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screenings; it's diagnosed thousands of cases of breast and cervical cancer; and it's helped educate women about the importance of early detection. We expect that in 2007, this program will provide more than 700,000 screenings for low-income and uninsured women. The program is an important part of this Nation's fight against cancer, and the bill I'm about to sign will continue to lifesaving work.

I appreciate working with the United States Congress to fund breast and cervical cancer research and prevention. The span of my administration, we have spent, along with Congress, $6.7 billion. My budget for 2008 includes another billion dollars for research and prevention activities. We'll continue to work to ensure that every American woman has access to the screenings she needs to detect the cancers in time to treat them.

Again, I want to thank the Members of Congress for their hard work and their dedication in passing this important piece of legislation. I appreciate you all joining us to witness the bill signing ceremony. And it's now my honor to sign the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program Reauthorization Act. [*Laughter*]

[*At this point, the President signed the bill.*]

The First Lady. Thank you all.

The President. Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:32 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. H.R. 1132, approved April 20, was assigned Public Law No. 110–18. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks to the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan and a Question-and-Answer Session in East Grand Rapids, Michigan

April 20, 2007

The President. Thank you all very much. I'm glad to be back in Grand Rapids. I appreciate the opportunity to address the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan. I was leaving the White House today, Laura said, "Where are you headed?" I said, "To the west coast." [*Laughter*] She said, "Make sure you take your suntan lotion." [*Laughter*] I said, "The west coast of Michigan"—[*laughter*]—and I'm glad to be with you.

You can't help but think about Gerald Ford when you come to Grand Rapids, Michigan. You know, our country was blessed to have such a decent, honorable, kind, courageous leader in Gerald R. Ford, and we miss him a lot.

I appreciate Dixie Anderson, who is the executive director of the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan. I thank Barbara Propes, who is the president of the World Affairs Council of America. I want to thank Ping Liang, president, board of directors of the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan, and a fellow Yale Bulldog.

I appreciate my friend, Ambassador Pete Secchia for joining us today. He was the Ambassador to Italy under 41. I appreciate Sara Shubel, who is the superintendent of the East Grand Rapids Public Schools. Thank you very much for allowing me to come to this beautiful auditorium here in East Grand Rapids High School. I appreciate Jenny Fee, the associate principal, as well as Larry Fisher.

My purpose of coming is to instruct, is to talk about the issues that our world is facing, particularly the issue of Iraq. And I appreciate the chance to come to this high school to do so.

I thank Congressman Vern Ehlers, Congressman from this district. I appreciate you being here, Vern, and thank you for joining me and Congressman Pete Hoekstra on Air Force One. It's probably quite convenient for you to fly from Washington on Air Force One. [*Laughter*] Glad to provide the transportation. [*Laughter*] Both these men are really honorable folks who serve western Michigan well in Congress, and I want to thank you for your service.

I thank the Michigan Attorney General, Michael Cox, for joining us. Mike, thanks for coming today. Michigan Secretary of State Terri Lynn Land. She heard this was a foreign policy speech. [*Laughter*] I appreciate Mayor Cindy Bartman, city of East Grand Rapids; Mayor George Heartwell, city of Grand Rapids. Thank you all for serving. I appreciate your willingness to become public servants.

One of the messages I hope that I can convey to the high school students who are here, no matter what your political beliefs may be, that it's important to serve. It's important to serve the community in which you live. And you can do so all kinds of ways. You can run for mayor at some point in time, or you can feed the hungry. But service is noble, and service is necessary. I see we've got some who wear the uniform of the United States military. In this day and age, that's the ultimate service, as far as I'm concerned, and I appreciate you volunteering.

For more than a half century, the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan has been a forum for lively and important debate. I understand this council was set up in 1949. It's been an important forum for people to talk about the big questions facing our country. There is no bigger question than what course our Nation should pursue in Iraq, and that's what I'm here to talk about.

Three months ago, my administration completed an extensive review of that very question. I ordered major changes to our strategy in Iraq. And to lead this new strategy, I named General David Petraeus, an expert who wrote the Army's new manual on counterinsurgency warfare.

This new strategy is fundamentally different from the previous strategy. It recognizes that our top priority must be to help Iraq's elected leaders secure their population, especially in Baghdad, because Iraqis will not be able to make the political and economic progress they need until they have a basic measure of security. Iraq's leaders are committed to providing that security, but at this point, they cannot do it on their own.

And so I ordered American reinforcements to help the Iraqis secure their population, to go after the terrorists and insurgents that are inciting sectarian violence, and to get their capital under control. As our troops take on this mission, they will continue to train and mentor the Iraqi security forces for the day they can take full responsibility for the security of their own country.

General Petraeus has been carrying out this new strategy for just over 2 months. He reports that it will be later this year before we can judge the potential of success. Yet the first indicators are beginning to emerge, and they show that so far, the operation is meeting expectations. There are still horrific attacks in Iraq, such as the bombings in Baghdad on Wednesday, but the direction of the fight is beginning to shift.

In the coming months, I'll deliver regular updates on our operations. Today I want to share some details about how this effort is unfolding in three areas: Baghdad; Anbar Province; and the outskirts of Baghdad, where terrorists and extremists are making a stand.

The most significant element of our new strategy is being carried out in Baghdad. Baghdad has been the site of most of the sectarian violence; it is the destination for most of our reinforcements. So far, three additional American brigades totaling about 12,000 troops have reached the Baghdad area; another brigade is in Kuwait preparing to deploy; and one more will arrive in Kuwait next month. The Iraqi Government is also meeting its pledge to boost its force levels in the city. For every American combat soldier deployed to Baghdad, there are now about three Iraqi security forces—giving us a combined total of nearly 80,000 combat forces in the Baghdad area.

My point is, is that the American combat forces are not alone in the effort to secure the nation's capital. And just as important as the growing number of troops is their changing position in the city. I direct your attention to a map showing our troop presence around Baghdad late last year. This is how we were positioned. Most troops were at bases on the outskirts of the city. They would move into Baghdad to clear out neighborhoods during the day, and then they would return to their bases at night. The problem was that when our troops moved back to the bases, the extremists, the radicals, the killers moved back to the neighborhoods.

And we're changing. Part of our strategy change, part of the new mission in Baghdad is for American troops to live and work side by side with Iraqi forces at small neighborhood posts called joint security stations. You can see from this map, there are now more than two dozen joint security stations located throughout Baghdad; more are planned. From these stations, Iraqi and American forces work together to clear out and then

secure neighborhoods—all aimed at providing security for the people of Baghdad. If a heavy fight breaks out, our forces will step in, and Iraqi forces learn valuable skills from American troops. They'll fight shoulder to shoulder with the finest military every assembled.

