



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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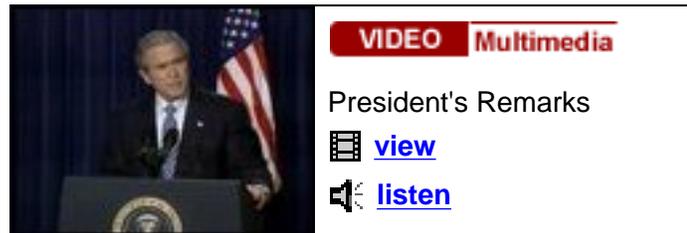
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President Bush Holds Press Conference

Press Conference of the President
Room 450
Eisenhower Executive Office Building

11:15 A.M. EST

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, all. Please be seated.
Thank you for coming to this, the last press conference of
the year 2003.



Before I begin, I do want to talk a little bit about a meeting I just attended. Rend Al-Rahim is here, she's the representative from the Iraqi government, the interim government, to the United States, as well as Dr. Khudair Abbas, who is the interim Minister of Health. We just had an interesting discussion in the Roosevelt Room about the health needs of Iraq, about the future of the health care system in Iraq. And we were joined by doctors, Iraqi doctors who were anxious to work with their fellow counterparts here in America to enhance educational opportunities and to get caught up on the latest technologies in health care.

The thing that struck me about the meeting was the kind of joy that they expressed about being free. It was a touching meeting, and I want to thank you all for coming. And, Doc, I want to thank you for your good work. We are making progress together in improving the lives of your citizens with better health care; immunization rates are up; people are getting health care.

He was reminding me, I think the budget of Saddam Hussein's government for health was, like, \$16 million -- less than a dollar per person. And, of course, we're spending a lot more than that now on health care in Iraq. But it was a very meaningful meeting. I want to thank you, please thank those good docs for being there.



This weekend's capture of Saddam Hussein was a great moment for the people of Iraq. Iraqi citizens have lost a source of fear, and they can now focus with confidence on the task of creating a hopeful and self-governing nation. With the capture of the former dictator, the enemies of a free Iraq have lost

their leader, and they've lost any hope of regaining power. The nightmare of the Baathist tyranny is finally over.

The terrorists in Iraq remain dangerous. The work of our coalition remains difficult, and will require further sacrifice. Yet, it should now be clear to all, Iraq is on the path to freedom. And a free Iraq will serve the peace and security of America and the world.

This achievement comes at the end of an extraordinary year for our country, abroad and here at home. In 2003, we have become a safer, more prosperous and better nation. Our armed forces, joined by our allies, continue on the offensive against terrorist enemies around the world. We continue our systematic hunt for al Qaeda leaders and al Qaeda cells in many countries. I want to thank the Congress for standing behind our military with needed resources, and for giving vital support to the work of reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan.

America's economy is growing at a robust pace, and beginning to generate new jobs for America, American workers. I want to thank the Congress for passing my jobs and growth package, which is doing just what it was supposed to do. And we will continue pursuing a pro-growth agenda next year.

In this year of accomplishment we passed Medicare reform. America's seniors can now look forward to prescription drug coverage, more choices and a stronger Medicare system. I want to thank the Congress for coming together to get the job done.

This session of Congress has also produced vital action on homeland security, healthy forests, global AIDS relief, housing assistance, adoption, Amber alerts to capture kidnapers and rescue their victims, and protection of children from partial birth abortion. Members of both political parties can take pride in the important goals we have met by working together.



We have a great deal to show for our efforts in 2003. Yet, unfinished business remains. The majority in both Houses support a comprehensive energy bill, as well as reforms in class action to curtail junk lawsuits. The House also passed a medical liability reform bill -- it is stuck in the Senate. These measures were blocked, and they are needed. They are needed to help America become more prosperous and they're needed to help America be a better place. When the House and Senate return in January, there will be more to do and I look forward to working with them -- I've got a few ideas about what we can do together in the year 2004.

As we end 2003, we have a lot to be thankful for -- especially for the fine men and women who wear our country's uniform, and who will spend their holidays far from home. I hope all Americans will keep these brave men and women in their thoughts and prayers during this blessed season.

I will take some questions, starting with AP man.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. What's the United States going to do with Saddam Hussein after questioning him? Will he be turned over to Iraqis for trial? And based on what you know now about mass executions and hundreds of thousands of graves, do you think that execution should be an option?

