

Weekly Compilation of
**Presidential
Documents**



Monday, March 19, 2007
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WEEKLY COMPILATION OF

PRESIDENTIAL DOCUMENTS

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Week Ending Friday, March 16, 2007

**Remarks Prior to a Discussion With
Members of the Community in
Sao Paulo, Brazil**

March 9, 2007

Well, first I'd like to thank Flavio for his hospitality. Laura and I are so thrilled to be in Brazil. We love your beautiful country, but I also love the fact that there are people who are deeply concerned about the plight of the least of us. And I am very proud of my country's contribution to helping social entrepreneurs who are helping people help others. I believe you can change society one heart at a time; that's what I believe. But I know in order to do so, it requires people who are willing to make sacrifice.

Flavio runs a place of love and compassion, all aimed at being a part of that social fabric that helps heal the broken heart and provides hope for the future.

And so I thank you all for joining Laura and me. I'm really looking forward to hearing about what you have done, how others can help. But the main reason I'm here is to thank you. We're all members of God's family, and when one of us hurts, we also hurt. And there are a lot of hurting people in the world, a lot of hurting people in Brazil. And the people in the United States care.

So I'm honored to be with you. I look forward to the roundtable. Flavio, I guess this is your place, so you start, right?

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:41 p.m. at Meninos do Morumbi. In his remarks, he referred to Flavio Pimenta, president and director, Meninos do Morumbi. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

**Letter to the Speaker of the House of
Representatives Transmitting a
Request for Fiscal Year 2007
Department of Defense
Supplemental Budget Revisions**

March 9, 2007

Dear Madam Speaker:

I ask the Congress to consider the enclosed revisions to the FY 2007 Department of Defense supplemental request proposed in my FY 2008 Budget. This revised request would better align resources based on the assessment of military commanders to achieve the goal of establishing Iraq and Afghanistan as democratic and secure nations that are free of terrorism. Overall, the discretionary budget authority in my FY 2007 supplemental proposal would not be increased by these requests.

The details of these amendments are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 10.

**Letter to the Speaker of the House of
Representatives Transmitting
Proposed Budget Cancellations**

March 9, 2007

Dear Madam Speaker:

I ask the Congress to consider the enclosed FY 2007 request to cancel \$3.1 billion of funding from lower-priority Federal programs and excess funds. This request would offset fully the funds needed to address the \$3.1 billion FY 2007 funding shortfall for the Department of Defense to implement the

recommendations of the 2005 Base Realignment and Closure Commission. The proposed cancellations would affect the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, the Interior, and Transportation, as well as the Corps of Engineers.

The details of this request are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

NOTE: This letter was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 10.

The President's Radio Address

March 10, 2007

Good morning. Today Laura and I are in Latin America, where we are visiting five countries: Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Guatemala, and Mexico. These countries are part of a region that has made great strides toward freedom and prosperity in the past three decades. They have raised up new democracies, and they have undertaken fiscal policies that have brought stability to their economies.

Yet despite the progress we have seen, many citizens in our hemisphere remain trapped in poverty and shut off from the promise of this new century. Nearly one out of every four people in Latin America lives on less than \$2 a day. Many children never finish grade school. Many mothers never see a doctor. The fact is that tens of millions of our brothers and sisters to the south have yet to see improvements in their daily lives, and this has led some to question the value of democracy.

Our Nation has a vital interest in helping the young democracies in our neighborhood succeed. When our neighbors prosper, they create more vibrant markets for our goods and services. When our neighbors have a hopeful future in their own countries, they can find work at home and are less likely to migrate to our country illegally. And when our neighbors feel the blessings of liberty in their daily lives, the appeal of radicalism de-

clines and our hemisphere becomes more secure.

The United States is doing its part to help our neighbors in Latin America build a better life for themselves and their families. We are helping these young democracies make their governments more fair, effective, and transparent. We are supporting their efforts to meet the basic needs of their citizens—like education, health care, and housing. And we are increasing opportunity for all by relieving debt, opening up trade, and encouraging reforms that will build market economies, where people can start from nothing and rise as far as their talents and hard work can take them.

On Monday, I will meet a Guatemalan citizen who has experienced the power of open trade and free economies. His name is Mariano Canu. Twenty years ago, he was an indigenous farmer whose land provided barely enough corn and beans to feed his family. No one in his family had ever been to college, and most of the people in his village never got past the sixth grade. And his own children's prospects for prosperity looked just as bleak.

Mariano was determined to do better for his family. So he organized an association of small farmers called *Labradores Mayas*. He persuaded his fellow farmers to switch their crops to vegetables they could sell overseas—high-value crops like lettuce, carrots, and celery. Soon they were selling to big companies like Wal-Mart Central America. Today, the business he helped establish is thriving, and it supports more than 1,000 jobs. It also has supported something else, a college education for Mariano's son.

Mariano is showing what the people of Latin America can accomplish when they are given a chance. We must help others like him gain the opportunity to build a better life for their families. The generosity of the American people is helping our neighbors in Latin America build free and vibrant economies. By doing so, we will increase living standards for all our citizens, strengthen democracy in our hemisphere, and advance the cause of peace.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7 a.m. on March 9 at the Hilton Sao Paulo for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on March 10. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 9 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

**The President's News Conference
With President Tabare Vazquez of
Uruguay in Anchorena Park,
Uruguay**

March 10, 2007

President Vazquez. Mr. President of the United States of America, Madam Secretary of State, members of the delegation visiting us, Ministers of State, the Ambassador of the United States of America in Uruguay, the Ambassador of Uruguay in the United States of America, ladies and gentlemen, journalists:

Mr. President, I would like to welcome you together with the very prestigious delegation that is with you. Mr. President, you represent a people that is a friend of the Uruguayan people. We have historical and friendly relations uniting these two countries, these two peoples. These are firm, respectful relations with solidarity.

In this sense, I would like to give an example with two elements which I think are of significance. First of all, Mr. President, thousands of Uruguayan citizens live in the United States of America and have found in that country standards of living that they did not have in our country, and that forced them to migrate. They bettered themselves there; they have their own families, their work; they have studied; they have health and education for their children. Therefore, this is a very clear element of what the United States people has given to the Uruguayan people.

Undoubtedly, there are many Uruguayans who are still waiting, pending legalization of the situation in this country, but I believe your solidarity will help our citizens to be able to live legally in your country.

And the second example I would like to mention is something that we Uruguayans recall very well. When we underwent the most severe economic crisis of our history, where Uruguay was living a very moving and very

serious condition, your country, and you, in particular, Mr. President, gave us a hand to help Uruguay to leave that situation in which it was and start with the way to recovery that we are now trying to consolidate.

Sixteen years ago, another President of the United States visited our country—it was 5 December 1990, and this President was your father. At that time, I was the mayor of the city of Montevideo, and I handed him the keys of the city of Montevideo. We had a brief exchange with President Bush, your father, and I recall a statement: “Let us,” he said, “leave aside our differences, as we do have certain differences, and let us follow the path of agreement and coincidences that we also have.” The defense of democracy as an organization and as a functioning of our societies, but rather as a style of life, the defense of freedoms and the determined struggle to improve the standards of living of our people, giving them work, education, and health, are common elements that permit us to think that we may continue working beyond our differences, Mr. Chairman.

With these words I would like to say that the path we have followed and the dialog we had today with the President of the United States is precisely this one: to try and increase our trade exchanges, the possibility of placing the fruits of our worker in the markets of the United States of America; try and increase the scientific, technological, cultural exchange with our brother country, and see how together we may have a better standard of living for our people.

Mr. Chairman, members of the U.S. delegation, I hope you may feel at home here. Most welcome.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. President. I feel very much at home. You know, it's—in my State of Texas, when you invite somebody to your *estancia*, it's a sign of respect. And I thank you very much for this warm gesture of hospitality, but after all, you are a *Tejano*. [Laughter]

We've had—this is our second meaningful dialog. I remember so well your visit to the Oval Office. You were very articulate about your desire to improve the lives of all people in your country. I was impressed then by your compassion and your care.

I was expecting to see a beautiful country when I came here, and that is precisely what I have seen. Your capital city is magnificent. The architecture is really beautiful. And then, of course, we come to this beautiful place that is so peaceful and reminds me of the great natural resources that your country has.

We discussed a lot of subjects. First of all, Mr. President, I completely agree with the spirit of our conversations, that we will find common ground, and we will advance that common ground for the benefit of our respective peoples.

One place we have common ground is the respect for human rights and human dignity, respect for rule of law; we welcome a free press—most of the time. [*Laughter*] No, all the time. We honor elections. And Uruguay is a strong example of the stability that can come with democracy. But you also recognize that which I recognize, that you can't take democracy for granted, that the people have to see tangible benefits.

And so on my trip to South America and Central America, I want to remind people that the United States and its compassionate people care deeply about issues such as education and health, issues that you're concerned about. We spent a lot of time talking about education, and I suspect most Americans don't know that we're actively involved in helping the President institute a program for youngsters to become more literate, particularly in English. We want to continue helping.

We spent time talking about how we can exchange students in a more—in a better way. We talked about exchanging ideas, that our experts sit down at the same table to discuss issues such as alternative fuels. In my trip to Brazil yesterday, we spent time talking about alternative fuels and the need for the United States and Brazil to work together—it's the same conversation we had in Uruguay.

We talked about the fact that—or at least I talked about the fact—the President is a modest man, but I talked about the fact that the Uruguayan economy is growing at—estimated at 7 percent. And I congratulate you, sir, on creating the conditions so that people feel comfortable making investments that

cause economies to grow, and that we want to work together to continue to advance the progress we have made on trade and investment at a pace that both our peoples will be comfortable with.

I want to thank you very much for your commitment to democracy and peace in our neighborhood. I congratulate you and the people of Uruguay for providing peacekeepers to Haiti and to the Congo. It is a gesture of a strong nation to reach out to help others realize the benefits of a free society. And you've sent a strong and powerful message.

Finally, I do want to say something about immigration in the United States. The President has spoken eloquently to me about the need for there to be an immigration policy that upholds the values of America. I explained to him that it is my interest to get a comprehensive immigration bill out of the United States Congress as soon as possible. I look forward to working with both Republicans and Democrats, Mr. President, to do what is right to uphold the laws of the United States, but at the same time, recognize that, on the one hand, we can't grant automatic citizenship, nor on the other hand, can we kick people out. And so therefore, there's got to be a rational way forward.

And I pledge to you, as a man who is concerned about people from your country that may be living in the United States, that I will work as hard as I can to have a compassionate and rational immigration law that respects the rule of law, but also respects the great traditions of the United States, a tradition which is a welcoming society; a tradition that says, you know, that we welcome our diversity because we believe in our diversity, we can find the strength of our Nation.

And so I've been—I'm really looking forward to this trip. I'm especially looking forward to the *asado*. I appreciate the—I appreciate your willingness to cook some Uruguayan beef. You've told me all along how good it is, and after we answer a few questions, we're about to find out.

So, Mr. President, thank you for your hospitality.

Uruguay-U.S. Relations

Q. My question is addressed to President George Bush. Bearing in mind the regional context governed by Presidents such as Vazquez or Chavez, especially, what similarities and what differences do you find amongst them? And what is your opinion about President Vazquez and Uruguay?

President Bush. The temptation is to try to get people to talk about their differences. I want to talk about our commonalities. We share respect for each other. We respect our countries; we respect our history and traditions; and we share a great respect for a government that—where the people decide who's in charge.

Interestingly enough, we both have gotten rid of colonial powers in our past, and it is—I think it is that heritage that makes Uruguay and the United States such natural partners. We talk about the need to invest and to grow economies through investment. That's a common ground that leads to a positive relationship.

We both recognize that education is vital for the success of our respective countries. When we find illiteracy in the United States, that's where we find poverty, oftentimes. And therefore, education policy is focused at improving the lives of all by giving people the skills necessary to compete in the 21st century.

I think many people in my country don't know that Uruguay is the leading exporter of software in South America. It means that one of the great assets of this country is the brainpower of the country. Oftentimes when you think of a country like Uruguay, you think of natural resources—fantastic farms, a lot of cows and lambs and blueberries—which, by the way, came up today in our conversation. But I think it is hopeful for both our countries to know that a friend is a leading exporter of something that requires the ingenuity and brainpower of its citizens. And so we find common ground there as to how to work together.

This is a—I would call this meeting very constructive and very hopeful and very positive. And that's—the reason why is because we've got so much in common. There's a lot more that unites us than divides us, Mr.

President, and I appreciate the chance to visit with you.

Tony.

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Q. Bret Baier [FOX News].

President Bush. Bret Baier.

Q. President Bush—

President Bush. So the guy—I'm 60 years old, and he thinks I can't hear. [Laughter]

Q. Sorry about that. Mr. President, the FBI acknowledged that some agents used post-9/11 powers to demand personal information on Americans. What do you say to people who are concerned about the use of these national security letters? And in the wake of how these letters were used, do you still have confidence in Attorney General Gonzales and FBI Director Mueller?

President Bush. I was briefed by the Attorney General and the Director of the FBI on this subject last week. We spent a lot of time talking about the IG report. First of all, I want to compliment the IG for good and necessary work. They brought the findings of this good work to my attention. My question is, what are you going to do to solve the problem and how fast can you get it solved?

And I was pleased by Director Mueller's answer, that he had already begun to address some of the problems, but there's more work to be done. I thought his testimonies the other day were very good; he took responsibility, as he should have. And I have confidence in Director Mueller, as I do in the Attorney General.

I want to remind you, Bret, and others that the IG report, which justly made issue of FBI shortcomings, also made it clear that these letters were important to the security of the United States. And so we'll address the problems in the report, and those problems will be addressed as quickly as possible.

International Trade

Q. Good afternoon. The first question is addressed to President Bush. You recognize the protectionist obstacles in your Government. How flexible may your administration be on making progress in a trade agreement with Uruguay, and what agreement has been reached today?

And the second question for both Presidents. President Vazquez, did you ask President Bush to intercede in the differences that Uruguay and Argentina have about the—[*inaudible*—]plans?

President Bush. We spent a lot of time talking about how to address Uruguayan concerns about market access for certain products. The President talked about a variety of issues when it comes to trade. He felt like the quotas on certain items, such as cows and sheep, was not fair, and I told him I would absolutely consider requests he made.

You thought I was teasing about blueberries, but I wasn't. It turns out, Uruguay produces a fantastic blueberry. And the fundamental question is, will that blueberry—will the blueberry grower be able to sell product into the United States?

So we talked about a variety of produce. And, you know, I told the President, I said, you can't solve problems unless you put the problems on the table, and that where we could help, we would, and where we couldn't, I would give an explanation as to why not.

Now, you brought up protectionist tendencies, and I'm concerned about protectionist tendencies, not only with our own country but around the world. I happen to believe a world that trades freely and fairly is a world that is more likely to be able to address poverty. And therefore, I'm a strong supporter of completing the Doha round of the WTO.

I shared with the President about our strategies as to advance the Doha round. I spent a lot of time with President Lula—he was most interested in our conversations, and I shared our conversations. I didn't betray any confidences, of course, but I talked to him about how we need to advance the Doha round. The United States is fully prepared to reduce agricultural subsidies, as I explained to the President. We just want to make sure there is market access for our products. And that's what I told President Lula, that's what I've told the Europeans, and that's what I shared with the President.

I'm optimistic we can get a deal done. As a matter of fact, our Trade Minister is—Susan Schwab has remained in Sao Paulo to talk to her Brazilian counterpart, all aiming

at continuing to make progress toward what is a complicated, but necessary deal.

Thank you.

President Vazquez. As an answer to your first question, I fully agree with what has just been expressed by the President of the United States. We have created a space, starting with this meeting, where our experts, our ministers are going to discuss and make progress on issues of bilateral relationships.

Now, concerning the general multilateral situation, Uruguay has made clear its position in the defense of free trade and tried to have a drop of tariffs and subsidies, which hinder the sale of our great cultural products, particularly. But we have also analyzed the possibility of making progress with the GSP, particularly on certain issues that are going to be considered in the coming weeks.

As to the second part of your question, I have not talked about the problems we have with the republic of Argentina with the President of the United States, amongst other things, because in a few days from now—in a few weeks, and thanks to the conciliation of His Majesty, the King of Spain, we are going to get closer. We're not going to negotiate. We're going to have a dialog between the two Governments in order to find a friendly way out. We're going to try to come to an understanding and to be able to solve the very sad differences that we have with our brethren of Argentina.

President's Visit to Central and South America

Q. Thank you, Mr. President and Mr. President. For President Bush, Hugo Chavez suggested that you are afraid to mention his name. So, are you? And how much of a threat is he to the United States' interests in the hemisphere?

And, President Vazquez, can you discuss at all your position between trying to broaden ties to the United States in terms of trade, but also indicate to your own neighbors that you are—want to remain integrated in South American trade?

President Bush. I've come to South America and Central America to advance a positive, constructive diplomacy that is being conducted by my Government on behalf of the American people.

My message to the people in our neighborhood is that we care about the human condition and that we believe the human condition can be improved in a variety of ways—one, investment. And so the question is, how can we have constructive dialog with our neighbors as to how to spread the benefits of investment?

