

could prayer together for a world that sees the promise of the Psalms made real: “Your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth.”

I want to thank you all for coming. I particularly want to thank you for your prayers. You know, somebody asked me one time when I was there—over seeing the Sea of Galilee, they said, “What did you think about when you were there, Mr. President?” I said, “I have finally understood the story of the calm on the rough seas.” I may have been a little hardheaded at times, but I’m absolutely convinced it was the prayers of the people who helped me understand, in turbulence you can find calm and strength. And I thank you for those prayers.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:12 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Shirley Dobson, chairman, National Day of Prayer Task Force, and her husband, James; Ravi Zacharias, honorary chairman, National Day of Prayer Task Force; Rabbi Lyle Fishman, Ohr Kodesh Congregation, Chevy Chase, MD; and Pastor Steve Mays, senior pastor, Cavalry Chapel South Bay, Gardena, CA. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on the Observance of Asian Pacific American Heritage Month

May 1, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you. Good afternoon. And welcome to the White House. The East Room is a fitting place to celebrate Asian Pacific American Heritage Month. I say fitting because in 1860, this was where James Buchanan first—became the first President to receive an official delegation from Japan. It was a great meeting, except for one slight wrinkle. The interpreter the Japanese brought with them couldn’t speak English. [*Laughter*] So he translated Japanese into Dutch—[*laughter*]—and then another interpreter translated Dutch into English. [*Laughter*] I thought that was pretty interesting. People say when I speak, it sounds like Japanese translated into Dutch translated into English. [*Laughter*] I’m just upholding a diplomatic tradition. [*Laughter*]

During Asian Pacific American Heritage Month, we honor citizens whose families have come from halfway around the world, but who are now an integral part of America. I want to thank former Secretary and my dear friend Norm Mineta, who, when he was in Congress, introduced legislation that led to this celebration. And I thank each of you for coming to be a part of it.

Madam Secretary, we’re proud you’re here. Elaine Chao has been a member of my Cabinet since day one, and I think America is better off for it. So thank you for coming, Madam Secretary. Members of Congress—Congressman Wu, thank you for being here, sir. Members of my administration, I’m glad you all are here. Members of the diplomatic corps, it’s so kind of you to take time out of your day to come. We got our veterans here and, of course, members of the United States military. Proud to call you Commander in Chief, and thank you for being here today.

More than 15 million Americans claim Asian or Pacific ancestry. They make America’s culture more vibrant, and we’re a better place—and a more lively place, I might add, from Songkran celebrations in Los Angeles to Chinese New Year parties in Chicago to Diwali festivals right here at the White House.

Asian Pacific Americans make our country more competitive. It turns out, there’s a great entrepreneurial streak that runs throughout the citizens whom we honor today. Small-business owners all over America are creating new jobs and are living the dream. They enrich America because of their love for America.

Many Asians have settled in this country after fleeing oppressive regimes. They looked at America as a hopeful place. They include the boat people of Vietnam, men and women who escaped the killing fields of Cambodia, those who endured the Cultural Revolution in China, and victims of the regime in North Korea.

America must always remember that we are a place of hope and freedom for people who live in oppressive societies. Throughout the Asian American community, there is a special appreciation of liberty known only to those who’ve been denied it. If you’ve been

denied freedom, if freedom is something you long for, you understand how to treasure it. Asian Americans are committed to advancing the cause of freedom—I can't thank you enough for that—both in their ancestral nations and in our own.

Together we work to expand economic freedom and prosperity in the Asian-Pacific region. It's in our interest that we enter to trading agreements with nations throughout the world, starting with South Korea. I negotiated a free trade agreement last June with South Korea. This agreement is going to create opportunities for American businesses and workers. It will increase trade between our countries by about \$17 billion. It's going to strengthen America's relationship with one of our closest, closest allies. When President Lee visited the United States a few weeks ago, I promised him that I would encourage Congress in as many ways as I could to get this agreement passed, that I'd work hard to remind people that this is a mutually beneficial agreement.

The Asian community efforts have supported free trade agreements throughout the Asian-Pacific area. And I want to thank you for working to educate Members of Congress about why we ought to improve this agreement as soon as possible.

