

some interesting, innovative ideas that are taking place from the insurance industry to the providers to the Federal Government. And we will continue to implement transparency. And it's just the beginning. And I predict that when this—as this society becomes more transparent, as the consumers have more choice to make, you'll see better cost containment. And as we're able to contain costs, we achieve some great national objectives: One is to make sure health care is affordable, and two, make sure it's available.

I want to thank you all for coming to join us. It was an interesting discussion. Appreciate your time. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:18 p.m. in the Great Hall at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Alvaro Uribe of Colombia and an Exchange With Reporters

February 16, 2006

President Bush. Thank you all for coming. The President and I will make a statement. We'll be glad to take two questions per side.

Mr. President, *bienvenidos*. I'm glad you're here.

First of all, the President and I are friends, and we are personal friends, and we're friends of freedom as well. Every time I visit with President Uribe, I am impressed by his strength of character and his belief in the future of his country. Mr. President, I'm proud that you're here. I want to thank you for the wide-ranging discussions we have had.

The President, of course, has got trade on his mind. I've explained to him very carefully that we are interested in a trade agreement that we will negotiate in good faith. The agreement must be good for the people of Colombia, as well as the people of the United States. And I assured him that our trade negotiators will be fair in our approach.

So, Mr. President, thank you for your strength of character, and thank you for your friendship. And welcome here to the Oval Office.

President Uribe. President Bush, this meeting has been very constructive, as it always is whenever we meet. I want to thank you; I want to thank the Government; and I want to thank the Congress and the people of the United States for their permanent interest in Colombia.

Our peoples have a relationship that is historic, and it's also a relationship that is close. We also have a convergence, a convergence that is based on democratic values and the belief that democracy needs security in order to build those values.

We have been negotiating an FTA for the last 23 months. All of us have come to this negotiation in good faith, and I'm sure that we will see a conclusion. This meeting has been good for democracy, and it has been good for the interests of our people, as well as for our shared war on terror and our war against the drugs that finance that terror.

Thank you.

President Bush. I understood you. [Laughter]

President Uribe. Thank you.

President Bush. Nedra [Nedra Pickler, Associated Press].

Vice President's Hunting Accident

Q. Yes, Mr. President, do you feel it was appropriate that the Vice President didn't reveal his shooting accident until the next day, and through a private citizen? And do you think it was okay that he didn't talk to you about it, personally, until Monday?

President Bush. I thought the Vice President handled the issue just fine. He went through—and I thought his explanation yesterday was a powerful explanation. This is a man who likes the outdoors, and he likes to hunt. And he heard a bird flush, and he turned and pulled the trigger and saw his friend get wounded. And it was a deeply traumatic moment for him, and obviously for the—it was a tragic moment for Harry Whittington.

And so I thought his explanation yesterday was a very strong and powerful explanation, and I'm satisfied with the explanation he gave.

Q. But are you satisfied about the timing?

President Bush. I'm satisfied with the explanation he gave.

Mr. President is about to ask somebody to ask a question.

Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Q. Mr. President, is there going to be a free trade agreement with Colombia or not?

President Bush. *Espero que si.*

Q. *Pronto?* Soon?

President Bush. *Vamos a ver.* I spent time visiting with the President about the progress on negotiations. Free trade agreements are never easy to negotiate—*es muy dificil*—and because—there's interests. He represents the people of your country very well. He's a good negotiator, as is his trade minister. They're strong in representing the interests of the people, whether they be farmers or manufacturers. And our people are good, strong negotiators, too.

I'm very hopeful. I'm very hopeful we reach a conclusion. Trade agreements are never easy, and that's what's very important to understand. But in my judgment—and by the way, I, too, have to convince the American people of the importance of trade agreements—in my judgment an agreement with this important country, Colombia, will be a very important agreement. And so we're working hard.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Vice President's Hunting Accident

Q. Some Democrats say that this shooting episode has contributed to a perception of White House secrecy. What do you say to that, sir?

President Bush. I think people are making the wrong conclusion about a tragic accident. The Vice President was involved in a terrible accident, and it profoundly affected him. Yesterday when he was here in the Oval Office, I saw the deep concern he had about a person who he wounded. And he—again, I thought yesterday's explanation was a very strong and important explanation to make to the American people.

And now our concerns are directed toward the recovery of our friend. I knew Harry Whittington when I was the Governor of Texas, down there in Austin. He's a fine man. He's been involved in our State's politics for a long period of time. And, you know, my

concern is for Harry, and I know the Vice President feels the same way.

Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Q. President Bush, do you think the negotiators are making the link between the fact that it's important to prove legal economy as a way to fight against terror and illegal drugs?

President Bush. That's a great question. I believe that when we work together in a free trade, it strengthens markets and the appreciation for open markets, whether it be in Colombia or here at home. I believe free commerce between nations will enable countries—people in countries to realize their full potential. I think one of the things that's very important—I know the President is dedicated on—is a strategy on the one hand that says, he will deal harshly with those who deal in drugs. But he also recognizes there needs to be economic activity to compete.

We've had a lot of discussions about crop substitution and microloans for people to be able to develop ways to make a living that is distinct from and different from being involved in the drug trade.

And so absolutely we understand the connection between trade of legal products in a free way between nations as a way to compete against illegal activities. I appreciate the President's leadership on working hard to make sure that Colombia is rid of narcotrafficking. It's a great country, with a wonderful history. And the determination to rid the country of narcotrafficking will go down as a very important part of your nation's history, and we'll continue to say that Colombia is a great country with great enterprise and great hope and great opportunity.

So thank you for coming. *Adios.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Harry Whittington, chairman, Texas Funeral Service Commission, who was injured on February 11 while hunting with the Vice President on a ranch in Corpus Christi, TX; and Minister of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism Jorge Humberto Botero of Colombia. President Uribe spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Letter to the Speaker of the House of Representatives Transmitting a Request for Fiscal Year 2006 Supplemental Appropriations for Ongoing Military and Intelligence Operations and Selected Other International Activities

February 16, 2006

Dear Mr. Speaker:

Today, I am submitting a request for Fiscal Year 2006 supplemental appropriations of \$72.4 billion for ongoing military and intelligence operations in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and selected other international activities. These funds support U.S. Armed Forces and Coalition partners as we advance democracy, fight the terrorists and insurgents, and train and equip Iraqi security forces so that they can defend their sovereignty and freedom. Already more than 35 Iraqi battalions have assumed control of their own areas of responsibility. This request provides the resources necessary to continue that effort so the Coalition can continue to hand over control of more territory to Iraqi forces.

In Afghanistan, our Armed Forces continue to track down terrorists, help the Afghan people rebuild their country, and train and equip Afghan security forces so that Afghanistan may continue to take control of its democratic future. Our coalition has trained many thousands of Afghan soldiers and police. These forces are risking their lives to fight our common enemy. This request provides the resources necessary to continue the train and equip effort so Afghan forces can eventually provide for the security of their own citizens.

The request includes funds to confront the threat from Improvised Explosive Devices and to improve the protection of our forces. In addition, the request addresses the need for substantial investment to repair or replace equipment worn out or lost in military operations. It also provides additional funding to cover the costs of restructuring the Army and Marine Corps into more agile, self-sustaining units that provide increased combat effectiveness critical to winning the Global War on Terror.

The request includes bonuses and incentive pay to properly compensate American troops for the sacrifices they make in defense of freedom. It also includes funds to cover enhanced benefits for survivors of all military members and provides for newly authorized benefits for those injured in combat.

The request also provides funds for the extraordinary security and operating costs associated with supporting U.S. diplomatic activity in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The request includes funds to help create political and economic stability in post-conflict areas, help Iraqis protect and sustain their infrastructure, and build Iraqi capacity at the national and provincial levels for better, more responsive, and transparent governance. The request also supports the successful Commander's Emergency Response program that enables military commanders to respond to urgent, small-scale, humanitarian relief and reconstruction needs in their area of responsibility. These counter-insurgency and stabilization activities help build civilian capabilities to ensure the transition to greater Iraqi self-reliance. Coupling increased civilian capacity with increased military capacity is essential to sustained progress in all realms—security, political, and economic—and is essential to neutralizing the insurgents and defeating the terrorists.

Finally, the supplemental requests funds for urgent, unanticipated needs to help relieve human suffering associated with a number of humanitarian crises, including Sudan and other parts of Africa, assistance for refugees, and the costs of humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts in response to the devastating earthquake in Pakistan. The request also includes funding to address urgent democracy-promotion activities in Iran.

I hereby designate the specific proposals in the amounts requested herein as emergency requirements. This request reflects urgent and essential requirements. I ask the Congress to appropriate the funds as requested and promptly send the bill to me for signature. The details of the request are set forth in the enclosed letter from the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush