

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:56 p.m. at the National Building Museum. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Rick Perry of Texas, chairman, Republican Governors Association, who introduced the President; Gov. Matt Blunt of Missouri, vice chairman, and Gov. Mark Sanford of South Carolina, dinner chairman, Republican Governors Association; former Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson; former Attorney General John Ashcroft; former Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge; former Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Christine Todd Whitman; former U.S. Ambassador to Canada Argeo Paul Cellucci; former Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns; Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael O. Leavitt; Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne; Secretary of Agriculture Edward T. Schafer; Gov. Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., of Indiana; Gov. Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., of Utah; and Gov. Bobby Jindal of Louisiana.

Remarks to the Leon H. Sullivan Foundation

February 26, 2008

Thanks for coming. I appreciate the warm welcome. Last Thursday, Laura and I returned from a 6-day visit to Africa. It happened to be her fifth visit and my second. Without a doubt, this was the most exciting, exhilarating, uplifting trip I've taken since I've been the President. It was an unbelievable experience.

And I want to thank the Sullivan Foundation for letting me come by to visit with you about the trip. And I appreciate the good work they're doing on behalf of the people on the continent of Africa. Hope, thank you very much for introducing me and inviting me back. It's always an honor to be with Andrew Young, chairman of the board of directors of Leon Sullivan.

By the way, I should have recognized Carl Masters, your husband—[laughter]. That was a major faux pas, just like I should have recognized that my wife, unfortunately, is not here, but she sends her very best regards.

I do appreciate very much Ambassador Howard Jeter for his service to the United States. I thank the members of the Leon H. Sullivan Foundation who are with us. Pleased to see members of the diplomatic corps who have joined us.

I'm honored that Congressman Donald Payne, who is the chairman of the Africa and Global Health Subcommittee, has joined us today. Thank you for coming, Mr. Chairman. He's knowledgeable about the issues on the continent of Africa, and that's good. And I want to thank you for your interest and your diligence. Sheila Jackson Lee—she's supposed to be here. If she's not here, I'll give her an excused absence—after all, she is from Texas.

I appreciate so very much Jendayi Frazer. She is a—[applause]. I probably won't have to say anything else. [Laughter] She's been awesome to work with, in putting this strategy in place.

I appreciate very much Rear Admiral Tim Ziemer. He's in charge of the malaria initiative. Admiral Ziemer, he's a no-nonsense guy. I hope people have come to realize I am too. I'm not interested in promises; I'm interested in results. That's why I went to Africa, to see results firsthand. Admiral Ziemer, we're getting great results on the malaria initiative thanks to your leadership.

Lloyd Pierson, President and CEO of the African Development Foundation—appreciate your leadership, Lloyd. Jody Olsen, Deputy Director of the Peace Corps—[applause]—contain yourselves. [Laughter] Although, I'll tell you—it's not a part of this speech, but I had a wonderful lunch with Peace Corps volunteers in Ghana. Our Peace Corps is full of compassionate, hard-working, decent people who are serving America on the frontlines of compassion. And I really can't thank the Peace Corps enough.

Last time we met was at your summit in Nigeria, and that was during my first trip to Africa. You know, things have changed in Africa since then, I mean, striking changes. These changes are the result of a new generation of African leaders. They're reformers who are determined to steer their nations toward freedom and justice, prosperity and peace. They're also the result of new American policy and new American commitments.

In my first term, we more than doubled development assistance to Africa. And at the beginning of my second term, I asked the United States Congress to double our assistance again. It is an important commitment that Congress can make. I'm looking forward

to working to get these budgets out, Mr. Chairman.

America is on a mission of mercy. We're treating African leaders as equal partners. We expect them to produce measurable results. We expect them to fight corruption and invest in the health and education of their people and pursue market-based economic policies. This mission serves our security interests. People who live in chaos and despair are more likely to fall under the sway of violent ideologies. This mission serves our moral interests. We're all children of God, and having the power to save lives comes with the obligation to use it.

