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## President Discusses Global War on Terror Following Briefing at CENTCOM

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 [In Focus: National Security](#)

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THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. Thanks for the warm weather. (Laughter.) It's nice to be back here. I just came from MacDill, where I was talking to General Abizaid and General Brown, and one of the things that's clear is folks there at MacDill really do appreciate the support that the citizens of the communities of Tampa and St. Pete and the surrounding area provide them. So I want to thank you all very much for being -- (applause.)

I'd like to share some thoughts with you, and then answer questions as time allows, if you've got any. First, I send Laura's greetings. She's doing great, by the way. She's a fantastic First Lady and -- (applause.) She's obviously got to be a woman of enormous patience. (Laughter.)

I appreciate Congressman Adam Putnam, Bill Young, Mike Bilirakis, and Katherine Harris for being here today. (Applause.) Oh, there they are. Proud to give them a ride on Air Force One. (Laughter.) Some of them aren't going back, by the way. (Laughter.) Mark Kennedy -- is Mark here with us, from Minnesota? I think he was going to drop by -- he supposedly was going to be here. You don't know him because he's from Minnesota, but I do and he's a fine guy. (Laughter.)

I want to thank my buddy, Mel Sembler, Ambassador Sembler, who represented our country so well, once in Australia under 41, and then Italy under 43. (Applause.) And Betty. I want to thank the Chambers of both Tampa and St. Pete. I want to thank the Mayors from Tampa and St. Pete -- Mayor Iorio and Mayor Baker are with us. Thank you both for coming. Appreciate you being here. (Applause.)

I didn't mean to take you away from your work. Any excuse is a good one on Friday, right? (Laughter.)



So long as I keep the speech short. I want to thank members of the Statehouse who are here. I want to thank you all for letting us use this beautiful facility. And thank you for coming.

First of all, the economy is in good shape. It's growing. (Applause.) I guess that's an easy thing to say in the state of Florida, when the unemployment rate is 3.3 percent. Pretty amazing, isn't it? (Applause.) I'm sure the Governor is going to try to take credit for it, you know. (Laughter.) I'm not going to because the role of government is to create an environment where the entrepreneurs can flourish and small businesses can grow.

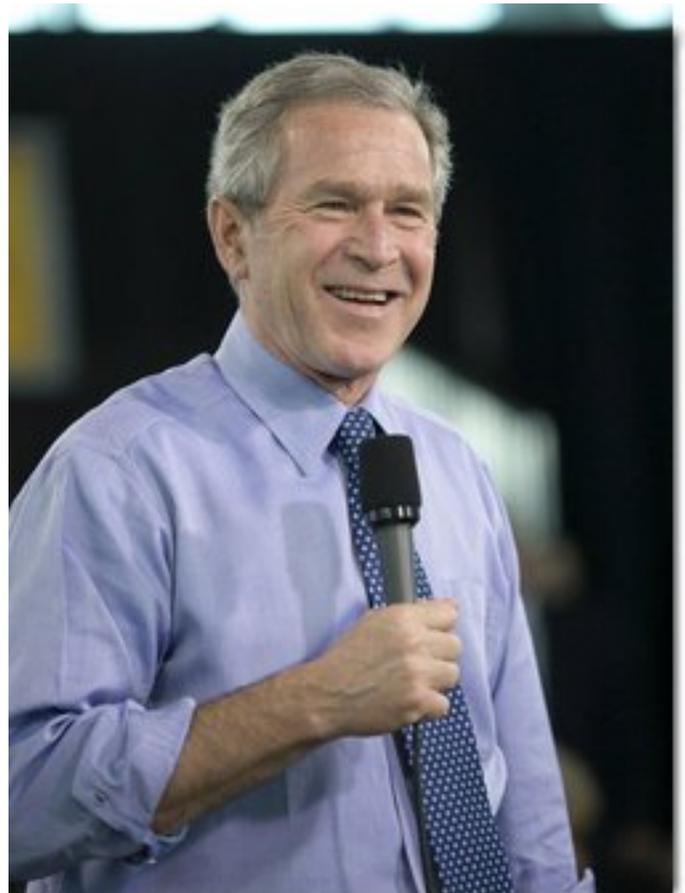
And the fundamental question facing this country of ours is, how do we keep ourselves to be the economic leader of the world. It's really an interesting question. You know, in spite of the good economic numbers -- 4.7 percent unemployment around the country, our economy growing at over 3 percent, in the face of hurricanes, as well as high gas prices, home ownership is an all-time high, small businesses are growing -- in spite of all that, there's a certain sense of uncertainty. People are worried. They're worried because they're changing jobs a lot; they're worried because of the competition from India and China. There's a certain sense of uncertainty.

And so we have a choice to make about our economy: Do we retreat in the face of uncertainty, or do we lead? And I -- I will be working with the Congress, members from both political parties, to be the leader of the world. And here's some ideas. One, keep taxes low. We can't be the economic leader of the world if we run up your taxes. And so we're going to keep them low. (Applause.)

And you'll hear a debate in Washington, D.C. that says, well, we've got to run up your taxes to balance the budget. That's not the way it works in Washington. They will run up your taxes and they'll figure out new ways to spend money. The best way to balance the budget is to keep the taxes low and be wise about how we spend your money. That's how we're going to balance the budget. (Applause.)

In order for us to be competitive and lead in the world, we've got to get -- we've got to get off of Middle Eastern oil. I know it shocks some of you to hear a Texan say, we're addicted to oil. And we are, and it's a problem. It's a problem. It's a national security problem, and it's an economic security problem to be reliant upon oil from parts of the world that may be unstable, or parts of the world that simply don't like us. And so the best way to deal with that is to continue to foster new technologies because of research and development that will enable us to use different fuels in our cars, for example.

There's Kennedy right there. Good to see you, Kennedy. The reason I thought of him is because he's



from a part of the world that's growing a lot of crops that can be converted into energy. We're close. We're close to technological breakthroughs that will enable us to convert wood chips and sawgrass -- we already convert sugar, corn and soy -- into fuel. And think about that. If this technology comes true, which we believe it will, then pretty soon a President is going to say, we're growing a lot of crops and we're less dependent on Middle Eastern oil. There are 4.5 million cars today that are flex-fuel cars that can either run on gasoline or ethanol. In other words, the technology is available inside the automobile. And it's coming.

And we're making some great breakthroughs on battery technology. Next week I'm going to travel around the country going to some of the most innovative places around our country that are providing new technologies to enable us to become less dependent on oil, which will keep us a leader in the world.