I also am reminding people that the United States taxpayer is most generous when it comes to bilateral aid. Since I've been the President, we've doubled the amount of annual bilateral aid to Latin America from \$800 million a year to \$1.6 billion a year. And most of the money is aimed at social justice programs, programs like education and health care.

I also know full well that—and I saw this firsthand yesterday in Sao Paulo—that many American NGOs and faith-based groups and individuals express their concern about the plight of the poor through programs and activities all aimed at giving people a chance. Yesterday in Sao Paulo, we went to a pretty wealthy neighborhood, but it was surrounded by a *favela*. And there we found in the midst of hopelessness, there was a little center of love. And some of the program money had been raised as a result of concerts in the United States, where citizens, average citizens contribute to make sure this program remain viable.

And so the trip is a statement of desire to work together with people in our neighborhood. I've been to Central and South America a lot since I've been the President, because I fully understand a prosperous and peaceful neighborhood is in the interest of the United States of America.

I would call our diplomacy quiet and effective diplomacy—diplomacy all aimed at helping people, aimed at elevating the human condition, aimed at expressing the great compassion of the American people.

And, Mr. President, I appreciate you giving me a chance to come and visit with you, have a dialog about how we can advance our interests and the interests of our neighborhood.

President Vazquez. Concerning your question, the strategy for international insertion of Uruguay is quite well defined and quite clear. We are in favor of an open inte-

gration process; we are strongly in favor of the regional process. We are where we are and we don't want to leave this place. And the trade we have and the cultural, historical relationships that we have with our brethren countries in the region are very solid, very strong. But we don't want a close integration process, but an open integration process.

This MERCOSUR should be able to integrate to other blocks or other countries of the world, and also each of the members of this process—for example, Uruguay—might be able to exercise its sovereign right of developing bilateral relations with other integration processes or other countries. It is in this sense that we are working, and it is in this sense that we are holding with the President of the United States.

Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:53 a.m. in the Visitors Center. In his remarks, he referred to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Minister of Development, Industry, and Trade Luiz Fernando Furlan of Brazil. President Vazquez referred to U.S. Ambassador to Uruguay Frank E. Baxter; Uruguay's Ambassador to the U.S. Carlos Gianelli Derois; and King Juan Carlos II of Spain. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. President Vazquez spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted By President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia in Bogota, Colombia March 11, 2007

Mr. President, thank you very much. I appreciate your hospitality. I am amazed by the beauty of your country. I've never been here to the beautiful capital city of your country, but Laura and I were struck by two things: the beauty of the landscape and the warmth of the people.

We bring greetings from the United States to the people of your country. We have been friends, and we shall remain friends. We value your democracy. I appreciate your strong leadership. We come during a period where your country has come through very difficult times, and now there's a brighter day

ahead. And my message to the people of your country is, we want to help every individual realize their God-given potential.

I'd like to propose a toast to the people of this country, to the leadership of this country. May God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3 p.m. at Casa de Narino. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Uribe. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia in Bogota

March 11, 2007

President Uribe. Mr. President of the United States of America, George W. Bush; distinguished members of the delegation; friends from the Government; distinguished journalists who have come from other countries and from Colombia: I would like to welcome again in the warmest fashion possible. I would like to welcome his delegation as well.

During the working lunch we have just had, at the end, I was able to read some beautiful paragraphs from Bolivar, the Liberator: one in the Charter of Angostura, where he actually was talking about the creation of the American Nation around—or on the basis of freedom, tolerance, and of having a general law that would respond to common interest through individual wills. The Liberator also mentioned a very nice paragraph during the Constitution Assembly in Bolivia on the legacy of President George Washington.

I was saying that the relations between the Colombian people and the American people are sound. We have mutual understanding on democratic values since the birth of our two states. This visit is a reason for being proud. We will trust even more our relations and the Colombian process, and we would like to thank you very warmly, President Bush.

You have come to Colombia at a time of unrest because of the peace process that is

taking place. You have come at a time of revelations that really have motivated a public debate. But they are taking place because of one reason, and that reason is that our policy on democratic security has tried to defeat terrorism in the guerrillas, in the paramilitaries, because our democratic security policy wants to reestablish democratic institutions fully in Colombia. And these revelations are taking place because our law on justice and peace requires and demands truth—truth so that the country will know the dimension of the tragedy we have gone through, truth to prepare us for a future free of the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the drug traffickers.

The law on justice and peace that is being enforced has been discussed in Congress throughout its approval process, and it has been discussed during its implementation, and has three elements that makes it different from former legislation in Colombia and in the world.

Number one, justice. There will be no amnesty for crimes against humanity. This law requires reparations to take place, and there is no other single country in the world other than Colombia that might say that in order to have shorter sentences within a law of peace, the perpetrators are required to hand in their assets, so as to repair the victims. And that has never happened anywhere else in the world.

There are two countries in Latin America that tried to compensate for the problems of the victims under dictatorships but with money coming from the budget. Here we will strive to give them all the assets that the perpetrators have. It is truth, justice, and reparations, and these are the three key elements of our legislation.

This country has an independent justice system, Mr. President, which makes our democracy different. The decision of my administration in this process of institutional recovery is total support for justice so that Colombia may finally overcome the time of terrorism.

I would like to go back in history. For 30 years, the Marxist guerillas actually hit Colombia, and they proposed a social revolution, and they produced even more poverty. They proposed more democracy, and they were assassinating and murdering the mayors

and the council members, and they were actually killing democracy.

These guerillas ended up being financed by drug traffickers. And there are many people in many regions of Colombia that were not protected by the state, and now they feel protected, thanks to our security policy. The growth of the guerillas and the lack of a state protection for citizens resulted in these guerillas producing the paramilitarism, and these paramilitary phenomenon started committing the same crimes, atrocious crimes, as the guerillas. The Marxist guerillas brought to Colombia the validity of combining all sorts of struggle. They infiltrated universities, the labor movement, and the peasant movement. They infiltrated very important sectors of intellectual movements and journalists. And they infiltrated politics.

The same guerillas planted a hatred amongst the classes. They wanted to eliminate the foundation of solidarity on which this nation was built. The guerillas taught the paramilitaries to combine all sorts of struggle. And what happened then? Some of these guerillas actually signed an amnesty, but they were not required to tell the truth, which is something we are requiring now. So they didn't say which were the sectors of the civil society that had been infiltrated. These guerillas were not demanded to give reparations to the victims, as we are asking for now. And these guerillas were able, in spite of having committed so many atrocious crimes, to get an amnesty for atrocious crimes, amnesty that is not given out today for these crimes against humanity.

The peace process that we are undertaking with the—[*inaudible*—]of truth, justice, and reparations, actually set the limits for peace processes in the future. We have been very rigorous in this process. It has been a very serious process, and the world and Colombia will know that the processes in Colombia in the future, with the guerillas, such as the ELN and FARC, should require, as we are requiring today, truth, justice, and reparations.

I would like you to know, Mr. President, that our commitment is the full defeat of terrorism and the total recovery of justice and of democratic institutions. We are working with a model of state. We are not dismantling

the state, as has been done in many Latin American countries throughout the nineties, nor are we proposing a state-dominated government. We do not accept the dismantling of the state or state monopolies. What we are building is trust for private investment in Colombia, and at the same time, we are demanding social responsibilities. We see in trust a way of investing in our country. In investment, we see a development tool, and in growth, we see a possibility of overcoming poverty and building equity.

You have come to Colombia, Mr. President, with a thesis which is necessary for our continent, and that is a diversification of the energy basket. After Brazil, Colombia is the second country in the continent in the production of biofuels. We have created the tax incentives. We have approved regulations in agreement with the standards of the World Trade Organization. There are projects that are producing more than 1,000 liters of ethanol in Colombia, and there are many more that are being installed. We have 6 million hectares in the Orinoco department, and these are savannas, in general, that we can use for biofuel production without destroying a single tree in our jungle.

We have thanked the President of the United States of America and his delegation for the support given to Colombia through the Plan Colombia. The fight against drug trafficking has received support, practical support, and your support, the support of President Clinton, the support of your Congress, Your enthusiastic support, Mr. President, have been very practical and have helped the struggle of the Colombian people against drug trafficking.

We have the opportunity of discussing very important issues as well, such as the agenda against poverty, our social goals, our program of forest rangers families, which is unique in the world, that is paying 50,000 peasant families so that they can protect the jungle, free of drugs and so that they can recover the jungle where it has been destroyed.

We have discussed our trade agreement again and political possibility of integration, and far away from ideological sectorisms that is trying to look for opportunities of investment and employment with dignity and social security programs.

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for coming to Colombia. I am very proud of my fellow countrymen—when you could come here after landing at the airport, going through this beautiful landscape, and was able to go to Plaza de Bolivar and to this palace. I am very proud, Mr. President, that the world may see how the Colombian people is overcoming nowadays the great difficulties that we have suffered in the last years.

And again, thank you so much for your visit, sir.

President Bush. Thank you very much for your kind words and for your invitation. Laura and I are thrilled to be back in your country again. I've been really looking forward to coming to this beautiful capital city, and I thank the people of Colombia for such a generous welcome.

We did have an extensive conversation, but that's what you'd expect when friends sit down at a table together. I bring the greetings of the United States. The people of this—my country care deeply about the human condition. We believe strongly in human rights and human values, just like you believe in them. We're two strong democracies, and we've got a lot in common and a lot of values that we share. So this visit advances those values.

I listened very carefully to the President when he was—expressed concern about the immigration laws of the United States. He was most eloquent in his concern about Colombians who live in the United States, and I assured him that a top priority of my administration is the passage of comprehensive immigration reform. I will work with both Republicans and Democrats to get a comprehensive bill to my desk as quickly as possible, Mr. President.

We talked about the benefits of expanding trade so that people in both our countries can benefit. The United States is Colombia's largest trading partner. Colombia is the second-largest market in Latin America for U.S. farmers. Trade is beneficial to both countries, and it can grow even more with the free trade agreement that we signed in November.

I told the President that I will work hard for the passage of that important piece of

legislation. I believe that a trade package with Colombia is in the interests of both our Nations, Mr. President.

I'm looking forward to visiting with some Afro-Colombians today to talk about social justice programs. The reason I do is because it's very important for the people of South America and Central America to know that the United States cares deeply about the human condition and that much of our aid is aimed at helping people realize their God-given potential. And so we'll talk about programs all aimed at giving people a chance to realize their dreams, Mr. President.

You described many of those programs at lunch—or your cabinet described many of those programs at lunch, and I was most impressed by the strategy of your administration and the vigor and the energy of your Cabinet.

I'm looking forward very much to talking and continuing to work with you to defeat the drug lords and narcotraffickers—narcoterrorists. You recognize, like I recognize, that the most important function of state is to provide security for its people. You cannot tolerate, in a society, the ability of people to take innocent life to achieve political objectives. And so I appreciate your steadfast strength and so do the people of this country.

I am looking forward to working with you on the second phase—or the next phase of Plan Colombia. We're going to work with your government to continue to fight drug trafficking. The United States has an obligation to work to reduce the demand for drugs, and at the same time, work to interdict the supply of drugs. There's a lot we can do. But part of it is to help you exercise control over all your territory, is to strengthen the rule of law, and to expand economic opportunity for the citizens. And we want to help.

The Plan Colombia recognizes the importance of protecting human rights. I appreciate the President's determination to bring human rights violators to justice. He is strong in that determination. It's going to be very important for Members of my United States—our United States Congress to see that determination. And I believe, if given a fair chance, President Uribe can make the case.

This Colombia Government continues to make progress that is going to earn greater confidence from all its citizens and greater respect in the international community. You've set high expectations for your nation. I appreciate your determination, and I'm proud to call you a personal friend and to call your country a strategic partner of the United States. Thank you for having me.

Okay.

Colombian Government

Q. Good afternoon. President Bush, what is your opinion about the way in which the government has handled the scandal of the politicians involved in drug trafficking because—and the paramilitaries? Because we know that there are many more members involved with the paramilitaries. Up to what extent do you support President Uribe given the fact that most of these paramilitary heads are drug traffickers? And finally, the U.S. will insist on extraditing these people?

President Bush. I support a plan that says that there will be an independent judiciary analyzing every charge brought forth, and when someone is found guilty, there's punishment. That's the kind of plan I support. It happens to be the kind of plan the President supports. In other words, there's no political favorites when it comes to justice, that if someone is guilty, they will pay a penalty. And the best way to assure that that penalty is fair and the justice is fair is for there to be a court independent from politics.

And so, when I asked this very same question to the President about the news I've been reading in Washington, DC, the same questions he's going to be asked when he and his government come to talk to our Congress, he answered just like I described. He said, "We have an independent court. We've got a firm law. People will be held to account, whether or not they're—no matter what political party they may or may not be associated with." That's what the people of Colombia expect; that's the kind of justice they're going to receive.

Listen, this country has come through some very difficult times. And the best way to heal wounds is for people to see fair, independent justice being delivered, and I be-

lieve that's the kind of justice this government will do.

Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

U.S. Troop Deployment/Democracy in Colombia

Q. —key Members of Capitol Hill are finding it disconcerting that the number of U.S. troops deployed keeps climbing. Even the budget revisions that you announced a couple of days ago ordered up more. I'm wondering, do you think that the American citizens should now look at the troop buildup that you announced in January, the 21,500, as merely a starting point? And—

President Bush. Go ahead.

Q. And President Uribe, with all the talk about Chavez, could you tell us your opinion on whether you think his influence in the region is overstated?

President Uribe. What is my opinion on?

Q. With all the talk about Chavez, could you tell us how much you—if you think that his influence in the region is overestimated or exaggerated?

President Bush. The troop announcement I made was over 20,000 combat troops. Secretary Gates and General Pace went up to Congress and testified to the effect that those combat troops are going to need some support. And that's what the American people are seeing in terms of Iraq, the support troops necessary to help the reinforcements do their job. My hope, of course, is that Congress provides the funding necessary for the combat troops to be able to do their job, without any strings attached.

Secondly, in terms of Afghanistan, I did announce, as a result of a review of our policy, an additional 3,200 troops. But in addition to that, the troops that you're referring to are going to be part of a training and embedding mission that I did also discuss during that strategy, although I didn't have any details of the troops.

President Uribe. Colombia is a loyal ally to the States, and it shows solidarity towards Latin America as well. We have promoted more integration with the U.S.A. through Plan Colombia and the free trade agreement and more integration with Latin America as well. The Andean community, it has been led by Colombia and has an agreement

signed with MERCOSUR. We have contributed to the creation of the South America Union. Colombia has been recently accepted as the main member of a Plan Panama Puebla.

So we are looking also for a trade agreement with Canada. We are about to close negotiations with three Central American countries. And as you can see, this is our democratic and loyal international policy. With our sister countries we have very good relations. We respect, and we ask everyone to respect, the guiding principles of international public law, as well as the respect for the autonomy in each country and the principle of nonintervention. We have to help one another in promoting freedom and in overcoming poverty and in conquering health.

I have to mention something about the question that was asked to President Bush. Number one, the whole world must know that this country was affected for 30 years by the Marxist guerillas; that these guerillas infiltrated politics and journalism; that they infiltrated the labor movement and labor unions, universities. And the truth was never demanded, which is something we have to demand in the future.

Number two, the world must know that many—during these years, some regions in Colombia were not protected. Number three, the world must know that the guerillas and the lack of protection was what generated the paramilitarism. Number four, the world must know that this administration is the first one that has started fighting directly against the paramilitarism. There is a political discussion going on, but the paramilitary aggression has gone down radically.

Why? Because the law on justice and peace has let most—has resulted in most of the paramilitary leaders being in jail because our security policy has actually eliminated more than 1,700 of these paramilitary groups' members. And I'd like to have so many people from other countries in Colombia present here to be able to say that most of the crimes that are being tried and prosecuted happened before my administration, to say that democratic security has been recovering the transparency in electoral processes in Colombia. Last year's elections, the opposition to

my administration has not even one complaint about lack of guarantees. They were able to visit all the places with which in the past were not possible to visit because, on the one hand, there was control by the guerillas, and there was also paramilitary control in other regions, and they couldn't visit these places.

Candidates running for the Presidency in 2006 received effective guarantees. They were able to visit the whole country, and the effect of the democratic security policy was quite evident because there were no pressures against them by the terrorists. The only pressure in the year 2006 were against the people who supported my campaign in departments in the southern part of the country, where FARC, together with the drug traffickers, introduced a strike, and they threatened those who were going to vote for me. And this is something that the world should be aware of. And there were candidates to Congress and the President from all ideological movements.

The world must also know that it is a government that has asked for the truth; that the government is promoting the law on justice and peace; that it is this administration that has made the decision of dismantling the criminal machinery of the paramilitaries; that it was the government who made the decision to put them in jail; that it is this government that has made the decision that they have to give out their own assets to—for the reparations of the victims; and that it is the government that has made the decision of supporting justice fully.

For the first time, the supreme court of justice in Colombia, which is an independent branch, has its own investigators. Thanks to the will of this administration of funding this group, we are dismantling what was built for many years, for more than three decades. Terrorism advanced in taking parts of Colombia, and terrorism made progress in suppressing freedoms, in threatening journalists, in assassinating labor union leaders. And of all this, we are actually making progress.

