

Week Ending Friday, April 25, 2008

The President's Radio Address

April 19, 2008

Good morning. Next week, I will be hosting the North American leaders' summit in New Orleans. This event will give me an opportunity to meet with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexican President Felipe Calderon to discuss some of the most significant issues facing our hemisphere and the world.

One of the issues I will be discussing with these leaders is the importance of expanding trade in our hemisphere. Recently, I sent Congress an agreement that would expand America's access to markets in Colombia. Unfortunately, the Speaker of the House has chosen to block the Colombia free trade agreement instead of giving it an up-or-down vote that Congress committed to. Her action is unprecedented and extremely unfortunate. I hope that the Speaker will change her mind. If she does not, the agreement will be dead. And this will be bad for American workers and bad for America's national security.

And here is why. Today, almost all of Colombia's exports to the United States enter duty free. But the 9,000 American businesses that export to Colombia, including nearly 8,000 small and midsized firms, face significant tariffs on their products. The situation is completely one-sided. Our markets are open to Colombian products, but barriers that make it harder to sell American goods in Colombia remain. If the free trade agreement were implemented, however, most of Colombia's tariffs on American goods would be eliminated immediately.

There's also a strategic imperative to approve the agreement. By obstructing this agreement, Congress is signaling to a watching hemisphere that America cannot be trusted to support its friends. Over the past 6 years, Colombia's President Uribe has been a steadfast ally of the United States. He's

transformed his country from a near-failed state to a stable democracy with a growing economy. He has partnered with America in the fight against drugs and terror. And he has addressed virtually every one of Congress's concerns, including revising the free trade agreement to include some of the most rigorous labor and environmental protections in history.

He has done all this while his country is under violent assault from a terrorist organization and facing constant intimidation from anti-American regimes in the region. As Canada's Prime Minister Harper has said, "If the U.S. turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could hope to achieve."

Leaders in Congress have made a serious error, but it is not too late to get it right. This week, a long list of senior officials from Democratic administrations and Democrats from previous Congresses signed a letter urging Congress to approve the agreement this year. They wrote, quote: "We feel that the treaty should be considered as soon as possible and that any obstacles should be quickly and amicably resolved." I strongly agree. I believe that if the Speaker allows a vote on the merits, a majority of the House of Representatives will approve the trade agreement. So I urge leaders in Congress to reconsider their position, recognize the stakes at hand, and approve the Colombia agreement as soon as possible.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:35 a.m. on April 18 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 19. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 18 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

**The President's News Conference
With President Lee Myung-bak of
South Korea at Camp David,
Maryland**

April 19, 2008

President Bush. Welcome. We're glad you're here, Mr. President, and we're glad you brought Mrs. Kim. We had a wonderful dinner last night and looking forward to having lunch too, today.

We've had great visits. And this is an important visit for me to get to know you. I heard about your background. I admire your strength of character. And this is an important visit to strengthen the relationship between our two countries, and I believe we have done so.

President Lee. Thank you.

President Bush. President Lee is the first Korean President to visit Camp David. And I don't know if the American citizens understand your nickname.

President Lee. Yes.

President Bush. You're known as "the Bulldozer." [*Laughter*] He said to make sure that it was a bulldozer with a computer. [*Laughter*] And the reason why is that this is a man who takes on big challenges, and he doesn't let obstacles get in the way. I like his spirit; I like his candor; and I like his optimistic vision. But most of all, I really appreciate his values.

A good relationship is based upon common values, and our countries share common values, values of the rights of each individual to live in a free society. We believe in human dignity and justice.

Now, we discussed a variety of issues. We talked about our defense cooperation. In 2004, our nations began an alliance transformation that has involved realigning U.S. forces in Korea and relocating some of them from the peninsula. We're in constant touch, and we're constantly reassessing our needs. And we have reaffirmed our need to remain in close dialog. And we reached an agreement to maintain the current U.S. troop level on the peninsula. This is a mutual agreement that benefits both our nations and will strengthen our alliance, and Secretary Gates and Defense Minister Lee will coordinate its implementation.

Korea has asked that—to upgrade its foreign military sales status with the United States and to have the same access to U.S. military technologies as NATO and other key allies. And I strongly support this request and have instructed Secretaries Rice and Gates to work with the Congress to get this done.

Yesterday our nations signed a memorandum of understanding on security improvements necessary for Korea to enter the Visa Waiver Program. This was a very important issue for the President.

President Lee. Yes. Sure.

President Bush. We spent a lot of time talking about this issue. These security enhancements put Korea on the path toward visa-free travel to the United States for its people. We promised that both sides will work hard on this issue so that Koreans will be visiting the United States under the Visa Waiver Program before this year ends.

The United States and Korea are working to improve security and advance freedom in the Asia-Pacific region. Together with China, Russia, and Japan, our nations are pressing North Korea to fulfill its obligations to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Thanks to the six-party framework, North Korea has begun disabling the plutonium production facilities at Yongbyon. And now North Korea must fulfill its other obligations: provide a full declaration of its nuclear programs and proliferation activities in a verifiable way.

President Lee and I discussed our mutual concern for the human condition in North Korea. I mean, we are—our hearts break when we hear these stories of families that have been torn apart or people being subjected to harsh work camps because of their beliefs. We believe in basic rights, and we believe those rights ought to be extended to the people of North Korea.

We're also thankful for the Koreans' contributions to the young democracies, whether it be Afghanistan or Iraq or Lebanon. And we want to thank you and your people, Mr. President, for those sacrifices.

And then, of course, we talked about our economy. As a former CEO, President Lee understands the importance of trade. First of all, I want to thank you, Mr. President, and I appreciate your decision to reopen the Korean market to American beef, consistent