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Congress to pass it and send it to the States for ratification.

Marriage is the most enduring and important human institution, honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught us that the commitment of a husband and a wife to love and to serve one another promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society. Marriage cannot be cut off from its cultural, religious, and natural roots without weakening this good influence on society. Government, by recognizing and protecting marriage, serves the interests of all.

In our free society, people have the right to choose how they live their lives. And in a free society, decisions about such a fundamental social institution as marriage should be made by the people, not by the courts. The American people have spoken clearly on this issue, both through their Representatives and at the ballot box. In 1996, Congress approved the Defense of Marriage Act by overwhelming bipartisan majorities in both the House and Senate, and President Clinton signed it into law. And since then, voters in 19 States have approved amendments to their State constitutions that protect the traditional definition of marriage. And today, 45 of the 50 States have either a State constitutional amendment or statute defining marriage as the union of a man and a woman. These amendments and laws express a broad consensus in our country for protecting the institution of marriage.

Unfortunately, activist judges and some local officials have made an aggressive attempt to redefine marriage in recent years. Since 2004, State courts in Washington, California, Maryland, and New York have overturned laws protecting marriage in those States. And in Nebraska, a Federal judge overturned a State constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage.

These court decisions could have an impact on our whole Nation. The Defense of Marriage Act declares that no State is required to accept another State's definition of marriage. If that act is overturned by activist courts, then marriages recognized in one city or State might have to be recognized as marriages everywhere else. That would mean that every State would have to recognize marriages redefined by judges in Massachusetts or local officials in San Francisco, no matter what their own laws or State constitutions say. This national question requires a national solution, and on an issue of such profound importance, that solution should come from the people, not the courts.

An amendment to the Constitution is necessary because activist courts have left our Nation with no other choice. The constitutional amendment that the Senate will consider next week would fully protect marriage from being redefined, while leaving State legislatures free to make their own choices in defining legal arrangements other than marriage. A constitutional amendment is the most democratic solution to this issue, because it must be approved by two-thirds of the House and Senate and then ratified by three-fourths of the 50 State legislatures.

As this debate goes forward, we must remember that every American deserves to be treated with tolerance, respect, and dignity. All of us have a duty to conduct this discussion with civility and decency toward one another, and all people deserve to have their voices heard. A constitutional amendment will put a decision that is critical to American families and American society in the hands of the American people, which is exactly where it belongs. Democracy, not court orders, should decide the future of marriage in America.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:30 a.m. on June 2 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on June 3. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 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 Following Discussions With President Denis Sassou-Nguesso of the Republic of the Congo

June 5, 2006

President Bush. It's been my honor to welcome the President of the Congo here to the Oval Office. Mr. President, welcome. Thank you for coming. I welcome you not

only as the President of your country but as a leader of the African Union.

We had a very constructive discussion about a variety of issues. We talked about our common commitment to help end the genocide in Darfur. I appreciate the President's leadership in helping negotiate a peace agreement, and I appreciate his leadership in working with the United Nations so we can get the AU forces blue-helmeted as quickly as possible.

And one of my interests, of course, is to join with African nations in combating HIV/AIDS, and I want to congratulate the President for the low infection rate in Congo. Thank you for your leadership on that issue.

We've had a very good visit here, and I look forward to seeing you in St. Petersburg, Russia, where we can continue our discussions. So, welcome.

President Sassou-Nguesso. I, first of all, thank you, Mr. President, and I want to say to everyone that I'm very happy and honored to be here, actually for the second time, because in 1990, President Bush—father of President Bush now—welcomed me to this house on a state visit. So I'm very happy to be here, Mr. President.

Indeed, President Bush is absolutely right; we discussed a lot of issues that we're all interested in: peace, security, and not just in Africa, but beyond Africa, in the world. We talked about terrorism; we talked about the Iranian nuclear issue; we talked about the dialog that's about to open up, I hope, and that will bring good results to that problem.

And on behalf of all of Africa, I thank President Bush for his commitment in fighting AIDS, the commitment of the United States in the fight against HIV/AIDS. As you know, we had a special meeting on AIDS at the United Nations General Assembly, and as you know also, Africa is the continent that suffers the most from this scourge.

And we also talked about African development issues. We talked about the situation in the Gulf of Guinea, and the Congo Basin, the NEPAD, Project for African Development in Africa. And I was happy to see President Bush give his entire support to the development of Africa.

And I'm, again, very happy with this very useful meeting that we had with President Bush here. And I'm very happy for the fact that we're going to see each other in St. Petersburg, because President Putin invited me to come to the G–8 Summit as a representative for Africa.

I thank President Bush for his very friendly and warm welcome. And I'm very happy to be here, back in the White House.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:51 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President Sassou-Nguesso spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. President Sassou-Nguesso referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Manuel Zelaya Rosales of Honduras

June 5, 2006

President Bush. Mr. President, welcome. It's good to have you here. We've had a very good discussion, as you would expect amongst friends. We discussed our common interests, and one of our common interests is expanded commercial opportunity. And CAFTA gives us a chance to realize those opportunities. We talked about our common desire to make sure the democracies in the region are strong.

We talked about the immigration issue. The President is very concerned about the immigration issue. I assured him that my administration supports a comprehensive immigration bill that treats people with respect and, at the same time, upholds our laws. And over lunch, I will give him our strategy to continue to press for a comprehensive bill that will enforce our borders but allow people to come to our country in a legal way to work on a temporary basis.

So, Mr. President, thank you. The people of America respect your country and appreciate our close ties. And we're sure glad you're here.

President Zelaya. Thank you. I have expressed my appreciation to the President. I'd like to reiterate my thanks to him for the frankness with which he has spoken about the solutions to the common problems we face in the Western Hemisphere.