So I think I have to tell an anecdote as well. Not long ago, I was asked if the government supported direct transmissions on TV of the hearings where the paramilitaries are being tried before the prosecutors. And I said

that the government supported this transmission alive and direct because that is the way to get the truth. So instead of being afraid for telling the truth, we have been supporting truth. Instead of looking for ways out of justice, we are trying to support justice as much as possible.

Let's talk about the Director of the security agency, the DAS. When he left this agency, there were no complaints of links with paramilitaries against him. And he was then accused of facts that were known months after he left this agency, the security agency. And I have to discuss these subjects because these are subjects that are becoming increasingly important in international debates. The Minister of Defense has said that if there were any militaries related to terrorist organizations, they will be withdrawn from their positions.

But we cannot fall into the trap of the guerrillas, that we should weaken the armed forces. We are not going to make them weak, because this is the only way we have to have a country without any guerrillas and without any paramilitaries. There are members—if there are members of this Government that have any links to these organizations, will be immediately removed from their offices.

And so I am concerned for the question asked by the journalist. And he said—and this is not correct—that there are many members of the government related or with links with paramilitary groups. And this is a contradiction because this is the first government ever that has prosecuted the paramilitaries, that has actually killed some of the paramilitaries and sent others to jail. We are going to eliminate paramilitarism, and we are going to eliminate the guerrillas, because we can't fall in the trap that poses a paramilitary scandal that will actually do away with all the results in democratic security.

The Minister of Defense, at lunch, was saying that we are going to levee a tax on the wealthiest contributors in Colombia so that they can contribute to the consolidation of the democratic security program. And we will demand the truth without any fears, and this is what makes a difference.

When I was running for the Presidency, I was not well-interpreted. I was saying that

Colombia had to eliminate the guerrillas, but perhaps I was misunderstood because I also said that the only way was to recover the institutions and, hence, that we had to eliminate the paramilitaries as well.

On August the 7th, I will have been 5 years in power, and throughout all the time—and I say this before a great ally, the President of the United States, and before the world, thanks to the journalists present here—throughout this government, we have constantly fought the guerrillas, the paramilitaries, and the drug traffickers continuously. Our sole purpose is Colombia free of this plague; our sole purpose is a Colombia that will have strong institutions again. There is nothing to hide here. We are fighting against narco and terrorism. And let that be clear to you all.

FARC/American Hostages

Q. Good afternoon. This is a question for President Bush. The FARC had many people kidnaped for political purposes and for very many years. And the humanitarian agreement has been discussed, amongst others, the free citizens of your countries. Mr. Shannon said this week that the U.S. would be extremely happy if we could get a solution through a humanitarian agreement. So my question is, are you going with your administration to propose an option of a humanitarian agreement, so that these kidnapes are finally released, vis-a-vis a military action?

And number two, Mr. President, is it true that you two discussed the military actions that had to be reinforced to release the hostages? And you have not answered if you are going to insist on extraditing the paramilitary heads from Colombia.

President Bush. —President Uribe. We've had good relations; we're friends; we've worked very closely on the extraditions. And so it will be a government-to-government decision.

In terms of the hostages, I am concerned about their safety. I really am—I'm worried about their families. These are three innocent folks who have been held hostage for too long, and their families are concerned about them. We hear from their families. Their kidnapers ought to show some heart, what they ought to show. And I've obviously

discussed this with the President, and he's developing strategies that will hopefully bring them out safely. That's all I ask.

It's amazing, isn't it, to live in a society where you've got part of your country where people just kidnap somebody who is here trying to help, without any regard to whether or not—how their family feels.

So that's what I think about, sir. That's what's on my mind about those hostages. Obviously, I'd like to see them come out safely.

Matt [Matt Spetalnick, Reuters].

Iran and Syria/Iraq Regional Conference

Q. President Bush, in your assessment, what, if anything, was accomplished at the Baghdad regional conference? And what are your expectations for future rounds? Also, do you take—do you believe that Iran and Syria were serious in their post-conference statements that they want to help stabilize Iraq? And if that is true, do you see a possibility of opening the way towards more formal direct contacts with those two countries?

President Bush. I'm the kind of person that likes people to say something and then do it; then we'll react. Words are easy to say in politics, in the international diplomacy. If they really want to help stabilize Iraq, there are things for them to do, such as cutting off weapon flows and/or the flow of suicide bombers into Iraq. There's all kind of ways to measure whether they're serious about the words they uttered. We, of course, welcome those words. Those are nice statements. And now they can act on them.

I thought the conference—well, first of all, I thought the conference got people in the neighborhood to say positive things about the young democracy. In other words, people are now committed publicly to helping Iraq, which was, I thought, very positive. I think the other benefit from the conference is, is that the government gained some confidence. In other words, this young democracy had nations from around the neighborhood and around the world come and talk to them in a way that was constructive and positive.

Part of the success in Iraq is going to be whether or not this government has got the confidence necessary to make hard decisions. They're learning what democracy is all about.

They've come from a tyranny to democracy in a pretty quick period of time. And I believe the conference will give the different factions inside Iraq the confidence necessary to do the hard things to reconcile and the government the confidence necessary to make the decision so that reconciliation can happen.

So it was a positive outcome. And in terms of the expectations of the next meetings, we'll see. But the point is, is that the momentum made in the first one can be carried over to the second one. Secretary Rice will be going to that meeting. In other words, it's a step up in—I'm not dissing anybody, but it's a step up in the pay grade, let's put it that way. [Laughter] And I think—and I think Condi is going to—will take an agenda that will help advance this young democracy, and she's going to work with the other nations to do so.

Gracias, Senor Presidente.

President Uribe. *Gracias*, President.

President Bush. Thank you very much. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:34 p.m. at Casa de Narino. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates. President Uribe referred to Andres Mauricio Penate Giraldo, Director, Department of Security Administration, and Minister of National Defense Juan Manuel Santos Calderon of Colombia. President Uribe also referred to ELN, the National Liberation Army, and FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. President Uribe spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Prior to a Discussion on the United States Afro-Colombian Outreach Program in Bogota

March 11, 2007

Well, Mr. President, thank you very much. Laura and I, as well as Secretary of State Rice and our Ambassador, are honored that citizens from your country have come to share with us stories and concerns that will better enable our Government to help. And

the reason I say that is because the best foreign policy for the United States is to help people realize their full potential. That can be done through education—jobs.

The President and I had a long discussion this morning about issues that will help create jobs and facilitate the flow of trade, for example, all aiming at helping the people in our respective countries realize God-given potential. And so we come bringing the greetings of the people of the United States. Our Ambassador has briefed me on some of the programs that the taxpayers of my country have helped fund. But we're really interested in hearing your stories. And Colombia is a fine democracy. And the true test of a democracy is for every citizen in that country to be able to feel the full promise of society.

And so we thank you for coming. And, Mr. President, why don't we—we can go around the table, and I'm interested in hearing the different stories about the lives of some of your citizens.

Shall we start? How about you, doctor? Do you want to start?

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:28 p.m. at Casa de Narino. In his remarks, he referred to President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia; and U.S. Ambassador to Colombia William B. Wood.

Remarks Following a Tour of Labradores Mayas in Iximche, Guatemala

March 12, 2007

[The President's remarks are joined in progress.]

—Mrs. Bush and I have been looking forward to meeting you, because you represent people who dream, people who work hard, and people who make wonderful products.

And there's two things I want to share. One, that USAID, which is funded through the generosity of the American people, is helping people like you all throughout the region to realize your dreams, because we believe in the dignity of every person. We want people to realize their God-given potential. You have proven that if given a

chance, you and hundreds of others can succeed, and that's what we want.

Secondly, free trade is important for a lot of people. It's important for our country, it's a gateway. It creates jobs in America just like it creates jobs here.

And so we thank you for your wonderful hospitality. We loved being with your families. *Gracias. Que Dios les bendiga.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:43 a.m. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony in Guatemala City, Guatemala

March 12, 2007

President Oscar Berger Perdomo of Guatemala. Dear friends, welcome all. On behalf of my Government and on behalf of the people of Guatemala, I am pleased to welcome President George W. Bush, his wife, and his distinguished delegation in our country.

We celebrate that President Bush decided to include Guatemala in his tour throughout Latin America. We welcome you with affection in this multiethnic and plural-lingual country, where many cultures live together, where the strong features of modernity, and where, after a lengthy and painful conflict that divided us during 14 years, we are, with determination, following the path of reconciliation, in search for building a plural, democratic, tolerant, and participatory society.

Our historic relationship with the United States of America, at times troubled, date far back. We are pleased to confirm that in recent decades this relationship matured and is today characterized by further interactions that are respectful and broad in scope.

We share values, including, of course, representative democracy and social justice. We also share interests that through last year with the entry into force of the free trade agreement between the Central American countries and the Dominican Republic on the one hand, and the United States of America on the other hand.

And we would be remiss if we do not recall that at present it is estimated that approximately 10 percent of our population lives in the United States of America—upon the integration of the labor markets of both Nations.

As is the case in every mature relationship, once in a while differences of opinion arise, for example, with regard to the issue of migrants and particularly those who have been deported without clear justification. But as is also the case in every mature relationship, what brings us together exceeds by far those differences. We value that relationship, and we shall make efforts in order to enhance and extend it, as we shall make efforts to address the differences that we find between us with a constructive spirit.

We shall take advantage of our conversations today, that will take place within a framework of cordiality and openness, to address topics of mutual interest—fighting poverty, respect for human rights, and a frontal fight against organized crime, as well as Central America's economic integration. We shall also review the strengths and weaknesses of our own evolution since the signature of our peace accord.

I finish by reiterating our recognition to President Bush for his persistence in having been able to put forth the free trade agreement, and also for his initiative to promote an integrated migratory reform, that we trust will culminate with your approval, Mr. President. These two initiatives will certainly contribute to bring our two nations even closer together.

Once again, President Bush, First Lady, Madam Laura Bush, and members of your delegation, welcome to Guatemala.

President Bush. *Senor Presidente, gracias por su bienvenidos a este pais, pais bella.* I thank you and the First Lady for treating Laura and me with such grand hospitality. This is my first official visit to Guatemala, and we thank the people of this country for their magnificent hospitality.

I'm honored to stand in the historic courtyard where the 1996 peace accords were signed. The accords mark the end of 36 years of internal conflict and the beginning of a more hopeful future for Guatemala.

Guatemala is a proud country with a rich culture. This morning, Laura and I toured the highlands where the ancient Mayans built a great civilization many centuries ago. This beautiful land is now the home of Central America's largest democracy. You've built a diverse and vibrant nation, and the people of the United States admire your determination and your resilience.

Our two countries share many values. We both believe good governments must be accountable to the people they serve and subject to the rule of law. We both believe free enterprise and hard work help lead to prosperity, and we both believe our nations have a responsibility to spread opportunity and advance the cause of social justice.

The United States and Guatemala are partners in this important work. We're working together to improve access to education and health care to give Guatemalans a safe and legal path to jobs in the United States and to lift millions of people out of poverty by expanding trade. The ties between our two countries have never been stronger or more important.

Mr. President, Laura and I appreciate the invitation to visit your country. We appreciate the time we spent with you and your very accomplished wife. You're a man of vision and courage. You understand that real leadership requires making tough choices that serve your Nation well in the long term.

I appreciate your unwavering commitment to your people, Mr. President, and I look forward to working with you to build a better future for both our countries.

Muchas gracias, mi amigo.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:55 p.m. on the Patio de la Paz at the National Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Wendy Widmann de Berger, wife of President Berger. President Berger spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**The President's News Conference
With President Oscar Berger
Perdomo of Guatemala in Guatemala
City**

March 12, 2007

President Berger. Distinguished members of the media, welcome, and thank you for honoring us with your presence. A very fruitful, interesting, and productive day with President Bush. Today's visit to the Department of Chimaltenango, Iximche, the contact that we were able to have with our people, the cultural legacy that we were able to witness together, and that the special meaning that it is together closer to the Guatemalan people, and hear from them of their history with President Bush and Mrs. Bush, has been very important today.

After that very interesting visit, we met with teams of Presidents Bush and Berger, and evidently, on the table were extremely important topics, particularly as regards Guatemala. And we were able to discuss security and our efforts to fight drug trafficking. In that sense, President Bush expressed his full support for—expressed his support, also, for the Maya Jaguar plan that is already in operation, and has told us that he is going to make a regional proposal to fight drug trafficking, regionally, where he is inviting Mexico and the Central American countries to join the United States in that fight. Part of this strategy seeks to train the security bodies that are in charge of fighting drug trafficking, and the intelligence that is going to surround these teams, and then be able to identify these sources in a permanent strategy, and I insist, regional strategy, which I think is key. We should no longer work in isolation. We should work jointly—that is, the countries that face this very serious problem.

Likewise, we talked about the Millennium Challenge Account. And Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told us that Guatemala continues to be among the countries that could be elected. In the coming 2 months, we are going to receive a response. We expect that it might be favorable for Guatemala.

Today President Bush, who is participating in this productive effort—we were able to see how these Guatemalan workers produce

the best vegetables in the world and have been able to enter a very important market, particularly the Central American market, the effort of whose integration President Bush is also aware of.

Of course, President Bush's visit brings us closer to the most important and largest economic power and the largest market in the world, with many possibilities, through CAFTA, where we can have—give better access to the U.S. market to Guatemalan produce, where we highlighted snow peas and berries, chili peppers and tomatoes. We had a limitation, and there was—as of a couple of months, we are exporting significant amounts of Guatemalan produce. So we also mentioned support by U.S. customs to control Guatemalan port and customs services. This gives us a better rating and makes it possible for us to exercise a more efficient trade effort.

We've mentioned to President Bush, and we've invited the United States to become the partner of the Central American Economic Integration Bank—CABEI—one that he favored. And he is well aware of the fact that this bank and its resources are used to build infrastructure, to promote investment, and to give support to governments as well.

I believe that everyone will probably be waiting to hear from the—about the topic of migrants. This is a topic that we discussed at greater length with President Bush during the trip this morning and during this afternoon's meeting. It is a concern for President Bush; it is a concern for the Guatemalans and the 13 million illegal aliens who are currently living in the United States.

President Bush has confirmed that there are no express instructions to persecute Guatemalan illegal aliens—that is, somebody is acting beyond the scope of the law, he has to be brought before the law. But if—there is no intention to persecute undocumented workers. He has convinced us that the best proposal is the migration law reform. He extensively explained the efforts that the—what the efforts will need to be engaged by the Democratic groups and the Republican groups in the Senate, but that should not be an issue that should be on the agenda next year. That should be taken care of, and he expects that by August, we will have a reform

for the immigration act, where a legal status will be considered for those who are already living there and regulations of how to become a legal worker in the United States.

I would like to take this opportunity, President Bush, to thank you for your visit. Guatemala feels honored. We feel highly satisfied and deeply committed with this effort. We have been in the eyes and the minds of the entire world during these couple of hours that we have been sharing with you. And what is most important, I believe that for the people in the highlands of Guatemala today, there was a message of closeness, of rapport with President Bush, and of a hope. Together we can achieve great things, as Mariano Canu said in Tecpan, where he showed us what he can do with his work team, how he can give added value to the wonderful vegetables of the highlands of Guatemala, to be able to send it to the great U.S. market.

Once again, for President Berger, this has been a wonderful opportunity to have been able to share with Mrs. Bush and President Bush. And for Guatemala, it is a reason for pride. Once again, thank you very much for your visit.

President Bush. *Senor Presidente*, thank you very much for your warm welcome. I agree with you; it's been a great day for Laura and me. And we really loved traveling with you and Wendy, and it's just a wonderful experience.

I appreciate your kindness on this first official visit to your country. Relations between the United States and Guatemala are stronger than ever. We're friends. And that's important. Our countries are fellow democracies. We're partners in trade. We're allies in the cause of social justice. Today President Berger and I discussed some of the ways that the United States and Guatemala can continue to work together to build a more hopeful future for the people in our respective countries.

Guatemala is a strong and vibrant democracy of more than 12 million people. President Berger understands the importance of building a government that is accountable to all its citizens, and I appreciate that commitment. I appreciate the steps you've taken to increase transparency, to reduce corruption, to modernize the civil service, and to help

improve Guatemala's record on human rights. You've got strong leadership, Mr. President.

In September, you elect a new President, who will face the task of building on your successes. The United States and the international community will support the people of Guatemala in holding free and fair elections.

Your President and I both believe that a strong democracy requires security from drug lords and violent criminals. So we spent a lot of time talking about that today. I appreciate the fact that you have renewed the fight against the drug trade, that you've worked to eradicate opium poppy, and you fired hundreds of corrupt police officers. That's what leaders do; you find problems and you address them for the good of the people. We appreciate Guatemala's commitment to this work, and we'll continue to stand with you.

President Berger is working with the United Nations to form an international commission to help investigate and prosecute organized crime in Guatemala, and the United States strongly supports this effort. Our countries are working together to fight transnational gangs. And the President was right—I suggested we think about this issue regionally. You've got to understand that these gangs are able to move throughout Central America and up through Mexico into our own country, and therefore, we've got to think regionally and act regionally.