This mission rarely makes headlines in the United States. But when you go to Africa, it is a visible part of daily life, and there's no doubt that our mission is succeeding. You see it when you hold a baby that would have died of malaria without America's support. You see it when you look into the eyes of an AIDS patient who has been brought back to life. You see it in the quiet pride of a child going to school for the first time. And you see that turning away from this life-changing work would be a cause for shame.

The best argument for our development programs is found in the people they benefit. So with the help of our fabulous White House photographers, I have assembled a slideshow—[laughter]—of images from our visit. And this morning it is my pleasure to share it with you.

[At this point, a slideshow was shown.]

Our first stop was to the western African nation of Benin, where we touched down on a Saturday morning. Benin is a vibrant democracy with a rich history. It has a wise and determined leader in President Yayi. I was proud to be the first sitting American President to visit the country.

At the airport, we were greeted by women and children wearing traditional dress, and they were dancing and playing drums. And they brought several hand-painted signs that the American people need to look at: "Benin people and his President thank the whole U.S. people." "Beninese people will remember forever."

President Yayi and I had a productive meeting. He told me that the malaria initia-

tive and our \$307 million Millennium Challenge compact are helping alleviate poverty and save lives in his country. And I told him that America's support is a reflection of his commitment to govern justly and to tackle problems head on. I congratulated him on his effort to fight malaria, which apparently includes a national awareness day called George W. Bush Day. [Laughter] I pointed out to him that hasn't even happened in Texas. [Laughter]

While President Yayi and I had our discussion, Laura and Mrs. Yayi met with girls who have received scholarships through our Africa Education Initiative. In Benin, these scholarships cover the cost of school supplies, such as uniforms and books and oil lanterns that allow students to read at night. Many of these girls are the first in their family to complete primary school. And their plans didn't stop there. Three girls told Laura that their goal is to become the first woman President of Benin.

Laura and I left Benin impressed by the energy and determination of its people. Benin is an optimistic, it is a confident, and it is a capable nation. And it was a great place to begin our visit to Africa.

Our next stop was Tanzania. We were met by President Kikwete and Mrs. Kikwete as well as Tanzanians. They were dancing, and they were playing great music. And there was also some unexpected fashion. [Laughter] I thought the dresses were pretty stylish. [Laughter] But my good wife reminded me that I shouldn't expect to see them flying off the shelves in American stores anytime soon. [Laughter]

As we drove from the airport to our hotel, there were tens of thousands of people who lined the motorcade route to show their gratitude to the American people. And many of them were smiling, and they were waving, and they were holding flags. It was an unbelievable—unbelievable sight.

Sunday morning began with a meeting with President Kikwete at the State House. The President told me that relations between our nations are the best they have ever been. He said that America's support is helping Tanzania improve education and fight HIV/AIDS and dramatically reduce malaria. He gave me a memorable gift. Laura said we

probably need another pet. [Laughter] I'm worried that Barney might be slightly intimidated.

Following our meeting, we signed the largest Millennium Challenge compact in the history of the program. The \$698 million agreement will support Tanzania's efforts to improve transportation and energy and its water supply. At a news conference, I again called for Congress to reauthorize the Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, to maintain the principles that have made it a success, and to double our initial commitment to \$30 billion over the next 5 years. Then President Kikwete jumped in to say—and I want to quote him on this—“If this program is discontinued or disrupted, there would be so many people who lose hope; certainly, there will be death. My passionate appeal is for PEPFAR to continue.” I couldn't agree more with the President. And I hope every Member of the United States Congress hears that appeal.

They should also hear about the HIV/AIDS clinic at the Amana District Hospital, where Laura and I visited with the President and Mrs. Kikwete on Sunday afternoon. The clinic opened in 2004 with support from PEPFAR. And two thoughts struck me on the visit. First, this program is saving lives; there are tangible results. When I visited sub-Saharan Africa in 2003, 50,000 people were receiving medicine to treat HIV/AIDS. When I visited again last week, the number had grown to more than 1.3 million.