Another thing we need to do is to make sure that our health care system is modern. I want to talk real quick about Medicare here. First of all, I'm aware there's a lot of seniors in this state that rely upon Medicare. The federal government made a commitment to the seniors around the United States, starting with Lyndon Baines Johnson, that we would provide good health care to the seniors. And when I got to Washington, I found that we were not providing modern medicine. I mean, we would provide the money for ulcer surgery in the old Medicare, but not the prescription drugs necessary to prevent the ulcer from happening in the first place. And that didn't seem to make sense to me. It's an old, centralized system that was not modern and was not fulfilling the promise we made.

And so I worked with Congress -- Republicans and Democrats -- to get a new bill out of Congress that said we're going to provide a prescription drug benefit, and as we do, we're going to give seniors more choices and more options from which to choose.

About 25 million seniors have signed up for this new plan since January 1st. That's a lot of folks in a quick period of time. And needless to say, when you make that kind of transition to a modern system, there's going to be some glitches. And our job is to fix those glitches. And that's what the Department of Health and Human Services under Mike Leavitt is doing. And it's important for our seniors to take advantage of this new program. Call 1-800-Medicare. Or if you've got a mom or a dad who's eligible for Medicare, sit down with them and explain the new benefit. It is a really good deal for America's seniors.



To make sure that health care works, we'll continue to take care of the poor. In other words, the government has made a commitment to the elderly and the poor, but the government has also got to understand, the best medicine is private medicine. (Applause.) And we should not get in between the doctors and the patients in America.

Finally, I want to spend a little time on education, briefly. First of all, No Child Left Behind Act is working. It's a piece of legislation that says we're going to raise the standards for every child, and we're

going to measure to make sure children are meeting those standards. Can you imagine -- you might remember the old -- well, I'll tell you. When I was governor of Texas, we had a system that didn't measure right early on, and guess what happened? We just shuffled kids through the system who couldn't read, and we found out too late. And that is a terrible system. It lets people down. And we're spending a lot of your money. It seems like to me, it makes sense to say, when we spend your money we ought to insist upon results. Results are good for the taxpayers; more importantly, they're good for the students. So now we measure early, before it's too late, and we're correcting problems before they're too late. And our kids are learning to read.

And we need to apply that same rigor to children in math and science, particularly in junior high. Fourth grade tests, our kids are doing fine compared to other countries. But there's a big drop-off when it comes to math and -- mathematics, particularly in junior high. And so we need to apply that same standard. We'll measure in junior high, and if you need help, we'll provide it for you. And the reason why is the jobs of the 21st century are going to require mastery in math and science and engineering. (Applause.) And if we don't make -- and if we don't educate our kids, the jobs are going to go elsewhere, whether we like it or not. So to make sure America remains the leader in the world, we're going to stay on the leading edge of research and development, and educate the young scientists of tomorrow today.

And so, look, my attitude about the future is this, when it comes to the economy, and when it comes to foreign policy: We shouldn't fear it. Let's shape the future. Let's be the leader tomorrow that we are today.

Now, we're living in historic times when you think about this world we're in. It is a time of challenge, and it's a time of opportunity. We've got the challenge to protect the American people. My most important duty is to protect you from harm. And we have an opportunity to lay the foundation of peace for generations to come.

I make a lot of decisions. My buddies in Texas, when they show up to Washington, after they get over the initial surprise that I'm still there -- (laughter) -- or got there in the first place -- (laughter) -- say, like, what's it like, you know? What is the job description? What's it like to be President? And the best way to answer it is, I make a lot of decisions. And part of the reasons -- my thinking was shaped on September the 11th, let me put it to you that way. And I think it's important for you to understand how the President thinks and why I make decisions I make, particularly decisions relating to war and peace.

I knew we're at war when they attacked us. As a matter of fact, I was down here in Florida. It didn't take long to figure out what was going on. And I vowed that day that I would not rest, so long as I was the President, in protecting the people. So a lot of my decision-making is based upon the attack. And I know we're at war, see -- I knew it then, and the enemy has, unfortunately, proved me right because they continue to attack. In order to win the war against the enemy you got to understand the nature of the enemy.

First of all, these people are cold-blooded killers, people who will kill the innocent in order to achieve a tactical objective and a strategic objective. They have no conscience. You can't negotiate with these people. You cannot reason with them. You must bring them to justice.

Secondly, they have an ideology, they believe in something. The best way to describe what they believe in is to think about what life was like in Afghanistan under the Taliban. These were people that saw to it that young girls didn't get educated. If you didn't agree with their view of religion you were whipped in the public square. They tolerated no dissent, no different point of view, and they were tearing down the -- destroying the culture from the past. They had no sense of history other than their dim view of history. That's what they think.

And they have made it clear their objectives. You probably have read some of Zawahiri's writings, admonitions to his fellow fighters. They've made it clear that they believe the United States is soft and weak, and that they can shake our will. They've made it clear that it's just a matter of time before we vacate parts of the world which they can then occupy in order to be able to plan, plot attacks against the United States of America. They have made it clear they're interested in weapons of mass destruction. In other words, they've laid out a strategy, you know, for the world to see.

And my job is to take that strategy seriously. My job is to see the world the way it is, not the way some would hope it would be. If 9/11 affected our thinking, then we've got to make sure when the enemy speaks, we take every single sentence that they say seriously, and deal with it. And that's what we're doing.

So I want to share some of the strategy in winning this war on terror. Make no mistake about it, we're going to win the war on terror. We'll protect the American people. (Applause.)

First, when we see threats, we've got to deal with them. When I was growing up in West Texas, oceans protected us. You might remember some of those days. Old Mayor Martinez, I know he remembers those days when we felt pretty comfortable here in America. We could see a threat overseas, but oceans made it pretty clear that -- to a lot of folks -- that nothing would happen, you know. September 11th came along and made it clear that we are vulnerable, that the enemy can hit us if they -- if they want to.

And therefore, when you see a threat, you've got to deal with it. You can't take things for granted anymore. The best way to deal with this enemy is to defeat them overseas so we don't have to face them here at home, and to stay on the hunt. (Applause.) And that's what we're doing.

And we've got a coalition of countries. I spent a lot of time reminding people about the nature of the war. Listen, the tendency for folks is to say, well, this really isn't a war. I can understand that. Who wants to walk around thinking there's a war about to hit us. I mean, that's -- that's my job to worry about it, not yours. How can you have an economy recover from a recession if people are afraid to risk capital because they're worried about thinking something is going to happen? And the same thing happens overseas. People kind of want to slip to the comfortable. They don't believe it's a war, some of them, and I understand that. And so we spend a lot of time reminding people that we've got to work together because the enemy can't stand what we stand for, and that's freedom. They just hate freedom. And so we've got a good coalition, and -- and we're on the hunt. We're keeping the pressure on them. It's hard to plot and plan and execute attacks when you're on the run.

