't. Prescription drugs became an integral part of medicine, and yet the senior was not covered with prescription drugs in Medicare. It didn't make any sense to me to pay thousands for an ulcer operation but not a dime for the prescription drugs that could have prevented the ulcer from happening in the first place.

And so we modernized Medicare with the prescription drug benefit, but we also did something unique when it came to Government programs. We gave seniors choices. In other words, we created more of a marketplace. It's amazing what happens when people demand something: People provide for it in the marketplace. Competition helps keep price low. It was estimated that we would spend some 600 billion additional money through Medicare, and yet the cost to the Government and you, more particularly, is substantially lower because of competition. That's a principle.

When it comes to pension plans, I think you ought to be managing your money. I don't think you ought to be relying upon government to tell you what your benefit is. I think you ought to be in a position to take your own money and manage it on a tax advantage basis.

In other words, my point is, the principle is that we ought to trust people to make decisions. To whom much is given, much is required. I'm glad you asked this question; thank you. [*Laughter*] Listen—Laura says, "You love to hear yourself talk, don't you?" [*Laughter*]

I want to share this story with you, though, because I believe an important principle is, to whom much is given, much is required. The United States of America has been given

a lot. We are a blessed nation. For—those of you who travel around the world know exactly what I'm talking about, about what a great life we have here compared to a lot of other folks.

When I first came into office, I was deeply concerned about the pandemic of HIV/AIDS, particularly on the continent of Africa. I was concerned because during the 21st century, an entire—it was possible that an entire generation could be wiped out by a disease for which we could do something about.

I went to Congress; I went to you. I asked for a substantial sum of money to help fund a campaign to save lives on the most 19 affected nations on Earth. I asked a former CEO of Eli Lilly, Randy Tobias, to run the program. As a result of your generosity based upon the principle, to whom much is given, much is required, over 850,000 people receive antiretroviral drugs today. That's up from 50,000, 3 years ago.

Is it in our Nation's interest to do that? I believe it is. If what happens overseas matters here at home, then I do think it's important to help address issues like starvation and disease. But I also think it's in the interest of the soul of the Nation to adhere to an important principle. And I think we're adding to a glorious chapter in our history to say that the people of the United States have helped save thousands of lives that otherwise might have been lost to HIV/AIDS.

And so those are some of the principles. And you asked a question, what do I think? I think it's important to stand on principle. I think it's important to make decisions based upon a core set of beliefs. That's what I think. And politics comes and goes, but your principles don't. And everybody wants to be loved—not everybody, but—[*laughter*]—you run for office, I guess you do. [*Laughter*] You never heard anybody say, "I want to be despised; I'm running for office." [*Laughter*] But I believe, sir, in my soul, that I have made the right decisions for this country when it comes to prosperity and peace. That's what I believe.

I want to share something with you about history. I'm reading a lot of history, I mentioned to you. I read three histories on George Washington last year. The year 2006, I read three histories about our first President. My attitude is, if they're still writing about 1, 43 doesn't need to worry about it. [*Laughter*]

Yes, ma'am.

Shootings at Virginia Tech/School Safety

Q. This is in regards to the Virginia Tech tragedy. Being a high school student——

The President. Go ahead. Go ahead. Let's get the mike there.

Q. Sorry.

The President. Thanks.

Q. This is in regards to the Virginia Tech tragedy. Being a high school student, I was wondering what's being done to ensure safety in schools?

The President. I think that—first of all, I don't know your principal very well—I met him. I will tell you, though, that his biggest concern, besides you learning to read, write, add, and subtract and be a student who can contribute to society, is your safety.

One of the lessons of these tragedies is to make sure that when people see somebody or know somebody who is exhibiting abnormal behavior, to do something about it, to suggest that somebody take a look; that if you are a parent and your child is doing strange things on the Internet, pay attention to it and not be afraid to ask for help and not be afraid to say, "I am concerned about what I'm seeing."

I think there's a tendency at times for people—and I fully understand this—is to respect somebody's privacy, you know, and not share concerns. But some of the lessons of the shootings have been that it is—and I don't know about this case—and by the way, they're still digging out the facts, so I think it's very important for us not to comment until it's all said and done—but that other cases, there have been warning signals, that if an adult, for example, had taken those signals seriously, perhaps tragedy could have been avoided.

And so the lesson is, is that—and I know you're—the lesson is, is that the principals and teachers and adults of this school must be on alert, and I know they are.

And as I—I repeat to you: You're lucky—all of us—a lot of these high schools are really lucky to have people who care about you.

I mean the—unfortunately, in a complex society, the teacher's job and the principal's job is more than just teaching; it is safety. And yet that is a vital concern, I know, to the folks who run this school.

Okay, yes, ma'am.

War on Terror

Q. [*Inaudible*]—misconception about scaling back in Iraq.

The President. Sure, go ahead. Wait, I want this question recorded. A little hustle there. [*Laughter*] Thank you.

Q. I believe there's a big misconception that scaling back in Iraq will cost less in the long run than to go in and get the job done. How do you get that message across to America and especially to Congress?

The President. Yes, I appreciate that. Her concern is that a scale back will either save money or save lives or save headache, and how do you get the message out? Coming here is part of getting the message out. The President has got to be educator in chief, and I've just got to keep talking about it. I've spent a lot of time on this subject. This is a subject that has concerned a lot of our fellow citizens. They are deeply worried about whether or not it is possible for us to succeed, and that there needs to be an explanation of the violence.

And my answer is, is that the—there is a political process that's ongoing, an economic process that's ongoing, a rebuilding process that's ongoing, and a security process that's ongoing, and that you can't have the former unless you have security. And therefore, it's in the interest—if a failed state creates violence and chaos that eventually could come and hurt us, it's in our interest to help succeed.

And therefore, the troop levels need to be commensurate with the capacity of that society to protect itself. The objective is to have the Iraqis take over their own security. It's just that they weren't ready to do so. And I appreciate your question.

It's very important—I think some really are—I know a lot of people are tired of it. People get pretty tired of war, and I understand that. It's really important as we—that we have a sober discussion and understand what will be the consequences of failure.

As I told you, on the rug—the reason I brought up the rug was to not only kind of break the ice but also to talk about strategic thought. The President's job is to think not only about today but tomorrow. The President's job is not only think about the short-term security of the United States but to think about the little guys, you know—what the world will look like 20 or 30 or 40 years from now.

And I appreciate your question because I will continue to work hard to explain the consequences of this world in which we live; that what happens overseas matters here at home in the 21st century, and that we are in the beginning of a long struggle that will have, hopefully, not a lot of military action, would be my hope for future Presidents. But it is a struggle akin to other struggles we have been through.

The ideological struggle of the cold war is a potential parallel. It's freedom versus communism. This is a—this is a struggle with freedom versus extreme radicalism. There have been—how do you allow a society, or how do you encourage societies to evolve after struggle, after conflict? There are other historical parallels. And my job is to continue to explain the consequences—consequences of success, which I believe will be peace; the consequences of failure, which I believe will be creating a more dangerous situation here in the United States.

Boehner is a busy man. He is busy representing the people of this district. He is now giving me the signal—[*laughter*]. I'm feeling his vibes. [*Laughter*] I'm going to fly him back to Washington.

I'm honored that you gave me a chance to come and visit with you. I ask for God's blessings on our troops and their families, on the people of Virginia Tech, and on the people of the United States. Thank you for your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Steve Bruns, former president, Tipp City Area Chamber of Commerce; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Usama bin Laden, leader of the Al Qaida terrorist organization; Mahmud al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the Iraqi House of Representatives; King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia; President Bashar al-Asad of Syria; Secretary of Defense

Robert M. Gates; and Bob Dole and Donna E. Shalala, Cochairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.

Proclamation 8127—Small Business Week, 2007

April 19, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

During Small Business Week, we honor small business owners and workers for their important role in ensuring that America remains the economic leader of the world. Every day, our Nation's small businesses help enhance the lives of our citizens and lead the way in an economy distinguished by low unemployment, sustained job creation, and one of the fastest growth rates of any major industrialized nation.

To help extend our Nation's prosperity, my Administration is committed to continuing the pro-growth economic policies that encourage enterprise and make America the best place in the world to do business. Our economy has created more than 7 million new jobs since major tax relief was enacted in 2003, and we are working to keep taxes low to help small businesses continue to expand. We are taking steps to make health care more affordable and available for small business owners and employees by encouraging Health Savings Accounts, supporting Association Health Plans legislation, and proposing a standard tax deduction for health insurance. My Administration is also committed to ensuring that small businesses can compete in the global economy.

By continuing to expand trade, we can open new markets for American products, lower prices for consumers, and create better American jobs.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of cities and towns across the country, and we salute small business owners, entrepreneurs, and employees for enhancing our communities and expanding opportunities for all. The hard work and ingenuity of our Nation's small business men and women are helping to sustain America's economic strength.

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim April 22 through April 28, 2007, as Small Business Week. I call upon the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies, activities, and programs that celebrate the accomplishments of small business owners and their employees and encourage the development of new small businesses.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this nineteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-first.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 9:29 a.m., April 23, 2007]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on April 24.

Proclamation 8128—Dutch-American Friendship Day, 2007

April 19, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On Dutch-American Friendship Day, we celebrate our longtime friendship with the Kingdom of the Netherlands and honor the many Dutch Americans who have made significant contributions to our country.

Our close partnership with the Netherlands dates back to the founding of our Nation, and it remains among our oldest continuous relationships. Many of the Pilgrims first sailed for the New World from a Dutch port, and when a small American warship approached the island of St. Eustatius in 1776, the Dutch port there gave the American flag its first friendly gun salute. A few years later, the Netherlands became one of the first nations to recognize the independence of the United States of America. The United States