The first thing we can do is share information so we can help track down gang members, and we can increase communications; we can develop effective ways to protect children from gangs. There's a lot of work to be done, but it first starts with making a sincere commitment to addressing the problem.

Improving education is an important goal for both our Nations. We spent a lot of time today talking about education. And the President and First Lady of Guatemala are absolutely committed to extending education's reach beyond just the capital city. And I appreciate that commitment, Mr. President. More than 40 percent of the population of this country is under 15 years old—it's an interesting statistic, isn't it—which means

that a more hopeful future depends on teaching the younger generation the skills necessary to be able to succeed in the 21st century.

And we want to help. We've done some interesting work here, and the American people need to know that our commitment, our bilateral aid in Guatemala goes toward helping meet education goals. It's in the interest of the United States that there be literate populations in our neighborhood. In the city—in the department of Iximche, we established a project that helped raise the number of children who complete first grade from 51 percent to 71 percent. It's not a well-known program, but it worked. And this country of mine is committed to helping make these kind of programs successful, Mr. President.

We also want to expand access to health care. Today, as the President mentioned, we went to Santa Cruz Balanya—it was a really interesting moment. The American people would have been incredibly proud of watching our military folks dispense with basic health care needs to people who needed help. And the people of Guatemala would be especially proud to have seen your military working side by side with our troops to do the same thing. There's a great mission of compassion, and it's making a difference to people's lives.

Imagine not being able to see, and all of a sudden, somebody appears in your life, gives you an eye test, and fits you for glasses so you can see better. Or you have a perpetual toothache, and somebody shows up, in this case in military uniforms, and says, "How can I help?" It is in the interest of the United States to continue these kinds of missions, Mr. President.

It is estimated that we have served more than 160,000 Guatemalans since 2001, providing health care, basic health care needs. And I was sharing with the President a little earlier that we're going to set up a health care training mission in Panama, so that we can train trainers, so that people in Guatemala can come and get just the basic skills necessary to take back to their towns and villages to be able to dispense with basic health care.

The United States and Guatemala trade a lot, especially now that Guatemala has become a full member of CAFTA–DR. President Berger and I believe that CAFTA can spread opportunity, provide jobs, and help lift people out of poverty. We saw how trade can transform the small village of Chirijuyu—part of our experience in traveling with the President was to get outside the capital. It was really, really fun—and really heartwarming. As a matter of fact, it was one of the great experiences of my Presidency. The town has grown from subsistence farming to selling high-value crops like lettuce and carrots and celery. As a matter of fact, I got to pack some lettuce. The President and I were hauling boxes of lettuce; we were putting them in the truck.

I met Mariano Canu. See, I talked about this man, Mariano Canu, in my speech in Washington, DC. I'd never met him, but I was intrigued by his story about how a fellow had gone from being a subsistence farmer, just scratching out a living, barely making it, the father of six kids wondering whether or not they would have a future, and then he organized an organization of small farmers called *Labradores Mayas*. And they came together and became more efficient. And then they found markets. They found markets throughout Central America as a result of CAFTA, and into the United States as a result of CAFTA.

And the guy is making a living. He's making more than a living; he's built a thriving enterprise. You should have seen the look on his face, about how proud he was to show to the President of his country and the President of the United States the great progress being made.

As the President mentioned, I'm working with the United States Congress on comprehensive immigration reform. He asked me about an incident that took place up in Massachusetts the other day. I said, "Yes, we're going to enforce the laws in our country, just like you should enforce the laws in yours." It is against the law for somebody to hire somebody who is in our country illegally to work. And therefore, the deportations took place as a result of law enforcement enforcing the law. This wasn't—they didn't say, "Oh, maybe there's Guatemalans

there; let's go get them." That wasn't what happened, just so you know. You've got to understand that when we enforce the law, we do so in a fair and rational way. It just so happened that Guatemalans were working there illegally.

He also mentioned to me that there's some conspiracies about how children are being left behind in Guatemala. *No es la verdad*. That's not the way America operates. We're a decent, compassionate country. Those are the kind of things we do not do. We believe in families, and we'll treat people with dignity. And the system needs to be fixed. And so we spent time talking about our strategy to get comprehensive immigration reform out of the Congress.

As I told the President, it seems like to me, we've got to get this done by August. I hope so. I don't want to put a timetable on the legislative process. Timetables are generally meant to be broken. We don't believe in timetables, but I do believe in pressing hard and working with Democrats and Republicans to get it done, Mr. President. And we want there to be a rational way for people to come and do jobs Americans aren't doing. We don't want people to feel like they have to get stuffed into the back of a truck and pay exorbitant fees to *coyotes* to come and try to realize dreams. There's got to be a better system.

And I told him the biggest problem in the debate is going to be what to do with the people who are already in our country illegally. And I explained to him, there will not be amnesty, automatic citizenship. It's just not going to happen. Nor is it feasible to try to kick everybody out of our country. That's not possible. And so I'm going to work with members of both parties to find a rational middle ground to have a comprehensive plan, Mr. President. It's important to you, but it's important to the United States of America to do this as well.

We also talked about adoption. I don't know if my fellow citizens understand this, but there are a lot of U.S. families who adopt babies from Guatemala, thousands of babies. This year, it is very important for the United States and Guatemala to implement the Hague Convention on adoptions to help protect children and families during the adop-

tion process. We found common ground on that issue. And I appreciate your strong stand, Mr. President, and I assured the President we would follow through ourselves.

I can't thank you enough for your leadership. I appreciate the vision you have for your country. When you speak, you speak with passion, because you care deeply about the future of Guatemala, and you care deeply about the people of Guatemala. It's an honor to be with you. It's been a joyful trip for us. I'm looking forward to the dinner that you're hosting for Laura and me. I'm not going to talk too long because I might get too hungry. [Laughter] But thank you for your time.

President Berger. Thank you, Mr. President. Very nice—[inaudible]. Thank you. Thank you, President Bush. I have here a note where I'm asked to make reference to the members of the media who are going to ask questions.

Go ahead, Francisco.

Illegal Immigrants

Q. President Bush, good afternoon. Mr. President, deportations continue. At the end of 2006, and only a week ago, this practice of deporting, of arresting immigrants and beginning a process of deportation continued. In Guatemala, information of abuse of authority and lack of respect for the right of the Guatemalan immigrants has been disseminated. My question is, now that you are in Guatemala, is there a commitment from your country to the 13 million Guatemalans to cease these deportations since you expect to have a comprehensive immigration reform?

President Bush. The commitment is, people will be treated with respect, but the United States will enforce our law. It's against the law to hire somebody who is in our country illegally, and we are a nation of law.

The best way to solve the concerns of the citizens of Guatemala—listen, I fully understand that the citizens of Guatemala are concerned about their relatives or friends who are in the United States. And I appreciate that. The best way to address the concerns inherent in your question is for me to work with Congress to get a comprehensive bill. And I'm optimistic we can do so. It's going

to be tough work, don't get me wrong, but I believe we can get a comprehensive bill out of the Congress.

And I think you'll find that—let me say, I certainly hope you'll find that people who are in the—that are interfacing with our Government are treated with respect and decency. That's certainly the instructions. Now, I'm sure they don't want to be sent home, but nevertheless, we enforce laws. And I readily concede the system needs to be changed, and I hope I can convince the majority of both the House and the Senate to change the law in a rational way.

Massimo [Massimo Calabresi, Time].

Congressional Action on Immigration Reform

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. May I extend good wishes to your father's health.

President Bush. Thank you.

Q. You've spoken throughout this trip about the—

President Bush. That's actually a kind gesture. Thank you.

Q. You've spoken throughout the trip about the need for comprehensive immigration reform. It's been a big subject here in Guatemala City. Can you provide a little more detail, sir, if you would, about how you intend to overcome congressional opposition? There is opposition in both parties, specifically at the moment. A bill has been expected for some time now. You've been working with Senators, and your staff have been working with Senators. Is there a hold-up? How are you tackling the problem at the moment, sir?

President Bush. Yes. No, I appreciate that. He's referring to the process at this point in time, about why hadn't a consensus bill in the Senate began to emerge, and it's because this is a complicated issue that requires both parties learning to work together on this issue. I believe it is, first of all, incumbent to find, as best as possible, a coherent Republican position in the Senate. And that's where we're spending a lot of time right now. And then, as I understand it, Senator Kennedy will be carrying the bill on the Democrat side, and then once we can get a coherent Republican position, one that most Re-

publicans are comfortable with, then we'll start working with the Senator.

As you know full well that if we don't have enough consensus, nothing is going to move out of the Senate. And if nothing moves out of the Senate, nothing is going to happen in the House. And so therefore, the initial stages of getting a bill that meets objections is time-consuming, but it is worth it and necessary in order for us to be able to address the concerns, many of which were expressed during the last debate on immigration reform.

Now, I'm optimistic. I really am. I believe we can get something done, and I believe we're beginning to find consensus. I think there is pretty widespread consensus that there ought to be a temporary-worker plan that says, you can come legally to the United States to do a job Americans are not doing, for a period of time. That will help a lot of the Guatemalan citizens. It will mean somebody, first of all, doesn't have to sneak in the country in the first place and pay a *coyote* or buy forged documents or sleep in some sleazy place hiding from authorities until you're able to make destination. You'll be able to come in, in a rational way.

Secondly, that once you're in the United States, if you have to come home to be with your family, you'll be able to do so in a legal way. In other words, you'll be able to come back and forth without fear. Now, you won't be able to—there will be a time limit on the amount of time, and that's part of the negotiations.

The hard issue, as the President noted and I just talked about, was what to do with the people who've been in our country for more than a limited period of time. And that's a difficult issue, and it's one that's got a lot of politics in the country. The idea of giving someone automatic citizenship is just not acceptable. It's not acceptable to a lot of people in our country, and, Massimo, you understand that. And yet the fundamental question is, how do you design a system that doesn't raise those fears? And yes—obviously, he didn't like my answer. Oh, you did like it. Well, good. [Laughter]

My dad had been ill, and he kindly brought greetings, for which I am grateful.

Legislative Agenda on Immigration Reform

Q. Thank you, sir. That was very specific. That's a lot, though. Do you think you can get that done by August?

President Bush. Well, I—you know, August is a date that I was musing about, and that date came to mind because I understand how difficult it can be coming down the stretch in the legislative session in a calendar year because the appropriations bill—you're learning more about this than you probably want to know—but the appropriations bills begin to crowd out the calendar in the latter part of the year. And they can consume a lot of time.

And therefore, my hope is—my hope is—it's certainly not a promise, but my hope would be that we'd be able to get something out of the Senate and then into the House, and something—then they can work the conference in the fall. That would be the hope.

And—but I'm not the person that sets the calendar. I'm just a simple member of the executive branch. [*Laughter*] It's the legislative branch that decides the calendar.

And—go ahead.

President Berger. I would like to say that, in fact, the Guatemalan people would have preferred a more clear and positive response—no more deportations, so to say. But as the President has said, there is a legal framework that needs to be respected. But historically, I think that we have never been so close to finding a solution to this problem as now.

I was very pleased to hear President Bush say that this is a problem that they also have. It is not only a problem for migrants; it is a problem for the American citizens who have—and a problem that has to be resolved. We have never before been as close as we are at this time of seeing a light at the end of the tunnel and in a near future in getting the undocumented status changed for 13 million illegal aliens who are living in the U.S.

Narcotics and Drug Trafficking/Death of Salvadoran Congressmen

Q. Good afternoon, President Bush and President Berger. President Bush, in Guatemala, there is a very serious problem of drug trafficking. You talk about a regional strategy

to tackle it. I would like to ask you to expand on this topic, also taking into account that the latest reports produced by the United States on Guatemala have not been very favorable. And also, the issue of drug trafficking has led to very serious security problems in Guatemala. The latest was the murder of three Salvadoran Congress Members. The U.S. is also participating in this investigation. How far will the U.S. cooperation go? Because there is also the request for a mini-Colombia Plan to face it.

President Bush. Yes. The drug trafficking is very serious—a serious problem for the United States, and so—most of the drugs end up in the United States, which really says that we need to do a better job of convincing our citizens not to use drugs. If demand for the drugs went down, it could make it more difficult for the drug traffickers to find markets.

Secondly, drug trafficking is a serious problem because narcotrafficking destabilizes areas. It's in our interests, in our country, to promote prosperity and peace and stability. Narcotraffickers promote instability and tensions, which make it hard for the general populous to become prosperous. It also turns out, narcotraffickers oftentimes leave behind the poison as they head to other markets. In other words, the local population can become deeply affected by *drogas*.

And so this is a serious issue. We've had experience in dealing with one state that, obviously, had to deal with the potential of narcotraffickers undermining democracy, and that's Colombia. This is—in my judgment, the best way to deal with this problem and to convince others throughout our country that it makes a lot of sense to commit assets is to think regionally, because as the President mentioned, he said, one of the interesting dynamics that's taking place here is that people and goods are moving quite freely across borders. Well, if people and goods are moving quite freely, drug traffickers will be moving quite freely. And there's kind of almost a borderless domain for these people.

And therefore, thinking regionally—and that includes the United States and Mexico and Central America. Now, I'll bring this up with President Calderon tomorrow, about

how we can work constructively. A lot of this has to do with sharing of information. In other words, we pick up pretty good information at times. After all, the United States, oftentimes, is the endpoint, is the end of the distribution chain. And sometimes our DEA or folks can trace back movements of drugs, which might then be able to help the region be able to disrupt and affect.

Look, I am a “if they break the law, arrest them” person. I think we ought to go find these people and bring them to justice. And it’s tough, because the richer they become, the more lethal they become and the more dangerous they are to democracies. And that’s why there needs to be a collaborative effort, the details of which will emerge as we continue to strategize. But step one is to share information.

As to the Salvadorans, of course, I’m deeply concerned about their death, as is the President. And we have sent, I think, four FBI agents down here to help with forensics and to help track down the leads, so that wherever those killers may light, the authorities can go get them. And that’s what we need to do.

But this is a serious issue, and we spent a lot of time talking about it.

Elaine [Elaine Quijano, Cable News Network].

This will be your last question, Mr. President, and then we can start thinking about dinner, *la cena*. *Que vamos a comer?*

President Berger. *Tortillas.*

President Bush. *Tortillas? Que bueno.* [Laughter]

President Berger. We have tortillas with guacamole and beans.

President Bush. *Con el muerso, hoy.*

Border Security/Immigration Reform/ Trade

Q. Thank you. President Bush, your decision to sign legislation authorizing construction of a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border was not viewed positively here in the region. How would you respond to critics who feel that that sent a message that Latin Americans are not welcome in the United States?

And, President Berger, what are your thoughts on the idea of a fence, the U.S. border policy in regard to a fence?

President Bush. I did sign legislation modernizing our border. It was more than just fence; it was infrastructure—kind of a novel infrastructure, like detection devices, berms. We’ve got a very long border, and it needs to be enforced. It needs to be enforced not only to stop *coyotes*, but it needs to be enforced to stop drugs. It needs to be enforced to stop potential terrorists, and it needs to be enforced to stop arms—by the way, arms that sometimes go the other way, I’m told. And so we’ve got to have border. That’s what countries do; they enforce their borders.

And so we modernized the border. It was more than just fence. And I understand it sent a signal that said, you’re not welcome. Quite the contrary; people are welcome, but under the law. There are thousands of people in our country who are not citizens who are there legally. The question is, what do we do with people who have been there over years, the result of a law that isn’t working well? And I’ve already given that answer.

I will also explain that part of convincing people that a comprehensive plan can work is to assure the American people that we’re doing our duty by enforcing law. In other words, a lot of citizens said, “You just don’t care about whether or not we have a border that’s secure.” And the Congress responded by saying, “Of course, we care.” It is the first step toward a comprehensive bill. In other words, people in Congress were saying, “Let us do something about border enforcement, and then let’s go comprehensive”—I hope that’s what they’re saying.

In other words, that’s what I’m pressing them to say. Okay, we’ve responded to the needs of border enforcement; there are people being sent back. As a matter of fact, I think it’s interesting—and frankly, I didn’t anticipate this—that the good press corps of Guatemala, reflecting the concerns of the Guatemalan people, and the President of Guatemala reflecting the concerns, asked me about deportations. I mean, that was a primary concern. It means that something is—the law is being enforced, is what that means.

The American people need to be persuaded, Elaine, that the Government takes our responsibilities seriously, which then will

make it easier to convince reluctant Members of Congress to come up with a comprehensive plan.

Now I've always been for a comprehensive plan. You might remember, if you look back at some of my speeches—I know you didn't listen to any of them, but you might want to go back and read them. [*Laughter*] Well, that's not fair. Okay, anyway, but I've always felt it was important. And I learned firsthand how important it was as the Governor of Texas. I used to say, family values do not stop at the Rio Grande River and that people are coming to do jobs Americans are not doing because they want to feed their families. That's why I said that.

