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China has discovered that economic freedom leads to national wealth. The growth of economic freedom in China provides reason to hope that social, political, and religious freedoms will grow there as well. In the long run, these freedoms are indivisible and essential to national greatness and national dignity.

As our two nations work constructively across areas of common interest, we are candid about our disagreements. The growing strength and maturity of our relationship allows us to discuss our differences, whether over economic issues, Taiwan, Tibet, or human rights and religious freedom, in a spirit of mutual understanding and respect.

China is a great civilization, a great power, and a great nation. Premier Wen, when my country looks forward to—my country looks forward to working with you as China increasingly takes its place among the leading nations of the world.

The United States and China have made great progress in building a relationship that can address the challenges of our time, encourage global prosperity, and advance the cause of peace. It is my hope that your visit will further that progress.

Welcome, and thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10 a.m. on the South Portico at the White House, where Premier Wen was accorded a formal welcome with full military honors. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Premier Wen.

Remarks Following Discussions With Premier Wen Jiabao of China and an Exchange With Reporters

December 9, 2003

President Bush. Welcome. I will make a statement; the Premier will make a statement. We'll answer questions, one from the American side, one from the Chinese side, one from the American side, and one from the Chinese side.

Mr. Premier, welcome. We're going to have extensive discussions today on a lot of issues. We've just had a very friendly and candid discussion. There's no question in my mind that when China and the United States works closely together, we can accomplish a lot of very important objectives. Our relationship is good and strong, and we are determined to keep it that way for the good of our respective peoples and for the sake of peace and prosperity in the world.

So, welcome. Glad you're here.

Premier Wen. I'm very grateful towards President Bush and the U.S. Government for the kind invitation and warm hospitality.

Just now, President Bush and I had an indepth exchange of views on China-U.S. relationship and on international and regional issues of mutual interest. The discussion took place under very friendly, candid, cooperative, and constructive atmosphere, and we reached consensus on many issues.

President Bush and I both believe that the further improvement and growth of the bilateral ties between China and the U.S. will not only bring benefits for the people of the two countries but also in the interest of world peace and stability.

Thank you.

President Bush. AP man.

Taiwan

Q. Mr. President, George Gedda of AP. Given the sensitivity of the issue, do you believe the referendum planned by the Taiwanese on March 20th should be canceled?

President Bush. Someone needs to interpret that.

Let me tell you what I've just told the Premier on this issue. The United States Government's policy is "one China," based upon the three communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act. We oppose any unilateral decision by either China or Taiwan to change the status quo. And the comments and actions made by the leader of Taiwan indicate that he may be willing to make decisions unilaterally to change the status quo, which we oppose.

Why don't you call on somebody from your press.

Q. Premier Wen, what is the position of the Chinese Government on the question of Taiwan?

Premier Wen. Our fundamental policy on the settlement of the question of Taiwan is peaceful reunification and one country, two systems. We would do our utmost with utmost sincerity to bring about national unity and peaceful reunification through peaceful means.

The Chinese Government respects the desire of people in Taiwan for democracy, but we must point out that the attempts of Taiwan authorities, headed by Chen Shui-bian, are only using democracy as an excuse and attempt to resort to defensive referendum to split Taiwan away from China. Such separatist activities are what the Chinese side can absolutely not accept and tolerate.

We also want to say that so long as there is a glimmer of hope, we would not give up our efforts for peaceful reunification. We have expressed our will and determination to uphold national unity. This is for the very purpose of maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Straits. And such stability can only be maintained through unswerving opposition and firm opposition to pro-independence activities.

On many occasions and just now in the meeting as well, President Bush has reiterated the U.S. commitment to the three Sino-U.S. Joint Communiques, the "one China" principle, and opposition to Taiwan independence. We appreciate that. In particular, we very much appreciate the position adopted by President Bush toward the latest moves and developments in Taiwan, that is, the attempt to resort to referendum of various kinds as excuse to pursue Taiwan independence. We appreciate the position of the U.S. Government.

President Bush. Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, thank you. North Korea is saying they will freeze their nuclear program if the U.S. takes them off the terrorism list and provides fuel aid. Is this a worthwhile idea? And how are you going to get the six-party talks going again?

President Bush. Yes, well, we spent a lot of time talking about North Korea here. We share a mutual goal, and that is for the Korean Peninsula to be nuclear-weapons-free. I thank the Premier for China starting the six-party talks, and I will continue those talks. I think they're very important.

The goal of the United States is not for a freeze of the nuclear program. The goal is to dismantle a nuclear weapons program in a verifiable and irreversible way, and that is a clear message that we are sending to the North Koreans. And we will continue to work with China and the other countries involved to resolve this issue peacefully.

China-U.S. Relations

Q. Premier Wen, what's your reading of the status quo and the future development of China's economic relationship and trade with the United States?

Premier Wen. The expansion of China's economic cooperation and trade with the United States, as we see today, has not come by easily. Just imagine, 25 years ago, our trade was less than 2.5 billion U.S. dollars, and now the volume has exceeded 100 billion U.S. dollars. Our economic and trade

links have been conducive to the interest of our two people and two countries.

We have to admit, though, in our economic and trade relationship, problems do exist, and mainly, the U.S. trade deficit with China. The Chinese Government takes this problem seriously and has taken measures to improve the situation. Soon, in a few minutes, we will have a large group meeting with the U.S. side, and in that setting, I would make one proposal, and I will also share with President Bush five principles we think that should guide the development of economic cooperation and trade between China and the U.S.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Chen Shuibian of Taiwan. Premier Wen spoke in Chinese, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on the Resignation of Mel R. Martinez as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

December 9, 2003

Mel Martinez is a good friend and an exceptional public servant. As a refugee from Cuba, Mel came to America in search of freedom and opportunity as one of the many young children sent by their parents as part of a Catholic relief program known as Pedro Pan. As Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, he has worked tirelessly to help every American realize the promise of our country for themselves and their families. I appreciate the energy, optimism, and compassion he brought to my administration. I thank him for serving our Nation so selflessly, and Laura and I wish Mel, his wife, Kitty, and their family well.

Statement on the Resignation of John Bridgeland as Assistant to the President and Director of the USA Freedom Corps

December 9, 2003

John Bridgeland has been a valuable advisor to me for nearly 4 years. He started on the policy staff of my Presidential campaign in early 2000. Since January 20, 2001, he has faithfully served in my administration, first as Deputy Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy and Director of the Domestic Policy Council and then as Assistant to the President and the first Director of the USA Freedom Corps Office. He has worked tirelessly to strengthen a culture of service in America and to ensure that we all love our neighbors as we want to be loved ourselves. His work has had a positive and vitally important impact on government, nonprofit and community service organizations, businesses, and many men, women, and children who need a helping hand. I appreciate and thank John for his friendship and wise counsel. This good man has touched many people through his dedicated public service, and I wish him, Maureen, and their three children all the best.