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Office of the Press Secretary
February 16, 2007

President Bush Meets with Ambassador Ryan Crocker, Ambassador-Designee to Iraq

The Oval Office

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1:43 P.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: I just had a lengthy conversation with our nominee to be the ambassador from the United States to Iraq. I've gotten to know Ambassador Ryan Crocker during my time as President because he's been -- fulfilled a very important mission for the United States, and that is the Ambassador to Pakistan, where he served ably and served well. And I'm confident I picked the right man to be our new ambassador in Iraq.

The Ambassador will follow General David Petraeus into Iraq, so now we've got a new military commander and a new head of our diplomatic mission there. These are two competent individuals who will help us implement our new strategy in the country of Iraq. And that new strategy has said that we're going to help this young Iraqi government be able to sustain itself and defend itself by enforcing security in the capital city.

I was telling the Ambassador that I had a visit today with Prime Minister Maliki via secure SVTS. I was pleased that he's meeting benchmarks that he had set out for his government. One of the benchmarks was to move Iraqi troops into the city of Baghdad -- troops that will be complemented by our own troops. He is meeting those obligations. A second such benchmark is that he would change the rules of engagement so that criminals, regardless of their religion, would be brought to justice in equal fashion. He is meeting that benchmark. Thirdly, he passed a budget of which \$10 billion is available for reconstruction. He said he would do that; the budget has been passed, he has met that benchmark.

And that's good news for the Iraqi people. And it should give people here in the United States confidence that this government knows its responsibilities and is following through on those responsibilities.

And so the Ambassador heads into a really important assignment, carrying a message of hope to the Iraqi people that the United States wants them to succeed, and a message of urgency to the Iraqi



government that our patience is not unlimited and that we expect that government to perform. And as I said, I was able to tell the Prime Minister how much -- how closely we're watching, that we've got a good new man coming as ambassador, and that we appreciate the fact that he's beginning to meet the benchmarks that he set out for his people.

Mr. Ambassador, Godspeed, and thank you.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Thank you, sir. Pleased to have your confidence.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you.

By the way, we're looking forward to quick Senate confirmation. He's had his hearing, and of course, when I call him "Ambassador," it's not ambassador to Iraq, it's ambassador designee to Iraq, but ambassador now in Pakistan. And the Senate needs to confirm him as quickly as possible so he can join General Petraeus and do the job.

Thank you.

END 1:46 P.M. EST

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