

Remarks Following Discussions With President Alejandro Toledo of Peru March 10, 2006

President Bush. I am very pleased to welcome *mi amigo* back to the Oval Office. I have grown to admire President Toledo for his strength of character, his clear vision, his willingness to make difficult decisions, even sometimes when the popularity polls suggest he do something differently. Leadership requires strength of character, the willingness to make tough choices.

I admire my friend's record. Peru is on the verge of elections, and he'll be passing on to a successor a stable economy and stable political process. And that is a wonderful legacy—the first President in 50 years to be able to say, “I'm passing on a stable economy and a stable political process.”

I admire the growth rate, the economic growth rate of Peru. It's the strongest growth rate in South America. I always admire this about my friend—he is—he says that one of his biggest goals was to reduce poverty, and he recognizes that while progress is being made—a lot of progress—that more needs to be done. He cares deeply about the people of Peru. He's a man of—he's got a *corazon gigante*.

I have enjoyed working with him. We accomplished some important missions, one of which was a free trade agreement between Peru and the United States was the result of his leadership and his vision.

And so it's with mixed emotions that I meet my friend. I'm pleased to be in the presence of an accomplished person, somebody who's led, and I'm going to miss working with him, because he's been a partner in peace.

And so, Mr. President, welcome to the Oval Office. It's an honor to have you back, and it's a joy to be with you. Welcome.

President Toledo. Thank you very much. You're very generous.

Let me say very briefly, Peru and Latin America are partners with the United

States in more than just a free trade agreement. It's very important, the free trade agreement, because it generates jobs and enables to continue the sustained rates of economic growth, to reduce poverty. But we are also partners in spreading the democratic values in the region. We're also partners in the fight against narcotrafficking and terrorism. We are partners in the search of peace in the world. We are partners in trying to inculcate in the region that democracy is the imperfect way, but it's the best way that we have. We are partners in trying to convey the idea that being elected democratically is good, but it's insufficient; we need to govern democratically.

And I'm sure that after I finish and pass away the power to the next President, the Peruvians and Latin Americans do not want to go through this cycle that creates instability, that does not attract capital investment to continue growth, to generate jobs, to invest more in health, nutrition, and education, and to reduce poverty.

Mr. President, partnership means to focus seriously and deliver results in what we believe, but also means to have the degrees of tolerance to entertain our differences. And that's democracy, as practiced over here.

It has been a very productive relationship. I also have mixed feelings. And I would say publicly, you are my friend now, you will be my friend after I'm not President, and you will be my friend when you are no longer President. [*Laughter*]

The United States is a market of 290 million people, with an average income of \$37,000 a year. It's a market that I will leave for the next President, and that means jobs, because that has to do with poverty. I don't believe in giving away fish, just a decent job and a quality education and health.

Mr. President, I hope that we soon will sign the free trade agreement and will continue working for the approval of that free trade agreement in our respective Congress.

I went through a tough time, but I'm stubborn. I'm a believer, a strong believer in my convictions. And I'm sure that the wisdom of Peruvians will, on April 9th—or May—will elect someone that believes in democracy, that believes in the stability to continue on, to build on our accomplishment, but correct our mistakes; that we cannot go back and forth, because the poor people cannot afford to wait so much.

Thank you very, very much for receiving us today. It has been a very productive

meeting. I want to thank my collaborators. I'm not going away yet; I still have 5 more months. [*Laughter*] And we will continue working. We have done a good job, I think, of exchanging productive ideas in the meetings of APEC. APEC represents around 57 percent of the world economy, 46 percent of the world trade. And so in 2008, the next Peruvian President, he or she will receive you in Peru as a President of the APEC.

Thank you very, very much.

President Bush. *Mi amigo, gracias.* Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on the Resignation of Gale Norton as Secretary of the Interior *March 10, 2006*

Gale Norton has been a strong advocate for the wise use and protection of our Nation's natural resources and a valuable member of my administration for more than 5 years. As the first woman Secretary of the Interior, she served the Nation well with her vision for cooperative conservation, protection and improvement of our national parks and public lands, and environmentally responsible energy development on public lands and waters. She was instrumental in establishing my Healthy Forests Initiative that has helped make communities safer from catastrophic fire, while improving wildlife habitat. Gale played an influential role in shaping the

Nation's offshore and onshore energy policies to help enhance America's domestic production. When Hurricane Katrina devastated the gulf coast region, she played a leading role in my administration's efforts to restore badly needed offshore energy production to avoid further supply disruption and higher energy costs for consumers. Because of her leadership and thoughtful attention to management, repairs, and maintenance issues, Americans will be able to better enjoy our great national parks and wildlife refuges for generations to come. I appreciate Gale's dedicated service to our country, and I wish Gale and John all the best.