We're working to increase security and reduce the threats to freedom in the Asia-Pacific region. Thank you for coming, Chris Hill. He's very much involved in what we've called the six-party talks, which is where we've joined with Korea, Japan, and Russia and China to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program. Nations have come together to send a clear message that it's important to abandon those nuclear weapons ambitions. We want a Korean Peninsula that is nuclear weapons-free.

We've put together what's called the Proliferation Security Initiative. It works with more than 85 countries, including many in the Asia-Pacific region, to stop the shipment of the world's most dangerous weapons. In other words, this is just kind of a quest for security and freedom. And we're working with nations all throughout the world, including those in the Asian-Pacific region, to protect our peoples from the true threats of the 21st century. We're working with Pakistan

and Indonesia and Malaysia and the Philippines and other partners—and Singapore and other partners—to dismantle terrorist networks and to combat the ideology of the extremists.

You can always defeat an ideology of hate with an ideology of hope. And there's nothing more hopeful than a system based upon human rights and human dignity and a system based upon the freedom for people to worship and speak their minds freely.

We're working with India to promote democracy and the peace it yields throughout the continent. We're working together to extend the hope of liberty throughout Asia.

I know you share my concerns about the situation in Tibet. I welcome the recent statements by the Chinese Government expressing its willingness to meet with representatives of the Dalai Lama. It's precisely what I have suggested President Hu Jintao do. I think it's important that there be a renewed dialog, and that dialog must be substantive, so we can address the real way—in a—including—can address in a real way the deep and legitimate concerns of the Tibetan people.

In Burma, the brutal military regime continues to reject the clear will of the Burmese people to live under leaders of their own choosing. So over the past 8 months, my administration has tightened sanctions on the regime. We've imposed visa bans on the junta's generals and their families and their cronies. We're trying to send a clear message, and we hope the rest of the world follows as well.

Today I've issued a new Executive order that instructs the Treasury Department to freeze the assets of Burmese state-owned companies that are major sources of funds that prop up the junta. These companies, in industries such as gems and timber, exploit the labor of the downtrodden Burmese people but enrich only the generals. And today I'm sending yet another clear message that we expect there to be change, and we expect these generals to honor the will of the people.

We're are also working to address the humanitarian crisis in Burma. The U.S. has resettled tens of thousands of Burmese refugees in the last few years, and this year, we

expect to admit as many as 18,000 more. Last December, I signed legislation to ease restrictions that have prevented ethnic minorities involved in the struggle against the Burmese regime from entering the United States.

And I applaud the Asian Americans who have helped these refugees get settled once they come to the United States of America. It's got to be hard to come here not knowing the language. It's got to be hard to come here as a stranger. And I thank those of you and those around the country who have opened up their arms and said, "Welcome to America. How can we help you settle in?" I urge others, especially those who share the customs of these newest Asian Americans, to help them feel at home here in their adopted country.

We're working together to strengthen our partnership with Japan, which is really one of the great success stories of freedom. Six decades ago, my dad fought the Japanese. They were the sworn enemy of the United States of America. And now his son sits down with the Prime Ministers of Japan talking about how to keep the peace. Isn't that interesting? What a great irony it is, that the father served to fight, and the son serves to work with the Prime Minister of the former enemy to keep the peace. Freedom is transformative. Freedom and democracy are powerful instruments of change.

The lesson learned in this example is one that we can apply elsewhere around the world to yield the peace that we all want. And this friendship was made possible by Americans who understood the power—the transformative power of freedom years ago. I wasn't the first person to think of that. Fortunately, predecessors of mine understood with great faith that freedom is universal, that freedom is widespread, that people long to be free, and if given the chance to be free, peaceful societies develop.

With us today are veterans from the 442d Regimental Combat Team. This was a segregated Army unit composed mostly of volunteers recruited from internment camps in the United States. Isn't that interesting? People whose love of the country was such that they were over—able to overcome the bitterness of being interned by a country they

called home. And they were willing to put on the uniform, and not only put on the uniform—they served America with distinction in eight battle campaigns in Europe. In 1945, members of the 442d helped liberate the concentration camp at Dachau. They went from an intern camp, to wear the uniform of the United States Army, to liberate camps in Europe.

