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Remarks by the President at the 2006 President's Dinner

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Washington, D.C.

7:50 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all very much. (Applause.) Thank you, please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. (Applause.)

Jim, thanks very much for your introduction. Thanks for your leadership for this incredibly successful dinner. Thank you all for coming.

I told Laura, I said, I'm going to the President's Dinner. She said, cook it yourself. (Laughter.) She's doing great, by the way. She is a -- (Applause.) I'm a lucky man that she said yes when I asked her to marry me. She is a fabulous mom, a great wife, and she's doing a wonderful job as the First Lady of the United States. (Applause.)

She sends her best. She, like me, understands that -- that we're going to keep the House and we're going to keep the Senate thanks to you all. (Applause.) And there's a reason why we got to keep the House and the Senate. We got a fabulous Speaker and leadership team in the United States House of Representatives and a great leader in Bill Frist in the United States Senate.

We're here for a reason. We're here to solve problems and not pass them to future congresses and future Presidents. (Applause.) We're making a difference for the people of the United States of America. When we see problems, we solve them. The Democrats are good talkers; we're good doers. We get the job done. We understand the stakes to the world in which we live. We understand the most important responsibility we have in Washington is to defend the people of the United States, and that's exactly what we're doing. (Applause.)

I appreciate the members of my Cabinet here tonight. Thank you all for coming. Don't stay too long; you got to get back to work. (Laughter.)

I'm thrilled that Speaker Denny Hastert is here, and Leader Bill Frist. I want to thank the -- must have a lousy seat. (Laughter.) I want to thank Elizabeth Dole and Lamar Alexander. I want to thank Congressman Tom Reynolds. I want to thank Mitch McConnell. I want to thank John Boehner. I want to thank all the members of the House and the Senate who've joined us tonight. I appreciate your service to our country, and I'm proud to serve with you. (Applause.)

These are historic times in which we live, and these are times that require people to make hard decisions. I'm proud to be serving with people here in Washington, D.C. who make decisions on what's right, not what the focus groups say and what the polls say. And what is right is doing what it takes to defend the United States of America from attack again. (Applause.)

I'm proud to be serving with people who understand the lessons of September the 11th. And here's what I've learned. I've learned that we must look at the world the way it is, not the way we hope it is. I've learned that in order to do our duty to protect the American people, we must understand the nature of the enemy we face. We face cold blooded killers who would like nothing more than to strike the United States of America again, and the only way to defeat them is to stay on the offense and bring them to justice before they hurt America again. (Applause.)

When the President speaks, he better mean what he says, and when I said, if you harbor a terrorist, you're equally as guilty as the terrorist, I meant exactly what I said. And when the Taliban refused to cough up al Qaeda, we acted. In the United States Congress, we're strong supporters of upholding that doctrine. And as a result of our action, America is safer, al Qaeda no longer has training camps, and 25 million people now live in freedom. (Applause.)

I'm proud to be working with a Speaker and the Leader of the Senate, and Republican members of the House and the Senate who understand the stakes of the world in which we live. I am proud to be working with clear-eyed realists, who understand that we can give no quarter to an enemy that would like to do us harm again.

One of the lessons of September the 11th is that when this country sees a threat, we must deal with it before it fully materializes. When a lot of us were coming up, we thought oceans could protect us from harm, but the lesson of September the 11th is, oceans can no longer protect the United States.

The best way to protect the United States is to take care of threats before they come to hurt us. In Iraq, Republicans and Democrats saw a threat. We saw Saddam Hussein who terrorized his neighbors, Saddam Hussein who killed his own people, a Saddam Hussein who used weapons of mass destruction, a Saddam Hussein who had funded terrorists, Saddam Hussein who defied U.N. resolution after U.N. resolution. And when he defied his last U.N. resolution, we removed him from power, and the world is better off for it. (Applause.)

And I'm proud to be serving with members of the United States Congress and the United States Senate who stand by their convictions, who don't try to change history in the midst of hard work. And that's what this world requires; it requires hard work by the United States of America. And right now we're doing hard work in Iraq. Iraq is the central front on the war on terror. And it's important we succeed.

You know I just recently went to Baghdad, had an interesting experience there. I met the new Prime Minister and the new cabinet of a unity government. (Applause.) And here's what I saw, I saw people dedicated to living out the -- to living out the desires of the 12 million people who went to the polls in defiance of the car bombers and the killers. I saw people from different groups in that country coming together to say, we want to succeed. And I saw people wondering whether the United States would have the nerve to stay the course and help them succeed.

I went to Iraq, and I said, it's up to you. It's up to you to seize this moment. But I also told them this, when America gives its word, America will keep its word. And we will help this good country of Iraq become a thriving democracy in the heart of the Middle East. (Applause.)

