

Laura and I thank the Ford's Theatre Society and to the producing director, Paul Tetreault.

Since we moved to Washington, Laura and I have been guests of Ford's Theatre a number of times, and we appreciate the vital work it is doing. As a working stage, Ford's Theatre provides an important venue for the arts right here in the heart of our Nation's Capital.

I'm really grateful to the members of the Armed Services who participated in tonight's celebration. Our military is defending America and advancing the cause of freedom and peace around the world. We are privileged to be citizens of a country served by our brave troops, and we thank them for their service.

We appreciate the military families who are with us tonight. It's not easy being left

behind when a loved one goes to war. By loving and supporting a man or woman in uniform, our military families also serve our Nation, and America is grateful to all of them for their support and sacrifice.

Once again, we thank all the entertainers and the supporters of the Ford's Theatre who have made this evening one to remember. May God bless you all, and may God continue to bless the United States.

NOTE: The President's remarks were videotaped at approximately 8:45 p.m. at Ford's Theatre for broadcast on July 4 on the ABC Television Network. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Jeff Foxworthy, the Pendragons, and Julie Roberts. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 13.

Remarks on the African Growth and Opportunity Act June 13, 2005

Thank you all for coming. Welcome to the White House. I want to thank the five Presidents who are with us today: President Mogae of Botswana, President Kufuor of Ghana, President Guebuza of Mozambique, President Pohamba of Namibia, and President Tandja of Niger.

We just had a great discussion. I consider these men friends. I consider them to be strong patriots of their respective countries, and I consider them to be democrats.

I want to thank Secretary of State Condi Rice for joining us today, and she was in the discussions we had earlier. I'm honored that the members of the diplomatic corps have joined us. I thank the Ambassadors for being here.

I appreciate Members of the Congress being here: Senator Bill Frist, the majority leader is with us; Congressman Bill Thomas, Congressman Charlie Rangel of the Ways and Means Committee, two fine

Members, and I appreciate you being here as a symbol of unity and support for—*[laughter]*—for moving the trade agenda forward. I appreciate Congressman Jim Kolbe from Arizona for being here as well. Thank you all for coming, really are honored you're here, and I know the Presidents are as well.

All the Presidents gathered here represent countries that have held democratic elections in the last year. What a strong statement that these leaders have made about democracy and the importance of democracy on the continent of Africa. All of us share a fundamental commitment to advancing democracy and opportunity on the continent of Africa, and all of us believe that one of the most effective ways to advance democracy and deliver hope to the people of Africa is through mutually beneficial trade.

That was certainly the idea behind the African Growth and Opportunity Act, a bipartisan act, an act of the United States Congress that recognized this fact. You see, AGOA is promoting democratic reform in Africa by providing incentives for these nations to extend freedom and opportunity to all of their citizens. Under this law, African nations can obtain greater access to our markets by showing their commitment to economic and political reform, by respecting human rights, tearing down trade barriers, and strengthening property rights and the rule of law, which is precisely what the leaders of these five nations are doing.

Because AGOA is producing results, I've twice signed into law provisions that build on its success and extend its benefits long into the future. My predecessor worked with the Congress to get the law passed. I have been honored to work with the Congress to extend the good law. And the reason why I feel confident in going to the Congress is because it has worked. It's a good piece of legislation that has made a difference in people's lives.

In 2004, we saw dramatic evidence of the results that this new engagement between the United States and Africa is helping produce. Last year, exports to the United States from AGOA nations were up 88 percent over the year before, and non-oil exports were up by 22 percent. In other words, we pledged to open our markets; we have opened our markets; and people are now making goods that the United States consumers want to buy. And that's helpful. That's how you spread wealth. That's how you encourage hope and opportunity.

Over the same period, interestingly enough, U.S. exports to sub-Saharan Africa were up 25 percent. In other words, this is a two-way street. Not only have folks in Africa benefited by selling products in the United States; American businesses, small and large, have benefited through the opening of the African market as well. Across sub-Saharan Africa, economic growth

increased to an 8-year high. Real per capita income increased by 2.7 percent, and this growth is expected to continue in 2005. By creating jobs and lowering prices and expanding opportunity, AGOA is today developing benefits for Americans and Africans alike, and that's important for our fellow citizens to understand. Trade is beneficial for the working people here in America, just like it's beneficial for people on the continent of Africa.

We'll continue to work for policies that build on these impressive results. In December, I announced that 37 African countries are now eligible for AGOA benefits, and next month in Senegal, senior ministers from my administration will meet with government ministers from these 37 AGOA nations to build on this progress. These representatives will be joined by hundreds of American and African businesses and private organizations who will discuss ways to promote development and strengthen civil society.

As we expand our trade, the United States is committing to expanding our efforts to relieve hunger, reduce debt, fight disease on the African continent. One thing we discussed was the Millennium Challenge Account, and I assured the leaders we will work harder and faster to certify countries for the MCA, so that MCA countries and the people in the MCA countries can see the benefit of this really important piece of legislation and funding.

I also announced last week that the United States will provide about \$674 million of additional resources to help alleviate humanitarian emergencies in African nations, especially the growing famine in parts of Africa. On Saturday, we also announced an agreement worked out through the Group of Eight industrialized nations that will cancel \$40 billion in debt owed by 18 of the world's poorest nations, including 14 in Africa. The countries eligible for this relief are those that have put themselves on the path to reform. We believe that by removing a crippling debt burden, we'll