

Statement on the Proposed United States-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement *March 8, 2006*

The United States and Malaysia share strong trade and investment ties and a commitment to generating prosperity through openness, democracy, and freedom. Today we seek to further strengthen the ties between our two countries by launching negotiations on a comprehensive U.S.-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement.

Once completed, a free trade agreement with Malaysia will generate significant commercial, economic, political, and strategic

benefits to both countries. It will improve our ties with the Southeast Asia region and strengthen our engagement in Asia. Malaysia is our tenth-largest trading partner, and the United States is Malaysia's second-largest source of imports. A U.S.-Malaysia Free Trade Agreement will advance our commitment to opening markets around the world and expanding opportunities for America's farmers, ranchers, workers, and businesses.

Remarks Following a Meeting on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives *March 9, 2006*

We just had a very interesting dialog here. I want to thank members of the faith community, the community-based action community, the corporate community, the foundation community for joining in a dialog about how we can continue to foster the good works of millions of our fellow citizens who deeply care about the future of our country and the plight of their fellow citizen.

One of the things that always strengthens my belief in our future is my understanding of how many acts of kindness take place on a daily basis in the United States, and it doesn't require any government edict or

government law. People really care about the future of our country; millions of our citizens weep when they know somebody hurts. But nevertheless, there still needs to be focused efforts on encouraging more giving of money and time.

So I want to thank you all very much for joining us. Appreciate your being social entrepreneurs. I thank you for really strengthening the heart of the United States of America. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:49 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel.

Remarks at the White House National Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives *March 9, 2006*

Thanks for coming. Appreciate you being here. Thanks for the warm welcome. This is the second White House National Conference on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, and I appreciate your attend-

ance. I take this conference very seriously, and I'm glad you do as well.

The last conference was in June of 2004. Some of you were probably wondering whether I'd be back for this conference.

[*Laughter*] For those of you who did think I was going to be back, it was just as matter of faith. [*Laughter*] I appreciate you being here. It's good to see some old faces—on some young people—and some new faces.

I want to thank my Secretary of Commerce, Carlos Gutierrez, for introducing me. I appreciate Secretary Elaine Chao, the Department of Labor; Secretary Jim Nicholson. It's a good sign when Cabinet members come. It shows a commitment beyond just the President.

I appreciate my friend Jim Towey. I don't know if you know Towey. There he is. His job has been to make sure that the Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative becomes an integral part of the Government and that the White House effectively reaches out to people to assure them that if they participate in the faith-based initiative, they won't have to lose their faith. It's hard to be a faith-based program if you can't practice your faith, no matter what your faith may be. And I'm proud of the work that Towey has done.

Every time I talk about Towey, I always bring up the same old, tired line about him, but I might as well try it one more time. So he was Mother Teresa's lawyer. And I always wonder about a society where Mother Teresa actually needed a lawyer, you know? [*Laughter*] But she—they picked a good one in Towey.

I want to thank Acting Administrator Fred Schieck of the USAID. He's here because USAID must continue to reach out to faith-based programs in order to make sure that we fulfill missions around the world in a compassionate way. Stephen Goldsmith, who is the Chairman of the Corporation for National and Community Service, is with us. Steve, thanks for being here.

Congressman Tom Osborne—where is the Congressman? He's somewhere here. Anyway, I appreciate you coming, Congressman. Dr. Jim Billington, who is the head of the Library of Congress—Dr.

Billington, thank you for coming. Leaders in the armies of compassion—those would be your sergeants, your lieutenants, and a few generals—thank you all for joining. And I appreciate members of the corporate community who have joined us and foundation America that has joined us as well. This is an important conference.

We meet at a time of great hope for the country. In my State of the Union—I stated this, and I believe it firmly—that America is witnessing a quiet transformation, a revolution of conscience, in which a rising generation is finding that a life of personal responsibility is a life of fulfillment. Part of being personally responsible in America is to love a neighbor like you'd like to be loved yourself. And for those of you who are finding those who have heard the call to help interface with those in need, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. You represent the true strength of the United States of America.