Now, we're going to win the war on terror if we don't lose our nerve. We will win the war on terror by bringing the terrorists to justice. We will win the war on terror by defeating the terrorists in Iraq, and we will win the war on terror by defeating their hateful ideology with freedom.

You see, I want you to understand something loud and clear. I make my decisions based upon principles that just aren't going to change, and I'm proud to be standing with members -- Republican members of the House and Senate who stand on the very same principles. We believe in the universality of freedom. We believe everybody desires to be free. And we believe that the spread of freedom will yield the peace this world wants. It is important to have members of the United States Congress who will not wave the white flag of surrender in this war on terror. (Applause.)

There is a debate here in Washington, and there should be. And I welcome the debate, and we should welcome the debate. But I want to remind you of the consequences if those who want to withdraw from Iraq happen to prevail in the debate. An early withdrawal would be a defeat for the United States of America. An early withdrawal would embolden the terrorists. Talk about a deadline before we've done the job sends chills throughout the spines of Iraqi citizens who are wondering whether or not the United States has the capacity to keep its word.

An early withdrawal would embolden al Qaeda and bin Laden. An early withdrawal, before we completed the missions, would say to the United States military, your sacrifices have gone to vain. There will be no early withdrawal so long as we run the Congress and occupy the White House. (Applause.)

I want to thank the members of Congress, Republican members of Congress, for supporting the United States military. It's really important for our military to know that the United States of America supports them in Iraq. I'll tell you one of the things that just struck me when I was there, in Baghdad. I looked in the eyes of our civilians who were there and I looked in the eyes of our troops, and I saw brave, honorable, and decent, and courageous souls; I saw the best of America. And this Congress and this White House will give them what it takes to win the war on terror. (Applause.)

And here at home, Republicans in the House and the Senate, working with the White House, have dealt with some pretty tough times for our economy. I know it seems like a long time ago, but it wasn't all that long ago that we had to deal with a recession, and a stock market correction, and corporate scandals, and attacks on our country, and two wars, and two major invasions as a part of the war on terror, and natural disasters, and high energy prices. Yet instead of talking, we acted, and we acted on principle.

We Republicans believe that when you have more of your own money in your pocket to save, spend, or invest, it can overcome tough economic times. We believe that we ought to trust you with your money, and not trust government on how to spend your money. And as a result of our pro-growth economic policies, this economy is strong and we intend to keep it strong. (Applause.)

Our economy grew at 3.5 percent last year, and that's faster than any other major industrialized nation in the world. We added 5.3 million new jobs since August of 2003. The national unemployment rate is 4.6 percent. That's below the average for every decade since the 1960s. The entrepreneurial spirit is strong in America because of Republican pro-growth economic policies. (Applause.)

And there is a clear record on this issue. And as people start going to the polls next November, I want them to remember who cut the taxes, and who was against the tax cuts. Every single tax cut was opposed by the Democratic leadership, every tax cut: tax cuts for child -- children, families with children, tax cuts to get rid of the death tax, tax cuts on capital gains and dividends, tax cuts for everybody who pays taxes, tax cuts for small businesses. We're the party of tax cuts, and we're the party of economic growth. And we intend to keep it that way by making the tax cuts permanent. (Applause.)

If you want your taxes raised, vote Democrat. If you want your taxes low, keep Denny Hastert and Bill Frist as leaders of the House and the Senate.

Oh, you get all kinds of excuses for raising taxes here in Washington. The classic is, we need to raise the taxes to balance the budget. That's not how Washington works. I've been here five-and-a-half years, I can tell you how it works. See, they're going to raise your taxes, and then they'll figure out new ways to spend your money.

The best way to balance the budget is to be fiscally wise with your money and to keep pro-growth economic policies in place, which is exactly what we're going to do. We're on our way to cutting this deficit in half by 2009, because our economy is strong as a result of low taxes, and because we're working together to make sure we're wise about how we spend your money. I'll tell you one thing about spending your money though. So long as we have got any soldier in harm's way, I look forward to working with the Congress to make sure he or she gets all the equipment, all the training, all the pay necessary to win this war on terror. (Applause.)

We're willing to deal with tough issues, and we got a tough issue in immigration. This is an important debate for the United States of America, but I want all of us to remember one thing: We are a nation of immigrants, and we will treat people with respect, no matter what country they're from. (Applause.)

The American people expect us to secure our borders and we will. We will increase the number of Border Patrol agents, and I want to thank the Congress for passing strong measures to do just that. We will provide new technologies for our borders, to help our Border Patrol agents. We will end catch and release, so when we catch somebody trying to sneak in our country, they're going to go back home. We will send a clear message to people trying to sneak across our borders; the United States will secure our borders. But I also want you to understand that to secure our borders, we need a comprehensive immigration plan.

