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people of good will to come together to help make recommendations on how to deal with a very serious situation.

And we applaud your work. I will take it very seriously, and we'll act on it in a timely fashion. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:58 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, cochairs, Iraq Study Group. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Oscar Arias Sanchez of Costa Rica

December 6, 2006

President Bush. Mr. President, welcome. I'm glad to welcome you back to the White House. I appreciate the very important discussions we had. Our discussions started with the bilateral relationship between the United States and Costa Rica. It is an important relationship. It's an important relationship when it comes to trade; it's an important relationship when it comes to interchanges between our governments and our peoples.

Mr. President, you spent a lot of time talking about the importance of education, and I respect you for that, and I appreciate your emphasis on education. And we will investigate ways to determine whether or not the United States can help, if you so desire, on matters of education. And I congratulate you on being very successful in educating the younger children of your country. And I, again, admire your focus on extending the education through all grades in Costa Rica.

Secondly, we spent time on CAFTA. It's an important initiative for this administration. I appreciate your dedication to the issue of trade. The President understands full well that trade is the best way to help reduce poverty around the world, and so he made it clear to me his deep desire for the United States to take the lead on the Doha round of the trade discussions, which I assured him we would.

I appreciated very much your advice, Mr. President, on the neighborhood in which we live. I thank you for your clear vision when it comes to forms of government. And I appreciate you sharing with me your insights as to the different countries and different leaders and how best that we can work together to achieve peace and stability.

It's an honor to have you here, sir. You represent a fine country that a lot of Americans have had firsthand knowledge with. And I'm proud to welcome you.

President Arias Sanchez. Well, thank you, Mr. President, for your time. This room is familiar to me. I visited the Oval Office in the past, during the Reagan years and when President Bush was President. I was telling President Bush that in the past, every time I came to the White House, it was not to talk about Costa Rica, but about Nicaragua, and I'm very happy that we had a chance to talk about Costa Rica this time.

And as he just mentioned, my country is a small country—we produce what we do not consume, and we consume what we do not produce. This is why trade is so important to us. Costa Rica is a very open economy, is the second-largest open economy in this hemisphere, after Chile. And this is why CAFTA is important to us and this is why we're so determined to approve CAFTA, ratify CAFTA in our Congress as soon as possible. And we are in the process of initiating negotiations with the European Union about free trade agreement with the whole of Europe, the European Union.

Concerning education, this is my priority. Peace was my priority 20 years ago; now it's education. I was asking President Bush that his program, No Child Left Behind, could be applied in many Latin American countries. You are all aware that what explains our failures, among other things, is the fact that average schooling in Latin American countries is only 6½ years, and that explains the social inequality and the poverty of our people.

So at the beginning of the 21st century, we're going to spend more on education, which is my dream and my determination to spend as much as 8 percent of GDP on education. We are simply condemning our children to remain poor as their grandfathers—and this is something that certainly the people of Latin America don't deserve.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Glad you're here. Good job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:41 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Members of Congress

December 6, 2006

I've just met with Members of Congress from both political parties. My message is this: I want to work with the Congress; I want to work with people in both parties, so that we can send a message to the American people that the struggle for freedom, the struggle for our security is not the purview of one party over the other. The American people want us to work together, and my intention is to do just that.

Today the Baker-Hamilton Commission, the Iraq Study Group put out what I thought was a very interesting report. There's some very good ideas in there. Not all of us around the table agree with every idea, but we do agree that it shows that bipartisan consensus on important issues is possible—really important for the American people to know that there are people of good will here in town willing to set aside politics and focus on the security of this country and the peace of the world.

And I want to thank you all for taking time out of your schedules to come. It means a lot to me, and I think it means a lot to the American people, to recognize that there are people in this town who are concerned more about the security of this country than they are about the security of their own political positions. And I'm proud to be with you. And I want to thank you for your thoughts. I take your comments very seriously. I take your ideas very seriously. And it's important to me that we continue to hear from the Congress as we fashion a way—a new way forward in Iraq, a new look, to achieve our objective of a country which can sustain itself, govern itself, defend itself, and be an ally in this war against extremism and terrorism.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:27 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Statement on Senate Confirmation of Robert M. Gates To Be the Secretary of Defense

December 6, 2006

I am pleased the Senate has overwhelmingly voted to confirm Dr. Robert Gates as the next Secretary of Defense. In his confirmation hearing, Dr. Gates demonstrated he is an experienced, qualified, and thoughtful man who is well respected by members of both parties and is committed to winning the war on terror. Throughout his career, Dr. Gates has transformed the organizations he has led and empowered them to successfully address complex issues. I am confident that his leadership and capabilities will help our country meet its current military challenges and prepare for emerging threats of the 21st century.

I thank Chairman Warner and Ranking Member Levin for leading dignified and constructive hearings, and I thank the Senate for moving quickly on this nomination.

Executive Order 13417—Establishing an Emergency Board To Investigate Disputes Between Metro-North Railroad and Certain of Its Employees Represented by Certain Labor Organizations

December 6, 2006

Disputes exist between Metro-North Railroad (Metro-North) and certain of its employees represented by certain labor organizations. The labor organizations involved in these disputes are designated on the attached list, which is made a part of this order.

The disputes have not heretofore been adjusted under the provisions of the Railway Labor Act, as amended, 45 U.S.C. 151 *et. seq*. (RLA).

A party empowered by the RLA has requested that the President establish an emergency board pursuant to section 9A of the RLA (45 U.S.C. 159a).