And so the first step of our strategy is defeat them there so we don't have to face them here. And

we've got some great special forces -- I met the special forces command guy here -- and there's great intelligence officers and wonderful coalition folks. We're cutting off their money. It makes it kind of hard to operate when you can't get your bank accounts full of money in order to -- we're just doing a lot of stuff. And it's important for citizens to know that there's a constant, constant pressure. I think about it every day.

And we're making progress -- Khalid Shaykh Muhammad, September the 11th plotter-planner, is incarcerated; his successor brought to justice. Slowly but surely, we're finding them where they hide, and they know we're on their trail.

Secondly, we got to deny them safe haven. These people can't operate without safe haven. It's an interesting war we're in. It's totally different from what we're used to because we're not -- we're not facing nation-states; we're dealing with an enemy that is international in nature, that hides in states.

When the President says something like, if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist, those words mean nothing unless you act upon them. And I said that to the people of Afghanistan -- the Taliban. They didn't listen. And so we acted. And removing the Taliban -- (applause) -- is a clear signal that we won't tolerate safe haven. In other words, if you harbor the terrorist, you're just as guilty as the murderers. And that's a clear signal that the United States must continue to send in order to win the war on terror.

We saw a threat in Saddam Hussein. Obviously, this issue is one that has caused a lot of people to wonder about certain aspects, caused me to wonder about the capacity of our intelligence services to provide good intelligence. And that's why we're constantly working to reform the intelligence services, to make sure we get the best intelligence, because I thought there would be weapons of mass destruction -- and so did everybody else in the world; and so did people in the United States Congress from both political parties -- thought that there would be weapons of mass destruction.

The United Nations and the United Nations Security Council thought there would be weapons of mass destruction. After all, they passed a unanimous resolution that said, disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. In other words, we worked the diplomatic front.

And so when Saddam Hussein chose war -- and believe me, he made the choice -- the hardest thing for the President of the United States to do is commit troops into combat. It's the last option, the very last option. Except September the 11th taught me, and September the 11th taught me, that we got to take threats seriously. And the world saw a threat. This man was harboring terrorists. He was on a state sponsor of terrorists list. I didn't put him on there, he was put on there by previous Presidents. He was firing at our pilots. He had invaded countries. He was a threat. And the world spoke with one voice, and said, disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences. And when the United States says something, it must mean it. And we said, disclose or face serious consequences. And when he wouldn't, he faced serious consequences. Removing Saddam Hussein has made America safer and the world a better place. (Applause.)

And we have a plan to achieve victory. Victory is a state -- a democracy that can sustain itself and defend itself and join America in fighting the war on terror. That's the goal of victory. That's the

definition of victory.

First part of our strategy is a political strategy. I try to tell people how I make decisions, and part of making good decisions is you've got to believe something. You have a belief system that, by the way, can't alter because of politics, or polls, or focus groups, or what somebody wants you to think. And I believe that freedom is universal. I believe that deep in everybody's soul is the desire to be free. That's what I believe. I don't believe freedom or liberty is confined here to Methodists from Texas. I believe everybody wants to be free -- white, black, brown, Muslim, Jew, Christian, agnostic. I believe there is a deep desire for people to be free.

And if you believe that, then you have faith in people demanding freedom, if given a chance. And the Iraqis proved that theory right. Eleven million people went to the polls in the face of unbelievable terror, terrorist threats, and said, I want to be free; let me vote; let me decide my future. And so on the political front, they're making progress because of the courage of the Iraqis.

And now the task at hand is to work with those who won votes in the new parliament to set up a unity government; one that is -- can help deal with the grievances of the past; one that unites under the fabric of democracy. And that's what we're doing. I talked to the Ambassador, Zal Khalilzad, there yesterday. He's spent a lot of time working with making our position known that we want the government to be a unified government.

Secondly, we're helping the country rebuild itself after years of neglect, so that people can see the benefits of democracy. And we started off initially with kind of these grand projects. We got the Congress to appropriate money, and we tried to build some great electricity-type renovations, and the enemy kept blowing them up. And so we've altered our strategy. One of the things that you've got to do in a situation like this is constantly adjust. You can't just get stuck in one kind of response mode. You've got to think and watch the enemy and adjust to the enemy in order to achieve an objective. And we're doing that. And so now we've got much smaller-scale projects that are yielding instant results for the people on the ground, so people say, wait a minute, this democracy deal is a pretty good thing, you know.

Businesses are flourishing in Iraq. Freedom is coming, freedom is coming. There's a determined enemy trying to stop it, of course. They can't stand freedom. I told you, they think the exact opposite we do. They don't believe that everybody desires to be free. They want everybody to live under their totalitarian thumb. That's what they want. Not America and our coalition. We want governments to be responsible and responsive to the people. That's what we believe in.

Thirdly, in order to achieve our objective, the Iraqis are going to have to fight the enemy. They've proven their worth, in terms of defying the terrorists when it comes to making the vote, and they're proving their desire to defend themselves against the enemy, too. You know how I know? I'm listening to the people on the ground. I talk to our commanders a lot. They're the ones who are giving me the appraisal about how well these Iraqis are being trained.

An interesting measurement, right off the bat, however, was how the Iraqis responded to these attacks on the police stations and the recruiting stations. You remember they had a series of attacks on the

recruiting stations? Guess what my question was to them out there -- are there still people lining up to join up? If you're getting blown up standing in line, are they still coming? And the answer was, absolutely. And we're training them, and there's a command structure -- command and control structure getting in place. And this military is getting better and better. We're turning over a lot of territory to the Iraqis. They now have two divisions, which is a lot of folks, that are capable of taking the fight nearly on their own. The training mission is working.

So on the security side, we're on the hunt. We're after Zarqawi. See, he wants us to leave. He believes we'll lose our nerve so he can establish a safe haven in Iraq. And we're not going to let him do it. And so we've got great special operators and U.S. forces and coalition forces on the hunt. And at the same time, we're training the Iraqis.

There's a big debate in Washington about who gets to decide the troop levels. Well, those troop levels will be decided by this administration. And this administration is going to listen not to politicians, but to the commanders on the ground, about what we need on the ground in order to win this deal. (Applause.)

After I leave here, I'm going to go visit with a family of one of the fallen troops. I have to be able to look that person in the eye, and say, the cause is just. I believe it is just and necessary. And I have to look that person in the eye and say that the sacrifice of your loved one will not go in vain, that we will complete the mission. And that's what I want to assure my fellow citizens. No matter what it looks like in Washington, D.C., I'm committed to victory in Iraq so to achieve peace.

And so in the short-term, we're going to succeed in Iraq. We'll deny them safe haven. We'll stay on the hunt. But there has to be a long-term strategy, as well, to win. And that long-term strategy is to liberate people and give them the chance to live under the greatest system of government ever, and that's democracy -- because democracies respond to people.