We need a plan that says, instead of trying to sneak across our borders, you can come and work in our borders -- in our country, on a temporary basis for jobs Americans aren't doing. We need a temporary worker plan in order to make sure this border of ours is secure. (Applause.) We need to give those temporary workers a chance to come here and then go back home after they work, and to give them a card, see. They need to have a tamper-proof card. And that's how you begin to have true enforcement.

It's against the law to hire somebody who's here who is illegally here, and we intend to make sure we uphold the laws against employers who are hiring illegal immigrants. We oppose amnesty. Amnesty is wrong for the United States of America. Amnesty sends the wrong signal to people here by playing by the rules. On the other hand, it is unrealistic to expect the United States of America can deport 11 million people. And so my plan is that if you pay your fine, pay your dues, learn English, you can get at the end of the citizenship line, not ahead of those who are here legally. (Applause.)

And finally, during this debate I want us to remember that this country has had an amazing capacity to assimilate people from different walks of life, and so a part of a comprehensive plan will not only be to secure our borders, but to have an orderly work plan to be responsible on how we treat people who have been here, but as well as to help people learn English, and learn the customs, and habits of the United States of America.

I love a country where someone can go from picking onions to owning a grocery store, when somebody can go from sweeping the floor of an office to running the office. I love a country where somebody can come and work in a small business and own the small business. America is one nation under God, and the Republican Party must always stand for that. (Applause.)

You know ours is the party that came here to Washington, D.C. and saw a Medicare system that wasn't working. The Democrats were great about talking about making Medicare work; they could never get anything done. And we did. People say, what did you care about Medicare for? I cared about it because the government has made a commitment to the elderly to provide good healthcare. And once -- my view is, once you make a commitment, you got to honor the commitment. And I saw a Medicare system that wasn't working and so did a lot of the Republicans in the United States Congress.

I'll give you an example of why it wasn't working. We had a Medicare system that would pay \$25,000 for surgery, but not one single dime for the prescription drugs that could prevent those surgeries from being needed in the first place. The system was old. It was tired. It wasn't working. And Republicans came together to make sure we had a Medicare system that delivered modern medicine for our seniors. And if you're a poor senior in America, we give you help. The days from choosing between an electricity bill and medicine are over, thanks to the Republican Party. (Applause.)

There is more work to be done when it comes to making sure health care is available and affordable. That's why we support association health plans to help small businesses be able to afford health insurance. That's why we support health savings accounts, so you're in control of the health decisions. That's why we support the advent of information technology to help bring excess costs out of the systems. And in order to make sure healthcare is available and affordable, we strongly support medical liability reform. We got to make sure these junk lawsuits stop running good doctors out of practice, and stop running up your bills. (Applause.)

Ours is the party -- ours is the party that understands we got to have a comprehensive energy plan to make us less dependent on foreign sources of oil. We strongly support conservation measures. We strongly support clean coal technologies and nuclear power. We strongly support hybrid vehicles, new battery technologies, ethanol. Ours is a party that is willing to work hard to say to the American people, soon, that we're less dependent on foreign sources of oil, and that's good for national security, and that is good for economic security. (Applause.)

What I'm telling you is we stand for some things, and we get things done for the American people. We stand on principles. We believe in human dignity of each and every person. We stand for a culture of life. We strongly stand for families in America, and we believe it is essential to make sure that we have a judiciary that understands its proper role in society.

I want to thank the United States Senate for confirming two fantastic Supreme Court Justices in John Roberts and Sam Alito. (Applause.) And our pledge to you is that I will continue to nominate good judges, good honorable men and women, who will interpret the law and not legislate from the bench.

Ours is a party that understands that government can hand out money, but it cannot put hope in a person's heart, or extend the purpose in a person's life, and therefore we strongly support -- we strongly believe in supporting faith-based and community programs that all exist to put an arm around a brother who is lost, or a sister who needs help, and says, I love you. We strongly believe that government ought to support programs of faith in order to help lift the souls and the spirits of those who need something much greater than government can provide.

Ours is a party that believes in limited government and empowering the people of the United States. There's no question that this country of ours can accomplish anything we set our minds to. We can win the war on terror and we will. We can make sure people are able to find work all around our country. We can help the homeless, help the addicted, we can help feed the hungry. We can lift up the souls of every person who is lucky enough to be a citizen of this great country, and we will.

I want to thank you for your help. I want to thank you for giving us a chance to lead this great country. I want to thank you for helping make sure that Denny Hastert and Bill Frist remain in their positions in the Senate and the House, and I assure you this, we will continue to lead this country with an optimistic, hopeful, positive vision that says to every American, opportunity belongs to you as much as your neighbor.

May God bless you all, and may God bless the United States of America. (Applause.)

END 8:12 P.M. EDT

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