

those who may have lost their job as a result of 9/11. But always remember, the most important thing for those who have lost their job is to be able to find work. And so the question I'm going to ask and the question I hope Congress asks is, how best to create jobs? What can you do to encourage economic growth so that people who want to work can find work?

I'm optimistic that 2002 is going to be a better year than 2001. And we will discuss ways here to make—to figure out how Government can make that happen. One thing I will do, after the course of these discussions and some discussions later on this week, will put in my budget an economic stimulus package.

And speaking of that, I hope that when Congress comes back, they will have listened to their constituents and that Congress will realize that America, like me, is tired of partisan bickering, that we ought to come together, we ought to unify around some sensible policy and not try to play politics with tax relief or, for that matter, economic stimulus packages.

I'll be glad to answer a few questions. Fournier [Ron Fournier, Associated Press].

National Priorities and the Federal Budget

Q. Mr. President, can you increase funding for the military and homeland security without dipping into the Social Security and Medicare accounts? And Chairman Greenspan, if I could—

The President. Well, wait. I promised him that he could come. He's an independent soul, and he can have a press conference elsewhere. But one of the things we're not going to do is drag the Chairman into a press conference. Otherwise, he won't come back—[laughter]—to the White House.

Q. I'm sure he would—

The President. Well, you can find him at his place of business. Sorry to tell you how to do—it's a new year. [Laughter] I plan to be much more assertive with the press.

Q. [Inaudible]—going to ask him if he thought the recession was over, that's all.

The President. Okay. I said to the American people that this Nation might have to run deficits in time of war, in times of a national emergency, or in times of a recession. And we're still in all three. We had a national emergency; we're trying to win a war; and we're in a recession. So I have no problem figuring out ways to win the war, figuring out ways to protect the homeland—and those will be the priorities of my budget—and at the same time—and spending the money necessary to do both—and at the same time, recognizing that we may not balance the budget for this year.

It makes sense to spend money necessary to win the war; it makes sense to spend money necessary to protect the homeland. And we're in a recession. There are some talk about raising taxes. That would be a disaster, to raise taxes in the midst of a recession. Even—I think you'll find that to be—most economists agree with that point of view. Certainly, if they're fair about it, they will say that.

And so I—as I said out there, somebody must be reading a different kind of economics textbook here in Washington. And most of the people that I spoke to in California and Oregon understood that we shouldn't be raising taxes in a recession. Yes.

Economic Stimulus Package

Q. Mr. President, given that there was real progress on a stimulus package in December—[inaudible]—will your package, your proposal take effect more quickly than the one you proposed in December? And in addition to that, do you think, in the meantime, further interest rate cuts might be a way to provide an immediate boost?

The President. Well, first in terms of monetary policy, I'll leave that in the hands of our Chairman, Chairman Greenspan. He's done a fabulous job in running the