By living in Baghdad neighborhoods, American forces get to know the culture and concerns of local residents. Equally important, the local residents get to know them. When Iraqi civilians see a large presence of professional soldiers and police patrolling their streets, they grow in confidence and trust. They become less likely to turn to militias for protection. People want security in their lives, and they tend to turn to the most apparently effective security force. And as people gain confidence in the ability of the Iraqi troops, along with the United States, to provide security, they begin to cooperate. In fact, Iraqi and American forces have received more tips in the past 3 months than during any 3-month period on record. These are tips provided by local citizens about where to find terrorists and insurgents.

Most people—the vast majority of people want to live in peace. Iraqi mothers want their children to grow up in peace. And if given the opportunity and given the confidence, civilians turn in the terrorists and extremists and murderers to help achieve that peace.

This new approach to securing Baghdad brings risks. When I announced the new operation, I cautioned that more troops conducting more operations in more neighborhoods would likely to—bring more casualties. Since the security operation began, we have seen some of the highest casualty levels of the war. And as the number of troops in Baghdad grows and operations move into even more dangerous neighborhoods, we can expect the pattern to continue.

We must also expect the terrorists and insurgents to continue mounting terrible attacks. Here is a photo of the devastation caused by a car bomb at a bus stop in Baghdad on Wednesday. The victims of this attack were innocent men and women who were simply coming home from work. Yet this was hardly a random act of murder. It has all the hallmarks of an Al Qaida attack. The terrorists bombed the buses at rush hour, with the specific intent to kill as many people as possible. This has been long a pattern of Al Qaida in Iraq; this is what they do. They carried out the spectacular attack on the United Nations headquarters in Baghdad. They bombed the Jordanian Embassy in Iraq. They claimed credit for the bombing of the Golden Mosque of Samarra. Just last week, they sent a suicide bomber to attack the Iraqi Parliament building.

Al Qaida believes that its best chance to achieve its objectives, which is to drive the United States out of Iraq and prevent the emergence of a free society in the Middle East, is to defeat the security operation by conducting spectacular attacks that provoke Iraqis into taking violence into their own hands and lead Americans to conclude that the sectarian killing will never be contained. This strategy is merciless, but it is not without logic. It's important for all Iraqis, Sunnis and Shi'a alike, to understand that Al Qaida is the greatest threat to peace in their country. And the question is whether we and the Iraqis will give in and to—respond the way Al Qaida wants. Because of the lessons of September the 11th, the answer is, the United States Government will not give in to what Al Qaida wants. And the Iraqis must not give in to Al Qaida if they want to have a peaceful society.

The nature of a strategy aimed at securing the population is that the most important gains are often the least dramatic. Day by day, block by block, Iraqi and American forces are making incremental gains in Baghdad. Thanks to more troops on the streets and more cooperation from residents, the average number of weapons stockpiles seized each week has jumped 50 percent since the beginning of the new strategy. American and Iraqi forces tracked down and captured the leaders of a major car bomb ring. We found and cleared a warehouse where terrorists were storing chemicals to make weapons. We captured members of a death squad that had terrorized hundreds of residents in a Baghdad neighborhood. As a result, displaced families are beginning to return home. And the number of sectarian murders in Baghdad has dropped by half since the operation began.

The results of the security operation are uneven across the city. In some areas, there have been sharp declines in sectarian killing, while in other areas, the level of violence is still far too high. Yet even in volatile districts like Sadr City, our new approach is beginning to make a difference. A report last month in the Grand Rapids Press quoted an Iraqi resident of Sadr City. Perhaps you read it. If you didn't, here's what it said: "They thanked us"—they're talking about our forces and Iraqi forces—"They thanked us with respect and a smile." This resident said, "I'm happy that such a campaign is done in my neighborhood." People want security, and they want to live in peace.

Developments like these are not as spectacular as a terrorist bomb. When a family decides to stop depending on militias to protect them or a young man rejects insurgency and joins the Iraqi Army, it doesn't usually make the evening news. Yet small, individual choices like these are vital to the success of our campaign. They show that despite all the violence, the vast majority of Iraqis want security; they want to live in peace. I know I've said that more than once. It's important for our citizens to understand that people around the world are anxious for peace, and yet there are extremists and radicals and murderers who will do anything they can to prevent it from happening.

The Iraqi security forces are growing in maturity and gaining trust, and that's important. Our men and women in uniform are showing great courage and skill, and that's important to the Iraqi people as well.

Another significant element of our new strategy is being carried out in Anbar Province, a largely Sunni area west of Baghdad. For much of the past 4 years, Anbar has been a hotbed for insurgents and Al Qaida terrorists. Remember, Al Qaida is Sunni in nature. According to a captured Al Qaida document, according to what Al Qaida has made clear, their goal is to take over the Anbar Province and make it their home base for Iraq. That would bring them closer to their stated objective of taking down Iraq's democracy, building a radical Islamic empire, and having safe haven from which to launch attacks on the United States' citizens here at home or abroad. That is what Al Qaida has stated. That is their objective, and Anbar Province is where they're trying to achieve their objective. Al Qaida has pursued this goal through a ruthless campaign of violence, and they grew in power. They were succeeding.

And then something began to change. The people of Anbar began to realize their life was not the paradise Al Qaida promised—as a matter of fact, it was a nightmare. So courageous tribal sheiks launched a movement called "The Awakening" and began cooperating with American and Iraqi forces. The sheiks and their followers knew exactly who the terrorists were, and they began providing highly specific intelligence. To help capitalize on this opportunity, I sent more troops into Anbar Province. Alongside the Iraqi Army and police, U.S. marines and Special Operations forces have been striking terrible blows against Al Qaida.

The maps show the dramatic changes taking place in Ramadi, which happens to be the capital of Anbar Province. The red-shaded areas in the first map show the concentration of Al Qaida terrorists in the city 2 months ago. The second map shows the concentration of the terrorists now. Their presence has declined substantially. Here is how one reporter described the changes: "A year ago, Ramadi's police force had virtually been wiped out, leaving only a couple dozen officers and a lawless city with nowhere to turn for help. Now guerrilla fighters have begun to disappear; schools and shops have reopened; and civilians have begun walking in previously deserted streets."

Anbar Province is still not safe. Al Qaida has responded to these changes with sickening brutality. They have bombed fellow Sunnis in prayer at a mosque; they send death squads into neighborhoods; they have recruited children as young as 12 years old to help carry out suicide attacks. But this time, local Sunnis are refusing to be intimidated. With the encouragement of their tribal leaders, they're stepping forward to protect their families and drive out the terrorists. They're stepping forward to prevent Al Qaida—the people who attacked us on September the 11th, 2001—from establishing safe haven in Anbar Province. And I believe strongly it's in the interest of the United States of America to help them.