You know, our foreign policy in the broader Middle East for a long period of time was just kind of tolerate the status quo and hope for the best. It didn't work. The surface looked placid, but beneath the surface was brewing resentment and anger and fertile recruiting opportunities for those who have got a dark vision of the future. And so we're working to help the Iraqis develop a democracy.

Elections are only the beginning of democracy, not the end. Election is the beginning of a process to -- where government listens to the people. In order to make sure democracy works, there has to be institution-building, and support for young, fledgling democracies. And that's what you're seeing. This is an historic moment. The world is changing because freedom is on the march. And we shouldn't be discouraged about setbacks -- short-term setbacks, or the enemy's capacity to take innocent life, because we've seen democracy change the world in the past.

I think about all the wars fought in Europe over the past 100 years. A hundred years seems like a long time, probably, for the little guy there. Me, too. It seems like a long -- I'm only 59 years old. But Americans shed a lot of blood in Europe -- World War I and World War II. And yet, the continent is -- Europe is peaceful. You know why? Because there's democracies living side-by-side in peace. Democracies don't fight each other. Generally, people in a democracy don't campaign and say, vote

for me, I promise you war. They say, vote for you -- vote for me, I work for the peace. I want your children to grow up in a peaceful world. That's what people say to get elected.

Japan -- one of my favorite analogies and stories about this is, my friend, Koizumi, Prime Minister of Japan. He's an interesting guy. I like him a lot. We spend time talking about the peace. He understands that democracy in the heart of the Middle East, democracy in a part of the world that is desperate for freedom, is an important part of laying the foundation for peace. And so he committed Japanese troops to help the Iraqis rebuild their country and to provide security so they could rebuild their country.

What's amazing about this is that, like many whose relatives -- like many here whose relatives fought against the Japanese, my dad did, too. Isn't that interesting? Eighteen-year-old kid, Navy fighter pilot; country calls him; like thousands, he goes overseas to fight the sworn enemy -- the Japanese. And today, this guy's son is sitting down with the Prime Minister of Japan working to keep the peace. And what happened in between was that a Japanese-style democracy grew. Democracies yield the peace. And what the youngsters here have to see that's happening is we're laying that foundation for peace. Some day when you're old and -- older -- I know you never think it's going to happen, but it does -- you look back and say, maybe old George W. Bush and the United States Congress was right in keeping the faith that democracies can yield the peace we all want. (Applause.)

I got two other things, two other things I want to tell you, then I'll answer questions. We not only protect ourselves by keeping the pressure on the enemy and defeating them over there so we don't have to face them here at home, we've got to protect ourselves by doing smart things in America. I hope -- I appreciate working with the Mayors on homeland security issues. We're training a lot of first responders and getting people ready in case something happens.

Secondly, in order to ask our folks on the front line of protecting America to do the job, they got to have all the tools. And the Patriot Act passed right after September the 11th -- had a little problem getting it out of the United States Senate, got kind of hung up there. My reminder to those senators is that the bill may -- about ready to lapse, but the threat isn't. And if people in Washington expect those on the front line of protecting America to do their job, they got to give them the tools. The Patriot Act needs to be passed. (Applause.)

Finally, I made a decision that has been in the news lately, and I want to share with you my thinking, because it's an important decision. September the 11th made it clear to me that an enemy would do anything it could to hurt us. We're at war. I understand some don't think that, that we're at war. There are good, decent Americans who believe that. I know that. This is not what I -- I don't believe it, see. I got a different point of view. I asked our people on the ground there in Washington, is there anything more we can do to protect the American people? What can we do? The enemy wants to hit us, they're planning to hit us. Is there anything we can do so I can go around the country saying, go about your business, we're taking care of your security for you. I think most people would ask that question.

And General Mike Hayden of the NSA -- he's a wonderful person -- said he thought there was something more we could do. And he showed me the plans for this country to pick up a conversation -- listen to conversations from people outside the country, inside the country, who had an affiliation with

al Qaeda, or were al Qaeda. He said, I think we can design a program, Mr. President, that will enable us to have quick response to be able to detect and deter a potential attack.

I said, that's interesting, General. I said, that makes a lot of sense to me. I said, you're not going to listen inside the country. No, this is calls from outside the country in, or inside out, to people who we know or suspect are affiliated with al Qaeda. And I remember some of those phone calls coming out of California prior to the September the 11th attacks by the killers -- just thinking maybe if we'd have listened to those on a quick response basis, you know, it might have helped prevent the attacks.

My second question was, is it legal? See, I take that oath of office seriously -- I've taken it twice as your President -- to uphold the laws and the Constitution. And so we got lawyers all over Washington, as I'm sure you can imagine. (Laughter.) I'm not one. I said, is it legal? I'm asking this to the Attorney General of the United States, the Legal Counsel in the White House; NSA has got lawyers. I mean, a lot of lawyers looked at this, and they said, you bet, Mr. President, it's legal. And they gave me the legal ramifications. You'll see this all -- this is part of the debate.

Thirdly, I knew I needed to tell members of Congress. See, they like to be a part of the process. They're a co-equal branch of government. And I recognize that, and I honor that. And so we briefed members of the United States Congress on the full program so that they would know -- appropriate members of Congress -- leaders, Republicans, and Democrats, leaders of the Intelligence Committee whose job it is to provide oversight on intelligence operations. They were abreast. Like my old buddy called me, he said, you know something? If you're trying to pull one over on them, if you're trying to have an illegal program, why are you briefing the Congress? I said, because I want people to know.

Unfortunately, we're having this discussion. It's too bad, because guess who listens to the discussion: The enemy. If you don't think we're at war it doesn't matter then, does it? I know we're at war. And the enemy is adjusting. But I'm going to tell you something. I'm doing the right thing. Washington is a town that says, you didn't connect the dots, and then when you do connect the dots, they say you're wrong. In order to protect America, if somebody is talking to al Qaeda, we want to know who they are and why they're talking to them. (Applause.)

Okay. That's what's on my mind. Now, what's on yours? Yes, sir. Go ahead and yell it.

Q Mr. President, I just wanted to take an opportunity to tell you I think our country is blessed to have you as our President.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. (Applause.)

Q We are very thankful that you don't make your decisions based on the polls, like previous Presidents have.

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that. (Applause.)

Q And my comment is, is that I'm a homebuilder. I'm very happy right now.

THE PRESIDENT: You've got to be. (Laughter.)

Q But I wanted to just keep you apprised that things are good now, the economy is good, interest rates are low. There are people that still can't afford homes in our country today. Affordable housing is very important. We, as homebuilders -- I served on the Board of Directors of the National Association of Homebuilders.

THE PRESIDENT: Good.

Q We'll be up in Washington in about a month or so to see you guys. But we're concerned with the environment just as much as anyone else is, and -- but there's got to be a balance to make sure that we can develop land and provide homes -- affordable homes. And also Congress is working on some things now that has an effect on financing and interest rates for people buying their first homes. And let's make sure that we have affordable homes for people.

