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got a tax system that is transparent, open, and simple; people file their taxes over the Internet.

You're doing a fine job, Mr. Prime Minister. Proud of you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:31 a.m. at the Stenbock House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Andrus Ansip of Estonia. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

The President's News Conference With President Toomas Ilves of Estonia in Tallinn

November 28, 2006

President Ilves. Again, I'm very happy to greet the President of the United States, George W. Bush, in our fall weather here in Tallinn. Unfortunately, the weather isn't better than it is, but that's how it happens. This visit and these very open meetings that we have had, President Bush has had with me as well as with the Prime Minister, Andrus Ansip, truly prove that Estonia and the United States are close allies.

One of the main messages today was the message of freedom to those states who, like us, have chosen the way to democracy and freedom and will not bow to pressure from any of their neighbors, and by these countries we mean Georgia, Ukraine, the Balkan States. We should not hesitate to support these states. And we should not falter when any of our allies are losing hope or faith, and we will help them in every way we can.

We will also not falter in making Afghanistan more secure, where Estonian soldiers are helping to protect the welfare of Afghan citizens, again, together, hand in hand with the United States. NATO's greatest foreign operation in the post-cold-war period—it is the greatest challenge of the postwar period. It is a challenge not only for the neighbors of these countries but also for the whole world, as was proved by September the 11th.

We are hoping to strengthen the ties between European countries and the United States. Conflicts between us are minor or nonexistent, and any issues will be easy to resolve. President Bush's visit to Tallinn is taking place at a time immediately before the summit of NATO in Riga. This summit shows how far the Baltic States have developed and how strong the support of our allies is for us. We want to give a strong message at the summit, and that is that the doors to NATO are not closed and this is becoming a very mature, good organization.

And I want to tell Mr. Bush, welcome to Estonia.

President Bush. I'm proud to be the first sitting American President to visit Estonia. I'm really glad I came. Yours is a beautiful country and a strong friend and ally of the United States. I appreciate the warm welcome I've received. My only regret is that Laura is not with me. She's receiving the Christmas tree at the White House. She sends her very best, Mr. President.

We had a lot—we had a really good discussion. The President and I spent a lot of time talking about the issue of freedom and liberty and peace. I appreciate very much the leadership Estonia is providing inside NATO.

We talked about how our nations can cooperate to achieve common objectives and promote common values, values such as human dignity and human rights and the freedom to speak and worship the way one sees fit.

Estonia is a strong ally in this war on terror. I appreciate so very much the President's understanding of the need to resist tyranny. Of all the people in the world who understand what tyranny can do, it's the Estonian people. I appreciate very much the fact that Estonia is helping others resist tyranny and realize their dreams of living in a free society.

In Afghanistan, Estonians are serving as a part of NATO's International Security Assistance Force in a dangerous province that the extremists, the Taliban, seeks to control. I appreciate the fact that your forces are serving bravely, Mr. President. The people of Estonia need to be proud of their military. It's a fine military. And the commitment of your people is important to helping secure the peace.

I appreciate the troops that you have sent to Iraq. I also understand Estonian soldiers have been wounded and two soldiers have given their lives. We hold their families in our hearts. We lift them up in prayer. And

Americans are grateful to be serving alongside such brave allies.

Estonia is sharing its democratic experience with other nations. You have made a very successful transition to democracy, and you're helping other nations do the same, and that is a vital contribution to world peace. I appreciate the fact that you're training leaders from Georgia to Moldova to the Ukraine. I appreciate the assistance programs you're providing to the Afghan people. I also appreciate the fact that you work with your neighbors and through the European Union to promote freedom in this region and around the globe.

This morning the Prime Minister and I had a chance to meet as well, and he introduced me to some of your citizens who are helping to build democracies, and I thanked them for their work. We also discussed how Estonia has built a strong economy and raised the standard of living for the people. I appreciate the fact that you've got a flat tax; you got a tax system that's transparent and simple. I also am amazed by the e-governance you have here in your country. You really are on the leading edge of change, and you're setting a really strong example.

We talked about the fact that Estonians want to be able to travel to America visa-free. Both the President and the Prime Minister made this a important part of our discussions. They made it clear to me that if we're a ally in NATO, people ought to be able to come to our country in a much easier fashion. It is clear to me that this is an important issue for the Estonian people as well. I appreciate their leaders being straightforward and very frank. There's no question where they stand.

I am pleased to announce that I'm going to work with our Congress and our international partners to modify our visa waiver program. It's a way to make sure that nations like Estonia qualify more quickly for the program and, at the same time, strengthen the program's security components.

The new security component of the visa waiver program would use modern technology to improve the security regime for international travelers to and from the United States. In other words, we need to know who is coming and when they're leaving. And the more we can share information, the easier it will be for me to get Congress to make it easier for Estonians to travel to the United States.

We want people to come to our country. We understand a lot of Estonians have relatives in America. It's in our Nation's interest that people be able to come and visit, and it's important, at the same time, to make sure that those who want to continue to kill Americans aren't able to exploit the system.

I'm going to go to Riga right after our lunch. We have an ambitious agenda there. More than 50,000 NATO soldiers are providing security in six missions on three continents. These deployments have shown that our alliance remains as relevant today as it was during the height of the cold war.