By the way, the reason why trade is important in helping the programs like *Labradores Mayas* is that I also believe most citizens in Guatemala would rather find meaningful jobs at home instead of having to travel to a foreign land to work. And therefore, the more we can enhance prosperity in our neighborhood, the more we can encourage trade that actually yields jobs and stability, the less likely it is somebody who is worried about putting food on the table for their family will be coming to the United States.

Anyway, I thank you for your interest on the topic, Mr. President. It's been a wonderful press conference. Thank you.

President Berger. I would like to close with that topic, the American Dream for everyone. And we can have that American Dream in our own countries by promoting education, by improving infrastructure, by implementing CAFTA, which is a very interesting tool to produce and to export and also to attract investment and generate jobs. I would believe that we are firm along those lines and that the American Dream is going to be the dream for all the Americans living in the American continent.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:37 p.m. at the National Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Wendy Widmann de Berger, wife of President Berger; and President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico. President Berger and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony in Temozon Sur, Mexico

March 13, 2007

President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico. Your Excellency, Mr. George W. Bush, President of United States of America, Mrs. Laura Bush, and distinguished members of the staff accompanying President Bush, I hope you are all welcome to Mexico. We're very pleased with your visit because it reflects your interest upon our country, and it allows us to dialog about our complex bilateral agenda.

For many reasons, the relationship with the United States of America is a most important relationship for Mexico, but also the relationship with Mexico is a most important relationship for the United States of America. This is what you have expressed, Mr. President, in a meeting like this one when you expressed some years ago that there is no relationship all over the world that is most relevant to the United States than that one that you have with Mexico. Unfortunately, the terrible happenings against the United States' people made that in a very understandable way, the priorities changed. Nevertheless, I believe that it is now time to retake the spirit of those words and to direct our relationship toward a path of mutual prosperity. We are countries and friends as people with our prospective place and a shared future that I am certain that we can reach for mutual benefit.

I come originally from the State of Michoacan, one of the States that has endured tremendously with migration. And I know the pain of the families when they split and also of all those towns where the elderly are remaining alone. I also know that Mexicans lose in each migrant the best of our people—young people, working people, and audacious people, strong people—people that leave Mexico because they do not find the opportunities here in order to pull through with their lives. This is which we want to generate jobs for Mexicans here in Mexico, because that is the only way in order to truly solve the migratory issue.

That is a solution that is convenient for all of us, and as a result, we should commonly

resolve it, because while we have two economies that complement each other, but yet are not equal. One is intensive in labor, and the other one is intensive in capital. So therefore, migration might not be stopped, and certainly not by decree. This is why we are intensively working, so instead that our labor will be moving to where the capital is located. It will rather, receive in Mexico the investment where the labor is located, and our families will not continue splitting themselves nor our population. Mexicans will all due fully respect the right that of the Government and the people of the United States of America has to decide within its territory what will be best for their concerns and security.

But at the same time, we do consider in a respectful way that we may truly stop the migration by building a kilometer of highway in Michoacan or Zacatecas than 10 kilometers of walls in the border. This is why we wish to respect the rights of everyone, more so of our population. This is why we recognize and support the effort that you are conducting, Mr. President Bush, in order to promote a comprehensive migratory reform in the Congress of the United States, and we wish you the best of successes. This is why we also would like to continue working together, and now with tremendous emphasis in order to accelerate the development of our people, because I am certain that there is nothing better for the security and prosperity of our region than the prosperity of Mexico.

On the other hand, we share the intention of keeping a safe border, because those who live on both sides of the border deserve so, being American or Mexican. The government does the part that it has to do; it gets back all the public plazas and the streets from criminals and drugs. We have accredited with facts our firm commitment in our battle against those who wish to poison the bodies and the souls of our young population. But in order to be successful in our struggle, we need the collaboration and the active participation of our neighbor, knowing that while we will not reduce the demand for drugs in a certain area, it will be very difficult to reduce the supply in ours.

Mr. President, I have no doubt that together our Governments will move forward in the generation of new opportunities of well-being and prosperity for our nations. Please feel very, very welcome to Mexico.

President Bush. *Buenos dias. Estamos encantados de estar en Mexico otra vez.*

Mr. President and Mrs. Zavala, thank you for your warm welcome. We're delighted to be back in your country. As Governor of Texas, I visited your beautiful country many times, and I came to know and admire the people of Mexico. As President, I've worked to strengthen the ties between our two Nations. Mexico was the first country I visited after I became President of the United States. The United States and Mexico are partners. We're partners in building a safer, more democratic, and more prosperous hemisphere. And a strong relationship between our countries is based upon mutual trust and mutual respect.

President Calderon, I appreciate your determination to create new opportunities for the people of Mexico. I share your commitment to building an Americas where the poor and the marginalized begin to feel the blessings of liberty in their daily lives. I respect your views on migration. Because we're working together, I believe we will make good progress on this important issue. Together, we're working to ensure that we have a secure and modern border that speeds the legitimate flow of people and commerce and stop those who threaten our common safety and prosperity.

The United States respects rule of law. But in the debate on migration, I remind my fellow citizens that family values do not stop at the Rio Grande River, that there are decent, hard-working, honorable citizens of Mexico who want to make a living for their families. And so, Mr. President, my pledge to you and your Government—but, more importantly, the people of Mexico—is I will work as hard as I possibly can to pass comprehensive immigration reform.

We support your plans to improve education and health care and housing for all your citizens. We will continue to work with you to expand opportunities for trade and investment. We will work together to facilitate a smooth transition to full trade, especially

on sensitive issues like corn and beans. We recognize that the best hope to lift millions out of poverty is to spread prosperity through free and fair trade. The people of the United States understand that when we help our neighbors build a better life for themselves, we advance peace and prosperity for all of us.

Today, the most important ties between the United States and Mexico are not government to government; they are people to people. These ties include churches and faith-based institutions that serve people on both sides of the *frontera*. These ties include our colleges and universities, which run important exchange programs for students and teachers. These ties include our businesses, which trade one another—trade with one another and invest in each other's countries. And these ties include the families, who send an estimated \$20 billion in remittances each year to their relatives here in Mexico, one of the largest private economic initiatives in the world. These ties are vital, and they are growing.

Mr. President, geography has made our countries neighbors, but the choice we've made for each other is a choice for freedom. And that choice has made us friends. I'm honored to be in your country. I'm looking forward to our discussions over the next 2 days. You have set a very ambitious agenda that is going to require a lot of hard work. But I'm confident that by working together, we'll build a better life and a future of hope for our peoples.

Thank you for having me. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:04 a.m. at Hacienda Temozon. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon. President Calderon spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks at a Luncheon Hosted by President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico in Merida, Mexico

March 13, 2007

Senor Presidente, thank you very much for your gracious hospitality. I think you picked a perfect place to invite Laura and me and our delegation. It's a beautiful land. It is a spectacular day. And our meetings were constructive. Thank you, First Lady, for your hospitality as well.

Relations between Mexico and the United States are *muy importante*. We've got a great history. We've got a strong tradition of working together. And my job, Mr. President, is to do all I can to work with you to advance progress on both sides of the border.

There are issues, of course, issues that we discussed today and will continue to discuss in a manner of respect and dignity. Perhaps the biggest issue concerning your country is the issue of migration. America is a country of law; we'll respect law, but America is also a hospitable country, a country that recognizes the value of each human being. And as the President of your grand country, I know you're deeply concerned about how your citizens are treated within our country. And my pledge to you and the people of Mexico is they'll be treated with respect and dignity.

The best way to do that is to pass a migration law that upholds the values of America and, at the same time, allows us to respect the rule of law. As I told you in private, as you expressed your deep concerns about whether or not America can pass such a law, that I will use all the efforts I can, working with both Republicans and Democrats, to pass such a piece of legislation.

We spent a lot of time talking about Mexico's important role in the world, and I thank you for your leadership, Mr. President. You're President of a great country. You will use your influence to foster social justice and prosperity and peace. I look forward to your leadership on such issues—I look forward to helping you as best I can, as best as you request to do so.

And I, too, would like to offer a toast. I'd like to offer a toast to the great people of

a great country, *nuestro amigo*, Mexico, and to your *salud*, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:45 p.m. at Hacienda Temozon. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Calderon. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**Remarks at a Dinner Hosted by
President Felipe de Jesus Calderon
Hinojosa of Mexico in Merida**

March 13, 2007

Mr. President, Mrs. Zavala, members of your government, Governor of Yucatan, the mayor of Merida, other government officials, distinguished guests: *Buenas noches, y gracias*. Laura and I are delighted to be back in Mexico. We're grateful for the warm hospitality of President Calderon and Mrs. Zavala. We appreciate the chance to dine in this beautiful setting, which calls to mind Mexico's rich history and its bright future.

For Laura and me, the connection to Mexico stretches back for decades. *Somos Tejanos*. We have come to admire your country, the people, and your culture. As Governor, I worked closely with my counterparts on this side of the border and made a lot of friends in Mexico. As President, Mexico was the first country I visited and the first country whose leader I welcomed for a state dinner at the White House. Over the past 6 years, I've traveled all across your nation—from here in Merida to Monterrey to Los Cabos on the Pacific Coast. And this evening the relationship between Mexico and the United States is as strong and is as vibrant as it has ever been, and President Calderon and I intend to keep it that way.

The ties between our countries are deep and lasting. We are united by the bonds of family. We are united by the growing commerce that crosses our border each day. And we are united in our faith in an Almighty God.

The accident of geography made our two countries neighbors, but common values have made us friends. The most important

value we share is our belief in democracy, and last year, the world saw Mexican democracy in action. Across the country, large numbers of voters turned out for an election that was open, honest, and really close. Come to think of it, it sounds familiar to me. [*Laughter*] Your fidelity to the democratic process was the mark of a nation growing in confidence and freedom. And in the end, the Mexican people chose a good man to be their President.

Shortly before his inauguration, President Calderon came to see me in the Oval Office. I was impressed by his character, his leadership, and his devotion to the Mexican people. He's an innovative thinker with a vision of justice and prosperity for all in this nation. And during his first 100 days as President, he's shown his commitment to delivering results for all the people he has served. In my conversations today, he shared his willingness to work with members of all political parties and with people from all sectors of the civil society.

Today we discussed the President's top priorities. I share those priorities. His top priority is to provide security throughout the country. He's taking bold steps to enforce the rule of law, and to crack down on organized crime and drugs, and reform the judicial system.

The United States is a strong partner in these efforts. We've got work to do on our side of the border. People provide drugs because there is a demand for drugs, and the United States must do a better job of reducing the demand for drugs. And at the same time, I look forward to close cooperation. We'll work with the President and other Presidents in our region to interdict the supply of drugs.

President Calderon also knows the importance of creating new opportunities for Mexico's economy. He's laid out innovative policies to combat poverty and to create jobs. I found one of his policies most interesting—rewarding Mexican companies that hire first-time workers. And I appreciate his strong commitment to housing and infrastructure in southern Mexico.

He's called for economic reforms that encourage competition and fight corruption. He understands the importance of free and

fair trade. The United States welcomes a strong Mexican economy, and we fully understand that we must work together to facilitate a smooth transition to full trade, especially on sensitive issues such as corn and beans.

President Calderon holds deep convictions on the matter of migration, and so do I. Our nations share a 2,000-mile border, and that should be a source of unity, not division. So we're working together to keep both sides of the border open to tourism and trade and closed to criminals and drug dealers and smugglers and terrorists and gun runners.

I appreciate the President's commitment to secure Mexican borders on both the north and the south. And I told the President today—and I'm going to keep repeating it while I'm here in Mexico—that I know our country must have comprehensive immigration reform. We are a rule of law. But it's important for the American citizens to understand that family values do not stop at the Rio Grande River and that it's in our Nation's interests to have a comprehensive immigration law so we can uphold the great values of America, values based on human dignity and the worth of each individual.

And so, Mr. President, it's been a good day. We spent a lot of time talking about important issues in a very constructive and friendly way. I appreciate your candor. I appreciate your being straightforward. And I too would like to offer a toast to good people of Mexico and its leaders.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:16 p.m. at Hacienda Xcanatun. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon; Governor Patricio Jose Patron Laviada of Yucatan, Mexico; and Mayor Manuel Jesus Fuentes Alcocer of Merida, Mexico. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Calderon. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks in a Discussion With Training, Internships, Exchanges, and Scholarships Program Recipients in Merida

March 14, 2007

The President. I'd like to thank you all for joining us. One of the best things America can do is help people realize their dreams. The best way to realize dreams is through education.

I'm so happy that you all have joined me to share with me your experiences from one of our most effective programs, which is a program all aimed at improving the human condition. I'm proud of the citizens of the United States who show great concern for citizens in our neighborhood. And I thank you for coming to share your experiences.

Victor, would you like to start? I mentioned you in *un discurso en los Estados Unidos* about the benefits of this program. I understand you went to Bettendorf Community College—Scott Community College? Okay. Well, tell us, Victor, your story.

Victor Lopez Ruiz. I want to express my deepest appreciation for this opportunity. Thank you, Mr. President, for sharing the story in your speech last week. Your words fill me so happy. And I have the encouragement to keep working in my community. I want to express my gratitude, as well, to Becas CASS and USAID for selecting me for this scholarship in 2004. I received also an associate degree in international business and trade at Scott Community College, Bettendorf, Iowa.

And finally, I would like to thank everyone that supported me and helped me for this opportunity, my dreams come true—especially my family. I had to face many challenges to get an education, but I learned that with the right attitude and a lot of effort and commitment, everything is possible.

At the age of 12, I had to leave my community to be able to study high school. I faced several obstacles, including the fact that I did not speak Spanish, because my language is Tzotzil. Now I speak three languages. I had to work to support my education. This is how I was able to study. I still continue fighting for my dream today, which makes me value them even more.

I really enjoyed my time in the U.S.A. I lived with a nice family for the first year. We had a hard time trying to communicate to each other, but quickly I felt like one of their family. I still talk with them, and although I miss my Mexican food—[laughter]—I thought I would only be eating hamburger and pizza. [Laughter] My American family introduced me to delicious food, and I gained weight. From the U.S.A. culture, I learned to value organization, civic responsibility, and respect and tolerance, to be able to work with others.

I did an internship in a coffee production company in Bettendorf, to use the skills that I was learning in commerce and administration. These same skills have helped me to start a small, family-run Internet cafe and bakery in Comitán, Chiapas. I also volunteer with two associations, one is a local coffee company made up of indigenous people—coffee growers. They—assist with financial management and human resources, assist them in possessing the—certificate and serve as a translator. I am also continuing my education in bachelor degree in accounting at *Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas*.

I want to invite Mexican young people to come together and commit to their community and our country. Education is the only means to improve our quality of life and achieve peace, social peace in the entire world.

Once again, thank you for this scholarship program. I hope the U.S.A. Government will continue to support this program so that other young people can have the same opportunity that I have had.

Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much, Victor. What was the name of the family in Bettendorf?

Mr. Lopez Ruiz. Peter and Mary Shaffer.

The President. Well, I thank them. I hope they feel good about the fact that they helped you. There's a lot of American families that have great compassion for people around the world. And thank you for sharing the story.

Marcela. You went to Texas.

Marcela Ruiz Esparaza. I went to Texas. Good morning, Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen. Being a small-business owner is more than just a job or as a way to take a

living; it's a calling in life. The power of having an idea, taking a risk, and starting a small business that fulfills a need in the marketplace, and that creating jobs is truly magical. In Mexico, there exists a very strong entrepreneurial spirit, just like in the United States, where men and women from all over the country are ready to engage their God-given abilities, work hard, and improve the life of their families.

I have dedicated my life to helping business men and women in the State of Aguascalientes live their dreams and start their own small businesses. My center, CE INNOVA, was started in 2001 and has since helped over 300 small businesses start and prosper, which has resulted in the creation of hundreds of jobs and improved the lives of countless families.

A key factor in the CE INNOVA SBDC success was having the opportunity to participate in a training program offered by the *Universidad Autónoma* of Guadalajara and the University of Texas at San Antonio, and supported by USAID. The diplomatic training program shared a small-business counseling and training best practices from the 1,100 centers from U.S. small-business development network. This training not only helped us for better assist the entrepreneurs of Aguascalientes, but it also linked up with counterparts in the U.S. and helped us support a growing Mexican association of SBDC, now led by the *Universidad de*—[inaudible].

On behalf of the many business men and women that we have helped, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, and the American people for supporting us. I am very proud of the work of CE INNOVA SBDC and the Mexican Small Business Development Center Network are doing here in Mexico to grow the small-business sector, create jobs, and improving the life of its community.

Thank you very much.

The President. Very good. Thank you all very much. Thanks. We'll eat a little breakfast now, where we can continue our discussion.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:43 a.m. at the Hyatt Regency Merida. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

**The President's News Conference
With President Felipe de Jesus
Calderon Hinojosa in Merida**

March 14, 2007

President Calderon. Good morning, Mr. President, dear friends from the media. I thank you for being here in this press conference. I would like to thank very sincerely President George Bush for visiting our country and for dedicating almost 3 days to his visit in Mexico.