THE PRESIDENT: He will be detained. We will work with the Iraqis to develop a way to try him in a -- that will stand international scrutiny, I guess is the best way to put it.

I shared my sentiments today with Prime Minister Martin of Canada. He asked me about Saddam Hussein and his trial. I said, look, the Iraqis need to be very much involved. He was the person that -- they were the people that were brutalized by this man. He murdered them, he gassed them, he tortured them, he had rape rooms. And they need to be very much involved in the process. And we'll work with the Iraqis to develop a process.

And of course we want it to be fair. And of course, we want the world to say, well, this -- he got a fair trial. Because whatever justice is meted out needs to stand international scrutiny. I've got my own personal views of how he ought to be treated, but that's -- I'm not an Iraqi citizen. It's going to be up to the Iraqis to make those decisions.

Q And the question of execution?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I said I have my personal views. And this is a brutal dictator. He's a person who killed a lot of people. But my views, my personal views aren't important in this matter. What matters is the views of the Iraqi citizens. And we need to work, of course, with them to develop a system that is fair and where he will be put on trial and will be brought to justice -- the justice he didn't, by the way, afford any of his own fellow citizens.

Steve.

Q Thank you, sir. Will Saddam's capture accelerate the timetable for pulling U.S. troops out, and increase the likelihood of getting more foreign troops involved?

THE PRESIDENT: We will stay the course until the job is done, Steve. And the temptation is to try to get the President or somebody to put a timetable on the definition of getting the job done. We're just going to stay the course. And it's very important for the Iraqi people to know that. I've expressed that to Rend; I've told that to the Iraqi citizens with whom I have met on a regular basis.

I tell them two things: one, you can count on America remaining until the job is done. And it's important for them to hear that, because there will probably be some that will continue to test our will. They'll try to kill in hopes that we will flee. And the citizens of Iraq need to know we will stay the course.

I also tell them that now is a chance to seize the opportunity and show the world that which this government believes, and that is, you're plenty capable of governing yourself. And the level of the troops in Iraq will depend upon the security situation on the ground and those decisions will be made

by our commanders. I have not changed my philosophy of how a President ought to act during wartime, which is to set the strategy, lay out the goals and empower the military people -- both civilian and uniform -- to make the decisions necessary to achieve the objective. And they will make those recommendations about troop levels and what is necessary.

Go ahead, you've got a follow up? This is part of the holiday spirit, to give you a follow up. (Laughter.)

Q -- opportunity to get more foreign troops involved?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, listen, we're constantly working to get foreign countries involved, but I want to remind you we've got over 60 nations involved now. When you hear me talk about "our" efforts, I'm talking about the efforts of a lot of countries, we've got a large coalition involved. And of course we will accept the willingness of nations to put troops on the ground. We're continuing to work -- whether it be troops on the ground or construction contracts or loans, we're constantly reaching out to more nations to get them involved in the process.

And, after all, there is a reason why nations should be involved in the process. A secure and free Iraq is in their national interest. A free country, a peaceful country in the heart of the Middle East is in the interest of all nations. This is a transforming event. The emergence of a peaceful Iraq will transform the region in a positive way, that will make it more likely that the world is peaceful. And that we're constantly talking about that message and encouraging people to participate.

Gregory.

Q Mr. President, good morning. When Saddam emerged from his hole on Saturday, he told a U.S. soldier that he was willing to negotiate. Might there be room for negotiation, perhaps in exchange for a public statement to the Iraqi people that may serve your interest? And, secondly, this soldier also said to Saddam, reportedly, that President Bush sends his greetings. You say this is not personal, but you've also pointed out this was a man who tried to murder your father. What is your greeting to him?

THE PRESIDENT: Good riddance. The world is better off without you, Mr. Saddam Hussein. I find it very interesting that when the heat got on, you dug yourself a hole and you crawled in it. And our brave troops, combined with good intelligence, found you. And you'll be brought to justice, something you did not afford the people you brutalized in your own country.

And what was the first part of the question?

Q I know you scoffed at the idea of negotiation --

THE PRESIDENT: Oh, yes, yes. How do you know I scoffed at it? Laughing does not mean scoffing. (Laughter.)

Q Oh, I know, I'm just saying there were others who were scoffing. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: Okay.

Q If you were to do something that you might view as constructive, like making a public statement, a video statement?