My daughter is a school teacher here in Tampa, and it's important to people like her, people that protect us -- the fire department, the sheriffs, they need homes. The times are good now, and I was a builder when your friend, Jimmy Carter, was President, and interest rates weren't so good back then, and those were tough times. And I just want to tell you that I'm blessed to be here today with you in this room, and we all love you. (Applause.)

THE PRESIDENT: Well, thanks. Let me talk about that. Thank you. You'll be happy to hear, I don't set interest rates. (Laughter.) That's set by an independent body. And I just named a new Chairman of the Fed to do that. (Applause.) He's a good fellow. And so if I were you, I'd be worried about interest rates -- because when the interest rates go up, it makes it harder for your school teacher.

Well, there's help, to help certain folks who qualify with their down payments. We want people owning their own home. See, that's -- we want this to be an ownership society. We want people owning their own business, we want people owning their own home, we want people owning their own health account they can take with them from job to job like health savings accounts. And home ownership is high right now. More minorities own a home than ever before in our nation's history, which is a fantastic statistic.

But interest rates matter, as does good tax policy. Maybe you're hinting at whether or not the mortgage deduction would be part of a plan. I don't think you have to worry about the mortgage deduction not being a part of the income tax law. But thank you for bringing that up.

Yes, sir. Go ahead and yell it.

Q Mr. President, you mentioned a trip next week to visit the sources of renewable additional technology to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. We have a not-so-renewable resource, which is our precious Florida coastline. And because of your great brother, we do have an unemployment rate of 3.3 percent. How can you work with us to protect our Florida shoreline with respect to offshore drilling?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I made a commitment that nothing is going to happen within a hundred miles of this coastline, and I'm honoring the commitment. I don't care what people might be saying -- I guess maybe they quit saying it after the '04 campaign -- but it's a commitment that this government has -- at least my government has made, and I'm going to honor it. When we say a hundred miles off the coastline, we don't mean 99 miles or 89 miles, we mean a hundred miles. So rest easy.

Now, the thing about -- look, we've got to get off of hydrocarbons. We just do. And I'm a believer in nuclear power. (Applause.) I think it's a -- maybe some day, and I think we'll -- I'll figure out -- I'll find out how close we are when I visit with some of these solar technology people, but it's very likely that you'll become a little power generator in your own home, and that the excess power that you do not use you feed back in the grid. Hybrid batteries -- batteries for plug-in hybrid automobiles are pretty close, they tell me. And I'm going to see firsthand -- sometimes the President gets the cook's tour, I know it -- (laughter) -- but nevertheless, I'm going to see firsthand.

Now, what's interesting is, is that a lot of people in urban areas are not going to drive more than 30 miles a day. And so we're developing automobile engines that can run on electricity for 30 miles, and then if you go more, your gasoline kicks in. But it requires a battery that has got good storage capacity and is easy to recharge. It's coming.

And so there's a lot of technologies that are coming on the market, and we're spending money. And it's a good use of taxpayers' money, it seems like to me, in order to achieve some big objectives.

I'm going to India on March the 1st, around that period of time, and I believe that it's good policy for the United States to encourage these emerging economies to use clean energy, nuclear power, so as to help reduce demand for kind of non-renewables. And so I'm going to talk to them about development of a civilian nuclear power industry. They're telling me China has got about 34 plants on the market, which is good. But this expansion of nuclear power -- which is in our interests, by the way; it's in our interests because of the quality of the air, it's in our interests because it takes -- reduces demand, global demand -- is going to create another issue, and that is, what are we going to do with the spent fuel? This country doesn't reprocess spent fuel; we should. Reprocessing spent fuel means that we're able to continue to reuse the base material that went through the burn the first time in a plant, and reduce the amount that we have to then eventually store. And we chose not to do that in the late '70s because of proliferation concerns. I'm convinced we can work internationally to address those issues.

And so I'm just sharing with you -- we got a full strategy to help us make us less dependent on energy -- on foreign sources of energy.

Yes, sir.

Q I'm from Winter Garden in the central part of the state.

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, I know where you are.

Q Pressed into service by your brother, Honorable Jeb Bush.

THE PRESIDENT: Is that good or bad? If it's bad, take it up with him. (Laughter.)

Q I thought about calling him to ask him if he'd like to have the job back.

THE PRESIDENT: That's right. (Laughter.)

Q The concerns from the central part of the state is, we've got a really unprecedented growth rate there in the middle part. The challenge is for mass transportation to free us from the oil that you talk about. Unfortunately, the proportionate share of funding that we're able to secure seems to be tied into pork barrel like light rail, which -- Congressman Mica needs to buy into the fact that it's not realistic. So how do we get free from that so we can get direct funding for mass transit?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes. That will be something that you'll be able to effect five years from now, because I signed the highway bill, and it's done. And nobody wants to deal with it again until it expires, to be frank with you. But I understand -- but what he's saying is, how come you just don't let Floridians decide how to spend the money that's supposed to go back to them? Why do you earmark parts of the bill? That's what you're saying. And I do think Congress needs to work on earmark reform. I'm just not one of these guys -- if there's no hope, I got to let you know, brother. There ain't no hope. (Laughter and applause.) They're not going to -- they're not going to revisit the highway bill. They're just not going to revisit the highway bill until the highway bill expires. And then perhaps you can get the kind of -- they can get the kind of reforms. As you know, I ain't going to be around. (Laughter.)

Yes, sir. I've heard from Jeb on this issue, by the way.

Q Mr. President, welcome back to Tampa.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

Q And my question is, you've talked a lot about our addiction to oil today. You've also talked about advanced alternative fuel sources, in particular for household vehicles as a potential mitigant to that dilemma. But we have a very robust industrialized economy -- air, rail, shipping, trucking -- that has depended on oil, frankly, for generations to be successful and vibrant. So my question is, how do we maintain the most advanced industrialized economy on Earth, and actually reduce our dependency on oil going forward?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I believe -- first of all, natural gas has driven a lot of our industrialized growth, as you know. And we are -- we need to have -- import liquified natural gas if we're going to be modern and stay competitive.

Listen, we're going to need oil. The question is, are we able to reduce dependency from certain parts of the world. And I think that by relieving pressure on how we drive our cars, we'll, in fact, help segments of our economy that are going to take a while to diversify away from hydrocarbons, I guess is the best kind of macro look.

Things don't happen instantly; I understand that. But, nevertheless, there are some practical ways that we can reduce our dependency, and it seems like to me the most practical way is to change automobiles, change how we drive. In the short-term, ethanol and hybrid batteries makes the most sense to me. It's the most practical way, and most economic way, to begin the reduction of dependency.