At the clinic, we visited with a man and woman who learned they had HIV while they were dating but went on to get treatment, get married, and have a little baby boy who is HIV-free. We saw many others who have new hope because of PEPFAR, including a 9-year-old girl who is HIV-positive. She was smiling at the clinic with her grandmother because—sitting at the clinic with her grandmother because her mom and dad had died of AIDS. For the past year, Catholic Relief Services has been paying for the girl to receive treatment at the clinic. And I want to tell you what her grandmother said: “As a Muslim, I never imagined that a Catholic group would help me like that. I am so grateful to the American people.”

The second important point is that PEPFAR is allowing African nations to lay the foundation for a health system that does more than treat HIV/AIDS. When patients report to the clinic, they are given a series of tests, they get results quickly from a laboratory on site, and they can receive treatment in the same place. I was struck by the devotion and the professionalism of the clinic's staff. They spoke proudly about the rigorous training they received and the meticulous way they instruct patients on how to take their medicine. One nurse said PEPFAR funds are helping them to treat more patients while providing more privacy. This is helping extend lives, reduce the stigma of HIV/AIDS, and build the health infrastructure that will save many more lives in the future.

On Monday, we traveled to the northern part of Tanzania. We passed Mount Kilimanjaro and drove past a lot of people who were lining the street on the way to the city of Arusha. Of course, that's where the Sullivan Foundation is going to have its next meeting. You'll like it up there. [Laughter] And the people will like seeing you.

It's also on the frontlines of Tanzania's fight against malaria. Laura and I visited the Meru District Hospital, and we saw moms and babies that were overcoming this disease. When new mothers bring their babies, the hospital immediately tests them for malaria and HIV. Nurses distribute bed net vouchers, which mothers can use to buy insecticide-treated bed nets from local retailers at a 75-percent discount. I was concerned about the 75-percent discount, and so I announced a new effort, and that is to distribute an additional 5.2 million bed nets free of charge. And that would be enough for every child in Tanzania between the ages of 1 and 5. It is irresponsible to sit on the sidelines knowing that young babies are needlessly dying across the continent of Africa and elsewhere. And I was really pleased to be able to kick off this new initiative by handing out bed nets to this young mother.

So it made sense to go to the local factory where the bed nets are produced—called A to Z Textiles. On the floor of the newly opened facility, we saw the nets produced in a clean, safe working environment. The owner explained that the factory employs

1,200 local workers. If we're helping projects in Africa, we want those projects to employ people from the country in which we're helping. And the vast majority of those workers are women.

He takes great pride in supplying bed nets to Zanzibar, where the percentage of infants—I want you to hear this—where the percentage of infants infected with malaria has dropped from about 20 percent to less than 1 percent in 2 years. He called America—the American people's efforts to fight malaria “a godsend.” And I agree. I thanked him for his good work and was honored to see stacks of these lifesaving nets bearing the name of the United States of America.

In the afternoon, we visited a Maasai girls' school, where we received an unbelievably stirring welcome from the students. This school is led by a Catholic nun—who was on my left—empowers girls who have long lacked education. The girls receive scholarships from our Africa Education Initiative. The girls sang these lyrics: “Look at us. Listen to our voices. Today we can study because of the American people.” It was a stirring anthem. We also met a group of Maasai men. These guys can flag jump. [*Laughter*] Unbelievably powerful experience for Laura and me, and it was a great way to close our visit to Tanzania.

Early Tuesday morning, we headed to Rwanda. After flying over Lake Victoria, we touched down in the beautiful city of Kigali. We were greeted by Rwanda's thoughtful and effective leader, President Paul Kagame, along with Mrs. Kagame.

Our first stop in Rwanda was to the Kigali Memorial Centre. Laura and I laid a wreath to honor the victims of the 1994 genocide. I don't know if our citizens understand this, but between 800,000 and a million people were murdered in a very short period of time. More than 250,000 are buried at this memorial, and many of them were children, who are depicted in photographs that were donated by their families. This is a moving, moving memorial. One inscription read, “Age 4. Enjoyed singing and dancing.” And then it listed the brutal way in which this young girl was murdered. The memorial is a moving reminder that evil is real and we must confront it wherever it happens.