General Petraeus said earlier this month: "In the latest recruiting effort, which used to draw minimal numbers of Iraqis willing to serve in the Iraqi Army or the Iraqi police in Anbar Province, there were over 2,000 volunteers for the latest training." General Petraeus went on, "Frankly, it's a stunning development and reflects the frustration the Sunni Arab tribes have with what Al Qaida has done to them. It has really had a devastating effect." If given a chance, most people will reject extremists and radicals and murderers.

The United States will help Sunni sheiks and will help their people. We will stay on the offense in Anbar Province. We and the Iraqi Government are carrying out our new strategy in Baghdad and Anbar, as well as the "Baghdad belts"—these are areas on the outskirts of the capital that have been staging grounds for deadly attacks. I have discussed the capital city with you. I discussed a western Province with you. And I'm now going to talk about the belts around the capital city of Iraq.

We have moved an additional Stryker battalion to Diyala Province, which is northeast of Baghdad, where our soldiers and Iraqi forces are conducting raids against Al Qaida and insurgents. We have sent reinforcements to Diwaniyah Province—Diwaniyah, a city of Diwaniyah, which is 80 miles south of Baghdad, where we're working with Iraqi forces to rout out militia and Shi'a extremists.

In these and other parts of the Baghdad belts, Iraqi and American forces are fighting to clear and hold territory that the enemies of a free society considered their own. They're fighting back. As a result, violence is increasing. And as our forces move deeper into the territory, the violence could increase even more. Yet these operations are having an important impact on this young democracy. They're keeping the pressure on the terrorists and insurgents who have fled Anbar and Baghdad. They're helping cut off the supply of weapons and fighters to violent groups inside the capital. They're showing Iraqi citizens across the country, there will be no sanctuary for killers anywhere in a free Iraq.

All of these military operations are designed to improve security for everyday folks. They're designed to reduce sectarian violence. And they're designed to open up breathing space for political progress by Iraq's Government.

It may seem like decades ago, but it wasn't all that long ago that 12 million Iraqi citizens voted for a free and democratic future for their country. And the Government they elected is in place—it hasn't been in place a year yet—and they're working hard to make progress on some key benchmarks, progress to help this country reconcile and unite after years of tyrannical and brutal rule.

The Iraqi legislature passed a budget that commits $10 billion of their money for reconstruction projects, and now the Government must spend that money to improve the lives of Iraqi citizens. The Council of Ministers recently approved legislation that would provide a framework for an equitable sharing of oil resources, and now that legislation needs to go before their Parliament for approval. The Government has formed a committee to organize Provincial elections, and the next step is to set a date for those elections to be held. Iraqi leaders are taking steps toward agreement on a de-Ba'athification law that will allow more Iraqis to reenter their nation's civic life, and they need to agree on that measure and send it to the Parliament.

Prime Minister Maliki is working to build greater support from Iraq's neighbors and the international community. I just talked to him the other day on secure video—I was in the White House, and he was in Baghdad—and we talked about this neighborhood conference, an opportunity to rally the international community to help support this young democracy's efforts to thrive and prosper. And at the conference in Egypt next month, he, along with Secretary Rice and other concerned leaders, will seek increased diplomatic and financial commitments for this country.

Iraq's leaders have begun meeting their benchmarks, and they've got a lot left to do. As more breathing space is created by reducing the sectarian violence, Iraq's leaders have got to take advantage of that breathing space. I have made it abundantly clear to the Prime Minister that our patience is not unlimited, that we fully recognize that there has to be political progress and economic progress,

along with military progress in order for that Government to succeed. And it's up to the Iraqi people and the Iraq-elected folks to show America and the world they're ready to do the hard work necessary to reconcile and move forward.

It's important to understand that Iraq's Government is working hard in a difficult environment. The day after its building was bombed, the Iraqi Parliament held a special session. Its Speaker said the meeting sent "a clear message to all the terrorists and all those who dare to try to stop this political process that we will sacrifice in order for it to continue." I found that to be a heartening statement; that here Al Qaida bombs their Parliament, and this man stands up and says, you're not going to scare us; we want to represent the will of the 12 million people who voted.

You've just got to know my view of—the vast majority of Iraqis are courageous people. They've endured brutality as a result of murderers trying to stop their new country from—their new system of government from succeeding. And I'm impressed by their courage. And I believe this current Government under Prime Minister Maliki is committed to building a strong democracy. That's my judgment, having talked to him. I've watched a man begun to grow in office. I first talked to him in June, when he was named the Prime Minister. I've talked to him consistently ever since. I look to see whether or not he has courage to make the difficult decisions necessary to achieve peace. I'm looking to see whether or not he has got the capacity to reach out and help unify this country. He says, you know, sometimes it's hard to get the Parliament to do exactly what he thinks they ought to do. [*Laughter*] I know what he means. [*Laughter*]

As we increase troop levels, we're also increasing our civilian presence. We're doubling the number of what's called Provincial Reconstruction Teams, which partner civilian experts with combat units to ensure that military operations are followed up with rapid economic assistance. These teams help local Iraqi leaders restore basic services and stimulate job creation and promote reconciliation. Their work highlights a sharp difference: The Iraqi and American Governments want to rebuild communities and improve lives; the extremists and terrorists want to destroy communities and take lives. And when ordinary Iraqis see this difference for themselves, they become more likely to stand with their elected leaders and help marginalize the extremists in this struggle.

Here at home, a different kind of struggle is taking place, and its outcome will have a direct impact on the frontlines. Despite the initial signs of progress on the ground, despite the fact that many reinforcements have not even arrived, Democrat leadership of the Congress is pushing legislation that would undercut the strategy General David Petraeus has just started to pursue. They have passed bills in the House and Senate that would impose restrictions on our military commanders and mandate a precipitous withdrawal by an arbitrary date. They say, withdrawal, regardless of the conditions on the ground. That approach makes for a vivid contrast with the attitude in Iraq. A prominent Middle East scholar recently visited Iraq, described the difference: "A traveler who moves between Baghdad and Washington is struck by the gloomy despair in Washington and the cautious sense of optimism in Baghdad."

We have honest differences of opinion in Washington and around this country, and I appreciate those differences. The ability to debate differences openly and frequently is what makes America a great country. Our men and women in uniform should never be caught in the middle of these debates. It has now been 74 days since I sent to Congress a request for emergency funding that our troops urgently need. The leadership in Congress have spent those 74 days trying to substitute their judgment for the judgment of our generals, without sending me legislation. And now, to cover ongoing Army operations, the Pentagon is being forced to transfer money from military personnel accounts.