THE PRESIDENT: David, it's just way too early to tell. First of all, I don't trust Saddam Hussein. I don't believe he'll tell the truth. He didn't tell the truth for over a decade; I just can't believe he's going to change his ways just because he happens to be captured. And so I don't think we ought to trust his word.

I think what need to happen is he needs to be brought to justice. And the Iraqi citizens need to be very much involved in the development of a system that brings him to justice. And there needs to be a public trial, and all the atrocities need to come out, and justice needs to be delivered. And I'm confident it will be done in a fair way.

Terry.

Q Mr. President, do you believe that the capture of Saddam Hussein will bridge some of the differences, the bitter differences that have arisen in the world over Iraq? Or do you believe that the Iraq war marks a dividing line, perhaps a long-term dividing line, between those countries which fought to topple Saddam Hussein and those which did not?

THE PRESIDENT: Interesting question. I think that -- well, first of all, as I want to repeat, there's over 60 nations involved in the reconstruction of Iraq now. So there's a -- a lot of people are participating, and we're out working to encourage others to participate.

You're talking -- what you're talking about is France and Germany, truth be known, if I might clarify your question to me. Look, France and Germany -- I have reached out to them; they've reached out to us. It's in our national interests we work together. A whole and united and peaceful Europe is in this country's interest. And we look forward to working with them on a wide range of issues, whether it be intelligence-sharing, or the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I want to remind you, Germany has committed troops to Afghanistan. It's in this country's interest that Afghanistan emerge as a peaceful country. Germany is contributing to that effort. There's a lot of areas where we do work together.

We had a disagreement on this issue about Saddam Hussein and his threat. I obviously felt like September the 11th changed the equation to the point where we needed to deal with emerging threats and deal with them in a way that would make America more secure. And they didn't see that, they didn't agree with that point of view. I can understand that. And we are now reaching out to them, by the way -- Jim Baker, as you know, will be going to both those two countries tomorrow, I think it is, to encourage them to work with us on debt relief, all aimed at encouraging the development of a free and peaceful Iraq.

So I don't agree that this is a dividing line. I think this is a disagreement on this particular issue. And I know that we can work together on a variety of other issues, and I'll cite one example -- Iran. I was most pleased that the French and Germans, as well as the Brits, delivered a very strong message to

the Iranian government about the development of a nuclear weapon. It was a message that we agree with, and that is, don't do so, otherwise there will be international consequences at the United Nations. And it was a very important message to be delivered. We agreed on that. And working together, it made it easier for us to send that -- to send that message.

John. Working my way across here.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. The capture of Saddam Hussein is something that has been universally applauded. But there still remain a lot of lingering questions about the postwar phase of Iraq. This administration has stated that it would like to see an interim Iraqi government stood up by next June; the ability to be able to begin to draw down troops if that's possible. Even a political novice would have to say, well, there appears to be some political component to all this, some way of making real progress ahead of the November elections.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, well, people can read whatever they want to read into it. My job is to keep America secure. That's my job. I've got a solemn duty to do everything I can to protect the American people. I will never forget the lessons of September the 11th, 2001. Terrorists attacked us. They killed thousands of our fellow citizens. And it could happen again. And, therefore, I will deal with threats -- threats that are emerging and real.

We gave Saddam Hussein plenty of time to heed the demands of the world, and he chose defiance. He did. He said, forget it, I don't care what the United Nations has said over a decade; I don't care about all the resolutions passed. He chose defiance; we acted. And I acted because I -- I repeat -- I have a duty to protect this country. And I will continue to protect the country, so long as I'm the President of the United States.

A free and peaceful Iraq is part of protecting America. Because I told you before, and I truly believe this, this will be a transforming event in a part of the world where hatred and violence are bred; a part of a world that breeds resentment.

And, you know, look, we're going to an election; there's going to be plenty of time for politics. And people can debate all they want. I'm going to do my job. That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to do my job to make this country safer, and I believe we're making good progress toward that objective.

Angle.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Until recently, a growing number of Americans and a couple of presidential candidates were saying it might be time to think about getting out of Iraq. I know you said that you intend to stay the course, but I wonder what your view is of such sentiments, how concerned you are about that view among the public, and whether or not you think Saddam's capture should change people's thinking?

THE PRESIDENT: You know, I think Saddam's capture should make it clear to the people of Iraq, most importantly, that he's through, that people can no longer -- no longer have to hold back their sentiments and their feelings toward living in a free society because he might reemerge. That's the

most important thing about this capture, is that he can no longer provide any excuse for some who were afraid to act.

