AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

parade grounds that every time, I'm a better person for it, since she's a—[*applause*]. This is the last event on the last stop of what has been a comprehensive trip around the continent of Africa. And it's a fitting—fitting that we talk about education as the last subject to discuss.

First of all, I just want you to know that, Madam President, we admire you, and we appreciate your leadership. I particularly appreciate your commitment to liberty and freedom. Now, the problem is, of course, it's one thing to be for freedom, but it's really important to have a healthy, educated group of folks to be able to realize the blessings of freedom.

And so our desire in the United States is to answer the universal call to love a neighbor and to help those—I believe to whom much is given, much is required. A lot has been given the United States of America, and I firmly believe it's in our national interest to help others not only realize the blessings of liberty but to fight disease when we find it and to deal with illiteracy where we encounter it.

And so our initiative on malaria or the AIDS initiative is all aimed at saving lives, which in essence helps save societies. And same thing with our education initiative. And so we really appreciate you all coming to share your message with us. I hope you're not nervous. [*Laughter*] I bet you're not, because all you got to do is tell us what's on your mind. Just share your stories, and I think people will find that they're most interested.

But what you must know here in Liberia is that the United States of America is with you, and we'll stay with you because we want you to succeed. It's in the interest of the United States of America that Liberia do well. And so, Madam President, we are—[*applause*]—we're proud to stand with you. We're not going to tell you what to do because you're plenty competent. I believe African leaders can run African countries. But I do believe the United States of America can help. And that's exactly what we're going to discuss today, Madam President.

So thank you very much for that introduction. And Laura is thrilled to be here as well. She is the librarian in the family. [*Laughter*]

President Johnson Sirleaf. That's right. [*At this point, the discussion continued, and no transcript was provided.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:04 p.m. at the University of Liberia.

Interview With Reporters Aboard Air Force One

February 21, 2008

Press Secretary Dana Perino. So I thought the President and Mrs. Bush would spend a little bit of time with you, with their reflections, on the record. We don't have a lot of time, especially because Ben Feller [Associated Press] is not feeling well.

The President. I would say this is one of the most exciting trips of my Presidency. Exciting because when we first got to Washington, Africa was—parts of Africa were in turmoil, not much had been to arrest disease, there wasn't intense world focus on the continent. The second trip to Africa for me, the fifth for Laura, was a chance to herald courageous people in their efforts to deal with hopelessness. And what really made me happy was that the people of Africa have come to appreciate the generosity of the American people.

I had a couple of goals. One was to encourage people to continue to make difficult choices—democracy is hard work—but also assure them that we'd stay with them if they made the right choices.

Secondly, I wanted to highlight for the American people what the—that great compassionate work is being done. And I'll give you some—Laura can share some anecdotes too. You know, in the hospital in Tanzania, to see a 3-year-old baby survive a mosquito bite when years earlier probably wouldn't have was a very compelling moment for me.

To have the little orphans in Rwanda put on such a cheerless—a cheery face because somebody is trying to provide them love was inspiring to me. To watch their little guys play tee-ball—all of whom were orphans—against the little school and see how inspired they were, but also see the concern and care of their mentors and coaches, was very inspiring to me.

All of these programs are supported by the American taxpayer, and all of them matter.

To hear the testimony of these kids and teachers in Liberia about how our aid has helped them regain confidence—I don't know if you all were in there when the mother of three talked about—her husband left her, she said, because she was illiterate, so he just left her with the three kids. And she's a part of this adult literacy program that USAID is helping with. She talked about being able to read, fill out bank checks, her deposit slips; then announced she wanted to go to college, and then announced she wanted to take Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's job. [*Laughter*]

Anyway, it's the human condition that matters. You heard me say a lot on the trip that we're on a mission of mercy, and that's what I think we are. And I think it's in our national interest to do it. I know this: I know that when you volunteer as an individual to help somebody who hurts, it helps you. Well, I believe the same when it comes to collective hearts of America. So it's been a—it's an exciting trip. I mean, you saw the crowds; you saw the enthusiasm.