Statistics matter, and you'll hear me talk about some of the results of the faith-based initiative. It's hard to be a results-oriented society unless you actually focus on results. I'd like to share some results with you to boost my belief that there is a quiet transformation taking place. Violent crime rates have fallen to their lowest level since the 1970s. Welfare cases have dropped by more than half. Drug use amongst youth is down 19 percent since 2001. There are fewer abortions in America than at any point in the last three decades. The number of children born to teenage mothers has fallen for a dozen years in a row. I attribute the success of these statistics to the fact that there are millions of our fellow citizens all working to help people who hurt, working toward a better tomorrow.

There's a lot of work to be done, obviously. We still have pockets of poverty where people wonder whether or not the American experience belongs to them. We have place where there is hopelessness and despair. We've got people that are homeless. We've got addicts trapped into a, what

appears to them, I'm certain, kind of a never-ending cycle of despondency.

In answering the challenges, staying focused on helping change America one person at a time is a vital part of government, corporate America, philanthropic America, and the faith and community-based programs. It's got to be our continued focus. Even though statistics are improving, so long as we find anybody who hurts, we all should recognize that we hurt. It's the collective conscience of America that really helps define the nature of our country, and it gives me great optimism for the future of our country.

You know, it's interesting, as I—one of my jobs is to constantly herald our strengths. I think when people recognize if you deal with problems from your position of strength, it's more likely you'll be able to solve problems. And what's interesting about the conscience of our country is that it was first recognized by de Tocqueville. I often speak about Alexis de Tocqueville and his observations about what made America unique and different in the 1830s. He talked about voluntary associations of people all coming together to achieve a common good.

That's what you've done. You're representing voluntary associations of people all aiming to achieve the common good. And the common good is achieved in America when we help people who hurt, when we provide mentors for people who need love, when we provide food for those who are hungry, and we provide shelter for those who need shelter.

Our job is to make sure that the spirit that de Tocqueville saw is not only relevant today but stays alive and well throughout the 21st century. There's forever going to be a need of compassionate help in our society. And for those of you who are on the frontlines of social entrepreneurship, thank you for setting such a good example.

Part of this conference is to make sure that you receive encouragement. The other part is to make sure you've got the tools

necessary to succeed. Part of the tools necessary to succeed is to help philanthropic America understand it's okay to support faith-based institutions.

We've got fantastic corporate foundations in America who recognize that we all ought to focus on results, not process, that the question government and private philanthropy ought to ask is, does the program get the results that we all want, as opposed to, what is the nature of the people trying to get results? When you focus on results, all of a sudden it becomes crystal-clear how best to spend resource dollars to achieve certain objectives.

And today I met with some folks earlier that talked about their foundations and how their foundations recognize the importance of achieving results—funding results-oriented programs, regardless of whether or not they're faith-based or not.

And for those of you who have set the example, I want to thank you very much, but the truth of the matter is that a recent survey of our Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives—headed by Towey—of 20 large corporate foundations found that only about 6 percent of their grants went to faith-based groups. I believe the results are better than that. I am confident that the faith community is achieving unbelievable successes in—throughout our country.

And therefore, I would urge our corporate foundations to reach beyond the norm, to look for those social entrepreneurs who have been—haven't been recognized heretofore, to continue to find people that are running programs that are making a significant difference in people's lives.

When we studied 50 large foundations, we found that one in five prohibited faith organizations from receiving funding for social service programs. In other words, there's a prohibition against funding faith programs from certain foundations in the country. I would hope they would revisit their charters. I would hope they'd take a look at achieving social objectives—make

the priority the achievement of certain social objectives before they would make the decision to exclude some who are achieving incredible progress on behalf of our country.

I believe all of us, no matter what level of government we're in—Federal, State, and local—and I believe all of us, no matter if we're private or public, ought to allow religious organizations to compete for funding on an equal basis, not for the sake of faith, but for the sake of results.

The Tax Code can be—can encourage contributions. We had an interesting discussion from a person earlier that said that the level of giving in America is substantial, but it can be more. We all can do our part, individually, but the Tax Code can help as well. I've got some interesting ideas to help philanthropy here in America. One of them is to allow corporate America to deduct—take larger tax deductions for food donations.