The memorial centre is also a reminder of how far Rwanda has come in the past 14 years. During our meeting, President Kagame updated me on his country's dramatic and hopeful turnaround. Rwanda has taken bold steps to foster reconciliation, rebuild its devastated infrastructure, and to grow its economy. It is a hopeful country. And to build on this progress, the President and I signed a bilateral investment treaty, which will help attract more capital to Rwanda's dynamic economy.

We're also cooperating on matters beyond Rwanda's borders. I thanked Rwanda for being the first nation to contribute peacekeepers to Darfur. And I announced that the United States has committed \$100 million to assist African nations willing to step forward and serve the cause of peace in Darfur. I also had the honor of dedicating a new U.S. Embassy in Kigali, which is a sign of our lasting commitment and our deep friendship.

Our final stop in Rwanda was a hillside school that is supported by PEPFAR, the emergency plan. It was a really interesting experience. We met with a lot of students and their parents. You know, this is a scene at the most popular club at the school, which is the Anti-Aids Club. The students told me about their ambitious projects, which include teaching abstinence and providing HIV/AIDS testing and counseling. Abstinence may be controversial in the Halls of Congress; it is not controversial on this campus. As a matter of fact, they put a skit on for us. In it, a girl is approached by a rich man who offers her gifts in exchange for sex. She calls it a “ridiculous” proposition and says, “I'm not that kind of girl.”

Laura and I departed Kigali inspired by the courage of the Rwanda people, grateful for their hospitality, and confident in their extraordinary potential for the future.

Our fourth stop was Ghana. We received another warm welcome, with tens of thousands lining the street, including thousands of schoolchildren in their uniforms. I suspect they're really happy I came; they didn't have to go to school—[*laughter*]—at least until the motorcade passed.

President Kufuor and I met at Osu Castle. It's a striking white building on the shore of the Atlantic. For generations, the castle was

a post in the slave trade. And today, it is a seat of a proud and democratic Government. During our meeting, President Kufuor and I discussed the wide-ranging cooperation between the United States and Ghana.

After the meeting, I added a new element to our partnership, a \$350 million initiative to target neglected tropical diseases like river blindness and hookworm across the globe. Needless to say, the President really welcomed this announcement.

He spoke powerfully about the ideological struggle unfolding around the world, and he stressed the importance of America's continued engagement in Africa. Listen to his words: "If the United States should lock itself into isolationism and think it is safer, then I would say, perhaps they don't know what is coming." Wise words from a wise man.

Our next stop was a visit to the Embassy staff at the U.S. Ambassador's Residence in Accra. I think the audience was happy to see Laura and me—it seemed that way—but I know they were even more excited to see our surprise guest, reigning American Idol Jordin Sparks. This young child can sing. [Laughter] And she sang the national anthem that inspired all that were there. And I reminded people there that this spring, American Idol will again use its prominence across our TV screens to raise funds for malaria relief in Africa.

After lunch, we went to a trade fair and met local merchants who export their products to the United States through AGOA. And my predecessor gets a lot of credit for getting AGOA out of the United States Congress, and I appreciate the Congress working to extend it again. This is a good program, and it's working.

At the trade fair, we saw how the USAID helps these budding entrepreneurs secure financing and increase their access to the U.S. market. Sometimes we take entrepreneurship for granted. The spirit exists, but sometimes people just need a little help. And that's what we're doing.

One group called Global Mamas specializes in helping women entrepreneurs find new places to sell their goods. With USAID help, the company has gone from 7 employees to about 300 employees in 5 years. Those are before Global Mamas.

One woman named Esther runs a dress-making company called My Redeemer Liveth. Since the trade hub opened, she's increased her exports and more than tripled her number of employees. She told me, "I'm helping other women, and I'm helping my family too."