The delay in spending is beginning to affect the ability of the Pentagon to fund our troops and all our missions. On Wednesday, I met at the White House with congressional leaders from both parties. It was a very cordial meeting. I think you would have been pleased at the tone of the meeting in the Cabinet Room there at the White House—

at least I was. I urged the people around the table to put politics aside and to send a bill that funds our troops, without arbitrary deadlines, without wasteful spending, and without handcuffing our commanders.

There is ample time to debate this war. We need to get the troops the money. When we debate the war on terror, it can be convenient to divide up the fight by location. And so we hear about, quote, "the war in Afghanistan" and, quote, "the war in Iraq," if they were something separate. This is a natural way to talk about a complicated subject—I don't think it's accurate. Our enemies make no distinction based on borders. They view the world as a giant battlefield and will strike wherever they can. The killers who behead captives and order suicide bombings in Iraq are followers of the same radical ideology as those who destroy markets in Afghanistan, or they set off car bombs in Algeria, and blow up subway trains in London. The men who attacked Iraq's Parliament last week swear allegiance to the same terrorist network as those who attacked America on September the 11th, 2001.

The fight in Iraq has been long and is trying. It's a difficult period in our Nation's history. I also say it's a consequential moment in our Nation's history as well. It's natural to wish there was an easy way out, that we could just pack up and bring our troops home and be safe. Yet in Iraq, the easy road would be a road to disaster. If we were to leave Iraq before that Government can defend itself and be an ally in this war against extremists and radicals and be able to deny safe haven from people who want to hurt the United States, the consequences for this country would be grave.

There would be a security vacuum in Iraq. Extremists and radicals love vacuums in which to spread chaos. The world would see different factions of radicals, different groups of extremists competing for influence and power. The extremists who emerge from this battle would turn the country into a new radical regime in the Middle East. I told you they want to launch new attacks on America, and they need safe haven from which to do so.

Not every enemy we face in Iraq wants to attack us here at home, but many of them do. And I believe it's in the interest of this country to take those threats seriously. We don't have to imagine what might happen if a group of terrorists gained safe haven. We've learned that lesson, I hope—precisely what happened in Afghanistan—it's really important for our memories not to dim. At least it's important for my memory not to dim, because my most important job is to protect the American people. The lesson of 9/11 is that when you allow extremists and radicals and killers to find a sanctuary anywhere in the world, that can have deadly consequences on the streets of our own cities. What happens overseas matters here in the United States of America. It's one of the fundamental lessons of September the 11th, 2001.

Those who advocate pulling out of Iraq claim they are proposing an alternative strategy to deal with the situation there. Withdrawal is not a strategy. Withdrawal would do nothing to prevent violence from spilling out across that country and plunging Iraq into chaos and anarchy. Withdrawal would do nothing to prevent Al Qaida from taking advantage of the chaos to seize control of a nation with some of the world's largest oil resources. Withdrawal would embolden these radicals and extremists. Withdrawal would do nothing to prevent Al Qaida from using Iraq as a base to overthrow other moderate countries. Withdrawal would do nothing to prevent Iran from exploiting the chaos in Iraq to destabilize the region, expand its radical influence, threaten Israel, and further its ambitions to obtain nuclear weapons.

If anything, withdrawal would make each of these dangerous developments more likely. Withdrawal would embolden enemies and confirm their belief that America is weak and does not have the stomach to do what is necessary to lay the foundations for peace. Ultimately, withdrawal would increase the probability that American troops would have to return to Iraq and confront an enemy that is even more dangerous.

So no matter how frustrating the fight in Iraq can be, no matter how much we wish the war was over, the security of our country depends directly on the outcome of Iraq. The price of giving up there would be paid in American lives for years to come. I firmly

believe that historians would look back on that decision to withdraw, and say, "What happened to them in the year 2007; how come they could not see the dangers to the United States of America?"

No one understands the stakes in Iraq more clearly than our troops. Every man and woman in our military volunteered for the job. They make us proud every day. Michael Evans is a specialist from Sumner, Illinois. His unit is part of the new operation to secure Baghdad. He said, quote, "It is a great feeling to know we're contributing to getting insurgents off the streets, so the people do not have to live in fear." He went on to say, "I'll be coming away from this knowing that I was doing something to help the American people—so that what happened on 9/11 never happens again."

I agree with him. Specialist Evans represents the greatness of our country: decent citizens volunteering to protect you. You know, for all we hear about the consequences of failure in Iraq, we should not forget the consequences of success in Iraq. Success in Iraq would bring something powerful and new, a democracy at the heart of the Middle East, a nation that fights terrorists instead of harboring them, and a powerful example for others of the power of liberty to overcome an ideology of hate.

We have done this kind of work in the United States of America before. I am—you know, I marvel at the fact that on the one hand, my dad joined the Navy at 18 to fight a sworn enemy, the Japanese, and on the other hand, his son, some 55 years later, best friend and keeping the peace with the Prime Minister of Japan. I find that an amazing fact of history: 41 fights them; 43 works with them to lay the foundation for peace, including working with Japan to deploy Japanese troops in Iraq. It's amazing to me. But it shows the power of liberty to transform enemies into allies.

We have done the hard work before of helping young democracies. As a matter of fact, we did so after a brutal World War II, in helping Germany and Japan get back on their feet and establish forms of government that yield peace. We did so after the Korean war. I suspect it would be hard to find anybody in 1953 to predict that an American President would one day be reporting to the World Affairs Council of Western Michigan that relations in the Far East are solid for the United States of America and that that part of the world is relatively peaceful compared to other troubled parts of the world. In '53 they would have been thinking about all the lives lost in Japan or in Korea. In '53 they would have seen a Communist China gaining strength.

And yet, in 2007, we've got a Korea that went through difficult times to get to the democracy she's now in and is now a major trading partner of the United States. We've got a China with an open marketplace, based upon the principles where consumers get to decide things, not the state. The political system has got a long way to go, but the marketplace is beginning to redefine that society. Or how about Japan, a place where we lost thousands of lives, and yet now they're a partner in peace.

America has done the hard work necessary to give liberty a chance to prevail. And it's in my opinion and in the opinion of people like Specialist Evans that we do so in the Middle East for the sake of peace for a young generation of Americans.

Thank you.

I'll be glad to answer a couple of questions, on any subject. Yes, sir.

Emergency Supplemental Appropriations/ War on Terror Strategy

Q. How do you think the new Democratic Congress will—[*inaudible*].

The President. Yes, thanks. First of all, I just want you to know that even though I'm quite critical of the delay in the supplemental funding, I respect the Democratic leadership in Washington. We have fundamental disagreements about whether or not helping this young democracy is—the consequences of failure or success, let's put it that way. It's also very important in this debate to understand that even though we have our policy differences—particularly as the young lad that you are—that we don't think either of us are not patriotic citizens, okay?