Now, listen, we've got a large fleet -- I told you, there's four-and-a-half flex-fuel cars [sic]. That's good, except there's about 200 million cars. And it takes a while for fleets to renew. And so things don't happen instantly, but they will happen quicker as we continue to press for innovation and technology.

Ultimately, I believe that we're going to be using hydrogen to power our automobiles. But that's 15 years down the -- for the technology to be applicable is 15 years down the road. And I guess what I'm not only -- I guess I am, what I'm telling you is that we see technological breakthroughs pretty darn quick when it comes to ethanol and hybrid batteries, which is a positive development for the people. And the interesting thing about ethanol is that the barriers to entry are pretty low, when it comes to manufacturing -- if the technology says that we can -- yields the capacity to convert switchgrasses and refuses to ethanol, once that technological breakthrough comes, the barriers to entry are pretty low when it comes to building the manufacturing capacity that converts raw material to ethanol. Much different from a big cracker refinery. And so that's positive. So we've got the car technology, hopefully have the breakthrough technology on fuel, and then the infrastructure will follow.

And so what I'm saying is, this is the most practical way to become less dependent on oil. And the economy will continue to function. But things are happening, by the way, in diesel. I don't know -- if any of you know something about trucking, you know that diesel, clean diesel engines are coming. We did a deal in my administration to work with diesel engine manufacturers to come up with a very low-emission engine that is now being applied in trucks, and it's going to make a difference -- on Caterpillar tractors. We're getting there, we're getting there.

Thanks for the question. Yes, sir.

Q -- it seems to me that we are facing in this country -- I've had the opportunity to interface with people of Muslim countries, and the war is bad enough, and I applaud what you're doing, because freedom is important, but what concerns me is if the youth in these nations are being taught that you and I and us Americans are, in fact, the devil incarnate, or Satan, himself -- I guess my question is, what can we do about that, to win over the people, the children, the youth, so that the next generation will not be facing the same dilemma? I think this is an incredible problem.

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate that. First is to support and work with moderate governments, and there are a lot. The largest Muslim nation is Indonesia. And we're working closely with the President there to help promote a better understanding of different religions. I will be seeing President Musharraf, who I like and he's a good fellow, who understands that moderation is an important part of a hopeful future. And so we'll support governments that practice moderation.

Secondly, provide assistance when assistance is needed. In my State of the Union, I said, we've got to reject isolationism. Isolationism is the tendency for a nation to withdraw and not feel an obligation to be

involved in the world. And we cannot defend ourselves if we're isolationist. I just made the case. But I also believe, and part of my philosophy in the decision-making is, to whom much has been given, much is required. And, therefore, when we see suffering in places like Pakistan, or because of the tsunami, the United States of America is leading the way in.

And it helps. It helped a lot in Pakistan, for example, to see those choppers flying relief supplies up for poor folks who had been -- whose lives had been just devastated. I can't remember the exact numbers, but President Musharraf told me, we're talking hundreds of thousands of people either dead, injured or displaced. And there was the United States of America military flying in supplies. I believe, John Abizaid -- General Abizaid told me today that we turned over our MASH unit to the Pakistani government to help so they could continue to provide aid and comfort.

And so there are practical ways. One is to support moderation, and two, help where help is needed. Our HIV/AIDS initiative, by the way, is a fantastic initiative. It is -- I can't tell you how proud I am of the American people for supporting this. It is necessary for the United States of America to be taking the lead on this issue to save lives. If we say human dignity matters and every life is precious, that that's part of a credo as a country, which it is -- that's what we say. We say, people matter, every human life is precious. Then those human lives apply not just here at home, but on the continent of Africa, or in Muslim countries. And there's a lot of Muslims in Africa who've seen the great compassion of the United States of America when it comes to helping to battle HIV/AIDS. There's a pandemic taking place. And you ought to be proud of this country, like I am, that we're filling that void of compassion and need and hope. (Applause.)

Yes. Right here. Yes. You're next. Yes. Yes, ma'am.

Q I know that you and First Lady Bush have talked much about our hurting generation of teens and our unproductive teens in our communities. Just wanted you to talk a little bit about the efforts being made with the work that you're doing in initiatives --

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks.

Q -- that will help that.

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate that. First, there's positive news. Teen pregnancies are down, teen drug use is down, and that's positive. That's good. (Applause.) Because of people at the grassroots level -- people at the grassroots level. I think one of the most important initiatives of this administration is to -- is the faith-based and community initiatives, which recognizes what de Tocqueville saw in the 1830s. He's a French guy who came over here. (Laughter.) In case you don't remember. And he recognized that the great strength of America was the capacity for individualists -- or the willingness of individualists to work together in what he called voluntary associations to make the community in which they live a better place. And he saw that in the 1930s.

It's a -- what he saw is still the strength of our country, if you really think about it. You know, government can hand out money, but government cannot put a hope in a person's heart. A lot of people miss one of the basics ingredients of life, and that is love. And love happens when somebody

puts an arm around a person and says, what can I do to help you, brother or sister.

And so part of our initiative in dealing with loneliness, discouragement, lack of self-esteem, is to encourage faith-based programs -- which all exist because they hear a universal call to love a neighbor, by the way -- to have access to federal money, in other words, level the playing field for grant money so that these programs -- which have been set up to love somebody and provide love -- have got equal access to federal money. It's a really important initiative.

There are targeted monies, of course. There's monies aimed at the different community groups dealing with drug use. But I think the most important initiative of all is to empower groups that really do provide mentoring and care and decency on an individual basis for somebody who needs it. And it's happening. It's happening in America. (Applause.)

Yes.

Q Mr. President, it's an honor to be here with you today, and I thank you so much for the time that you take to share with us. I'm a 40-year-old father of a three-year-old.

THE PRESIDENT: There you go.

Q And I'm also an adopted child. And it seems that, anymore, through the results of legislation from the bench, that maybe the unsafest place for a child in this country is in his or her mother's womb. And my question for you is -- and I commend you for your Supreme Court picks. I thank you for your bold stance in who you picked -- (applause) -- my question is, with my son, this is the future of America. And my question is, where do you believe we're headed? Long after your term of serving us has ended, long after we've had other Presidents serve this country, where do you think we're headed in the areas of abortion, the areas of traditional marriage, in the areas of faith and the foundations that this country was founded upon that are so under attack anymore? Where do you believe we're going?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm an optimist. I believe we're headed toward a period of personal responsibility, where people understand that they're responsible for the decisions they make in life.

I just gave you some statistics. Abortions are down in America, as well, by the way. People are -- one of my jobs is to promote a culture of life. And I just told you every life is precious, and I meant it, whether it be here at home, or on the continent of Africa where somebody's suffering from HIV/AIDS. And so I'm an optimist. I think people are -- I think people are beginning to understand that there is virtue in being personally responsible for the decisions you make in life.