But that's not what's important. You know, people say—Bob Geldof asked me, he said, "Why don't you take credit for it? Why don't you show what you have done for Africa?" Well, it's not me, for starters. And you don't act out of the desire to enhance your own standing; that's not exactly why one is called into service. It doesn't matter about me. What matters is, are we saving people's lives? That's what matters. And we are.

And so I'm really pleased with it and had great meetings with the leaders. It seems like a couple of months ago that we went to Benin. [*Laughter*] But he's a good guy. He's enthusiastic. And of course, Kikwete in Tanzania and Kagame in—look, the other thing about the Rwanda stop and the Liberia stop is, these are societies that only recently have been ravished by unbelievable and unspeakable violence. And yet they're getting back on their feet. And it's hard work, and we'll help them. That was what I told them. And these were five very strong leaders that we visited with.

Which leads me to conclude this—and Laura can share some thoughts—America should not be dictating to these countries. America ought to be helping leaders make decisions. And that's what we're doing. And we go to Africa with a belief in the capacity of human beings to meet high standards. That's what I kept trying to say to you out there in code. We didn't go guilt-ridden. We go with a positive sense about the capacity of leaders to rise to the challenge and meet certain basic criteria, such as honest government, investing in children, investing in health, and understanding that marketplace economics and trade is more powerful than accepting relief from countries.

Anyway—and how about the Liberian troops? You talk about proud people. Wasn't it unbelievable? "Yeah, Mr. President, it was." [*Laughter*]

Yes, Laura.

[*At this point, the First Lady made brief remarks.*]

The President. Okay, we'll do a round robin here. Yes, Ann [Ann Compton, ABC News], you're the senior person.

Africa's View of the 2008 U.S. Presidential Election/Texas Presidential Primary

Q. One of the things that we heard from people—I guess they do consider the United States a democracy, a role model. What if an American—African American were elected President? Did they talk to you——

The President. That never came up.

Q. It never came up?

The First Lady. It never came up to us at all. They said they were very fascinated with the election, one group that I talked to.

The President. I'd just like to remind you what Kikwete said. He said, "I hope the next President is as good as this one." Now, I'm not blowing my own horn—[*laughter*]—and I'm sure it was a screaming headline. [*Laughter*]

Q. Are you going to vote in the Texas primary?

The President. Yes, I am.

Q. As a Democrat or a Republican?

The President. I think I'll be in the Republican primary this year.

No—but it never came up. It seemed like a good storyline at the time. Somebody must be putting something out there in the pool, and everybody starts chatting about it.

Q. People would mention it to us.

The President. If you asked them, yes, "What do you think about Obama?" Yes, they mentioned it to you all right. Yes. [*Laughter*]

Q. I asked them—I went out on the street, and two of the four people I asked about—you know, I'd say, Obama——

The President. What?

Q. McCain—they like—they volunteered, two of them——

The President. Really?

The First Lady. What country?

Q. Dar es Salaam.

The President. Look, my mind was not on U.S. politics on this trip; it's just not. It is on yours, not mine. I'm focused on conducting foreign policy. Look, I understand this is the way it's going to be. We'll be having roundtables, and you're going to be fascinated on the latest thing on politics, and I'm going to be fascinated on trying to lay the foundation for lasting foreign policy that will make a significant difference to the United States. I'm not going to be frustrated about it—except every time. No. [*Laughter*]

President's Legacy/U.S. Foreign Policy

Q. A question on that—is this how, in the end, you would like this effort—or this kind of effort, if this not specific one—this is what your Presidency is ultimately about?

The President. We just have to let history be the judge. But we've been a very active—we've had a very active foreign policy, whether it be liberating people from tyranny in order to protect ourselves or liberating people from disease, we've been active and strong and bold. And we'll let history judge the results.