One of the keys to helping Africa succeed is to empower entrepreneurs. It is in our interest, as well, to open up trade and deal with subsidies and trade-distorting tariffs. And on the continent, I assured the leaders that I am firmly dedicated to coming up with a successful Doha round to make trade freer and fairer.

After the trade fair, we drove to a local school for one of the best ways you can spend a sunny afternoon, and that's watching a ball game. In this case, it was a tee-ball game. One team featured players from a local orphanage. Americans have got to know, there's a lot of orphans on the continent of Africa as a result of disease and civil strife. It's in our interests to help the orphans, and we are. They were called the Little Dragons, and we played a team from a local school that happened to be called the Little Saints. [Laughter] And we saw some very talented players.

We also met great coaches and mentors, many of them from our Embassy, who give their time to help the children improve themselves on the diamond and off. But this is more than a baseball program. This is a hopeful program. This is a program where people realize love. And this is a program where kids are able to develop aspirations and dreams. Some of them, of course, want to be big league players, but a lot of them—and they'll find out, if they can't hit the curve ball, they won't be—but a lot of them want to be doctors and pilots and engineers. One child told me, "I want to be a fashion designer." [Laughter] It's in our interests that we help people realize their dreams.

Laura spent time with Ghana's school-children. Here she is with Mrs. Kufuor. They were treated to a kindergarten performance of a song about math, and they listened to a fifth grade debate. And she opened a library. Laura is a librarian. She loves the library; she loves books. And she opened up a reading hut built with support of USAID.

And beneath the shade of the hut, she enjoyed some story time with eager young readers and a reading mascot. He's the guy on the left. [Laughter]

That evening, the President hosted a spectacular state dinner. The night ended with an impromptu dance to a traditional beat called high life. Some of us put on a better performance than others. [Laughter] That is our Ambassador. [Laughter] She was somewhat taken aback—[laughter]—as was Laura and most everybody else in the audience. [Laughter]

I'm impressed by the President of Ghana. He is an example of a leader who has made right choices for his people. And it is in our interests to support such leaders.

Early Thursday morning, we left Ghana for our final stop, which was Liberia. We were met by Africa's first democratically elected woman President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. In her office in Monrovia, the President told me about the challenges her country faces and her detailed plan to meet them. She has assembled a wise group of advisers and ministers, many of whom were educated in the United States. And I took a little time there at the meeting to thank them for leaving our wonderful country to go back home and help this young democracy not only survive but to thrive. I told the President that I admire Liberia's recovery from war and that she could count on America to continue to stand by her side. And that's a commitment we must keep.

The spirit of the Liberian people was unmistakable. We drove through the city. Again, there was some—a lot of folks lining the road, and they were cheering, and they were enthusiastic, and they were waving flags. I went to thank those who work at our Embassy, and I told them that the desire for freedom is universal. And it was interesting, the response from the Liberians in the audience, and they started shouting back, "Yes!" at the top of their lungs. They wanted America to hear their voices.

When Liberian troops trained—Liberia troops who were trained with U.S. funds marched past us—the President and me reviewing the troops—it was a proud moment. All of a sudden, you're beginning to see a force take place that will be disciplined and

serve the people as opposed to intimidating the people. It's worth our interests and efforts to help train people—these governments train force to bring stability to their countries.

But nothing sums up the new Liberia better than its approach to education. We had a roundtable at the University of Liberia. By the way, I'm pretty certain the President was educated at the University of Pennsylvania. The more people who come to be educated in the United States from abroad, the better off our country will be.

This man here is getting U.S. help to train teachers and principals to help rebuild the country's school system. I met a 15-year-old boy who was once reading well below grade level, and he didn't like going to school; that's what he said to the crowd. Both Presidents sitting there, he said, "I just didn't like going to school." And he was falling behind. And yet there's a USAID program to help students like him catch up, and now he wants to go to college. This woman I met told us that her husband left her and three children because she was illiterate. Pitiful excuse for not being—you know, standing up and being a good father. But nevertheless, it's what she said. And now she has learned to read, and she plans to go to college. And like a lot of other people we met, she wants to be the President of Liberia. [Laughter]

The progress in Liberia is real, and it is inspiring. As a Liberian official put it during a prayer at one of our ceremonies—and these are prayerful people, and they're not afraid to pray in public—the nation has passed from "the valley of despair to the buoyancy of new hope." The Liberian people have a distance to travel, but they do have an unshakable faith in liberty. And they got a faithful friend in the United States of America.

And so throughout our trip, Laura and I were overwhelmed by the outpouring of warmth and affection for the American people. Again and again, we heard the same words: "Thank you." Thank you for sparing lives from malaria and HIV/AIDS. Thank you for training teachers and bringing books to schools. Thank you for investing in infrastructure and helping our economies grow. Thank you for supporting freedom. And

thank you for caring about the people in Africa.

Americans should feel proud, mighty proud, of the work we're doing in Africa. At every stop, I told people that the source of all these efforts is the generosity of the American people. We are a nation of compassionate and good-hearted folks. We recognize the extraordinary potential of Africa. In schoolchildren waving flags on dusty roadsides to nurses caring for their patients at busy clinics to artisans selling their products in scorching heat, we saw people who have been given great challenges and responded to them with clear eyes and big hearts.

In Rwanda, a schoolteacher was discussing the fight to eradicate malaria and AIDS with her class. And she explained her attitude this way: "It can happen here." With those words, she summed up the new spirit of Africa: confident and determined and strong.

This is a spirit worthy of America's support. It is more powerful than any partisan quarrels here in our Nation's Capital. And having given our word, we must not turn back now. Congress needs to make America's commitment clear by fully and promptly funding our development programs. And Presidential candidates of both parties should make clear that engagement with Africa will be an enduring priority of the United States.

Laura and I are going to carry many fond memories from our trips to Africa. We will carry this clear conviction: With the continued support of America, the people of Africa can do more than survive; the people of Africa can succeed. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:48 a.m. at the Marriott Wardman Park Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Hope Masters, special adviser, Leon H. Sullivan Foundation, and her husband, Carlton A. Masters; Howard F. Jeter, president and chief executive officer, Leon H. Sullivan Foundation; Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi E. Frazer; President Thomas Yayi Boni of Benin and his wife, Chantal de Souza Yayi; President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete of Tanzania and his wife, Salma Kikwete; Anug Shah, owner, A to Z Textiles; President Paul Kagame of Rwanda and his wife, Jeannette Nyiramongi; President John Agyekum Kufuor of Ghana and his wife, Theresa Kufuor; entertainer Jordin Sparks; and U.S. Ambassador to Ghana Pamela E. Bridgewater.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Former Cabinet Secretaries and Senior Government Officials

February 26, 2008

I've just had a fascinating meeting with folks who have served our country nobly in the past. I thank them for coming. We got Democrats here; Republicans are here, concerned citizens. And our discussion was the trade bill with Colombia.

The trade bill is—with Colombia is a really important piece of legislation for America's national security. A stable neighborhood is in our interests. We want people to be prosperous; we want people to be free; we want people to feel comfortable about making, you know, the tough decisions that democracy requires. And the trade vote with Colombia would say a clear message to a strong democratic ally: We support you; we support you in your efforts.

A defeat of the trade bill with Colombia would send a contradictory message. It would embolden the false populism that exists on the continent. It would send a chilling signal to our allies, and it would harm national security of the United States.

We also talked about the economic benefits. Many of the Colombian goods come into our country duty free. It seems like we ought to be treated the same way by sending our products into their countries. And this will particularly benefit small businesses and farmers and ranchers.

And I want to thank you for your suggestions on how to advance this trade bill, how we can work with both Republicans and Democrats to get this trade bill out soon. It's in the Nation's interests. And a lot of time people think about trade, it's just an economic issue. In this case, it is a national security issue and one that the members of both parties must take seriously. And I repeat: If the trade bill with Colombia is defeated, it will harm the national security interests of the country.

And I thank you all for coming. I appreciate your time. Thank you for your advice.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:11 p.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building. The Office of the Press Secretary