AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

democracies trying to take hold, whether it be Iraq or Lebanon or in the Palestinian Territories?

And the call for nations such as ourselves is to support those who want to live in freedom. Freedom is the great alternative to the ideology of people who murder the innocent to achieve their political objectives—by the way, the very same ones that came and killed 3,000 of our citizens.

And so what I'm telling you is—let me end this press conference by telling you this: I have a partner in peace, somebody who has clear vision, basic values, who is willing to take tough positions to achieve peace. And so when you ask, am I comfortable with the Sarkozy Government sending messages, you bet I'm comfortable.

Mr. President, thanks for coming. I appreciate you being here

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:12 p.m. at the Mount Vernon Estate. In his remarks, he referred to President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan; Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Bernard Kouchner of France; and Parliament Member Sa'ad Hariri and Speaker of Parliament and National Assembly President Nabih Berry of Lebanon. President Sarkozy referred to Minister of Economy, Finance, and Employment Christine Lagarde and Minister of Justice and Keeper of the Seals Rachida Dati of France. President Sarkozy and some reporters spoke in French, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Following a Visit With Wounded Troops at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas

November 8, 2007

Thank you all very much for having me here today. If anybody were to come to this center, they would have to leave inspired and thankful, inspired by the service men and women who are recovering from wounds with such courage; thankful that there are instructors and preachers and volunteers who are helping these people get back on their feet and getting their lives together.

This center was funded entirely by contributions of more than 600,000 Americans through what's called the Intrepid Fallen Heroes Fund. This center is a tribute to the generosity of the American people. Make no mistake about it, the American people support the men and women who wear our Nation's uniform. This center is a testament to our deep belief that someone wounded in the defense of America needs all the help he or she can get. The service men and women here have borne the burdens of battle. They have kept our country safe. We honor them and their families by helping them with all we can.

I am here to highlight one of the world's top rehabilitation facilities, right here in my home State of San Antonio, Texas. It's a partnership between the private sector and the Federal Government. The Center for the Intrepid makes use of the best available technologies to give severely injured service members and amputees the opportunity to lead full and productive lives. That's the mission. The mission is to take a good man who I've met before and help him live a full and productive life.

This facilities include a pool, a—where's my man; there he is—a wave runner—by the way, this guy from Oklahoma handled those waves pretty well—an indoor running track, a two-story climbing wall, a prosthesis center, a virtual driving program that teaches patients how to control an automobile—that was my driver, right there—a fully furnished apartment that helps patients learn to adjust to disabilities in the real-life world.

This center also provides compassionate support for the families. The Fisher House Program—and I want to thank the Fishers for joining us today—provides onsite housing for up to 57 families, who—they're here to visit their injured loved ones. The Fisher family, that has supported the Fisher Houses, is a remarkable family, and these good folks represent the true spirit of America, people coming forth to help a neighbor in need. Real proud you both are here.

Medical advances have enabled facilities such as this one to provide wounded warriors with care that would have been unimaginable just a decade ago. The technology that's being used here is state of the art. Our system for managing the care, however, has fallen behind. The technology has advanced; our system needs to be modernized.

We have an outdated system that can bog down some of those recovering in a maze of bureaucracy. And that's what happened at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. The care at Walter Reed is fantastic. Our military doctors and nurses are some of the best in the world. The United States owes a huge debt of gratitude to the care providers at Walter Reed and at rehabilitation facilities like this one. However, there were serious problems caused by bureaucratic delays and administrative failures. And that is unacceptable. It's unacceptable to me as the Commander in Chief; it's unacceptable to the families of those who deserve the best care; and it's unacceptable to the American people.

And so at my request, I asked Senator Bob Dole, former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna Shalala to analyze the issue, to look at the problem, and to come up with specific recommendations for modernizing and improving our system of care. They came up with recommendations, and I strongly support them, and so should the United States Congress.

Now, many of the recommendations require administrative action, and that's precisely what this administration is doing. For example, over the next few weeks, the first Federal recovery coordinators will be hired. These coordinators will guide seriously wounded service members through their recuperation. We don't want people to fall through the cracks of care. We don't want people to be confused by the system. We want people's families to be comfortable with the care that their loved one is receiving, and therefore, we'll have these specially trained people to stay with a person throughout their rehabilitation.

A pilot program to establish a single comprehensive disability exam is underway. This replaces the two difficult—two different, difficult exams that service members must currently undergo through the Defense and Veterans Affairs Departments separately. It makes no sense. Somebody gets hurt, there ought to be one exam, not two. The whole purpose is to analyze somebody to make sure that they get that which they're entitled to as quickly as possible, without confusion.

