

people. President Bush has pledged to help improve economic support programs and strengthen Palestinian democratic institutions.

The Finance Minister and I discussed President Bush's generous proposal to provide assistance to the Palestinian Authority. The Finance Minister agrees this assistance is crucial as President Abbas seeks to strengthen the mandate he earned in the January Palestinian elections.

From the Finance Minister's office we went on to the Presidential compound in Ramallah to meet with President Mahmoud Abbas. The meeting was constructive. The parties on all sides appear to appreciate the importance of a longstanding and meaningful dialog on ways to bring peace and security to the Middle East. We had a very open and candid discussion about the status of the peace process, the Palestinians' obligations under the roadmap, and the need for both sides to establish greater trust. In particular, we talked of the need to coordinate the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip so that the Palestinian Authority can reestablish a strong presence in that territory. This whole concept of coordination seemed and is so critical to that successful disengagement.

It is crucial that after that withdrawal the Palestinian Authority is able to strengthen its democratic institutions and maintain security and maintain law and order.

We discussed Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. I believe that is a courageous decision on the part of the Israelis. President Abbas expressed his concern over unilateral Israeli measures, stressing that progress toward peace should be made through dialog, bringing people together through negotiation and through coordination.

To that end, President Abbas expressed his commitment to dismantling the terrorist organizations and preventing terrorist attacks against Israel. This came up again and again. He conveyed to me his firm belief that nonviolence is the path to a Palestinian State.

In our discussions it was evident that President Abbas is a serious leader, an elected leader, but also a leader who is in a very difficult situation. His election victory gave him a strong mandate to depart from his predecessor's legacy, Arafat's legacy, of violence and terrorism. But he must also compete for that popular support with violent factions such as Hamas that continue to reject peace with Israel, and at the same time they garner support among the people by providing social services to the people. That is what President Abbas faces.

I strongly believe it is, therefore, necessary that the United States continue to support President Abbas in his efforts to transform the Palestinian Authority's reputation for cronyism, corruption, and nontransparency. We need to actively help his administration reform and strengthen the Pales-

tinian security and improve economic services. We must continue to support both economic and social services and offer a stable and peaceful alternative to the radicals that reject peace.

We also had the opportunity to talk with an independent Presidential candidate who lost in the election but garnered significant support—a physician, Dr. Mustafa Barghuti, who ran as an independent in the Presidential elections 5 months ago. He spoke of a need for a strong, viable, independent party to serve as an alternative to Hamas. Like President Abbas, he believes peace is the only path to an independent Palestinian State.

Dr. Barghuti took me on a tour of his medical relief prevention and diagnostic center for cardiovascular disease in Ramallah. It was quite impressive. It is a model he developed as a physician that he hopes, with the appropriate resources, he will be able to spread through the West Bank. We share that common bond of being physicians and had a great dialog on the importance of social services provided through health care to further build that support of this new government.

My experience in the West Bank in my meetings with the various leaders of the Palestinian Authority bolstered my belief that President Abbas is a genuine partner for peace in the Middle East. I also witnessed firsthand how the conflict has deeply affected the daily lives and routines of many Palestinians.

I take this opportunity to urge my colleagues to support President Abbas in his efforts to improve the lives of the Palestinian people and make their governing institutions more accountable and responsible to all. I am hopeful his nonviolent approach to relations with Israel will eventually lead to a viable, independent Palestinian State that is able to live side by side with Israel in peace and security for both.

I yield the floor.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business for up to 60 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee, and the last half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from the great State of Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I yield myself such time as I might use on the Democratic side.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### NUCLEAR OPTION AND ABUSE OF POWER

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, from its beginnings, America has stood for fairness, opportunity and justice. Generation after generation our Nation has been able, often with intense debates, to give greater meaning to these values in the lives of more and more of our citizens. We know today we are a better Nation when our democracy and our policies reflect these values. We are a stronger America when our actions respect those values for all our citizens especially those who are the backbone of America those—who work hard every day, who care for their families, and who love their country.

Fairness; opportunity; justice.

But what we have seen in recent years is a breach of these values in order to reward the powerful at the expense of average Americans.

Those in power passed massive tax breaks for the wealthy and short-changed everyone else.

They granted sweetheart deals to Halliburton Corporation in Iraq while our troops went without armor.

They let the polluters write the pollution rules for our water and our air.

They let the oil industry write the energy policy in secret meetings in the White House.

Two weeks ago, over the opposition of every Democrat in the House and Senate, they forced through a Federal budget that preserves corporate tax loopholes at the expense of college aid, and slashes Medicaid for poor mothers to pay for tax breaks for millionaires.

They twisted arms for 3½ hours in the dead of night on the floor of the House to pass by a single vote a so-called Medicare reform that lavishes billions of dollars on HMOs and drug companies at the expense of senior citizens and the disabled.

They broke the ethics rules of the House of Representatives, then changed the rules to avoid investigation.

They want to break the promise of Social Security to our citizens by privatizing it, handing it over to Wall Street, and cutting benefits for middle-income Americans.

Their actions are a setback for the cause of fairness, opportunity and justice for all.

Now, Republican leaders want to break the Senate to get their way this time with the Nation's courts.

It's not as if the Senate has failed to confirm President Bush's nominations to the Federal courts. So far, we have approved 208 of his appointments and declined to approve only 10. We have blocked only the very, very few who are so far out of the mainstream that they have no place in our Federal judiciary. And yes, we have been willing to filibuster those nominees to protect America from their extremism.

Yet, Republican leaders now propose to scuttle the very Senate rules that have protected our constitution and our citizens for more than two centuries in a no-holds-barred crusade to