If one of the issues—[*applause*]*—it's kind of a specialized request, I admit it. But if one of the issues is to get food to the hungry, it makes sense to provide incentives for people who have got the wherewithal to be able to provide the resources to get the food headed toward the hungry in the first place. I think it will help those of you who are worried about getting food to people to know that providers of resources will be given an economic incentive to do that. That, hopefully, will make it easier for you to get the product to distribute.*

Secondly, seniors now have to pay taxes on a portion of their individual retirement account savings, and so why not allow them to take part of that money and send it to charitable organizations, as opposed to paying tax on it. So let me give you some practical ways that the Government—[*applause*]. I hope the Senate and the House takes these initiatives seriously so that they recognize the Tax Code has got an important part of helping make sure that there's

more than just talk behind the Faith-Based and Community-Based Initiative.

Government has got a role to play. As you know, this has been quite a controversial subject here in the United States Congress. We believe in separation of church and state—the church shouldn't be the state, and the state shouldn't be the church. No question that's a vital part of the country, and that's a vital part of our heritage, and we intend to keep it that way. But when it comes to social service funding, the use of taxpayers' money, I think we're able to meet the admonition of separation of church and state and, at the same time, recognize that faith programs provide an important model of success. They help us achieve certain objectives in our country.

It used to be that groups were prohibited from receiving any Federal funding whatsoever because they had a cross or a star or a crescent on the wall. And that's changed, for the better. It's changed for the better for those who hurt in our society. And so now, when the government is making social service grants, money is rewarded to groups—awarded to groups that get the best results, regardless of whether they're a faith-based program or not. That's all people want. They want access to grant money on an equal basis, on a competitive basis, so there's no discrimination one way or the other.

I repeat to you, and I'm going to say this about five times, I'm sure: Our job in government is to set goals and to focus on results. If you're addicted to alcohol, if a faith program is able to get you off alcohol, we ought to say, "Hallelujah and thanks," at the Federal level.

One of the things I asked old Jim Towey to do was to let me know if we're making any progress. You know, a lot of people around the country say, "Politicians are good at talking, but sometimes they don't really follow through." It's kind of like, the check is in the mail. So I said, why don't you give us a score card, and I want to share with you some of the results that

has taken place over the last year. The Federal Government awarded more than \$2.1 billion in competitive social service grants to faith-based organizations last year. That's an increase of 7 percent over the previous year, and that is 11 percent of all Federal competitive social service grants. We're making progress about creating a level playing field for people to be comfortable in, one, applying for grants, and two, when receiving a grant—and then actually getting the money out the door to social service organizations.

For example, \$780 million in grants was distributed through the Department of Health and Human Services. USAID gave \$591 million worth of grants. These are the faith-based organizations—521 million through HUD. And so going from ground zero to today, we're making progress. I can tell you why; it's because we're measuring.

A lot of people were nervous about applying for grants. I can understand that, you know. They said, "Why in the world would I want to interface with the Federal Government?" *[Laughter]* They may try to run my business. They may want to try to tell me how to conduct—how to run my program." We've done a good job, I think, through these different faith-based offices and throughout our Government of assuring people in the Government, don't—look, don't tell people how to run their business; accept the way they are, and focus on results. And part of the reason we had these conventions and these outreaches, regional outreaches, is to assure people that the role of the government is to fund, not to micromanage how you run your programs. I repeat to you: You can't be a faith-based program if you don't practice your faith.

We've launched some other initiatives which some of you are involved with—programs to help those who are addicted find treatment. We've talked about mentors for children of prisoners. And for those of you involved in the mentoring program for children of prisoners, I want to thank you on

behalf of a grateful nation. You are providing a fantastic service to help make sure the future is bright.

Can you imagine what it would be like growing up with your mom or dad in prison? Maybe some of you have. It's got to be a heartbreaking experience. And a lot of these kids just cry for love. And to help find a loving soul who is willing to embrace a child and to stay with that child is a wonderful contribution to the country, and it makes sense for the Federal Government to provide funding for such programs.

We are helping prisoners transition back into society. We want to help small service organizations gain capabilities. One of the things that some of you who have been involved with the faith-based community understand, that, you know, the big guys get rolling and kind of get a nice head of steam up, and there doesn't seem to be much focus on smaller organizations, some of which are just getting started. Our job is to make sure that the Compassion Fund helps startups. I don't want to sound like a business guy, but there are some people just getting started. They need tutoring; they need help. But they can provide a vital service.

One reason faith programs exist is because some good soul sees there's a demand. And they may not be the well-established organization, and it seems like to me, it's a proper use of resource to help startups, new social entrepreneurs, small social entrepreneurs get their feet on the ground to provide compassionate help, alongside the big ones. *[Applause]* There you go.