And I can understand why people would be afraid to act in Iraq, afraid that Saddam might come back -- after all, he's a torturer and a killer. I met with a doctor today, the guy took me aside and he said, I want to thank you, my dad was murdered by Saddam Hussein. A lot of people share that sentiment, by the way, because it's happened to them. And you can understand why people feared him -- after all, he stayed in power by fear, by ruling through fear.

You know, Jim, I will make the decisions based upon what I think is right to achieve the objectives I've outlined, the objectives I outlined prior to freeing Iraq from Saddam Hussein -- and that is to make this country more secure and the world more free.

And I'm confident people aren't going to agree with every decision I make. I understand that, and I don't expect people to agree with every decision I make. But regardless of whether they do or not, I'm going to continue making the decisions in the way that I think is best for the country. There will be ample time to have the debate about whether or not it's the right strategy or not. I look forward to the debate. I look forward to making my case to the American people about why America is more secure today, based upon the decisions that I've made.

As I said, there's ample time for policy. I know you all want to jump the gun, it makes exciting news, it makes the stories more interesting and more vital from your perspective. Let me just -- so that we can get this straight early in the process, I take my job seriously, I will do my job and I look forward to the political debate later on. So I'm confident during the numerous press conferences I'll be having next year -- just like I had this year -- that you'll be asking me questions about this political statement or that political statement, and my answer is going to be the same until I'm ready to engage, and that is, let me just tell you what the strategy is of this administration. Forget politics. The strategy that I've outlined in order to do my solemn duty -- and my duty is not only to keep the country more secure, but more prosperous and a better country, as well.

Dana.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. The dollar has fallen quite sharply, Wall Street is increasingly worried about the deficit. Sorry. Wall Street is increasingly worried about the deficit. Will you have a specific plan for reducing the deficit, or will economic growth alone take care of the problem?

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate that question. Josh Bolten laid out a plan that will shrink the deficit in half in a five-year period, and that's based upon reasonable growth assumptions. And it's a plan that depends upon Congress to continue to hold the line on spending. We have a deficit because of, one, a recession; two, a war. I want to remind you all that in order to fight and win the war, it requires an expenditure of money that is commiserate with keeping a promise to our troops to make sure that they're well paid, well trained, well equipped.

And so we've exceeded -- we've spent a lot on defense budgets in order to win the war. We've also spent a lot of money to secure our homeland. And then of course, there was the tax relief -- a stimulus

package which was necessary to make sure that we had ample revenues coming into the Treasury in the first place.

See, without the tax relief package, there would have been a deficit, but there wouldn't have been the commiserate -- not "commiserate" -- the kick to our economy that occurred as a result of the tax relief. And the tax relief is working. When the Senate finishes its work on the appropriations bill, we will have held discretionary spending to 4 percent, and that's what we agreed to with the Congress during the budget negotiations.

I want to remind you of a fact that I think you'll find interesting -- or maybe you won't find interesting, but I find it interesting -- that nonmilitary, non-homeland security discretionary spending was at 15 percent -- increase from year to year was at 15 percent prior to our arrival, then it was at 6 percent, 5 percent, and 3 percent. So we're working with Congress to hold the line on spending. And we do have a plan to cut the deficit in half.

Sanger.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, it's been nine months now, and still there is relatively little evidence of WMD in Iraq. In retrospect, if you think back over the year, would you have been better to make more of your -- of the argument that you've made in recent times, that democratization in the Middle East was the reason to go to war, rather than WMD?

And since the CIA has been telling you that North Korea does have two or more weapons, what lesson should Kim Jong-il draw from the capture of Saddam Hussein?

THE PRESIDENT: Very deft at weaving in two questions. Here's what I took away from September the 11th, 2001 -- that any time a President sees a gathering threat to the United States, we must deal with it. We can't pick or choose like we used to, could in the past. In the old days, oceans protected us from harm's way, and a President could stand back and say, well, maybe this gathering threat is an issue, maybe it's not. After September the 11th, that complacency, I guess may be the right word, no longer is relevant. And, therefore, I began to assess threats.