I am very pleased to inform you that President George Bush and myself, we're fully satisfied for how fruitful this meeting has been for both countries. As leaders of sovereign nations, we have talked in a respectful environment and a cordial environment about very diverse and complex issues of our bilateral agenda. We coincided in sharing our core responsibility, which now, more than ever, happened to be a shared responsibility. We reiterate our commitment with democracy, with the defense and respect of human rights, the promotion of free trade, with the rule of law, security, sustainable development and, in particular, our fight against poverty.

From this platform of understanding, we have covered in detail each of the issues of our bilateral agenda. I would like to express my gratitude to President Bush that we have talked so openly, with the sincerity and respect of both countries that are not only neighbors, but they are pursuing to do what true friends should do.

We have talked, for example, about the strengthening of a task force that will be directed to the transition of full trade of sensitive products such as corn and beans. We talked about the need to cover the phenomenon of migration as a factor of prosperity for both nations, orderly migration process. And we acknowledged the effort that President Bush and his administration is doing in order to promote within the Congress a comprehensive migratory reform that will acknowledge the rights of the migrants and workers, that would allow orderly and legal programs for temporary jobs, and would allow the reunification of family ties.

We have expressed our concern for protecting and guaranteeing human rights of

those who cross the border and, above all, about the enormous relevance of generating in Mexico opportunities that the citizens need for their development.

We shared the need of having a safe border that will close the gates to drugs, arms, and terrorism and that will open its doors to trade—prosperity and trade. Our border should be a tightening and closing point; the border should bring us together and not separate us. For this, we are considering the possibility of establishing new cross points and border bridges that will speed up the transit of goods and people. Both Presidents have agreed to coordinate in a better way our actions in order to confront organized crime in both sides of the border.

Mexico and the United States are nations that are joined together in the pursuit for better levels of well-being for its people. We do have the means, and in this meeting, we have seen the political will in order to reach shared goals. I'm fully convinced, then, from this visit on, we will be able to start a new stage of the relationships that take place between Mexico and the United States.

President Bush. *Senor Presidente, gracias. Buenos dias.* Laura and I have had a fascinating trip, and our final stop was a really good one, Mr. President. Glad to be back in Mexico. This is an especially beautiful part of your wonderful country. The hospitality was very generous—and the meals were quite good. [*Laughter*] *Estoy lleno.* [*Laughter*]

Over the past 2 days, the President and I have had a very—a series of friendly and very productive meetings. That's what the people of our respective countries expect. They expect people to work out differences in a constructive way. They expect leaders to seize opportunities for the benefit of our respective peoples. And the spirit is very strong to work together.

I appreciate so very much the fact that during our meetings, we reaffirmed the values of democracy and transparency and rule of law that guide both our countries. We discussed ways to make our Nation safer—both nations safer and both nations prosperous.

President Calderon is taking a tough stand against organized crime and drugs, and I appreciate that. I made it very clear to the

President that I recognize the United States has a responsibility in the fight against drugs. And one major responsibility is to encourage people to use less drugs. When there is demand, there is supply. And to the extent, Mr. President, that we can continue to make progress to reduce drugs, it will take pressure off of Mexico. So we have a responsibility.

Mexico has a responsibility as well, and the President is working hard on that responsibility. And we agreed to work together. Mexico is, obviously, a sovereign nation, and the President, if he so chooses, like he has, will lay out an agenda where the United States can be a constructive partner.

And the other place where we can work together is in the region. And so the President, who is a very strong leader in Central America, for example, will work with the United States and the Central American countries to develop a regional plan, because it could be successful in Mexico, and yet the problem could be transferred to the south, in which case we wouldn't have the security we would want. So, Mr. President, thank you for your leadership on this issue. I'm looking forward to working with you on it.

We talked about the economy. My view is, is that when Mexico grows, the United States benefits. And obviously, to the extent, Mr. President, you're able to put forth your innovative policies, we applaud your efforts. I appreciate so very much some of the innovative ideas that you're putting forward. As I said last night in the dinner, I appreciate very much the fact that you're focusing development in the south of your country.

Obviously, there was a lot of discussion about trade. People in my country are concerned about trade; people in Mexico are concerned about trade. There are strong protectionist sentiments in the United States. And I will work, Mr. President, to reject those protectionist sentiments, because I believe trade is one of the best avenues to help common prosperity. And anytime we have trade relations, there will be complications. And I pledged to the President that we would work together to ensure a smooth transition to full trade in dealing with sensitive issues such as corn and beans.

Education is an important issue that is— for our two countries. And I appreciate your

commitment to strong education. The United States can help. I'm a big believer in student exchanges between our two nations, on both sides of the border. And one reason I am is because I think it's important, sometimes, for people to gain an accurate perception of my country by coming to my country. I love the fact that students travel back and forth.

Mr. President, this morning I met with some students that are funded through USAID programs, who have come to the United States to take different courses in different subjects, and then have come back to Mexico to lend the expertise that they have gained to improve the communities in which they live. This is a vital program that the United States must continue, in my judgment, in order to help people realize the great benefits of education.

We spent a lot of time on the important and sensitive issue of migration. I say "sensitive" because obviously this is an issue that people can use to inflame passions. I say "important" because a good migration law will help both economies and will help the security of both countries. And the reason I say that is that if people can come into our country, for example, on a temporary basis to work, doing jobs Americans aren't doing, they won't have to sneak across the border.

And by the way, a system that encourages people to sneak across the border is a system that leads to human rights abuses. It's a system that promotes *coyotes* and document forgers. It's a system that allows for the exploitation of citizens who are trying to earn a living for their families.

And so, Mr. President, as we discussed, I will work with Congress, with members of both political parties, to pass immigration law that will enable us to respect the rule of law and, at the same time, respect humanity in a way that upholds the values of the United States of America.

I appreciate your hospitality. It's been a very warm greeting, Mr. President. I thank you and your good wife for being so kind to Laura and me. I look forward to future conversations. *Muchas gracias*.

President Calderon. *Gracias, el Presidente.* We will have a Q&A session now, starting with the Mexican press.

Mexico-U.S. Relations/Mexico's Foreign Policy

Q. Good morning, President of the United States of America, President of the United Mexico States.

President Bush. *Pardon a mi.*

Q. Good morning. Your visit is coming to an end now—this is a question for President George Bush—at the end of your visit, sir, have you found allies in order to place a counterweight to the initiatives of Hugo Chavez? What commitments did Felipe Calderon take on in order to be a counterweight to these initiatives of Hugo Chavez, on the one hand?

And on the other hand, President Felipe Calderon, Foreign Minister Patricia has said that you are working in order to strengthen the relationship with Venezuela. How is this compatible with the commitments that you're taking on with President Bush in order to give thrust to this counterweight in Latin America concerning—

President Bush. Thank you for the question. We spent a lot of time talking about Mexico's role in the world. Mexico is a respected nation; President Calderon is a respected leader. But our conversations focused on democracy and rule of law and prosperity and how to improve the lives of our fellow citizens. We spent time talking about social justice and concern for the poor.

One of the reasons I've come down here again is to remind people in this important part of the world that the United States cares deeply about the human condition; that we spent 1.6 billion of bilateral aid last year, most of the money going to social justice programs. And that doesn't include programs like the one I saw in the highlands of Guatemala, where our military was providing basic health care for citizens.

So, Mr. President and I spent time talking about how to advance a hopeful agenda, one that will lift the spirits of people. And I respect the role Mexico plays. I mean, Mexico will lead diplomatic efforts for the common security and common prosperity, and that's an important role.

President Calderon. The commitment and purpose of my Government is to have constructive, positive, and sound relations with all countries of the world and, of course,

with the countries of Latin America, without exception. And certainly the most important relationship with Mexico abroad is the one that we have with the United States, due to the migration that exists, the flows through the borders, and all else that you are well aware of.

However, Mexico is respectful of the opinions of other leaders. We are respectful of the heads of states of other countries, such as Venezuela and certainly the United States. We are a government that has principles and values, values such as democracy, freedom, liberty, and legality and certainly security and safety.

On the other hand, not as a strategy—this was not something that we focused on as a strategy in our talks, but as a conviction of our government. Mexico has to play a role which is balanced, weighed, and it has to be a leader in Latin America, in agreement with its culture, its history, its economy, its people.

We are deeply Latin American, and we too want justice, development, democracy for all of Latin America. That is where we are engaged and we are committed. We certainly do agree and coincide with other countries, many countries, of course, who coincide and agree with those principles.

Department of Justice

Q. Mr. President, thank you. The Attorney General acknowledged yesterday that in a statement made by—

President Bush. Hold on, Roger [Roger Runnigen, Bloomberg News]. The world wants to hear your voice.

Q. Thank you. The Attorney General acknowledged yesterday that there were mistakes in the firing of prosecutors. What is his future in your cabinet? Do you have confidence in him? And more importantly—or just as important, how effective can he be in Congress going forward when he's lost a lot of confidence among Democrats and doesn't have any defenders among Republicans?

President Bush. I do have confidence in Attorney General Al Gonzales. I talked to him this morning, and we talked about his need to go up to Capitol Hill and make it very clear to members in both political parties why the Justice Department made the

decisions it made, making very clear about the facts. And he's right; mistakes were made. And I'm, frankly, not happy about them, because there is a lot of confusion over what really has been a customary practice by the Presidents—U.S. attorneys and others serve at the pleasure of the President. Past administrations have removed U.S. attorneys; it's their right to do so.

The Justice Department recommended a list of U.S. attorneys. I believe the reasons why were entirely appropriate. And yet this issue was mishandled to the point now where you're asking me questions about it in Mexico, which is fine. I mean, if I were you, I'd ask the same question. This is an issue that—and so Al—let me just say, Al was right; mistakes were made; and he's going to go up to Capitol Hill to correct them.

I appreciate the fact that he's taken some action, because anytime anybody goes up to Capitol Hill, they've got to make sure they fully understand the facts and how they characterize the issue to Members of Congress. And the fact that both Republicans and Democrats feel like that there was not straightforward communication troubles me, and it troubles the Attorney General, so he took action. And he needs to continue to take action.

Immigration Reform/President Calderon's Meeting With Former President Vicente Fox of Mexico

Q. Good morning to both Presidents. President Bush, I ask you, why do Mexicans want to—why would you think that Mexicans could believe in a reform in migration when for so many years, this was not a possibility nor reality? And what are your chances of coming through with this bill in Congress? And President Calderon, you had lunch with President Fox. Can you tell us what you talked about?

President Bush. They talked about *carne*. [Laughter] Excuse me. I wasn't there. [Laughter]

No, that's a legitimate question, and the question is, why now? Why do I think something positive can happen? Well, first of all, the legislative process takes awhile in the United States. I don't know about Mexico, Mr. President, but sometimes, legislators,

you know, debate issues for awhile before a solution can be achieved.

And we had a very—by the way, we haven't had a serious debate on migration until recently. A law was passed in 1986, and then there really wasn't a serious debate until pretty much starting after the year 2000, if my memory serves me well. I've always known this is an important issue because I happened to have been the Governor of Texas. And so I'm very comfortable about discussing the issue and have elevated the issue over the past years. And Members of Congress have taken the issue very seriously, but it's hard to get legislation out of the Congress on a very complex issue.

A lot of Americans were deeply concerned that the United States was not enforcing our laws. They felt like there wasn't a commitment to the rule of law. Over the past year, I believe we have shown the American people that there is a strong commitment to the rule of law. And I think Members of Congress are now feeling more comfortable that the country is committed to rule of law, which then makes some more openminded to my argument, which is that if we can have migration reform, it will make it less likely somebody will feel like they have to sneak across our border, and therefore, take pressure off the border. In other words, security for the country, border security, will be enhanced by a good migration law, and then it will make it easier for us to focus our assets on drugs, terrorists, criminals, and guns moving both ways.

I believe—I feel pretty good about it. I don't want to predict legislative successes. But I can tell you my mood, and my mood is optimistic because the mood in the Congress seems like it has changed from skepticism last year to knowledge that getting a comprehensive bill will be in the Nation's interests.

Secondly, I'm optimistic because Republicans in the Senate are working with Democrats in the Senate. We're facilitating that work. The administration is very much involved with helping the Senators find common ground, to the point where we can move a bill as quickly as possible out of the Senate so it gets to the House of Representatives.

I'm not a betting man. I don't like to bet, because when I do, I usually lose, but I'm an optimistic man in this case, about getting comprehensive reform. And a bill is in the interests of both countries.

President Calderon. I met with former President Vicente Fox, whom I like, and we have a good friendship. We belong to the same party. I invited him to lunch; we talked for quite a while, talked about matters in a very constructive fashion. And he congratulated us for the work that we've done during these first 100 days. He also said that he had the will to collaborate and cooperate in a respectful fashion with the government for the benefit of Mexicans.

I have also met with other former Presidents, and I'm sure that I will continue to meet with President Fox in the future throughout my administration.

President Bush. Here it comes.

Department of Justice

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, President Calderon. On the dismissal of U.S. attorneys, there have been allegations that political motivations were involved. Is political loyalty to your administration an appropriate factor? And when you talked to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales last year, what did you say, and what did you direct him to do?

President Bush. Thanks, Kelly [Kelly O'Donnell, NBC News]. I've heard those allegations about political decisionmaking; it's just not true. Secondly, just so you know, I get asked—I mean, I get complaints all the time from Members of Congress on a variety of subjects—this Senator, this Congressperson so-and-so—and there's occasionally frustration with the executive branch. And they will pull me aside and say, "Are you aware of this? Are you aware of that?" And I did receive complaints about U.S. attorneys.

I specifically remember one time I went up to the Senate, and Senators were talking about the U.S. attorneys. I don't remember specific names being mentioned, but I did say to Al last year—you're right, last fall—I said, "Have you heard complaints about AGs? I have"—I mean, U.S. attorneys, excuse me—and he said, "I have." But I never

brought up a specific case nor gave him specific instructions.

Q. Sir, might he have inferred that you discussed it with him—was a need for him to take action?

President Bush. You're going to have to ask Al that question, but as I say, I discuss with my Cabinet officials complaints I hear. I mean, when Members of the Senate come up and say to me, "I've got a complaint," I think it's entirely appropriate and necessary for me to pass those complaints on. Now, I don't every single time, but people view their moment with the President, sometimes, as an opportunity to unload their frustrations about how things may be working in their State—or Congresspersons how things may be working in their district. And whether it be the Attorney General or the Secretary of State or other members of my Cabinet, I pass those complaints on at times.

What Al did was—and what the Justice Department did was appropriate—U.S. attorneys serve at the pleasure of the President. In other words, they're appointed by the President; they can be removed by the President. What was mishandled was the explanation of the cases to the Congress. And Al has got work to do up there. And the thing I appreciate about the Attorney General was, he said publicly that he could have handled it better, mistakes were made, and took action. And obviously, more action needs to be taken. That's what I discussed with him on the phone today.

Energy/Trade

Q. Good morning. President Calderon, concerning energy matters, 3 days before the celebration of the anniversary of the expropriation of oil in our country, could you tell us what the position of the Senators of opposition have stated about these matters of oil? We know that the reserves and, of course this oil abundance, perhaps, is coming to its end. Was this issue on oil discussed here?

And, President Bush, 2008 will welcome the opening up of livestock and agriculture matters. Sir, is there a possibility of renegotiating or, perhaps, leave it for a later date this negotiation of this part of the trade agreement because of the complaints of Mexican producers?

President Calderon. The truth of the matter is that we did not discuss this issue of oil, because this is something that has to do specifically with Mexicans. This is a Mexican issue. We will not privatize a company that belongs to Mexicans, such as of the case of Pemex. We will have to see this later on, in terms of sovereignty, and speak about the initiatives, of course, and to see what our Congress states. We do have problems with the decline of, especially, Cantarell, which has been very important in the production of oil throughout the years, but which is declining in amounts. But we will have to be very clear on the fact that we will be sharing responsibility between Congress and the President.

Concerning agriculture and livestock, I do share the sensitivity of our working group and President Bush. We have set up a working group to deal with the matters of corn and bean, precisely to make more agile this transition, which is established at the end of the free trade agreement, NAFTA.

We do have different problems now today, different from what it was one year ago, when we see that the prices of corn are going down. We are having very high costs in our production. This has left our producers out of competition. And now we are seeing what consumption is all about with these very high prices, in the case of corn.

However, due to the circumstance we have had in this meeting, we strengthened and we will be strengthening even more a group, a working group, which will address these issues, which are very sensitive for Mexican producers.

President Bush. No, no. Excuse me, Tony. One reason I didn't bring up energy is because energy is—it belongs to sovereign Mexico. And I'm confident that the President will make the best interests for the people of Mexico, working with the Congress.

In terms of opening up NAFTA, renegotiating NAFTA is a mistake, in my judgment. NAFTA has worked. And there is a mechanism in place, that the President just described, about how to resolve sensitive issues. There will be sensitive issues on a frequent basis when it comes to trade. And the best way to resolve those is through negotiations and discussions, recognizing the sensitivities

on both sides of the border. But trying to renegotiate a treaty that has been incredibly important for both sides of the border, in my judgment, would be a mistake. You don't want to weaken NAFTA; you want to make sure it stays strong in order that prosperity continues to expand and people benefit on both sides of the border.