There's other targeted programs, as well as social service competitive grant money. And I'm sure you're being briefed on—I hope you're being briefed on all this during this conference. You ought to feel comfortable about making sure that your program has a chance to participate in a myriad of opportunities. We want you to do that. We welcome your participation. We want involvement.

The other thing is, we're trying to work hard is—to change the culture here in Washington. The faith-based program is relatively new, and it takes a while for cultures to change, and we want people throughout the bureaucracies to not fear the involvement of faith programs and community-based programs in the compassionate delivery of help. And one of the real challenges we have is at the State and local governmental level. We've made good progress, by the way, here at the Federal level on competitive grant money.

See, a lot of money that comes out of Washington is formula-driven. It just kind of flows out. And so sometimes that money goes to the States, and the States are the decisionmakers as to whether or not a faith program can be involved in the—in receiving that money to help meet social objectives. We are constantly working with Governors and mayors to convince them that having a faith-based office in their respective centers of responsibility will really help improve their State, as well as the—as well as their cities.

And there's progress being made there. I think there's something like 30 Governors have now got faith-based offices, and over 100 mayors have got faith-based offices. And to the extent that you can influence your mayor or your Governor, convince them to open up an office and make sure that some of the Federal money that flows to the States is open for competitive bidding for faith-based programs.

By the way, we just set up a new faith-based and community office in the Department of Homeland Security. Last month, I signed a bill extending what's called charitable choice. It's a mechanism by which these programs can go forward. And it's—one of the most important things about the legislation I signed, it allows faith-based groups to receive Federal funding without changing their hiring practices. This is going to stay around for another 5 years. In other words, the bill extended the life

of the charitable choice provision in the welfare reform law by another 5 years.

I would hope Congress would recognize the importance of charitable choice and extend it forever. I mean, if it makes sense today, it makes sense forever.

You know, one of the things that really inspires me is when I get to meet folks who are on the frontline of changing America one soul at a time. And today I had the privilege of meeting a woman named Dana Ingram. She's with us. She is the founder of a faith-based housing and financial service organization in Hinesville, Georgia, called JC Vision. This is an organization that provides financial counseling and assistance in receiving credit and securing a home loan.

See, one of the things that I know is important for the future of the country is to promote ownership. I really like the idea when somebody opens the door of the place they're living and says, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property." And this lady—and Dana is involved with counseling. Look, face it; when you look at a mortgage deal, all that fine print makes some people nervous. It makes me nervous. [*Laughter*] Of course, I'm in temporary housing. [*Laughter*]

When she first—a few years ago, her program served 500 people on a budget of less than \$100,000. She applied for Federal funding. She said, "Yes, I'm a faith-based program, but I do believe that we can benefit from competitive grant money." And so she applied, and she was awarded a grant. Her budget is now \$400,000. Now she's serving 10,000 people. The idea is to promote successful programs, to focus on whether or not these programs are successful, and if they are, encourage them. One way to encourage somebody is to have a little grant money available on a competitive basis—nothing more encouraging than to get some grant money. And so Dana is encouraged, and she's expanding her program.

One of the really successful programs in America is a program called Teen Challenge. I don't know if you're aware of Teen Challenge. So Pastor Arthur Stafford is with us. Arthur works at Teen Challenge New Haven. Notice I didn't say, "Mister." I said, "Pastor." Teen Challenge is a faith-based program.

And he is a—his program is aimed, like many of the Teen Challenge programs, at helping young folks overcome addiction to drugs, which oftentimes lead to crime and other problems. Not long ago, funding constraints limited how many people Teen Challenge in New Haven could host. And they spent—Arthur and his buddies spent a lot of time raising money for the program. For those of you who are on limited budgets who have got grand ambitions to save lives, you know how much time you can spend away from the task at hand toward finding money to sustain your programs. And so Arthur and Team Challenge competed for and earned a Federal grant through the Access to Recovery drug treatment program. For those of you involved in drug treatment, the Access to Recovery drug treatment program provides a good source of money for you. I recommend you applying for grants from that program.

And so what Arthur has said is that—when he got the money—"It's been a blessing to our ministry." I find that interesting, don't you—"It's been a blessing to our ministry. We're not worried about how to raise money all the time; we can focus on transforming lives."