Yet the 442d is best known for their mission to rescue the trapped soldiers of the Texas National Guard's "lost battalion." A lot of Texans thanking you guys for that, by the way. [*Laughter*] In the mountains of eastern France, the 442d went up against the heavily entrenched Germans and suffered devastating casualties. But their courage saved more than 200 of their brothers. Their valor helped earn them several Presidential Unit Citations and helped make their unit one of the most highly decorated in U.S. military history. Their sacrifice earns the gratitude of the nation they defended, and an attitude we express today to the men of the 442d. Thank you for coming.

I do want to point out one soul who's joined us—and Ben is not going to be happy about it—Ben Kuroki. He probably doesn't want to be called out, but I'm going to do it anyway, Ben. I got the podium, and you don't. [*Laughter*]

Two days after Pearl Harbor, Ben volunteered to join the Army, where there is no doubt he met prejudice at nearly every turn. Still, he became one of the few Nisei admitted to the Army Air Corps. He flew 58 missions over Europe and Japan, and he earned three Distinguished Flying Crosses.

When he came back home, he turned to another mission: working to overcome the intolerance he had experienced during his early days in the Army. Ben edited newspapers. He spoke to audiences around the country. He became a strong advocate of racial equality. He knew something, and he knew the subject well, unfortunately.

Sixty years after the Japanese surrender, Ben received the U.S. Army Distinguished Service Medal. And at the ceremony, here's what he said: "I had to fight like hell to fight for my country, and now I feel completely vindicated."

We are glad you feel vindicated, but I am proud to tell you, America is a better place because of you, Ben. Thank you for coming.

And so during Asia Pacific American Heritage Month, we thank you all for helping make America a better place. We thank you for loving our country the way you do. The way—thank you for being great contributors to the life of our fellow citizens.

We ask for God's continued blessings on you, your family, and all the citizens of our great land. Thanks for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:53 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Transportation Secretary Norman Y. Mineta; President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea; Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Christopher R. Hill; Tenzin Gyatso, the Dalai Lama of Tibet; President Hu Jintao of China; and Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda of Japan.

Remarks on Emergency Food Aid Programs

May 1, 2008

In recent weeks, many have expressed concern about the significant increase in global food prices. And I share that concern. In some of the world's poorest nations, rising prices can mean the difference between getting a daily meal or going without food.

To address this problem, 2 weeks ago, my administration announced that about \$200 million in emergency food aid would be available through a program at the Agriculture Department called the Emerson Trust. But that's just the beginning of our efforts. I think more needs to be done, and so today I am asking Congress to provide an additional \$770 million to support food aid and development programs. Together this amounts to nearly \$1 billion in new funds to bolster global food security. And with other security assistant programs already in place, we're now projecting to spend nearly—that we will spend nearly \$5 billion in 2008 and 2009 to fight global hunger.

This funding will keep our existing emergency food aid programs robust. We have been the leader for providing food to those who are going without in the past, and we

will continue to be the leader around the world. It will also allow us to fund agricultural development programs that help farmers in developing countries increase their productivity. And of course, this will help reduce the number of people who need emergency food aid in the first place.

As America increases its food assistance, it's really important that we transform the way that food aid is delivered. In my State of the Union Address this year, I called on Congress to support a proposal to purchase up to nearly 25 percent of food assistance directly from farmers in the developing world. And the reason you do that is, in order to break the cycle of famine that we're having to deal with too often in the modern era, it's important to help build up local agriculture. I ask Congress to approve this measure as soon as possible. It's a commonsense way to help deal with food emergencies around the world.

Now, other countries have a role to play as well. America is in the lead; we'll stay in the lead. And we expect others to participate along with us. We're working with our G-8 partners and other developed nations to secure commitments from their governments for additional food aid.

We're also working toward the conclusion of a successful Doha agreement that will reduce and eliminate tariffs and other barriers as well as market-distorting subsidies for agricultural goods. And the reason why getting a Doha round done is important is it'll end up reducing the cost of food, importing food; it'll make it cheaper for consumers all around the world. In other words, we want to change the system to make it easier for people to get less expensive food.

We're also urging countries that have instituted restrictions on agricultural exports to lift those restrictions. Some countries are preventing needed food from getting to market in the first place, and we call upon them to end those restrictions to help ease suffering for those who aren't getting food.

We're also urging countries to remove barriers to advanced crops developed through biotechnology. These crops are safe; they're resistant to drought and disease; and they hold the promise of producing more food for more people.