And the threat of Saddam Hussein was a unique threat in this sense: the world recognized he was a threat for 12 years, and 17 resolutions, I think it is -- I believe it was 17 resolutions -- for the resolution counter, give me a hand here -- 17? Seventeen resolutions. And he ignored them. He just treated the U.N. as an empty debating society, as if their resolutions meant nothing. This is a person who has used chemical weapons before, which indicated to me he was a threat. He invaded his neighbors before. This is a person who was defiant, he's a deceiver, and he was a murderer in his own country. He was a threat.

And so I went to the United Nations, as you recall, September the 12th, 2002, and said to the United Nations, let's work together to disarm this man; you recognized he had arms, we recognize he's got arms, let's disarm him. And 1441 came about, it's when the world spoke through the United Nations Security Council with one voice, and in a unanimous voice said, disarm, or there will be serious consequences. In other words, they agreed that Saddam was a threat. And so we moved to disarm

him. In other words, there were serious consequences because he was defiant.

Since then, David Kay has reported back that he had weapons programs that would have put him in material breach of 1441. What that means, of course, is that had David Kay been the lead inspector, and had done the work that he did prior to our removal of Saddam, he would have reported back to the U.N. Security Council that Saddam was, in fact, in breach of the Council resolutions that were passed.

Secondly, North Korea -- one of the things, David, I think you've seen about our foreign policy is that I'm reluctant to use military power. It's the last choice, it's not our first choice. And in Iraq, there was a lot of diplomacy that took place before there was any military action. There was diplomacy prior to my arrival, diplomacy during my time here, and we tried all means and methodologies to achieve the objective, which was a more secure America, by using diplomatic means and persuasion.

In North Korea, we're now in the process of using diplomatic means and persuasion to convince Kim Jong-il to get rid of his nuclear weapons program. And that's changed by altering the dynamics between the United States and North Korea this way, by inviting other parties to be stakeholders in the process. And it's been successful, thus far, of convincing others that they have a stake in the process.

This started in Crawford with Jiang Zemin, where we held a joint press conference and he stepped out and said that we share a common goal, and that is a nuclear weapons-free peninsula. And as you know full well, that the relationship has evolved beyond just a statement, where we're now co-participants in the process of convincing Kim Jong-il to change his ways. And that's exactly where we are in the process. And I'm pleased with the progress we're making, and I hope, of course, he listens.

Suzanne.

Q Mr. President, you have justified your policy in awarding prime Iraq contracts to members of the Coalition Authority because of their sacrifice with the war in Iraq. At the same time, your administration has indicated some room for negotiation. Your critics have called this retaliation, and even blackmail. How do you respond to that, and how is this policy helpful in generating international support?

THE PRESIDENT: There are over 60 nations involved in Iraq. Make sure everybody -- let's all start from the same basis, if you don't mind. So there is international support. When you say there's over 60 nations involved in Iraq, that means that there's international support in Iraq. Again, I think you're talking about one or two countries, if I'm not mistaken. And we're reaching out to them, and we want them to participate. But the idea of spending taxpayers' money on contracts to firms that did not participate in the initial thrust is just something I wasn't going to do.

And you know what? The American taxpayers understand that. They understand that clearly. That's not to say there's not other ways to participate, and we look forward to including them in the process.

Stretch. Big Stretch. I'm sorry. (Laughter.)

Q I know you said there will be a time for politics. But you've also said you wanted to change the tone

in Washington. Howard Dean recently seemed to muse aloud whether you had advance knowledge of 9/11. Do you agree or disagree with the RNC that this kind of rhetoric borders on political hate speech?

THE PRESIDENT: There's time for politics. There's time for politics, and I -- it's an absurd insinuation.

Q In that case, sir, can I follow up on something unrelated? (Laughter.) Tom Ridge recently seemed to discuss something you had talked about pre-9/11, and that is finding a way to legalize some of the illegal immigrants in this country. Could you clarify your policy, what it is, short of blanket amnesty?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, first of all, I have constantly said that we need to have a immigration policy that helps match any willing employer with any willing employee. It makes sense that that policy go forward. And we're in the process of working that through now so I can make a recommendation to the Congress.

Let me also clarify something. This administration is firmly against blanket amnesty.

Let's see here. Judy.

Q Mr. President, do you have a sense yet of how involved Saddam Hussein was in planning and directing attacks on coalition troops? Should the American people expect that those attacks will now decrease, or should they be prepared that they might, in the short-term, get worse?

THE PRESIDENT: To answer your question, we're -- the Defense Department will try to learn more from Saddam Hussein as time goes on. And secondly, I believe there will be more violence because I believe there's holdovers of Saddam that are frustrated, and I believe there are foreign terrorists that cannot stand the thought of a free Iraq emerging in the Middle East.

This is a -- a free Iraq will be a defeat for those who believe in violence and murder and mayhem. And they will try to resist us there. And that's -- I do believe that there are going to be some people who are persuaded that since Saddam Hussein has been captured, that he will never return, and therefore, they need to be a part of the emergence of a free Iraq and a free society, and that there -- and it's going to be very important for the Iraqi authorities to reach out to those people and talk about a system that guarantees minority rights, and a system which says that for some the future is bright.

And I think when people begin to realize that, when people begin -- that were, I would call them fence-sitters, when people begin to realize that the Saddam regime is gone forever, and that the new society that will emerge will be a fair society, it will protect people, and protect people from the -- protect them based upon their own religious views, for example, guarantee them rights -- is what I mean by "protect," that it's more likely people will begin to sign on to the future of Iraq. And that's positive. It's a very hopeful thing.

But there will be terrorists, and they want to fight us. Remember this is -- Iraq is a battle in the war on terror. The war on terror is being fought on many fronts, and some of them obviously more visible than others. Obviously, the Afghanistan front was a visible front. Iraq is a visible front. The Philippines, for

example, is a front in the war on terror against Abu Sayyaf. And we've had fairly stealthy operations there to bring to leadership of Abu Sayyaf to justice.

The war on terror encompasses more than just military action, of course, or the use of special force strike teams. Cutting off money is an important part in the war on terror. So, Judy, it's very important for people to put this -- Iraq in a broader context about a war that will continue on.

The reason I bring that up is that these -- the enemy, the terrorists, the killers may continue to try to strike in Iraq. They think they may be able to defeat us there. Yesterday was a clear signal to them that they won't be able to. The other thing that's happening in Iraq that's positive, and I think this -- some of you, your papers and broadcasts have picked this up, is that the intelligence on the ground is getting better, it's getting richer. There's what they call "actionable intelligence," to which our military has responded on a quick basis is improving.

And that's a very important development. Because as you notice, when there's a hole in the ground and a person is able to crawl into it in a country the size of California, it means we're on a scavenger hunt for terror, and find these terrorists who hide in holes is to get people coming forth to describe the location of the hole, is to give clues and data. And we're on it. Our military is responding. And our intelligence services are doing very good work. It's just a long process that requires patience and perseverance.

Yesterday's arrest of this tyrant and killer was a good example of persistence and fine tuning intelligence and gathering information, and the hard work necessary to find people who are willing to hide in holes.

Other Stretch.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. At the outset you said that you will pursue next year, the election year, a pro-growth agenda. Up until now, pro-growth in this administration has largely been synonymous with tax cuts. Can you rule out the possibility of further tax cut proposals next year?

THE PRESIDENT: You know, Stretch, it's a trick question. (Laughter.) It's not very generous of you during the holiday season. (Laughter.)

First of all, I'm pleased with the economic growth that we've seen. I believe the economy is strong. I believe it's getting stronger. I'm pleased with the productivity numbers. I appreciate the fact that durable orders for durable goods are up. It looks like the manufacturing sector is strengthening.

What I've been referring to, in terms of pro-growth, are an energy bill, good tort reform coming out of the Congress. I thought we had a chance to get some this year. It got stuck, unfortunately, in the Senate. In my judgment it was a mistake. It was a mistake not to let class-action lawsuit reform go forward, it was a mistake not to get asbestos reform, a mistake not to get medical liability reform. All three of those measures, in my judgment, obviously, are justifiable reforms at the federal level, which would have made a difference in terms of a pro-growth environment. We need more regulatory relief. We certainly need to send a signal to the capital markets that we're going to maintain spending

discipline. Dana talked about the deficit. He also mentioned the strong dollar.

And by the way, I didn't answer that part of your question. I'll get back there right now. Part of the economic policy of this administration is a strong dollar policy. We fully expect markets to set the dollar. But we have a strong dollar policy, which is, in our judgment, good for the economic vitality of this country. And so we'll see, is the answer to your question.

Yes, Ed.

Q Mr. President, you said earlier this morning that in a trial that all of Saddam's atrocities be brought up. He was in power more than 30 years, that probably would make for a long rap sheet. Do you believe --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, Ed, you're not supposed to prejudge.