Our alliance defends freedom and, so doing, helps make us all more secure. We will discuss NATO's largest deployment, and that is Afghanistan. We're partnering with Afghan security forces to defeat the Taliban and strengthen that young democracy. To succeed in Afghanistan, NATO allies must provide the forces NATO military commanders require. And I appreciate Estonia's commitment. Like Estonia, member nations must accept difficult assignments if we expect to be successful.

In Riga, we'll discuss how our alliance must build on what we have learned in Afghanistan. We will continue to transform NATO forces and improve NATO capabilities so that our alliance can complete 21st century missions successfully. The threat has changed. Our capabilities must change with the threats if NATO is to remain relevant. The President understands that, and I appreciate our discussion along those lines today.

We're also going to discuss NATO's further enlargement. By inviting qualifying democracies to join our alliance at the next NATO summit in 2008, we'll continue to build a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

I want to thank you for your hospitality again. I know the people of this country are proud of their accomplishments. The American people would be amazed at what your country has done, and I'm proud for you. And I'm proud to call you friend. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Ilves. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. Is there some questions?

U.S. Visa Policy

Q. I have a question for both Presidents. Mr. Bush, you said that you really appreciate everything that Estonia has done and that the U.S. is very interested in seeing Estonians visit your country. But you, as President, when will you be proposing to Congress this change in the visa laws to give us visa-free travel? And the second part of the question is, what should Estonia do in order to help you resolve this issue more quickly?

President Bush. ——to work on our 3-percent requirement, and at the same time, assure Members of Congress that in loosening the visa waiver issue, or changing the visa waiver issue, that we'll still be able to protect our country from people who would exploit the visa waiver program to come to our country to do harm. And that process is beginning shortly.

President Ilves. And I may add that Estonia is constantly—has been raising this question. I had a very long discussion, even back when I was a delegate in European Parliament. I would say that we have come quite a long way from the time we started these discussions 2 years ago with Nick Burns, and we are prepared when the security requirements have been clarified, have been explained, then we will be able to implement them in our passports. And that is simply a technical problem, but it is resolvable.

President Bush. Are you going to call on anybody?

Russia-Georgia Relations

Q. First, my respect to both of you, Mr. Bush, Mr. Ilves. A question for Mr. Bush: You said that you discussed with Mr. Ilves the situation in Georgia. Estonia and the United States have helped in the development of this country of Georgia, and we are hoping to see some progress—in this country. But the conflict between Russia and Georgia is putting a stop to this. What do you think we should do to help resolve this conflict between Russia and Georgia?

President Bush. Precisely what we ought to do is help resolve the conflict and use our diplomats to convince people there is a better way forward than through violence. We haven't seen violence yet. The idea is to head it off in the first place. I spoke to Vladimir Putin about this very subject when I saw him in the Far East last week. I know that the President has spoken with President Saakashvili as well. The tenor of the conversation appears to be improving to me, that people understand that the best way to resolve their differences is to sit down at the table and solve them diplomatically. And so we'll continue to work along those lines.

I don't know if you want to add anything to that.

President Ilves. Briefly, just that we sincerely hope that Russia will understand that a democratic state on its borders is not a danger to Russian security. And we hope Russia will understand that authoritarian states at its borders will not guarantee its own stability.

President Bush. That's Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press], AP. Yes, Deb.

War on Terror/Democracy in the Middle East

Q. Mr. President, thank you, sir. What is the difference between what we're seeing now in Iraq and civil war? And do you worry that calling it a civil war would make it difficult to argue that we're fighting the central front of the war on terror there?

President Bush. You know, the plans of Mr. Zarqawi was to foment sectarian violence. That's what he said he wanted to do. The Samarra bombing that took place last winter was intended to create sectarian violence, and it has. The recent bombings were to perpetuate the sectarian violence. In other words, we've been in this phase for awhile. And the fundamental objective is to work with the Iraqis to create conditions so that the vast majority of the people will be able to see that there's a peaceful way forward.

The bombings that took place recently was a part of a pattern that has been going on for about 9 months. I'm going to bring this subject up, of course, with Prime Minister Maliki when I visit with him in Jordan on Thursday. My questions to him will be: What do we need to do to succeed? What is your strategy in dealing with the sectarian violence? I will assure him that we will continue

to pursue Al Qaida to make sure that they are unable to establish a safe haven in Iraq.

I will ask him: What is required and what is your strategy to be a country which can govern itself and sustain itself? And it's going to be an important meeting, and I'm looking forward to it.

Q. ——people who are saying that we're moving forward to a full war are wrong?

President Bush. Deb, there's all kinds of speculation about what may be or not happening. What you're seeing on TV has started last February. It was an attempt by people to foment sectarian violence, and no—no question, it's dangerous there and violent. And the Maliki Government is going to have to deal with that violence, and we want to help them do so. It's in our interest that we succeed. A democracy in the heart of the Middle East is an important part of defeating the radicals and totalitarians that can't stand the emergence of a democracy.

One of the interesting things that's taking place—and people have got to understand what's happening—is, when you see a young democracy beginning to emerge in the Middle East, the extremists try to defeat its emergence.

That's why you see violence in Lebanon. There's a young democracy in Lebanon run by Prime Minister Siniora. And that Government is being undermined, in my opinion, by extremist forces encouraged out of Syria and Iran. Why? Because a democracy will be a major defeat for those who articulate extremist points of view.

We're trying to help get a democracy started in the Palestinian Territory. Prime Minister Olmert has reached out, at one point, to Prime Minister Abbas—or President Abbas. And you know what happens as soon as he does that? Extremists attack, because they can't stand the thought of a democracy. And the same thing is happening in Iraq. And it's in our mutual interest that we help this Government succeed.

And no question, it's tough, Deb; no question about it. There's a lot of sectarian violence taking place, fomented, in my opinion, because of these attacks by Al Qaida, causing people to seek reprisal. And we will work with the Maliki Government to defeat these elements.

By far, the vast majority of the people want to live in peace. Twelve million people voted. They said, "We want to live under a Constitution which we approved." And our objective must be to help them realize their dreams. This is the—this is an important part of an ideological struggle that is taking place here in the beginning of the 21st century. And the interesting contribution that a country like Estonia is making is that, people shouldn't have to live under tyranny—"We just did that; we don't like it." They understand that democracies yield peace. This President is a strong advocate for democracies, because he understands. He understands what it means to live under subjugation, and he understands the hope that democracy brings to regions of the world. And I appreciate your steadfast leadership.

Toby [Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters]. Last question?

Q. Yes.

President Bush. I'll follow your instructions.

Iran-Iraq Relations

Q. Mr. President, would direct talks between the United States and Iran and Syria help stem the violence in Iraq? And would you agree to such a step?

President Bush. I think that, first of all, Iraq is a sovereign nation which is conducting its own foreign policy. They're having talks with their neighbors. And if that's what they think they ought to do, that's fine. I hope their talks yield results. One result that Iraq would like to see is for the Iranians to leave them alone. If Iran is going to be involved in their country, they ought to be involved in a constructive way, encouraging peace. That is the message that the Iranians—the Iraqis have delivered to the Iranians. That's the message that Prime Minister Maliki has made clear, that he expects the neighbors to encourage peaceful development of the country.

As far as the United States goes, Iran knows how to get to the table with us, and that is to do that which they said they would do—which is verifiably suspend their enrichment programs. One of the concerns that I have about the Iranian regime is their desire to develop a nuclear weapon, and you ought

to be concerned about it too. The idea of this regime having a nuclear weapon by which they could blackmail the world is unacceptable to free nations. And that's why we're working through the United Nations to send a clear message that the EU–3 and the United States, Russia, and China do not accept their desires to have a nuclear weapon.

There is a better way forward for the Iranian people. And if they would like to be at the table discussing this issue with the United States, I have made it abundantly clear how they can do so, and that is verifiably suspend the enrichment program. And then we'll be happy to have a dialog with them.

But as far as Iraq goes, the Iraqi Government is a sovereign government that is capable of handling its own foreign policies and is in the process of doing so. And they have made it abundantly clear, and I agree with them, that the Iranians and the Syrians should help, not destabilize this young democracy.

Thank you.

President Ilves. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11 a.m. at the National Bank of Estonia. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Putin of Russia; President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia; Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq; Prime Minister Fuad Siniora of Lebanon; Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel; and President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) of the Palestinian Authority. President Ilves spoke in Estonian, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Lunch Hosted by President Toomas Ilves of Estonia in Tallinn

November 28, 2006

Mr. President, thank you very much, and, Mr. Prime Minister, thank you as well for your gracious hospitality. I'm really thrilled to be here in Estonia. I love being in a country that values liberty and freedom. I appreciate being in a country that understands there are duties and obligations beyond her border to help others realize the benefits of liberty and freedom. I'm very proud of your military, and I'm pleased to be in the presence of those who wear the uniform of Estonia. I know our military has great respect for the Estonian soldiers.

I am amazed to be in a country that has been able to effect a flat tax in such a positive way. I am impressed by the e-governance that you have here in Estonia.

All in all, this has been a very worthwhile and exciting visit for me, and I thank you for your warm hospitality. And I'd like to raise my glass to the leadership of this important country, to our friendship, and most importantly, to the people of Estonia.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:42 a.m. in the Estonian Theater. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Andrus Ansip of Estonia. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Ilves. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia in Riga, Latvia

November 28, 2006

President Vike-Freiberga. Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's been a great pleasure to have the President of the United States here in Riga for the second time in less than 2 years. And I expressed how delighted we are to be receiving him and his delegation here on the occasion of the Riga 2006 summit.

The United States has been our strong supporter all those years when Latvia was not free, has been our supporter after we regained our independence, and I'm most grateful to the United States for the understanding and support we got in our direction and our movement towards NATO. Now that we are fully members, Latvians certainly sleep better at night knowing that they are protected by an alliance that will spare them the sorts of experiences they had in earlier years.

But of course I'm delighted to be welcoming the President of the United States as the representative of what still remains as a shining example of the free world, of the sort of success one can achieve in a country