Immigration Reform/Immigrant Life in the United States

Q. Thank you. President Bush, you said the other day that you want to first—on immigration, want to first find a coherent Republican position in the Senate. Most Senate Republicans voted against last year's bill in the Senate. What changes are you willing to make, and would you be willing to forego a path to citizenship as part of that bill? And President Calderon, it's been reported you have relatives working in the United States. What have you learned from their experiences? Do you know, do they want to become citizens? And do you know, are they there legally? [*Laughter*]

President Bush. What was your question again? No. [*Laughter*] Michael Chertoff and Carlos Gutierrez are negotiating with Republicans, helping Republicans find common ground, Steve [Stephen Dinan, Washington Times], and this isn't the appropriate place to be conducting negotiations.

It is the appropriate place to talk about the spirit of moving the bill forward. And obviously, we would like to be able to convince no-voters that it makes sense to be for a comprehensive immigration policy. I feel strongly that it's in our interests, national interests, to get a bill done. That's why, after all, I gave the address to the United States from the Oval Office on this very subject.

And you asked about amnesty—look, amnesty is not going to fly. There is not going to be automatic citizenship; it just won't work. People in the United States don't support that, and neither do I—nor will kicking people out of the United States work. It's not practical. It is not a realistic solution. Some may articulate that, but it's empty talk. And so therefore, there's got to be a middle ground, a reasonable way to deal with the 12 million or so people that have been in our country for a period of time. And that's

where a lot of the discussions are taking place, Steve. And I think we can find a rational way forward, somewhere in between automatic citizenship and kicking people out of the country. It's in our interests we do so. I mean, we are a nation of law, and therefore, if we can change the law for the better, we ought to do so.

And so, Mr. President, back to the man's question over there, I'm optimistic. But he helped—his question was somewhat insightful—well, very insightful, because what he pointed out was the legislative challenges that we face. He also made it clear in his question that the administration is very much involved with working with Republican Senators to help find common ground between Republican Senators and Senator Kennedy, who is emerging as the lead Senator on the Democrat side.

I will tell you, if we can find that common ground, we have a very good chance of getting the bill out of the Senate, because Senator Kennedy is one of the best legislative Senators there is. He can get the job done. I know firsthand, because we reformed our education system, Mr. President, with his help in 2001. Not to slip in another issue, but we do need to get No Child Left Behind reauthorized, and I'm looking forward to working with Senator Kennedy on the reauthorization.

President Calderon. Yes, I do have family in the United States, and what I can tell you is that these are people who work and respect that country. They pay their taxes to the government. These are people who work in the field; they work with—in the fields with vegetables. They probably handle that which you eat, the lettuce, et cetera. These are people who respect the United States. These are people who have children, who want these children to be educated with respect for the land where they live and with respect for Mexico. I have not seen them in a long time and do not know their migratory status.

I am from Michoacan, and in Michoacan, we have 4 million people, 2 million of these Michoacanos are in the States. We want them to come back; we want them to find jobs here in Mexico. We miss them. These are our best people. These are bold people; they're young; they're strong; they're tal-

ented; they have overcome tremendous adversity—who are working so that they can come back to their country someday.

And I'm saying this for all Mexicans, not only those Mexicans that I am related to by blood, by land, soil, air. And I want to say that I am fighting so that instead of having our people cross the border to find work, we want investments to cross the border and come over here.

The U.S. economy is capital intensive. We are labor intensive. We can give democracy to our people if we find sound basis so that we could also find those factors which can give jobs to our people. I have said this, and I will continue to say this: I hope—and I hope that someday, everybody will believe as I do. I believe in work. I believe that I will see all of these people coming back, and embrace them knowing that, well, that we live in countries that defend liberty and freedom.

Thank you so much to all. Have a nice day.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:04 a.m. at the Fiesta Americana Merida. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela; and Secretary of Foreign Relations Patricia Espinosa Cantellano of Mexico. President Calderon and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Joint Statement by the United States of America and Mexico

March 14, 2007

Mexico and the United States, as proud and sovereign countries, today reiterate their conviction that the shared values of democracy, transparency, rule of law, and respect for human rights are the solid foundation on which the increasingly rich and complex networks that link their economies and societies are based.

Presidents Felipe Calderon and George Bush resolved during their first official meeting in Mexico on March 13 and 14, 2007 in

Merida, Yucatan, to strengthen the partnership between two friendly neighbors. They agreed that government to government relations are but one small measure of the interaction between our two great countries. Our ties are deeper and wider: they are societal, economic, cultural, and familial.

During their meeting, the Presidents reviewed the wide range of issues of the bilateral relationship and the cooperation undertaken by their governments in order to promote productive and mutually beneficial relations between Mexico and the United States. The Presidents identified new opportunities to work together in order to improve the quality of life of their peoples as well as to make North America the most prosperous, secure and competitive region in the world.

In this vein, the Presidents acknowledged that economic growth and job creation are vital to reducing poverty and inequality and improving the quality of life. They emphasized the centrality of expanding trade between the United States and Mexico as the basis for our shared prosperity. They recognized the need for our governments to work together to speed and facilitate the secure and ever-expanding movement of legitimate goods and people across our shared border, including the development of new infrastructure and the more efficient use of existing infrastructure, where possible.

In seeking to enhance North American competitiveness based on the twin pillars of security and prosperity, the Presidents also underscored their awareness regarding the need to work together to facilitate the transition to full free trade in such areas as agricultural products. To this end, the Presidents agreed to intensify the discussions within the framework of the bilateral working group on corn and dry beans.

The Presidents recognized the continued threat to both nations posed by organized crime and drug trafficking, especially their associated violence, which do not respect borders. They underlined that the important efforts of the Mexican Government to confront organized crime head-on, as one of the most important priorities of its own domestic agenda, would benefit from increased support from and cooperation with the United

States. In this connection, they reiterated their commitment to intensify cooperation and information sharing between the law enforcement agencies of Mexico and the United States, especially along the border region. The Presidents stressed their commitment to increase bilateral cooperation to target criminal organizations, fight arms trafficking, which fuels the violence of criminal organizations, as well as drug trafficking, including methamphetamine and precursor chemicals, and illicit financial activities, including bulk currency smuggling across our borders.

The management of the U.S.-Mexican border is a shared responsibility. Our common fight against organized crime must be accompanied by cooperative actions in other areas which will also promote the security, prosperity and well-being of our border communities. Improved communication and information-sharing at all levels will allow us to continue to transform the border into a region of growing and shared prosperity.

Recognizing that the border region encompasses a remarkable diversity in landscape and native species, the Presidents acknowledged the need to continue efforts to protect our shared natural resources, including air and water, through binational cooperation.

The Presidents recognized that immigration across our common border vitally links both countries, involves shared responsibilities, and represents one of the most critical issues for the future well-being of both our peoples. In this regard they underscored the need to encourage productive investment aimed at creating more and better paid jobs in Mexico as an essential component of any comprehensive strategy to address this phenomenon and agreed on the need to continue advocating an approach to comprehensive immigration reform.

The Presidents also agreed to explore opportunities for people-to-people exchanges, especially in education, as a central tool in fostering greater understanding between our two countries. In this context they stressed that the investment Mexico and the United

States make in human capital must be considered an essential component of their efforts to promote North America's competitiveness and economic growth with justice and security for our peoples.

Finally, Presidents Calderon and Bush reiterated their conviction that the future of Mexico and the United States—and of the whole North American region—is now, more than ever, a shared future. Our commitment to the advancement of democracy, the respect for human rights, the promotion of free markets, the rule of law, security, sustainable development, and expanding opportunity for all, they underlined, will contribute to the consolidation of a prosperous, just, and peaceful future for all citizens in the Americas.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this joint statement. An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Vice President Adil Abd Al-Mahdi of Iraq

March 15, 2007

The President. It is such an honor to welcome the Vice President of a free Iraq to the Oval Office.

Mr. Vice President, I appreciate your courage. I don't know if the citizens of my country know, but the other day, a killer tried to take your life. And fortunately, you sit here, and you speak with enthusiasm and optimism about the future of your country.

One of the reasons why—the main reason why I've reinforced our troops in Iraq is to give leaders such as yourself the opportunity to do the hard work of reconciliation. I appreciate very much the progress that you're making. I know it's hard work. It's hard work to overcome distrust that has built up over the years because your country was ruled by a tyrant that created distrust amongst people.

But you, Mr. Vice President, are showing strong vision and a vision of peace and reconciliation. And I welcome you to the Oval Office. I thank you for your courage, and I thank you for the conversation we've had.

Vice President Abd Al-Mahdi. Thank you. Thank you, President. Thank you for receiving me, and the present occasion to thank you personally and to thank the American people for all the support you've given to Iraq, the sacrifices. Also, I visited yesterday some soldiers in the hospital, and I saw their high spirit. They had, really, better morality than I had, talking about their mission.

We are working hard together. Our security plan is marking some points. We are not finished, but we are doing better than expected in this plan. This will not solve the whole problem; the reconciliation process will take our political agenda forward. We are working on many issues: the hydrocarbon bill, which we approved in the Cabinet; we are working on a de-Baathification bill, and it will be presented later. We are working on so many things.

So, really, I want to take this occasion to thank all Americans—the United States, you, Mr. President, the Congress, the administration—for all the sacrifices, effort, assistance given to help my country. Thank you.

The President. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner

March 15, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. I had the honor of representing our great country over the past week in five different countries in our neighborhood—but I must tell you, it sure is good to be home. And it sure is good to be with you all. I'm proud to be standing with strong leaders like John Boehner and Roy Blunt. I thank you all for recognizing that it's in the best interest of the United States of America that John Boehner become the next Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Some of you may not know about my early political career—I ran for the United States Congress in 1978 in west Texas. I came in second place—in a two-man race. [Laughter] The campaign obviously didn't turn out the way I hoped it would, but things worked out okay in the end. The key is to learn from

every election and to come back stronger. And with your help, that's exactly what we're going to do in 2008.

I appreciate the character of the men and women on the Republican side of the United States House of Representatives. I've gotten to know them well over the last 6-plus years. But tonight I think it's appropriate we remember the life of a good man and a devoted public servant, Congressman Charlie Norwood. He fought lung cancer; he's in our thoughts and prayers; and we send our very best to Gloria and their family.

I appreciate the fact that you invited Laura, John. It's a smart move to invite her—actually, she was Boehner's first choice. [Laughter] She is still traveling, but she sends her love and her respect. I know I'm not very objective, but I firmly believe Laura, in all due respect to my mother, is the finest First Lady our country has ever had. Well, mom was pretty good too—mom was pretty good too. She's still telling me what to do, for all you mothers out there.

I want to thank Congressman Tom Cole, who is the chairman of the NRCC. I've known Tom a long time. He comes from right north of Texas. The NRCC has got one competent, smart, able person in Tom Cole, and I appreciate you serving, Tom. I really thank Devin Nunes, from California, for his leadership in this dinner tonight. Devin, it's good to see you; thank you for being here. I know I mentioned his name once; I'm going to mention it again, the House Republican whip, Roy Blunt from Missouri, is doing a fine job. I appreciate you, Roy. I'm proud to be with Cantor, Putnam, Granger, McCotter, Carter, and all the rest of the Members of the House of Representatives. Thanks for coming; appreciate you being here.

But most of all, thank you all for supporting this good group of folks. Obviously, it takes support like yours to get us back in the majority, but it also takes good ideas and takes people who are willing to stand on principle; people not driven by polls or focus groups, but people who stand for what they believe no matter what the critics may say. We believe in a strong national defense. We believe in less government and lower taxes. And we believe that government ought to

trust the American people to make the best decisions for their lives.

Ours is an optimistic agenda, and ours is a realistic agenda. And by pushing good ideas and standing strong for what's right, I believe that we can retake the Senate and the House and hold the White House in 2008.

The biggest challenge we face is to protect the American people from harm. You know, I recognize that after September the 11th, it would be easy for our Nation to let down its guard. I knew that the farther we got away from that tragic event, the more likely scenario would be that people would say, "Well, maybe the enemy is not there." And frankly, that's okay. It's not okay, however, if your Federal Government forgets their responsibility. And I just want you to know that every day, I think about and my administration thinks about our most important task, and that is to defend you. And the best way to do so is to stay on the offense and defeat the enemy overseas so we do not have to face them here at home.

We are chasing down the enemy by using good intelligence and by deploying some of the finest citizens our country has ever produced. And we will defeat the enemy in the long term by defeating their hateful ideology with an ideology of hope, based upon the universal concept of liberty.

This war on terror is fought on many fronts: in Afghanistan; in places like the Philippines; and around the globe. But the central front in this war—the central front, and our need to protect the American people, is being fought in Iraq. We're pursuing a new strategy in Iraq, a plan that demands more from Iraq's Government; a plan that brings security to Baghdad, as our top priority; and a plan that gives our troops the reinforcements they need to carry out their mission.

In Washington, we also have important decisions to make on Iraq. And the most pivotal question is whether the United States Congress will stand behind our new commander, General David Petraeus, and give our commanders the flexibility they need to do their jobs and our troops the support they need to carry out their mission.

Next week, the House will begin debate on an emergency war spending bill. Some

in the Congress are using this bill as an opportunity to micromanage our military commanders or to force a precipitous withdrawal in Iraq or threaten vital funding for Iraqi security forces and fund projects that have nothing to do with the war on terror. I believe the Members of Congress are sincere when they support our troops. And now is the time for them to show that support. Our men and women in uniform are risking their lives, and they need the firm support of the United States Congress.

Today the United States Senate wisely rejected a resolution that would have placed an artificial timetable on our mission in Iraq. And I thank the Republicans and Democrats who voted down that resolution. Many of those Members know what I know, that if American forces were to step back from Baghdad now, before the capital city is more secure, the scale and scope of attacks would increase and intensify; a contagion of violence could spill out across the entire country and, in time, the entire region. The enemy would emerge from the chaos emboldened, with new safe havens and new recruits and new resources and an even greater determination to harm the United States of America. If we were to leave Iraq before the job is done, the enemy would follow us to the United States of America, and we're not going to let it happen.

We've got work to do to make sure this economy continues to stay strong. Our principle is that if we trust you with your money, if the American people have more of their own money to save and spend and invest, the economy flourishes. And so we cut the taxes on the American people. We cut taxes for everybody who pays taxes in America. And our plan is working—this economy of the United States is strong.

America—not government, but America—has created more than 7.5 million jobs in the past 3½ years. Unemployment is low; inflation is low; wages are rising. This economy is on the move, and the best way to keep it moving is to make the tax cuts we passed permanent.

Oh, I know you'll hear the argument here that you've got to raise taxes to balance the budget, but we're proving them wrong. I set a goal that we would cut the deficit in half

in 5 years; we completed that goal years ahead of schedule. Why? Because when the economy grows, tax revenues increase. And the other reason why is because I worked with Republican leaders to bring fiscal sanity to the United States Congress. The best way to balance the budget is to grow the economy and not overspend the people's money. So I'm looking forward to working with John and Roy and the other Members of the House to pass a budget that can eliminate the Federal deficit within the next 5 years without raising taxes on the American people.

We need to come together to solve hard problems. One of the hardest problems in Washington is to reform Social Security and Medicare. There are a lot of baby boomers, like me, getting ready to retire. As a matter of fact, my retirement age of 62 is right around the corner, which will be a convenient time. *[Laughter]* And there are a lot of people like me. There are a lot of baby boomers who have been promised greater benefits than the previous generation, but the problem is, there are fewer people paying into the system and the system cannot be sustained.

My attitude—now is the time for Republicans and Democrats to come together, to put their ideas on the table, to reform Social Security and Medicare to save a future generation from onerous taxes. Now is the time to act; now is the time to put politics aside; and now is the time to do the hard work the people of the United States of America expect us to do.

We believe strongly that this country needs to remain competitive so that we can remain the economic leader in the world. And one of the best ways to remain competitive is to make sure our youngsters get a good, sound education. I believe strongly in local control of schools, but I also believe in raising standards and holding schools accountable for achieving results.

I don't see how you can solve a problem unless you diagnose a problem. And that's precisely the spirit behind the No Child Left Behind Act. Because we're measuring and because we're holding people to standards, test scores are rising all across the United States of America. We're getting better test

scores in reading and math, and most importantly of all, our minority students are beginning to close the achievement gap. The No Child Left Behind Act is working, and the United States Congress needs to reauthorize that good piece of legislation.

We believe that dependency on oil from overseas is a national security and economic security risk. You see, when you import a lot of oil from parts of the world that may not care for the United States of America, that's a national security risk. Or when you import a lot of oil from parts of the world where supply could be disrupted by a terrorist attack, that is a national security risk. We live in a global world, and as demand for crude oil rises in emerging economies like China and India, it causes the price of crude oil to go up, which raises the price of gasoline for you. And therefore, reliance upon oil is an economic security risk. And therefore, I look forward to continuing to work with the United States Congress to diversify our way out of dependency on oil.