So when you hear the debate, in my perspective, it's because of—I just disagree with the notion that when we have troops in harm's way that there ought to be a kind of

political process with strings attached to a piece of legislation that goes to fund our troops. As I say, there's ample time to discuss right or wrong. I don't believe there's ample time to delay funding for men and women who have volunteered.

Secondly, I feel very strongly—wait a minute—[*applause*]—this is a sober forum—or a forum of sober people, I hope. [*Laughter*] There is a—I have a fundamental problem with a—look, a lot of people didn't like the strategy. In other words, people said, "You shouldn't have done that, Mr. President." And I fully understand that aspect of it. I also found it quite ironic that the general I asked to lead the strategy, a counterinsurgency expert, David Petraeus, gets approved by the United States Senate 81 to nothing, and then, on his way over, they begin to micromanage his ability to follow through on the strategy.

So we have just a policy difference. When it's all said and done, I believe these troops will get the money they need. I think you're going to see there to be a continual debate on this subject. Interestingly enough, I said in a forum yesterday in Ohio and I'll share with you now, I thought at this point this year, I would be announcing troop reductions in Iraq, because I felt—this is, again, a year ago—I felt that the Iraqi Government was better prepared to be able to handle their own security. And by the way, they want to handle their own security. The Prime Minister is constantly saying, "Let me do more of it." We just believe he's not quite ready to do so and that it's in our interest to help him to be able to take on more of the security challenges. And I thought we'd be reducing troops.

And then what happened was, the Samarra bombing took place by Al Qaida, which caused there to be a sectarian outrage. And because the Government was ill-prepared to provide enough security in the capital, people began to use militias to provide security. And the sectarian outrage, the killing started to get out of hand. And I had a decision to make: withdraw from the capital and just kind of hope for the burnout theory—as you know, I was worried about chaos, and into chaos comes more extremists—or reinforce. I chose to reinforce, all aiming to get to a position where we'll be able to reposition our forces.

I liked what James A. Baker and Lee Hamilton suggested. I thought that was a good suggestion. And that is to be in a position at some point in time where our troops are embedded with the Iraqi units—in other words, there's Iraqi units providing security with a handful of U.S. troops helping them learn what it means to be a good military. That's not a given. It's hard to have a good military. It's hard to have a chain of command with logistical support and maintenance support. And we're good at it, and we can help others become good at it. And embedding troops and training troops makes sense for me. I like the idea of having our troops on the over-horizon presence, to be able to help bail out extreme situations. I really want to make sure that our special ops stays on the hunt for Al Qaida in Iraq. We can't let Al Qaida develop another safe haven. Listen, we spent a lot of energy to drive Al Qaida out of Afghanistan; we don't want them to be able to establish a same type of safe haven in Iraq. That's where I would like to be.

I made the judgment, along with our military commanders, we could not get there until we provided enough security. And I fully understand this is a rough war. As I mentioned in my speech—let me put it more bluntly: The enemy has got an advantage. They know that a spectacular bombing is going to make it on the news, and it shakes people's conscience, and it should. Ours is a nation that has deep compassion for human life and human dignity.

But they also know it makes people question whether or not we can succeed in Iraq. Remember, we believe most of the spectaculars, like the ones you saw—we don't have—I can't tell you for certain Wednesday's bombing was Al Qaida. In other words, I don't have the—I can speculate. But I can tell you a lot of the spectacular bombings have been Al Qaida. A lot of the suicide bombings have been Al Qaida. That's why I said Al Qaida is the main threat for peace, because what they're trying to do is shake the confidence of the Iraqi people and their Government and the coalition's ability to provide security, and shake our confidence.

And, you know, as I say, it is tempting to think, well, just pull out of there and everything is going to be fine. I firmly believe, however, that one of the lessons of September the 11th is that if we were to concede Iraq to basically Al Qaida, in a sense, that they would follow us here, that oceans no longer protect us. And it's also important for you to know that my thinking was deeply affected on September the 11th, 2001. And therefore, a lot of the core of my thinking is to work to protect the United States as my most solemn obligation.

Yes, sir.

Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. No, thank you. Good question. His question was, one, the relationship with Tony Blair; two, they have reduced their troops in Basra, in southern Iraq, and has that affected our relationship.

First, I have found Tony Blair to be a stand-up man. He's the kind of person who keeps his word. He's a strategic thinker. He thinks beyond the moment, to be able to try to project out beyond the current, so that the decisions that we have made jointly are decisions that end up yielding a long-term peace.

He, of course, like a good ally, informed me of his Government's intentions to reduce their presence in Basra. I concurred with him because the conditions on the ground were such that he didn't need to keep as many troops there as were initially stationed there. Secondly, what's interesting, as he made the announcement on Basra, he also made the announcement that they're going to send more troops into Afghanistan. Blair knows what I know—Prime Minister Blair knows what I know, that we're in a global war and that we think about Afghanistan and Iraq as separate wars—they're of the same war; they're just different theaters of this war.

He also knows what I know, that we have got to work really closely and share intelligence, and that's one of the reasons I appreciate Pete so much. He understands the intelligence business as a key component of keeping the country safe. We've got to share intelligence. This is—Tony Blair is the Prime Minister of a country which has been attacked; so has ours. And—no, I appreciate you bringing him up; he's solid. And in my judgment, the world needs courageous leadership, people like Tony Blair.

Yes, sir.

Iran and Syria/Spread of Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. What's the next step for the United States, or even the United Nations, in dealing with the belligerent behavior of Iran with regards to nuclear development?

The President. Yes, thank you. Excellent question. You go to school here?

Q. No. [*Laughter*]

The President. I was going to say, give the man an "A."

First of all, you do understand Iran is a Shi'a nation primarily. Interestingly enough, though, only 50 percent of the nation is Persian. A great portion of Iran is Azeri, Baloch, other kinds of nationalities make up their country.

The Iranians have defied international organizations in an attempt to enrich uranium and—we believe, because they want to have a nuclear weapon. And I believe this challenge is one of the most significant challenges we face—"we," the free world, face. There's a lot of reasons why.

One, just as an example, you really don't want a regime that funds terrorist organizations like Hizballah to have a nuclear weapon as a part of their capacity to create the conditions, for example, of diplomatic blackmail. Secondly, the current leader of Iran has—I can't remember exactly his words, but the sum of them were that the destruction of one of our allies was important to them—that would be Israel.

