

Week Ending Friday, November 9, 2007

The President's Radio Address

November 3, 2007

Good morning. On Tuesday, the Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to vote on Judge Michael Mukasey's nomination to be our next Attorney General. I thank the committee for scheduling this vote. I urge them to approve this fine man's nomination and send it to the full Senate as quickly as possible.

In a time of war, it is vital for the President to have a full national security team in place, and the Attorney General is a key member of that team. The Attorney General is America's top law enforcement officer, with critical responsibilities for preventing terrorist attacks and protecting our Nation.

Judge Mukasey is uniquely qualified to fill this vital role. He served nearly two decades on the Federal bench, and some of his most important legal experience is in the area of national security. He presided over the trial of the terrorist known as "the Blind Sheikh" and his codefendants in the conspiracy to destroy prominent New York City landmarks, including the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center.

And when the World Trade Center was attacked again on September the 11th, 2001, Judge Mukasey quickly reopened his court, even though it was just blocks from Ground Zero. He and other judges in his district worked day and night to ensure that applications for warrants were processed, investigations could proceed, and the rule of law was upheld.

This is the kind of leader America needs to head the Department of Justice at this important moment in our history. Judge Mukasey is a man of achievement. He is a man of character. And he has been praised by Republicans and Democrats alike for his honesty, intellect, fairness, and independence.

Since I sent his nomination to the Senate, Judge Mukasey has provided nearly 6 hours of testimony. He patiently answered more than 200 questions during his hearings, and he responded promptly to nearly 500 written questions. Yet some Senators are working against his nomination because they want him to take a position on the legality of specific techniques allegedly used to question captured terrorists.

As Judge Mukasey explained in a letter to Judiciary Committee members, he cannot give such a legal opinion for several reasons. First, he does not know whether certain methods of questioning are in fact used because the program is classified; he's not been given access to that information, and therefore, he is in no position to provide an informed opinion.

Second, he does not want our professional interrogators in the field to take an uninformed opinion he has given in the course of a confirmation hearing as meaning that any conduct of theirs has put them in legal jeopardy.

Finally, he does not want an uninformed legal opinion to give terrorists a window into which techniques we may use and which we may not. That could help them train their operatives to resist questioning and withhold vital information we need to stop attacks and save lives.

Congressional leaders should not make Judge Mukasey's confirmation dependent on his willingness to make a public judgment about a classified program he has not been briefed on. If the Senate Judiciary Committee were to block Judge Mukasey on these grounds, it would set a new standard for confirmation that could not be met by any responsible nominee for Attorney General. And that would guarantee that America would have no confirmed Attorney General during this time of war.

Senate leaders should move Judge Mukasey's nomination out of committee and

bring it to the Senate floor for an up-or-down vote. In this time of war, America needs the best people leading our efforts to protect the American people. With Judge Mukasey serving as Attorney General, our national security team will be stronger—and the Senate should confirm this good man as quickly as possible.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7 a.m. on November 2 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on November 3. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 2 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Medal of Freedom

November 5, 2007

The President. Good morning. Laura and I are thrilled to welcome you to the White House. We welcome the Members of Congress, the members of the Cabinet, and other distinguished guests. It's an honor to be with the Medal of Freedom recipients as well as their family members and friends. We're sure glad you're here.

The Medal of Freedom is the highest civil honor that a President can bestow. By an Executive order of John F. Kennedy, the medal is designed to recognize great contributions to national security, the cause of peace and freedom, science, the arts, literature, and many other fields. The eight men and women came to this distinction by very different paths. Each of them, by effort and by character, has earned the respect of the American people and holds a unique place in the story of our time.

Our first honoree, Dr. Gary Becker, once said, "Many intellectuals, many economists use obscure language when they write. Sometimes it's a way of disguising that they are not saying a heck of a lot." This economist, however, is different. Gary Becker's many books and articles and his 19 years as a weekly columnist have provided—proved him to be a thinker of originality and clarity.

Dr. Becker has shown that economic principles do not just exist in theory. Instead, they help to explain human behavior in fields well beyond economics. He has shown that by applying these principles to public policy, we can make great strides in promoting enterprise and public safety, protecting the environment, improving public schools, and strengthening the family. Dr. Becker has explained, as well, the real value of investing in human capital. He knows full well that an educated and well-trained workforce adds to the vigors of our economy and helps raise the standard of living for all of us.

This longtime professor at the University of Chicago has helped train hundreds of talented economists. He has been a wise and challenging presence in the lives of his students, and they remain devoted to him. One close friend said, "A 15-minute conversation with Gary Becker can change your thinking forever." He is without question one of the most influential economists of the last hundred years. With today's honor, he is one of only two persons to have received both the Nobel Prize in Economics and the Medal of Freedom. The other was the late Milton Friedman. And I know that today Dr. Friedman would be very proud of his friend and student and colleague, Dr. Gary Becker. Congratulations.

The Medal of Freedom for Oscar Elias Biscet will be accepted this morning by his son, Yan Valdes. His daughter, Winnie, is also present. Dr. Biscet is not with us today because he is a political prisoner of the regime in Havana. This ceremony at the White House is being broadcast live into Cuba. To the citizens of that land, I send the respect and good wishes of the United States.

Oscar Biscet is a healer known to 11 million Cubans as a physician, a community organizer, and an advocate for human rights. For two decades, he has told the world what he has seen in Cuba: the arrogance of a one-party state; the suppression of political dissent; the coercion of expectant mothers. For speaking the truth, Dr. Biscet has endured repeated harassment, beatings, and detentions. The international community agrees that Dr. Biscet's imprisonment is unjust, yet the regime has refused every call for his release.