I would just tell you this, and you've heard me say it, and it's true: There's no such thing as short-term political history. I mean, short-term history of an administration—forget "political"—there is such thing as short-term political history because there's an end result, win or lose. There's no such thing as an accurate history of an administration until time has lapsed, unless you're doing little-bitty things.

[*The First Lady made further remarks.*]

The President. The other thing about—one of the things I hope people, when they are able to take an objective look at an administration—which I'm not sure is possible, if you happen to have been living at the time of the administration; maybe you can, I don't think so—is whether or not an administration makes decisions based upon certain fundamental principles from which it will not vary. And you've heard me say over and over again, freedom is universal, or to whom much is given, much is required. Those are fundamental principles on which one can have a foreign policy.

And one of the great dangers for America is to become isolationist or protectionist. And the purpose of—on trips like this is to remind people of the need not to become isolationist. And so it's—I view this as—this was a trip that heralded results. But it was also a trip that gives us an opportunity to explain over and over again the foundations of the foreign policy of the Bush administration.

Yes, Feller. How you feeling, man? I've asked you twice. You look like you're a little pale.

Intelligence Reform Legislation

Q. I'm hanging in there.

The President. Have you vomited yet today? [*Laughter*]

Q. That's off the record. [*Laughter*]

Q. No, that's on the record. [*Laughter*]

Q. I see a big microphone. [*Laughter*]

I'd like to ask you about an issue they're raising back home, and it's not the '08 campaign.

The President. Okay.

Q. On FISA, I understand your position, but what I'm unclear about is whether you're doing something to break the deadlock. Do you see yourself engaging with the other side, compromising? Or where do we go from here?

The President. How do you compromise on something like granting liability for a telecommunications company? You can't. If we do not give liability protection to those who are helping us, they won't help us. And if they don't help us, there will be no program. And if there's no program, America is more vulnerable.

What I'm going to do is continue to remind people that unless they get this program done, we're going to be vulnerable to attack.

Q. Do you see an opportunity to work with the Democrats and——

The President. I mean, there may be one; I don't know. But I will just tell you, there's no compromise on whether or not these phone companies get liability protection. See, what the American people must understand is that without help from the phone companies, there is no program. And these companies are going to be subject to multibillion dollar lawsuits by trial lawyers, plaintiffs' attorneys. And it's going to drive them away from helping us, unless they get liability protection, prospective and retroactive.

It's just so important for people to understand the dangers. If we don't have the capacity to listen to these terrorists, we're not going to be able to protect ourselves.

Press Secretary Perino. Just a reminder that they have the votes to pass it in the House.

The President. They've got enough votes to pass the bill in the House. So, yes, I'm going to talk about it a lot and keep reminding the American—I'm glad you asked the question, because this will give everybody a chance to know the dangers of the course that some in the House have put us on. And I'll keep talking about it.

You know what? The American people understand that we need to be listening to the enemy.

Situation in Kenya

Q. Back to Africa, on Kenya—on Kenya, I'm trying to understand——

The President. Kenya?

Q. Kenya, yes.

The President. That's why you've got the Secretary sitting here.

Q. Exactly. I mean, are you going to send her back? Where are we? What's next? And how realistic is it—I still don't understand how anyone is really thinking that the Government, which has been so stubborn, is actually going to——

The President. ——the opposition.

Q. Yes.

The President. That's the dilemma; how you get two people to sit down at a table and work on what's best for Africa—I mean, for Kenya.

Q. But realistically, how do you? I mean, are you going to——

The President. She was in the room with them.

Q. Are you going to go back?

The President. We got Frazer, who's plenty competent.

[*Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made brief remarks.*]

The President. I was going to say that, you know, the most effective way to get these issues resolved is for these leaders to feel pressure from their own people. And it's one thing for Kofi and Condi and people making phone calls, but Kenya is a society; it's got a—for example, Kenya is the economic engine for East Africa. I don't know if you saw all those ships in Dar es Salaam. Those were originally—many of them were originally headed for Nairobi, interestingly enough. And I suspect these leaders are beginning to feel a lot of pressure internal.