Third, it's ironic, isn't it, that any time a democracy begins to take hold in the Middle East, extremist groups prevent that democracy from moving forward. One such democracy is Lebanon, a wonderful little country. And yet there is a Syrian influence—Syria uses not only their own agents inside the country but Hizballah to destabilize this young democracy. And Hizballah is funded by Iran. In other words, the Iranian regime's

current posture is to destabilize young democracies, and they're doing so in Iraq as well.

So our objective is to rally the world to make it clear to the current regime that if they continue their practices they will continue to be isolated. And we're making interesting progress. We've passed several U.N. Security Council resolutions, the primary benefit of which is to say to the Iranian regime, and equally importantly the Iranian people, that countries as diverse as the United States and China and Russia and parts of Europe will isolate you, will deny you, the Iranian people, the benefits that you deserve. Iran is a proud country with a great tradition and good, hard-working people. And yet their Government is making decisions that endanger peace and, at the same time, will continue to lead to isolation. And so, should the Iranian people worry about isolation? I think so, because you're missing economic opportunities. You're missing the chance to improve your lives. You're missing the chance to enhance your country's great history.

The choice is up to the Iranian Government as to whether or not they will be accepted into the family of nations, all aimed at promoting peace and economic prosperity. They've made a bad choice up to now. And so we'll continue to work hard with the rest of the world, all aiming at solving this very difficult problem diplomatically.

Yes, ma'am.

Iraq Study Group/Situation in the Middle East

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Sure.

Q. I think that's a great idea. I was wondering, we did have a group—a commission, I believe, here, that was discussing how to solve our Iraq problems, but we really haven't implemented the advice from——

The President. Baker-Hamilton.

Q. ——Baker-Hamilton commission. I was wondering how we were going to be able to convince the countries that participate in this conference in Egypt that we will actually consider implementing their advice——

The President. That's a good question. First, there was a couple of aspects of Baker-Hamilton—a lot of it had to do with troop posture. And Baker-Hamilton recommended that, as I described, a troop presence to help keep the territorial integrity of Iraq, to embed, to train, to be over the horizon, to chase down extremists. That's pretty much what they recommended, and I agree. The problem is—and by the way, on, like, page 70-something in their book, they said: And the United States may have to increase troop levels necessary to be able to get there. And that's what I did. [*Applause*] Wait a minute, wait a minute—because I realize that we couldn't be in a position on the troop postures they recommended if the capital went into flames. That's a judgment I made.

By the way, with the advice of a lot of people—and just so you know, I spend a lot of time listening to our military. I trust our military; I like our military; I'm impressed by our military. I spend a lot of time talking to Condi Rice. I spend a lot of time talking to allies in the Congress, and I spend a lot of time listening to and talking to people who have a different point of view.

It was after this considered judgment that I made that decision, all aiming at some point in time. Now, the problem is, the Congress, many of whom think that it's a good idea, however are unwilling to allow conditions on the ground to make the decisions as to when we can ever get there. I don't have that luxury. I must allow conditions on the ground to dictate our position in order to make decisions.

Now, a lot of what Baker-Hamilton talked about was—or some of what they talked about was the diplomatic initiatives. There were—they talked about a regional conference, and we're happy to participate. They also suggested that the United States enter into bilateral negotiations with Syria, for example. And this is where I have a disagreement. As you know—as you may or may not know, when I was a younger lad, Jimmy Baker was in Houston and a good friend of my family's, and in spite of my deep affection for him, I invited him into the Oval Office and said, "I disagree with you." And he said, "Fine, I disagree with you." [*Laughter*]

And the reason I do is because—now, there's a difference between a regional conference, in my judgment, and—I'll tell you

what I hope we can gain out of that—but I do want to address why it's—I think it would be counterproductive at this point to sit down with the Syrians, because Syria knows exactly what it takes to get better relations with the United States. It's not as if they haven't heard what we're for, and we're for making sure they leave the Lebanese democracy alone. They have undermined Lebanon's democracy. When the United States and France worked together on a U.N. resolution, the U.N. demanded that they leave Lebanon. They did, but they're still meddling.

Secondly, there's a man who was assassinated, named Hariri. It's very important that there be a full investigation of the Hariri murder, and they know we expect them to support that investigation. We believe they're hindering that investigation right now. Thirdly, they're providing safe haven for—I'll just say they've got—Hamas and Hizballah have got centers of influence in Damascus. That's unacceptable to the United States. We have made it clear to them that in order for them to have better relations that they must rid their capital of these organizations, all aimed at wreaking havoc in the Middle East and preventing, for example, the development of a peaceful Palestinian state that can live with Israel, side by side in peace.

And finally, Syria is a transit way for suicide bombers heading into Iraq. In sum, they have been particularly unhelpful in achieving peace we want. Now what happens when people go sit down with Bashar Asad, the President of Syria, he walks out and holds a press conference, and says, "Look how important I am; people are coming to see me; people think I'm vital." But he hasn't delivered on one request by the free world.

I asked our security folks, the national security folks to give me a list of all the foreign advisers and foreign secretaries of state and all the people that have gone to see Bashar Asad. And every time they send one in there, we say, why, why are you sending somebody there; what is your intention; what have you asked them to do? They all say basically what I just said, and nothing has happened. And my attitude is, is that I think talks would be counterproductive. I'm interested not in process. I'm interested in results. I'm interested in this leader turning Syria into a positive influence for peace, not an obstructionist to peace.

On Iran, I said we'll talk to Iran, but they've got to suspend their enrichment. Diplomacy works when people sit down at the table and need something from you. That's how diplomacy works. It is, in my judgment, just talking for the sake of talking doesn't yield positive results often. As a matter of fact, it can reaffirm behavior that is not in our interests. So we've said to the Iranians, we will talk with you, but first do what the world has asked you to do, and suspend the enrichment of uranium.

As I said in my talk here, and I'm speaking to you—I'm also speaking to the Iranian people. They must know that our beef with Iran is not with the people of Iran; it's with the Government of Iran that continues to make decisions that isolates you from the opportunities of a fantastic world.

Now, what do we hope to gain out of the regional conference? It's very important for us, first of all, for the Iraqi democracy to gain acceptance. This is a new Government. Remember, these folks were run by a tyrant for years, and now we're watching the emergence of a new government that has not been in office for a year yet, by the way. We've been there for more than a year, but the Constitution was passed in '05, late '05; the new Government was seated in June of '06. So Prime Minister Maliki—and it's important, I think, for the world to recognize, or the region to recognize that he was duly elected by the people of Iraq and represents the will of the Iraqi citizens. It's important for people to express their support for this new Government.