And we're making good progress. We have got a comprehensive policy to do so. We believe in nuclear power. We believe in clean coal technology. We believe in solar and wind energy. And we believe in spending taxpayers' money to develop technologies that will change the way we—change how we power automobiles. We're spending a lot of your money to develop new batteries so that within a short period of time, there will be plug-in hybrid batteries—which means if you're living in a city, you can drive the first 20 miles on electricity and not on gasoline. And I also strongly believe that it makes sense to empower our farmers to grow crops that can be converted into energy, like ethanol and biodiesel.

We're on the verge of important technological breakthroughs here in America, technological breakthroughs that will enable a future President and future Congresses to say, "We have done our duty for national security reasons, for economic security reasons—all of which, as well, will enable us to be better stewards of our environment."

We have got an issue with health care in the United States of America. If you're running a small business, you understand the pressures you feel as a result of growing

health care costs. But I caution you in this debate to remember, there is a philosophical divide in Washington between those who believe that government is the best provider of health care and those of us who believe that the best decisionmakers for health care are the providers and the patients.

Government has got a responsibility to the poor, and we're meeting that responsibility. We've got a responsibility to the elderly. And thanks to the leadership of people like John Boehner and Roy Blunt, we modernized Medicare by doing something unusual in medicine—we actually interjected marketplace forces; we included the marketplace. We said, our seniors should be allowed to make choices about what's best for them. Costs projected for Medicare are lower than expected. The market works. And the reforms we passed for Medicare are good, solid reforms for America's seniors.

We've got a strong record to run on, and we're going to make it stronger by passing association health plans. If you're a small business, you should be allowed to pool risk across jurisdictional boundaries so you can buy insurance at the same discount that larger companies are able to buy insurance.

We believe strongly in health savings accounts, which empowers consumers to shop in the marketplace for—to meet their health care needs. But we also understand that there must be transparency in health care for pricing and quality. We strongly believe in interjecting information technologies into health care—all aimed to hold down the cost of health care without inviting more government into your lives.

And finally, if you're interested in controlling health care costs and if you want to make sure health care is available, elect people who will vote for medical liability reform. There are too many lawsuits running too many good doctors out of practice in America.

I'm looking forward to working with the United States Congress on an idea that we put forward that will make private health insurance more affordable and more accessible to more of our citizens, and that is to change the Tax Code. I believe strongly that we ought to create a standard tax deduction for

health insurance like the standard tax deduction for dependents. A family with health insurance would get a \$15,000 deduction from incoming payroll taxes, whether they buy coverage on their own or get it from their employer. If you're single, you get a \$7,500 deduction. The whole purpose of the plan is to level the playing field to give those who buy insurance on their own the same tax advantage as those who get insurance through their jobs.

I know I'm not talking to Senators here—*[laughter]*—but I do want to assure you all that I will continue to fulfill my obligation to put people on our benches who will strictly interpret the law and not legislate from the bench.

We've got a full agenda, and we're working well together. Ours is an agenda based upon solid philosophy that we don't need more government, but we need more trust in the American people. Ours is an agenda that says, if you have more of your own money, the country benefits. And ours is an agenda that recognizes our primary responsibility is to stay steady and focused and defeat the enemy of the United States of America and leave behind a more secure America for generations to come.

The greatest honor of being the President is to represent a group of decent, honorable folks. And those are the people of the United States. I cannot tell you what a joy it is to travel our country and to meet quiet, compassionate people who, on a daily basis, love their neighbor just like they'd like to be loved themselves.

Oftentimes, I'm asked to define the strength of the country—and, sure, our military is strong, and we're going to keep it that way; and, yes, our wallets are fat, and hopefully, they get fatter for all of us. But the great strength of the United States of America, the true strength of this country is the fact that there are millions of fellow citizens who, on a daily basis, reach out to somebody in need; they reach out to say, "How can I help you, brother? What can I do to make your life better?" People who say, "If you need a little love in your life, you can count on me." This country is changing one heart and one soul and one body at a time because

we've got millions of our fellow citizens who love our country and love their neighbors.

I'm optimistic about this country. You've got to know something about your President: I am some kind of optimistic about where we're headed. We're a great nation, and we intend to keep it that way. And I thank you for your help.

May God bless you. May God bless your families. And may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:39 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Gloria Norwood, wife of former Representative Charles W. Norwood, Jr.; and Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors

March 16, 2007

A couple of weeks ago I announced that Senator Dole and Secretary Shalala agreed to chair a Commission of our fellow citizens to look into the health care that our veterans and those in the military are receiving.

Today I was pleased to meet the Commission members that have been selected. We've got Purple Heart recipients; got the wife of a severely wounded troop; we've got a doctor; we've got compassionate people who all care about whether or not our Government is fulfilling its responsibility to make sure our health care systems, both at DOD, Defense Department, and at the Veterans Administration, are meeting our obligations.

And I assured the members of this committee that I will support their work and will address the problems that they find. We owe it to those who wear the uniform and their families to make sure that our troops have the best, and that's what this Commission is meant to do. And I thank you for your willingness to serve. You're doing the country a great service, because the Commission report will ensure that service goes beyond my time in office. In other words, it'll really set

the stage for this Presidency and other Presidencies, set a standard that we expect Government to follow.

So thanks for being here. Appreciate your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 a.m. in Room 180 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Bob Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, Cochairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.

Remarks at a Saint Patrick's Day Shamrock Presentation Ceremony With Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland

March 16, 2007

Thank you. *Taoiseach*, good morning—or should I say, “top o’ the morning.” [*Laughter*] I’m really pleased that you came back to the White House. I’m looking forward to our discussions. And I cannot thank you enough for your strong leadership in resolving the issues of Northern Ireland, and I stand ready to help.

I gratefully accept the bowl of shamrocks. I am delighted that you have joined us, once again, to celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day. Saint Patrick’s Day is an occasion that unites two distinct groups of Americans, those who are of Irish descent and those who wish they were. [*Laughter*] Whether they’re Irish today or every day, Americans are grateful for our country’s Irish heritage and the enduring friendship that exists between Ireland and the United States is strong.

The ties that bind our two nations stretch all the way back to our country’s founding. Ireland gave us at least nine signers of the Declaration of Independence and many more who risked their lives to defend it. Irish Americans fought valiantly to preserve the Union in our Civil War. They helped turn back the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century. And they’re fighting bravely in today’s war on terror, risking their lives to secure a future of freedom and peace for generations to come.

Many of Ireland’s sons and daughters came to our shores to escape poverty and

famine. Once here, they helped us build and strengthen this great Nation with their gifts of industry and talent and faith. Irish workers built our railroads, our cathedrals, and our cities. Irish writers and musicians have enriched our literature and our culture. Irish priests and nuns established parochial schools that have helped generations of children build lives of prosperity and purpose. And with their many contributions, Irish Americans remind us of our heritage as a nation of immigrants and our duty to remain a welcoming society.

In 1783, President George Washington—I refer to him as the first George W.—[*laughter*]—wrote to recent Irish immigrants in New York that “America is open to receive the oppressed and persecuted of all nations,” and he expressed his wish that the blessings of equal liberty and unrestrained commerce would one day prevail in Ireland.

Well, today, Ireland is a free, independent, and very prosperous nation. Ireland now has one of the fastest growing economies in Europe. And over the past decade, our two nations have enjoyed a strong and growing trade relationship. And as Ireland prospers, a land whose people came to America seeking a better life is now attracting to its own shores immigrants with those very same dreams.

It has been said that the Irish, like the presence of God, are to be found everywhere. On this Saint Patrick’s Day, we’re grateful for the presence of the Irish in our country. And we are blessed by your presence here at the White House, *Taoiseach*. I thank you for coming to help us celebrate Saint Patrick’s Day and honor the friendship between our two nations. In the words of the Irish proverb, “May the Lord keep you in His hand and never close His fist too tight.” [*Laughter*]

Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.

Proclamation 8113—National Poison Prevention Week, 2007

March 16, 2007

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

In the 45 years since the first National Poison Prevention Week was proclaimed by President John F. Kennedy, many lives have been saved from unintentional poisoning through awareness efforts across our country. This week, we reaffirm our commitment to the safety of our fellow citizens and to guarding against accidental poisonings.

Protecting our children is a solemn and special responsibility, and we must all continue to work to reduce the number of poison-related injuries and deaths. I encourage parents to make homes safer by keeping toxic substances sealed and out of reach and by carefully reading the labels on medicines before giving them to children and on household products before using them around children. In addition, carbon monoxide alarms can help protect against carbon monoxide poisoning, which claims the lives of hundreds of Americans each year.

If a poisoning is suspected, citizens can reach their nearest Poison Control Center 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by calling 1-800-222-1222. This number should be called immediately at the first sign of a suspected poison emergency. The Poison Prevention Week Council website, poisonprevention.org, can provide additional information about poison prevention. By staying informed, being proactive, and remaining vigilant, we can avoid poison exposure and save more lives.

To encourage Americans to learn more about the dangers of accidental poisonings and take appropriate preventive measures, the Congress, by joint resolution approved September 26, 1961, as amended (75 Stat. 681), has authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation designating the third week of March each year as “National Poison Prevention Week.”

Now, Therefore, I, George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim March 18 through March

24, 2007, as National Poison Prevention Week. I call upon all Americans to participate in appropriate activities this week and to learn how to prevent poisonings, especially among children.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this sixteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord two thousand seven, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-first.

George W. Bush

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 8:45 a.m., March 20, 2007]

NOTE: This proclamation will be published in the *Federal Register* on March 21.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President’s public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

March 10

In the morning, at the Radisson Montevideo Victoria Plaza Hotel in Montevideo, Uruguay, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he and Mrs. Bush met with U.S. Embassy staff and their families.

Later in the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush went to Anchorena Park where he met with President Tabare Vazquez of Uruguay.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush had lunch with President Vazquez and his wife, Maria Auxiliadora Delgado de Vazquez. They then toured Anchorena Park.

Later in the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to the Radisson Montevideo Victoria Plaza Hotel. He then participated in an interview with Greta Van Susteren of FOX News for later broadcast.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush went to the U.S. Ambassador’s residence where they attended a reception for government and business leaders. Later, they

returned to the Radisson Montevideo Victoria Plaza Hotel.

March 11

In the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Bogota, Colombia, arriving in the afternoon. Upon arrival, they went to Casa de Narino where they participated in an arrival ceremony with President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia and his wife, Lina Maria Moreno de Uribe.

Later in the afternoon, the President had a meeting followed by a working lunch with President Uribe. Later, he and Mrs. Bush participated in a briefing on alternative farm products development. They then went to the U.S. Embassy where they met with the staff and their families.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Guatemala City, Guatemala, where, upon arrival, they went to the Real InterContinental Guatemala hotel.

March 12

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he and Mrs. Bush went to Carlos Emilio Leonardo School in Santa Cruz Balanya, Guatemala, and met with U.S. military medical readiness personnel. They then went to the town square where they met President Oscar Berger Perdomo of Guatemala and his wife, Wendy Widmann de Berger. They also met with Mayor Raymundo Juarez of Santa Cruz Balanya, visited with market vendors, and toured the Dr. Richard Carroll Municipal Library.

Later in the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Iximche, Guatemala, where they toured Mayan ruins and attended a cultural performance.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to the Real InterContinental Guatemala in Guatemala City. Later, they went to the National Palace where they participated in an arrival ceremony with President Berger and Mrs. Widmann de Berger. Later, he met with President Berger.

Later in the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to the Real InterContinental Guatemala where they met with U.S. Embassy staff and their families.

In the evening, the President and Mrs. Bush went to the National Palace where they had dinner with President Berger and Mrs. Widmann de Berger. Later, they traveled to Merida, Mexico, where, upon arrival, they went to the Hyatt Regency Merida hotel.

March 13

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he and Mrs. Bush traveled to Temozon Sur, Mexico, where they went to the Hacienda Temozon and toured the facility. He then met with President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Uxmal, Mexico, where they toured the Uxmal ruins with President Calderon and his wife, Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo. Later, they returned to the Hyatt Regency Merida.

On March 12, the President declared an emergency in Indiana and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local response efforts in the area struck by record snow and near record snow on February 12–14.

The President declared a major disaster in California and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by a severe freeze on January 11–17.

March 14

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, he met with U.S. Embassy staff and their families.

Later in the morning, the President and Mrs. Bush returned to Washington, DC, arriving in the afternoon.

The President declared a major disaster in Iowa and ordered Federal aid to supplement State and local recovery efforts in the area struck by severe winter storms on February 23 to March 2.

March 15

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing.

In the afternoon, at the Capitol, the President and Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland attended a Saint Patrick's Day luncheon hosted by Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi.

The President announced that he has nominated Henry Bonilla to be Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the Organization of American States, with the rank of Ambassador.

The President announced that he has nominated Hans G. Klemm to be Ambassador to East Timor-Leste.

The President announced that he has nominated William R. Brownfield to be Ambassador to Colombia.

The President announced that he has nominated Phillip Carter III to be Ambassador to Guinea.

The President announced that he has nominated Stephen W. Porter to be a member of the National Council on the Arts.

The President announced his intention to appoint H. Gary Morse and A.J. Scribante as members of the Board of Visitors to the U.S. Air Force Academy.

The President announced his intention to appoint the following individuals as members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council: Fred S. Zeidman (Chair); Miriam Adelson; Tom A. Bernstein; Carol B. Cohen; Joel M. Geiderman; Michael J. Gerson; Zvi Gitelman; and William S. Levine.

March 16

In the morning, the President had an intelligence briefing. Later, in the Oval Office, he met with Prime Minister Bertie Ahern of Ireland.

In the afternoon, the President and Mrs. Bush traveled to Camp David, MD.

During the day, the President had separate telephone conversations with King Abdallah bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia and President Mohammed Hosni Mubarak of Egypt.

Nominations Submitted to the Senate

The following list does not include promotions of members of the Uniformed Services, nominations to the Service Academies, or nominations of Foreign Service officers.

Submitted March 12

William Herbert Heyman, of New York, to be a Director of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation for a term expiring December 31, 2007, vice Deborah Doyle McWhinney, term expired.

William Herbert Heyman, of New York, to be a Director of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation for a term expiring December 31, 2010 (re-appointment).

Anne Cahn, of Maryland, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Institute of Peace for a term expiring January 19, 2009, vice Betty F. Bumpers, term expired.

Bruce P. Jackson, of the District of Columbia, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Institute of Peace for a term expiring January 19, 2011, vice Chester A. Crocker, term expired.

Kathleen Martinez, of California, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Institute of Peace for a term expiring January 19, 2011, vice Seymour Martin Lipset, term expired.

George E. Moose, of Colorado, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Institute of Peace for a term expiring January 19, 2009, vice Mora L. McLean, term expired.

Jeremy A. Rabkin, of New York, to be a member of the Board of Directors of the U.S. Institute of Peace for a term expiring January 19, 2009, vice Barbara W. Snelling, term expired.

Dale Cabaniss, of Virginia, to be a member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority for a term of 5 years expiring July 29, 2012 (reappointment).

Carol Waller Pope, of the District of Columbia, to be a member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority for the term of 5 years expiring July 1, 2009 (re-appointment).

Withdrawn March 12

William Herbert Heyman, of New York, to be a Director of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation for a term expiring December 31, 2008, vice Thomas Waters Grant, term expired, which was sent to the Senate on January 29, 2007.

Submitted March 15

Dell L. Dailey, of South Dakota, to be Coordinator for Counterterrorism, with the rank and status of Ambassador at Large, vice Henry Crumpton.

Mark P. Lagon, of Virginia, to be Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking, with the rank of Ambassador at Large, vice John Ripin Miller, resigned.

Henry Bonilla, of Texas, to be Permanent Representative of the United States of America to the Organization of American States, with the rank of Ambassador, vice John F. Maisto, resigned.

William R. Brownfield, of Texas, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Colombia.

Phillip Carter III, of Virginia, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Guinea.

Hans G. Klemm, of Michigan, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste.

Stephen W. Porter, of the District of Columbia, to be a member of the National Council on the Arts for a term expiring September 3, 2012, vice David Gelernter, term expired.

**Checklist
of White House Press Releases**

The following list contains releases of the Office of the Press Secretary that are neither printed as items nor covered by entries in the Digest of Other White House Announcements.

Released March 9

Transcript of a press briefing by Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs Daniel W. Fisk of the National Security Council

Released March 11

Transcript of a press gaggle by Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs Daniel W. Fisk of the National Security Council and Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Tom Shannon

Released March 13

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Tony Snow and Senior Director for Western Hemisphere Affairs Daniel W. Fisk of the National Security Council

Transcript of a press briefing by Counselor to the President Dan Bartlett

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Indiana

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to California

Released March 14

Statement by the Press Secretary on disaster assistance to Iowa

Released March 15

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Tony Snow

Statement by the Press Secretary announcing that the President signed H.R. 521

Released March 16

Transcript of a press briefing by Press Secretary Tony Snow

Statement by the Press Secretary: Senegalese Elections

Fact sheet: Four Years Later: New Strategy Requires Patience and Determination

**Acts Approved
by the President**

Approved March 15

H.R. 521 / Public Law 110-12
To designate the facility of the United States
Postal Service located at 2633 11th Street in
Rock Island, Illinois, as the “Lane Evans Post
Office Building”