And that -- there's a -- and cultures change and it takes a while for cultures to change. All of us -- I'm not going to peg anybody a certain age around here, but those of us born, like, around '46, '47, '48, we've seen a culture change in our lifetime, if you really think about it. The culture changed. And it can change again. And I think these statistics that show that some problems that seemed incurable at one point in our history indicate that there is a cultural shift. A lot of it has to do with people being responsible. Some of it has to do with there's a religious awakening around many communities in the country -- not just Christian religion, but Jewish religion, Muslim religion. People are becoming religious

in America. And that, in itself, helps people realize that you've got to be conscious of the decisions you make and mindful of the needs of others.

And -- but we still got challenges. One of the things that obviously undermines good teaching at home is TV and some of the movies. But I remind people, they put "off" and "on" knobs on TVs for a reason. (Applause.) You don't have to go to a movie if you don't want to go to a movie. See, I think you can promote responsibility at home and still live in a free society where people are allowed to express themselves. And my advice to parents is, pay attention to the Internet. Part of the problem we have in our society is people aren't paying attention to their kids' habits. And when you've got your child on the Internet, make sure you know what that child is looking at, because that's your responsibility. It's not the government's responsibility to take care of your child, it's your responsibility to take care of your child. (Applause.)

Q Thank you for being our President. We are all way better off and very safe --

THE PRESIDENT: Thanks. My high honor, by the way. (Applause.)

Q Thank you.

THE PRESIDENT: I'm glad I did it.

Q We appreciate it. How do you -- earlier you shared with us some intimacy about how you make decisions, and I felt that was heartfelt. How do you keep it together? What do you really think about when the biggest story this week was Dick Cheney's hunting trip, and not Al Gore blasting our troops and being treasonous in his regard to this war on terror in the Middle East? (Applause.) How do you keep it together?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I appreciate that. That's a loaded question. (Laughter.) I keep it in perspective. There's a lot of noise in Washington. There's a lot of flattery, there's a lot of criticism, just a lot of noise. And I keep it in -- I try to keep my life in perspective. I try to -- I don't try to, I do, keep my life in perspective. And I am focused on achieving certain objectives. Every day -- I said this, and I mean this -- every day I think about how to protect America. Every day in the morning, first thing in the morning, I get briefed by our intelligence officers about potential threats. Every morning I'm aware of the world around us. And I told you that it's -- 9/11 changed my thinking. My focus is there.

You know, I care deeply about troubled youth. I'm worried about Katrina victims. I'm worried about people that got moved out of their home and they ended up somewhere else. Put yourself in their perspective. I said home ownership is valuable. We talked about home ownership here, how important it is -- and somebody wakes up the next morning and their home is gone. And not only that, they ended up out, somewhere else, you know. The good news is those people found love, which is a wonderful thing about our country. And I think about those kind of things.

So to answer your question -- and I appreciate that -- first, I'm wise enough not to fall into your trap because -- (laughter) -- there are some keen reporters paying attention to every word I'm saying. (Laughter.) But I really don't let that bother me. I got my perspective, and I got my priorities. My faith is

a priority. My family is a priority. And -- (applause.) We got to deal with issues, of course, when they come up. That's part of -- it's part of Washington. It's part of being the President. There's -- issues come, they go, and they -- but I hope that when it's all said and done, people see me as a strategic thinker, and that I'm able to stay focused on a strategy that will leave behind peace and hope -- peace around the world, and hope not only around the world, but equally importantly, here at home, so people have this sense of the greatness of America. It's a -- we're a fantastic country.

Think about a country -- when you really put America in perspective, ours is a country where somebody can come with nothing except drive and desire, and end up being able to raise a family and realize dreams. It is a fantastic land. And the great thing about America is it doesn't matter who you are, you know, if you got the drive and the desire and the willingness, you can make it in this country. And it's a powerful -- it's a powerful -- that's a powerful statement to make. And that's the way we need to keep it, by the way. And so -- I don't even know how I got there, but anyway. (Laughter.)

Yes, ma'am.

Q In light of national security, some of us baby boomers are going to retire in the next three to five years.

THE PRESIDENT: There you go. I know how you're thinking, baby. (Laughter.) I'm right there with you. (Laughter.)

Q And the number of people replacing us is only at about 63 percent. So what are we going to do with immigration to make sure we have enough people to fill those positions?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, it's interesting, I thought you were going a different direction. (Laughter.) I'm going to answer two questions. I thought you were taking me down that Social Security route, because it's a really interesting -- that's a really interesting way to frame the immigration debate. Really is. I haven't heard it put that way.

Let me answer immigration first, and then talk about the unfunded liabilities inherent in Medicare and Social Security as a result of baby boomers like me and you retiring with not enough people to pay it, to pay the bill.

First, immigration. There are a lot of people working here in America doing jobs Americans will not do. And that is a fact. And it's a -- as I told you, we deal with the way the world -- the way it is, not the way we hope that it is, and therefore, how to deal with that issue, what do you do? You got people working here, doing jobs Americans won't do.

My attitude is, you recognize it for what it is, and you say, you can do this on a temporary basis. You say, if there's a willing employer and a willing worker on a job an American won't do, then it's okay to fill that job, so long as you're not here permanently, so long as this is not -- (applause.) And so I believe there ought to be a temporary worker program. We've tried this in America before -- pretty successful, at least in my own home state of Texas. You got people -- Red Putnam over there, he's got people -- probably have been bringing people in to pick oranges, I don't know. Agriculture relies upon a

lot of people willing to do the work that others won't do. And it seems like to me that there ought to be a legal way to make this happen without creating a sense of amnesty or permanency.

And so, one, I have to deal with immigration rationally. Now, we've got an obligation to enforce our borders and our coastlines, and we're spending a lot of money to do so. The Texas border is long and it's hard to enforce. I mean, it's a lot of miles, a lot of empty country. And so we're using new technologies -- drones, infrared, some mounds, some fencing in cities, to try to make it harder for people to cross. But the truth of the matter is, a lot of our Border Patrol agents are chasing people who are coming here to work, see. And it seems like to me that if we could have a rational system that would enable people to do this on a temporary basis, it would take the pressures off the borders. People would be able to come in here in a rational, legal way.

Now, as I told you, I'm not for amnesty. You got about 8 million-plus people here illegally. My worry is if the -- all of a sudden legal citizens, then another 8 million comes. And I don't think that makes any sense. So in terms of immigration, I'm for border enforcement, and strong border enforcement, with a rational guest worker program that's temporary in nature, where it's understood that you're working here for a period of time, then you're going back on home.

Now, I want to talk to you about what's happened as a result of the current program. When you make something illegal, and there's a -- you know, people coming here to work, people figure out ways around it. I'm not old enough to remember the old whisky days of Prohibition, but I remember reading about it -- people still made whisky, because people wanted to drink it.