Let me just talk about a couple of countries. One, Saudi Arabia. My friend, His Majesty, the King, kindly forgave 80 percent of the debt in the run-up to this conference; 80 percent of Saudi debt to Iraq was forgiven. That's a strong gesture. It's a gesture that I'm confident will spread good will in Iraq. And so the conference can be a success on that alone.

I will tell you, however, that His Majesty is skeptical about the Shi'a government in Iraq. And it's going to be very important for Prime Minister Maliki to follow through on

the new de-Ba'athification law, for example, which reaches out to Sunnis. People say, what does that mean? Well, the law was passed that basically said, if you were a member of the Ba'ath party, you couldn't participate in much of civil society. And in some Provinces, that is—that's precluded people from being school teachers. In other words, in order to be a teacher, you had to sign up for Saddam's deal, and yet you might not have been a political person. And so what a lot of folks are watching is to see whether or not there's going to be a reconciliation with the Sunnis who have been affected by the de-Ba'athification.

The oil revenue sharing is a very interesting aspect, and this is what people are watching for, because most of the oil is in Shi'a land or with the Kurds. And therefore, an equitable sharing agreement of the people's resources throughout society will send a signal that this Government is not going to take unnecessary retribution against peaceful Sunnis. And so the benchmarks that I described are important for America, but they're also important to make sure that further regional conferences are successful.

And so I talked to Condi about this last night—as a matter of fact, this very subject, about what constitutes success. And first of all, it's successful to have people come to the table and discuss Iraq and its new form of government. In other words, the region recognizes there is a new government when they come, and that's vital. And then we'll see whether or not some of the pledges, reconstruction pledges, will be met. Excellent question.

Yes, sir.

Public Opinion on Iraq

Q. Mr. President, thanks for coming to the west coast, first.

The President. Looking for the surfboard. [*Laughter*]

Q. You mentioned in your comments, sir, about the American patience. What's the Prime Minister's take on that? What is his understanding of American patience?

The President. Well, he is—you know, I don't know, I think he's concerned about his own country's patience, first and foremost. He's having a tough time. I will give you my take on patience. I think that if the American people fully understand the stakes of failure, they'll understand why we're doing what we're doing. And my own view of patience is that a President—and I believe Tony Blair agrees with this—must make decisions on certain principles and not try to chase opinion polls. If you make decisions based upon the latest opinion poll, you won't be thinking long-term strategy on behalf of the American people.

And Tony Blair understands that as well. At least that's what I get from him. That's—when I talk to him, that's the impression I get.

There weren't opinion polls when Abraham Lincoln was the President. Believe me, I'm not comparing myself to him, but I just don't think a President like Abraham Lincoln made a decision about whether all men were created equal based upon an opinion poll. [*Laughter*] Nor do I make an opinion about my strong belief that freedom is universal, and there's no debate. I believe in the universality of liberty, and I believe liberty has got the capacity to help transform parts of the world into peaceful parts of the world.

That's what I described to you at the end of—what happened at the end of World War II and at the end of the Korean conflict. I firmly believe in the power of freedom, and I firmly believe that everybody wants to be free. As a matter of fact, to take it a step further, I believe there's an Almighty, and I believe a great gift to each man, woman, and child in this world is freedom. That's what I believe. It is a principle from which I will not deviate.

People said to me—the guy asked a question the other day, you don't like the opinion polls and all that stuff—I said, any politician who says they don't want to be popular, you know—you can't win if, like, 50-plus-one don't like you for a moment. [*Laughter*] You can't make your decisions, however, based on something that just changes; it just, poof. And when it's all said and done, I fully understand that some of the decisions I have made have created a lot of national debate. But I want you to know something, that when I go home and look in the mirror in Crawford, Texas, after my time, I will be able to have said, he didn't change his principles

to be the popular guy, you know, he stood for what he believed.

Spread of Democracy in the Middle East/ U.S. Foreign Policy

Q. Mr. President, I really appreciate your emphasis on the universality of freedom. I'm wondering if and how the United States can promote liberal democratic reform in countries like Saudi Arabia and whether you could address specifically whether it is, perhaps, American support for these autocratic regimes that are creating such an Islamic backlash against the United States?

The President. That is a—boy, I don't want to be Mr. Gratuitous, say, fabulous question, but it's really one of the fundamental questions that has caused a lot of debate in Washington, DC, about my freedom agenda.

There are some who say that promoting democracy and liberty in the Middle East is a waste of time. I happen to believe that, kind of, managing stability doesn't address the root cause of the problems that caused 19 kids to get on an airplane and kill 3,000 of our citizens. And so part of our strategy to defend the country is the promotion of freedom around the world. I also, in my second Inaugural Address, believe in the interests of the United States to challenge tyranny wherever we find it. As an aside, and I'm not suggesting my friends here, the scribblers over here are saying this, but some have called him hopelessly idealistic to believe in the power of freedom to transform parts of the world that seem impervious to liberty.

I believe it is the only realistic way to protect ourselves in the long term, and that is to address the conditions that create hatred, envy, and violence.

The other thing that's important to note is that societies, depending upon their past, take a while to achieve freedom as we define it. In other words, some move at snail's pace, some move, obviously, quicker. And all the societies will reflect their own traditions and histories. So when you hear me talk about the freedom agenda, it's not like, I expect Jefferson democracy to be blooming in the desert.

Secondly, friendship with leaders makes it easier to have a frank and candid discussion in a way that doesn't offend. And my friend—I do have a good, very close relationship with King Abdallah of Saudi Arabia, and I'm proud of that relationship. It gives me a chance to be able to share with him ideas about—in a private way, obviously not so private now—[*laughter*]—why I believe giving people more voice in the affairs of their Government is in the interests of their Government. Same with my friend President Mubarak of Egypt. I have made it clear, for example, that—and by the way, the Egyptians had a Presidential election that was quite modern and different. And I don't believe that it's going to be possible to be able to have a less-free Presidential election during the next round.

And so there is progress being made toward more liberty, in a part of the world that most people said had no chance to be a place for democracy to take hold. I will give you the—in Yemen there was an election that was supervised by international bodies. They came out and said, it's a fair election. There are women now serving in Kuwait Parliament. Jordan, the King of Jordan is making moves toward liberalizing his society. I think, slowly but surely—and by the way, this is a long process. Remember, I talked about the aftermath of the Korean war. This is like—we're talking 55 years later. It takes a while.