And so today Matt Enriquez is with us. So Matt comes in to meet the President. I said, "How you doing, Matt?" He didn't speak—he looked a little nervous. [Laughter] Matt was addicted to drugs. He had spent time because of robbery. He was lost, and then he was found by people at Teen Challenge. He is now going to college.

Where are you, Matt? There he is. Where's Arthur? Pastor, stand up. [Applause] Yes, there you go. Get your Pastor, Matt. There he is. Thank you.

So Matt now goes to the Connecticut Culinary Institute. If you're looking for a cook, he's your man. [Laughter] Here's what he said: "The best thing about"—speaking about Teen Challenge—"is the love that's in the program. I had no idea what I wanted to do at all. This let me know what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

See, government can pass law, and it can hand out money, but it cannot love. And so I want to thank—[applause]. I appreciate the examples—letting me use you as examples. America can change one heart at a time. Matt is living proof. America changes not only when a soul like Matt gets saved but the person who is involved with helping Matt also becomes a stronger and better citizen as well.

And now Matt goes on. See, Matt himself serves as a way to help change lives. Maybe Matt—maybe somebody is listening here. I don't know if this deal is on C-SPAN or not, but if it is, maybe somebody is out there, like Matt, who needs help and can find help at a Teen Challenge or another program, all aimed at helping somebody save lives.

Matt, I know when you get your deal going and making a good living as a cook, you yourself will turn and help find—somebody else find help too. So I appreciate you.

Our job is—for the next 3 years, is to continue to work with Congress to make sure that money is opened up to faith-based programs. Competitive grant money should not be earmarked. It should be open for competitive-based grants so that—[applause].

We'll continue to work with local and State officials to open up their programs to faith and community-based programs. I'm going to continue to work on individual choice programs. I like the idea of providing help for individuals by empowering them to be the decisionmaker. In other words, it makes a lot of sense to me to say to somebody who is trying to recover

from a drug addiction, “Here’s the money to help you; you go pick the program that suits your needs so you can solve your problem.”

And so we got a lot of work to do to continue to encourage you to do the work you’re doing. I am inspired by the love and compassion that I find as I travel the country. For those of you, by the way, who are involved with helping the Katrina folks, I want to thank you from the bottom of our Nation’s heart for welcoming those who I’m sure felt lost and then felt welcomed when a total stranger embraced them in a typically American compassionate way. I assure you that as long as I’m the President, I will always recognize where the strength of this country lies, the true strength, and that’s in the hearts and souls of our fellow citizens.

My hope is that the vision that de Tocqueville saw in 1830 is a vision that some observer will find still strong in America in the year 2030 and 2060 and beyond. Because so long as America is able to unleash the compassion of our country, will it be able to bring hope into dark corners of our country, places where there is no light, places where there’s despair, places where people can realize their potential if given a chance.

And so I want to—for those of you who are a part of giving people a chance, for those of you who have heard the universal call, I thank you for your work and ask for God’s blessings on your lives and on your work.

Thanks for coming. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel.

Remarks on Signing the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005

March 9, 2006

Welcome. Thanks for the applause. Glad you’re here in the people’s house.

I’m going to sign—in a few moments I’ll be signing the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act. This is a really important piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation that’s vital to win the war on terror and to protect the American people.

The law allows our intelligence and law enforcement officials to continue to share information. It allows them to continue to use tools against terrorists that they used against—that they use against drug dealers and other criminals. It will improve our Nation’s security, while we safeguard the civil liberties of our people. The legislation strengthens the Justice Department so it can better detect and disrupt terrorist threats. And the bill gives law enforcement

new tools to combat threats to our citizens from international terrorists to local drug dealers.

It is an important piece of legislation, and I thank those here who helped get it passed. I particularly want to thank the Attorney General, Al Gonzales. It’s good to see former Attorney Generals here as well. I appreciate Secretary Mike Chertoff, Secretary John Snow, Ambassador Negroponte, Bob Mueller. Thank you all for coming. John Walters, appreciate you being here.

I particularly want to thank the Members of the Congress who are up here, starting with the Speaker of the House, Denny Hastert. Mr. Speaker, thanks for your leadership on this important piece of legislation. I do want to pay special tribute to Senator