And so guess what's happening today. We've got people getting stuffed in the back of 18-wheelers, driving across hot desert to find jobs that most often or not Americans won't do. There's a whole smuggling industry as a result of making temporary work -- not making it legal. A whole smuggling industry -- coyotes they're called -- and it's inhumane, it just is, any way you look at it.

You know, family values don't stop at the Rio Grande River. If you've got starving children and there's a job over here in America that pays you more than it does in Mexico that an American won't do, you come and do that job and get that money back to your family.

Secondly, one way to make immigration policy work is you've got to enforce the law. And so you've got to go to employers. I'm not going to come to your home building site -- but anyway. (Laughter.) You come to enforce the law, right? And so you're a home builder out here in the Tampa area; a bunch of people show up, roofers show up, and say, you know, we're legal, here's my card. You're not in the business of telling me whether or not that's a forged document, or not. You don't know. It looks real. And that's all you're expected -- but I'm telling you, they're forging these documents. There's a whole underground industry. They're smuggling people and they're forging documents. And our borders are being over -- it makes it much harder to enforce. And so I think by having a rational plan, temporary worker, no amnesty, will expose these people runners and drug -- document forgers for what they are. So that's my answer on immigration.

Now, Social Security and Medicare. They're giving me the hook, by the way, I've got another speech here in Florida. Laura said, whatever you do, don't be too windy. (Laughter.) I didn't listen to her.

You bring up a huge problem, and that is, she identified something younger workers better be asking politicians to do something about, and that is, just to put it blunt, Social Security is going broke. And the reason why is a baby boom generation, like some of us here, are fixing to retire. And there's a lot of us, and we've been promised greater benefits than the previous generation, and there are fewer people paying in the system. And it's difficult -- and we're living longer, yes, thank you. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Inaudible.)

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, cameras and everything, they're -- leave your name with them. (Laughter.) She's right, and we're living longer. I wish I'd have thought of that. (Laughter and applause.)

We've got to do something about it. And I tried last year. The job of the President is not to pass problems on, but to confront them. That's my job. That's what you expect people to do. And I'm going to continue trying. (Applause.) And so they said, well, we don't have a problem. Well, one thing people now have recognized is we got a problem. I succeeded. Not only did I succeed, others succeeded, too, in reminding -- we've got the issue talking up.

People are now beginning to realize what you realize and I realize, that we're going to fine -- it's just the people paying in the payroll taxes. Can you imagine looking at youngsters in the eye, and say, pay in the payroll taxes, and you know the system is going broke? That's not a good deal. And so in the State of the Union, I said, look, I tried it, I'm going to try it again, is basically what I said. This time I believe that we need to have a table with Republican and Democrats sitting around it, and sit down and get something done. This isn't going to pass unless it's -- people from both parties can come up with something to do. There's just too much opposition one way or the other, unless there's a bipartisan solution. I believe the American people are pretty sick and tired of needless partisanship in Washington, D.C., and I know -- (applause) -- and I know they expect us to get some stuff done.

And so I just want to assure you I'm going to keep trying, and keep trying, and keep trying, because it's the right thing to do. It's the right thing to uphold the honor of our offices by confronting these problems now, and not saying, it's okay for another President, or it's okay for another Congress, and just keep shuffling it down the path. Now is the time to get it done, because the longer you wait, the worse the problem gets. Every year that goes by, the problem gets worse for a next generation of Americans.

Okay, I've got the hook. Listen, let me conclude -- yes, ma'am. Anybody who makes that kind of noise --

Q I did not do that.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, good. (Laughter.)

Q It's a small part of the world, but it's very important to me -- I'm concerned about the children in northern Uganda who are the victims of the rebel Joseph Kony. And I'm wondering if you can bring any pressure to bear on President Museveni to stop that 20-year war and free those children from the bondage that they're under.

THE PRESIDENT: Really interesting question. She's talking about the -- northern Uganda, there's a group called the Lord's Group that has been terrorizing both northern Uganda and southern Sudan. I talked to Mrs. Garang, John Garang's widow. John Garang was the head of the Sudanese in the southern part of the country that, by the way, became adopted by a church in Midland, Texas, my old home town, interestingly enough. And early in my administration I got Jack Danforth, a former United States senator, to go and negotiate an agreement between northern Sudan and southern Sudan. And John Garang was a partner in peace. Unfortunately, he died in a helicopter accident about a year ago, I think. And the reason I bring this up is that there's no doubt it would be easier to deal with the Lord's Group if we were able to achieve peace between north and south Sudan. They take advantage of instability.

I have talked to this -- I've talked about this issue with Mrs. Garang, as well as -- now, there are peacekeepers in the region, by the way, U.N. peacekeepers on the north-south accord. I hope they're effective at helping the people of southern Sudan. I have talked to Museveni, President Museveni, about the issue, as well, and I've been with him, I think, two or three times. I know on two occasions we've talked about this -- and will continue to talk to him about it. I'm very aware of the issue.

My hope is that by having a southern Sudanese -- having the peace agreement negotiated between north and south so that the southern Sudanese can begin to get their lives back in order, get the oil money moving that's guaranteed to them, will help provide -- help drive them out of any safe haven in the south, which will make it easier for all of us to deal. It's kind of a roundabout answer, but I'm aware of the problem, first of all. And secondly, I'm surprised that anybody in this audience would bring it up, and I thank you for that.

We also have got a major issue in Darfur, Sudan. I presume if you're worried about northern Uganda, you're also worried about western Sudan, as am I. The strategy there was to encourage African Union troops to try to bring some sense of security to these poor people that are being herded out of their villages and just terribly mistreated. We need more troops. The effort was noble, but it didn't achieve the objective.

And so I'm in the process now of working with a variety of folks to encourage there to be more troops, probably under the United Nations. I talked to Kofi Annan about this very subject this week. But it's going to require a -- I think a NATO stewardship, planning, facilitating, organizing, probably double the number of peacekeepers that are there now, in order to start bringing some sense of security. There has to be a consequence for people abusing their fellow citizens.

At the same time, part of the issue in the Darfur region is that the rebel groups are not united in their objectives. And so politically, or diplomatically, we have to work to make sure there's one voice from which to speak, so that we can then create kind of the same agreement between government in Darfur that was created between north and south. A lot of talk, but we've got a strategy, and it's of concern, to the point where our country was the first country to call what was taking place a genocide, which matters -- words matter.

And so, thank you for bringing up that part of the world. That's very interesting that you would have that

on your mind. You're a decent soul, a decent soul. (Applause.)

All right, I've got to go. Thanks for your time. God bless. Appreciate it. (Applause.)

END 2:44 P.M. EST

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