Q I'm just counting the years.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay, good.

Q Do you believe that the invasion of Kuwait in 1990 should be included, as well as his assassination attempt against former President Bush?

THE PRESIDENT: That will all be decided by the lawyers. And I will instruct this government to make sure the system includes the Iraqi citizens, and make sure the process stands in -- withstands international scrutiny. But we'll let the lawyers handle all that, and as you know, I'm not a lawyer. And I delegate, and I'm going to delegate this to the legal community, which will be reviewing all matter.

Tamara.

Q Thank you, sir. Given your skepticism about Saddam Hussein's ability to tell the truth, do you think his interrogation might help resolve any lingering questions about what he did with his weapons of mass destruction and his ties to terrorist groups?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't know. I would think not. I mean, he's a deceiver. He's a liar. He's a torturer. He's a murderer. I can't imagine why he would change his attitude, since he'll be treated humanely by the U.S. coalition -- U.S. troops. And I would be very skeptical of anything he said -- one way or the other, I might add. You just don't know. He's a -- he's just -- he is what he is: He's a person that was willing to destroy his country and to kill a lot of his fellow citizens. He's a person who used weapons of mass destruction against citizens in his own country. And so it's -- he is the kind of person that is untrustworthy and I'd be very cautious about relying upon his word in any way, shape or form.

Q Mr. President --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, Bob.

Q -- when you asked the American people for their support three years ago, there was no way anyone could have imagined the nature of the job you would have before you. If you had known then what you know now, sir, would you have wanted the job? Would you have had any hesitation --

THE PRESIDENT: That's an interesting question.

Q -- about asking me the American people for it? And I have to ask you since we're here, sir, have you chatted with your Dad since Saddam was captured?

THE PRESIDENT: He called me -- let me answer your first question. I absolutely would have wanted the job. I have come to realize this job is a magnificent job, because you have a chance to use the position of the United States of America to achieve peace and freedom. And that is a rare opportunity for any person. I put together a fantastic administration to help me with this task. I feel very comfortable in the job because I've got great advice and advisors to whom I -- get good advice from great advisors to whom I listen. I am comfortable delegating the awesome responsibilities of -- in this administration's case, war two times to incredibly capable and brave people.

At home, this job affords the opportunity to capture what I call the American spirit, and to call people to serve in their communities and their neighborhoods, and to help people who hurt. It's a fantastic opportunity to try to lift up this country so everybody can realize its full potential. I absolutely would seek the office again, and I intend to do so in '04, by the way. (Laughter.)

I talked to my Dad. He called me Sunday morning. I got the call from Donald Rumsfeld Saturday afternoon and made the decision there until I was more certain about the facts that I would talk to very few people. I talked to Condi and asked her to call Andy. And I talked to Vice President Cheney. Because what I didn't want to have happen is that there would be this rush of enthusiasm and hope and then all of a sudden it turned out not to be the person that we would hope it would be. So I didn't talk to my family. I told Laura, of course, and pretty much went to bed early Saturday night. And Condi woke me at 5:15 in the morning, which was okay this time. (Laughter.) Just don't do it again. (Laughter.)

But she said that the Jerry Bremer had just called her and there was -- they were prepared to say this was Saddam Hussein, in which case we got dressed and hustled over to the Oval Office to start making calls.

One of the calls I did receive was from my dad. And it was a very brief conversation. He just said, congratulations, it's a great day for the country. And I said, it's a greater day for the Iraqi people. And that's what I believe. I believe that yesterday was a day -- or Saturday, when we captured Saddam, it was a day where America is more secure as a result of his capture. But, more importantly, Saturday was a great day for the people who have suffered under this tyrant.

I believe, firmly believe -- and you've heard me say this a lot -- and I say it a lot because I truly believe it -- that freedom is the almighty God's gift to every person, every man and woman who lives in this world. That's what I believe. And the arrest of Saddam Hussein changed the equation in Iraq. Justice

was being delivered to a man who defied that gift from the Almighty to the people of Iraq. And justice will be delivered to him in a way that is transparent and for the world to see. And so I told my dad, I said, it's a great day for America, but it's a better day for the people of this country, and that's why.

Thank you all for coming. I'll see you Thursday, coats and ties. (Laughter.) This year, Gregory, don't take any silverware. (Laughter.)

END 12:03 P.M. EST

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