And the fundamental question facing the country is, will we be engaged in the Middle East helping moderates defeat and fight off radicals—hopefully not militarily every single time, hopefully rarely militarily—but by defeating an ideology with forms of government. And it's really going to be an interesting debate. I have staked my claim for the first part of the 21st century. I will tell you, I am worried about our country becoming isolationist and protectionist. We have been through isolationist and protectionist spells in our history. One of my concerns is that people say, "It is not worth it to be engaged as heavily as we are in parts of the world," particularly the Middle East. I'm concerned about that. I'm concerned because I believe it will be missed opportunity to help people realize that—if you've got a Muslim brotherhood doing a better job of providing health care and education, the way to deal with that is to do a better job than they are, as opposed

to ignoring the realities on the ground. And that's what open societies that have got an election process force people to do.

I was criticized by some that upon insisting that the Palestinian elections go forward. I believe elections are the beginning of the reform process, not the end. I believe elections have the capacity to show the elite what's right and what's wrong. And I believe the Hamas elections in the Middle East made it clear that the Palestinians are sick and tired of corruption and government that was not responding to their needs.

I wasn't happy with the outcome of the election—sometimes that happens, you're not happy with the outcome of elections. [*Laughter*] But I was inspired by the fact that the Palestinians went to the polls and said, in the fairest way possible, "We're sick of it. Arafat has let us down; no peace. We want to live in peace. Where's the prosperity? Let's get us another bunch in there and see if they can do the job." The problem is, is that the new crowd they have in there refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist, which runs contrary to our policy. And therefore, we will continue to take the posture we're taken, because we're interested in peace.

I'm interested in helping the Palestinians develop a Palestinian state. It's all along the same agenda, by the way, which is the freedom agenda. I believe the only way for Israel to have secure peace in the long run is for there to be a democracy living side by side with Israel in peace. I'm afraid that Israel will ultimately be overrun by demographics in order for her to remain a Jewish democratic state. And yet Hamas wins. And you can't expect a Israeli democratic elected official to negotiate with a group of people who have avowed to destroy them.

And hopefully, at some point in time, the situation will get clarified, if the Palestinian people have another right to express themselves, and that right ought to be, are you for a state or not for a state? Are you going to have people that prevent a better future for emerging from you? By the way, this all started with the elections. And they said, "Oh, you shouldn't have elections; you shouldn't have been fighting against them." Why would I fight against elections? I'm for elections. I think elections are important for society. I think—and I think they're equally important here as they are in the Middle East.

And the fundamental question, really, facing in the long term on this is, will the United States believe that the value system that has enabled our country, by the way, to emerge—and it took us 100 years to get rid of slavery, for example. Far be it from us to say we're perfect. We had a great Constitution, but our history has been scarred by treating people like chattel, with slavery, which is an abhorrent part of our past. But nevertheless, it takes a while, and it takes patience. But it also takes great faith and certain value systems to help societies emerge.

The other question is on trade. And by the way, I happen to believe isolationism and protectionism go hand in hand. As you know, I'm an open-market trader. I believe in free trade. I think competition and trade not only helps the United States, I think it's the best way to alleviate poverty around the world. And that doesn't mean you don't enforce trade agreements. Recently we've enforced trade agreements with China—not trying to shutdown trade, but trying to enhance trade, trying to make trade more palatable to people in the United States, recognizing that there is such thing as fair trade as well as free trade.

But I'm concerned about people saying, "Well, it's just not worth it; shut her down; let's make it harder to trade." There's going to be some interesting trade votes coming up in front of the Congress here—free trade agreement with Peru and Colombia are coming up. And we'll find out whether or not the leadership and both Republicans and Democrats are truly committed to not only our neighborhood but trading in a way that enhances prosperity for both sides of the equation.

We're in the middle of negotiations on the Doha round of WTO. I hope some of you are concerned about world poverty. I certainly am. And the best way to deal with world poverty is to encourage prosperity through trade and opening up markets. And we're in complex negotiations, and I'm dedicated to getting this round completed in a way that meets our interests, but also meets other interests.

I want to share with you one other thing, then I've got to get out of here. You know, Laura says, "You get up there and all you do is talk, and you love to hear yourself talk." [*Laughter*] I want to share one other aspect of our foreign policy. I believe to whom much is given, much is required. And I want to share something about this great, generous nation, for which you deserve a lot of credit.

Whether it be on HIV/AIDS or malaria, the United States is in the lead. And when I got elected, I was deeply concerned about the fact that an entire generation of folks on the continent of Africa could be wiped out by a disease that we could not cure but halt. And I set up what's called the Global Fund for AIDS. And yet it kind of sat there empty. It was a deal where everybody could contribute, and then the United States would match to try to encourage commitments, but it didn't fill up. And so I went to Congress and asked that they spend your money on a unilateral initiative where we would take on I think the 17 most or 19 most affected countries in the world and deliver antiretroviral drugs.

Foreign policy is more than military. It is more than just spreading freedom. It's also, in my judgment, in our interest to base it upon that admonition, if you're blessed, you ought to help others. And as a result of the American people, we spread antiretrovirals or got antiretrovirals to 850,000 people. That's up from 50,000 in 3 years.

We're all interconnected in this world. What happens overseas matters here at home, from a security perspective, but I also believe it matters here at home from the perspective of keeping our spirits strong. It's in the interest of this country that we be engaged in freeing people from tyranny, the tyranny of government and the tyranny of disease and hunger.

I appreciate you giving me a chance to come and visit with you. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:02 p.m. at East Grand Rapids High School. In his remarks, he referred to Larry Fisher, associate prinicpal, East Grand Rapids High School; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Mahmud al-Mashhadani, Speaker of the Iraqi House of Representatives; Fouad Ajami, director, Middle East Studies Program, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University; former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan; President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran; and King Abdallah II of Jordan.

Proclamation 8129—National Day of Prayer, 2007

April 20, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

A prayerful spirit has always been an important part of our national character, and it is a force that has guided the American people, given us strength, and sustained us in moments of joy and in times of challenge. On this National Day of Prayer, we acknowledge God's grace and ask for His continued guidance in the life of our Nation.

Americans of many faiths and traditions share a common belief that God hears the prayers of His children and shows grace to those who seek Him. Following the tragedy at Virginia Tech, in towns all across America, in houses of worship from every faith, Americans have joined together to pray for the lives that were lost and for their families, friends, and loved ones. We hold the victims in our hearts and pray for those who suffer and grieve. There is a power in these prayers, and we can find comfort in the grace and guidance of a loving God.

At this important time in our history, we also pray for the brave members of our Armed Forces and their families. We pray for their safety, for the recovery of the wounded, and for the peace we all seek.

The Congress, by Public Law 100–307, as amended, has called on our Nation to reaffirm the role of prayer in our society and to respect the freedom of religion by recognizing each year a "National Day of Prayer."

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim May 3, 2007, as a National Day of Prayer. I ask the citizens of our Nation to give thanks, each according to his or her own faith, for the freedoms and blessings we have received and for God's