Secondly, they're actually hearing from African leaders about the dangers of allowing these kind of conflicts to not be nipped in the bud early, to be prevented from happening. And we will help. We sent people over. And we'll stay engaged. It's really up to the Kenyan society itself and the leaders there to get their leaders with them.

Q. Doesn't it seem to be that they're pressuring with violence?

The President. With what?

Q. The way that they're pressuring, it seems to be with violence.

The President. No, no, no, you're missing it. There is a civil society in Nairobi. You're talking about some of the splinter groups on some of the parties. There is a civil society, and it's a relatively sophisticated civil society that is exerting pressure, that is not resorting to violence.

Secretary Rice. The Kenyan press is very tough on these leaders to resolve this—[*inaudible*]—civil society—[*inaudible*]—people who are pressing for peaceful change and saying, you cannot let our society collapse into anarchy.

Return Trip From Africa

The President. I get to ask a question. Will you be taking a nap on the way back?

Q. I didn't sleep one wink last night, but if I sleep on the flight home, I won't sleep when I get home, and I have to be at the office at 6:15 a.m.

The President. You're going to go around the clock?

Q. Well, I might try.

The President. I'm actually promoting—I've obviously got a nap on my mind. [*Laughter*] I was just trying to, like, plant the seed.

Yes, Rog [Roger Runningen, Bloomberg News].

U.S. View of the President's Visit to Africa

Q. I want to go back to Africa. You talked about Americans and their generosity——

The President. What's that?

Q. Americans and their generosity—what do you think that Americans think of your trip?

The President. I don't have any idea. What are you writing about it? I don't know what they think of it. Ask another question. I really don't know. I'm focused on the trip.

When I get home, I pick up a book and start reading it, and I'm sound asleep shortly thereafter. So I'm not—I don't know. I really don't know.

The First Lady. Depends on what you all are showing.

The President. I don't know. I hope they think—here's what I hope they think: It's worthwhile to be supportive of a robust policy on the continent of Africa. It's worth our national security interest, and it's worth our interest to help people learn to read and write and save babies' lives from mosquito bites. That's what I hope they realize, and that's one of the main—that's a critical reason to go on the trip. I would hope that the country never says, well, it's not worth it over there, what happens over there—or it says, well, we've got to take care of our own first, exclusively.

And my answer is, we can do both. We're a generous country. And we do, do both.

U.S. Aid for Africa

Q. Do you have everything in place so that the next the President, who might not look at Africa in the first 6 months—everything is in place to continue?

The President. ——you know, getting this funding from PEPFAR. And I think we will. The PEPFAR program has been great. It's a bipartisan success. Congress funded the thing—not the "thing," Congress funded the program, and they ought to take great pride in the success of PEPFAR. There's a process that goes on to get it reauthorized, and we'll try to get it funded, and will get it funded. I feel pretty good about getting it funded.

Same with the malaria initiative; it's making a huge difference, and the success is unbelievable. In Zanzibar, 20 percent of the kids were infected, had gotten malaria. Now it's one [percent] *, in a pretty quick period of time.

Okay, guys.

NOTE: The interview began at 4:42 p.m. en route from Monrovia, Liberia, to Andrews Air Force Base, MD. In his remarks, the President referred to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia; musician and activist Robert Geldof; President Thomas Yayi Boni of Benin; President Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete of Tanzania; President Paul Kagame of Rwanda; Senator Barack Obama of Illinois; Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi E. Frazer; and former Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations. A reporter referred to Senator John McCain of Arizona. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Digest of Other White House Announcements

The following list includes the President's public schedule and other items of general interest announced by the Office of the Press Secretary and not included elsewhere in this issue.

February 16

In the morning, while en route to Cotonou, Benin, aboard Air Force One, the President had an intelligence briefing. Upon arrival at Cadjehoun International Airport, he and Mrs. Bush participated in an arrival ceremony with President Thomas Yayi Boni

* White House correction.