We're working to aggressively prevent and treat Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury. A new National Center for Excellence for PTSD and Traumatic Brain Injury has just hired its first staff members and moved into temporary offices. The purpose is to develop best practices. The real purpose is to make sure we help those coming out of combat to be able to adjust to real life as a civilian.

The Defense Department is working to ensure that the best health professionals are kept on duty at Walter Reed. There's some concern that since Walter Reed will be shut down, that Walter Reed is not going to have the best there is. They don't have to worry about it. We'll make sure that those at Walter Reed are incented to stay there until there's a new facility opened in Washington, DC.

And tomorrow the Department of Veterans Affairs will initiate two studies that will help provide the information necessary to modernize the veterans' disability system. The system needs to be modernized, and I want to make sure our men and women coming out of combat in Afghanistan and Iraq have a modern disability system. And that's what the studies are going to do.

Now, some of the recommendations put forward by Dole-Shalala Commission require legislative action. And we're working with the Congress. I look forward to having quick action by the Congress on the Dole-Shalala Commission recommendations, just like I expect the United States Congress to get the Veterans Affairs appropriations bill to my desk. Now, look, there's obvious—some disagreements between me and the Congress, but there's no disagreement over the amount of money we're going to spend for veterans. And they need to get the bill—to do their job. They need to get the bill to the desk of the President as a stand-alone piece of legislation, so the veterans of this country understand that we're going to support them.

Congress needs to take prompt action on measures that will send a clear signal that we support our troops in the field, and we support them when they're coming off the field; that we support those in harm's way, and that we support those through the best possible care and rehabilitation facilities.

Service members being treated here and at other veterans' facilities are focused on what they have left to give, rather than what

they have lost. And they have high hopes for their future.

Our country is inspired by Americans that we find in facilities like this. Christian Bagge is a guy I met over here at the hospital. I'll never forget looking at Christian's eyes and wondering whether or not he was going to make it. See, both his legs were blown off, and he didn't look good. I knew he'd get the best possible care. I knew that this Government would do everything we could to help him heal. And after talking to him for a minute, I realized he had the courage necessary. He told me one thing—he looked at me, he said, "Mr. President, you don't need to worry about me; someday I'm going to come to the White House and run with you on the South Lawn." I looked at him and said, "Come on, Christian. I'll be ready when you are"—not sure whether or not this good man would really be able to do it; certain he wanted to, but unsure. And if you'd have been in my position, you would have too. After all, he'd just come off the battlefield and lost both his legs.

Sure enough, the phone call came to the White House. Christian came. Guy who had both legs blown off, as a result of the care and compassion and as a result of the courage in his heart, came to run with the President at the White House. Plus, he outran me.

The spirit of America is strong in facilities like this. Our country is a remarkable country that has produced men and women who volunteer to protect our Nation in the face of danger. And there's no better example of finding those type of citizens than right here, citizens who have shown incredible courage, citizens who love our country, and citizens whose resolve is inspiring.

And so I appreciate you letting me come by. May God bless you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:27 p.m. at the Center for the Intrepid. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Bob Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, Cochairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.

Statement on House of Representatives Approval of a Free Trade Agreement With Peru

November 8, 2007

I am pleased that the House of Representatives today approved the free trade agreement with Peru with a strong bipartisan vote.

Expanding markets for our goods and services is crucial to continued economic growth and job creation here in America. Through free trade agreements, we establish rules that ensure the opportunities and benefits of trade are available to our workers, ranchers, farmers, and service providers.

For more than 14 years, Peru has benefited from broad access to our markets under the Andean Trade Preference Act. This U.S.-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement will help level the playing field for American exporters and investors. Approval of this agreement will also send a strong signal that we are willing to support those who share our values of economic freedom and democracy.

By strengthening our trading relationships with important neighbors—including through our trade agreements with Colombia and Panama—we will significantly advance both our economic and national security interests. These democracies are trying to improve the lives of their citizens. We should embrace the strong commitment to economic freedom of countries in our region and the efforts of Colombia to fight terrorists and drug traffickers and to strengthen the rule of law.

Today's vote in the House is the first on a free trade agreement since my administration and the leaders of both parties in Congress agreed on a new bipartisan way forward.

I encourage the U.S. Senate to quickly approve this agreement and for Congress then to move promptly to consideration of our free trade agreements with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea.