

We also heard from General Abizaid as well as General Casey, who reported on the ongoing efforts to win this war on terror, to defeat the enemy all around General Abizaid's theater of responsibility, as well as defeat the enemy in the central front in the war on terror, which is Iraq.

I appreciate very much General Pace joining us today as well. These leaders, folks on the ground who know the condition on the ground, recognize this is hard work, but they also report on steady progress that we're making toward meeting our important goals—important goal is to make sure Iraq is a democracy that can sustain herself, defend herself, and is not a safe haven for the terrorists.

Tomorrow I'm going to deliver a third in a series of speeches about the situation in Iraq. During Saddam Hussein's brutal rule, he exploited the ethnic and religious diversity of Iraq by setting communities against one another. And now the terrorists and former regime elements are doing the same; they're trying to set off a civil war through acts of sectarian violence. But the United States and our Iraqi forces cannot be defeated militarily. The only thing the Iraqi insurgents, as well as the terrorists, can possibly do is to cause us to lose our nerve and retreat, to withdraw.

I'm going to discuss how the Iraqi people and our coalition continue to work together to build a stable and free and prosperous Iraq. I'll remind the people we're not going to lose our nerve. The stakes are high; we will complete this mission. Our strategy for

rebuilding Iraq is comprehensive, and it includes a commitment from all parts of the Federal Government.

Secretary Rice encouraged our Cabinet members to build relationships with their counterparts in Iraq once the new Iraqi Government is formed, and I expect them to follow through on that—on their commitments. See, by making a broad commitment from the Federal Government, we'll help the Iraqis establish a democracy, we'll help them build the institutions necessary for a stable society, and we'll help defeat the terrorists.

Today was the—today two members of my Cabinet—we had the honor—a chance to honor two members of my Cabinet who won't be with us much longer: Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton and Chief of Staff Andy Card. These two folks have served our country with distinction and honor. I am proud to work side by side with them, and I'm proud to call them friend. Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. John P. Abizaid, USA, commander, U.S. Central Command; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; Gen. Peter Pace, USMC, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; and former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Interview With CNN Espanol

March 28, 2006

White House Chief of Staff

Q. Thank you for the interview. A very busy day at the White House, so I have to ask you, you accepted the resignation

of Andrew Card today—is this a sign of a major shakeup at the White House?

The President. No, it's a sign of a fellow who has worked 5¼ years. He's here every morning early in the morning; he stays late;

and he put his heart and soul in the job. And he came to me about 2½ weeks ago, or 2 weeks ago and said, “I think it may be time for me to go on; you know, I’ve given it my all.” And I thank him for his service. I consider him an incredibly close friend. And obviously, I picked Joshua Bolten to take his place. And now Josh’s job is to design a White House staff that meets the needs of the President, which is one of the key—most important needs, is to make sure I get information in a timely fashion so I can make decisions.

Q. Any more changes coming up?

The President. Well, Josh has just begun to take a look at the White House structure. And I haven’t had a chance to talk to him about the future yet. But right now I’m honoring and celebrating the service of Andy Card.

President’s Upcoming Visit to Mexico

Q. Let’s talk about Cancun. You’ll meet with President Fox, Prime Minister of Canada. What do you expect to accomplish in that trip?

The President. Well, I think it’s very important for the three of us to continue to commit ourselves to a relationship that—a commercial relationship based upon trade, free and fair trade, a security relationship based upon, kind of, mutual understanding of how we can cooperate. We’re going to have a cultural event. We’re going to go to the ruins, which will be fantastic, the Mayan ruins.

But the point is, is that the three of us need to be interconnected and work closely together for the good of our respective peoples. I’ll remind people that we’re not starting anything new. We’re really building on what our predecessors left behind. In 2005, there was enormous trade between Mexico and the United States, much more significant than it was, you know, 10 years ago. And I believe both countries benefit from that trade.

But it is also not a given that people in both our countries accept trade. And

therefore, one of the jobs of leadership is to remind people about the benefits, that trade equals jobs, and jobs means people have a chance to realize hopeful dreams.

Immigration Reform

Q. The Government of Mexico recently placed ads in U.S. papers acknowledging their responsibility in the border problem and saying they should have a role in the way the guest-worker program is shaped. Should Mexico have that role? Is that appropriate?

The President. Well, I think, first of all, the fact that they put those ads in the papers talking about joint responsibility in the border makes it easier for those of us who believe in comprehensive migration or immigration reform to get something done. And I appreciate the Government’s stand there.

The truth of the matter is, the laws of the United States will be written inside the Congress. Of course, thoughtful suggestions may help. But the job is really to get a bill out of the Senate and eventually the House—or out of a conference committee—that I can sign. And I’m interested in comprehensive immigration reform. That includes not only border security but also a temporary-worker plan that recognizes there are hard-working people here doing jobs Americans won’t do. And they ought to be here in such a way so they don’t have to hide in the shadows of our society.

The fundamental issue, by the way, it seems like to me, on the guest-worker plan, is should somebody get to the head of the line when it comes to citizenship? And my answer is, no, they ought to get in line, but they don’t get to get to the head of the line. And that’s where some of the tension about the debate is taking place right now.

Q. The debate is taking place in the Senate. They are discussing a plan, and they’re including your guest-worker program that you’ve requested. But the House said, no.

The Sensenbrenner bill doesn't include a guest-worker program.

The President. Well, I wouldn't give up on it yet; we're just starting. For your listeners, this is a process. The House has passed a bill; the Senate, hopefully, will pass a bill; and then they'll get to conference and work something out in conference. And I have called upon both the House and the Senate to pass a comprehensive bill. And a comprehensive bill means, to make sure you include a guest-worker program as part of a comprehensive bill.

I happen to believe a guest-worker program recognizes reality—what's taking place in our economy today. But it also—a guest-worker program is part of border security. I mean, rather than have people sneaking across the border to come and do jobs that Americans won't do, it seems like it makes sense for people to be given an identification card that they can come and use to do a job on a temporary basis, so they can go back and forth freely with this tamper-proof ID card and not have to sneak across, so that our Border Patrol agents on both sides of the border are really dealing with drug smuggling or gun smuggling or terrorists trying to sneak into the country.

Illegal Immigration

Q. So the question is, after those 6 years, if they get the 6 years in this program, how will you enforce sending people back who have to go back who have been living—

The President. Well, you'll have to have a tamper-proof card in order to work. In other words, there will be—it will make it much easier to have employer enforcement in place when there is a card that you know is tamper-proof, in other words, one that can't be forged.

Right now there's a whole document forging industry that has evolved. There are people sneaking across in 18-wheelers or people risking their lives. And the system

is inhumane, as far as I'm concerned, and it needs to be reformed.

Border Security

Q. The White House supported the Sensenbrenner bill in the House, making the exception that you were going to pursue a temporary guest-worker program. Now, that bill includes the construction of 700 miles of border, and that is seen not only in Mexico but in many Latin American countries as a sign that the U.S. wants to isolate itself from the region. Is that—

The President. I don't think people ought to read that into it. I think people ought to—first of all, the House is the beginning of the process, as you know. But people shouldn't—it's impractical to fence off the border. But it is also realistic to give our Border Patrol agents tools to be able to do their job. We ought to enforce our borders. That's what the American people expect. I've talked to President Fox about Mexico enforcing her southern border, and he agrees there ought to be border enforcement down there. But he, like I, understand it's difficult to enforce large borders.

And I don't think anybody believes that you could totally fence off the border and be effective. But I do think we ought to be in a position to give our Border Patrol agents better tools, more effective ways to prevent people from smuggling people and/or drugs across our border.

Venezuelan President Chavez

Q. I want to ask you about Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez. He refers to you in very strong terms. He does the same about Secretary Rice. What is your reaction to that, and where do you see—how do you see that affecting relations between your two countries?

The President. I judge the President based upon his honoring of the institutions that make democracy sound in Venezuela. I think it's very important for leaders to honor the freedom to worship, the freedom of the press, contracts, legal—to honor legal

contracts, to allow people to express their opinion without fear. And it's very important for leaders throughout the hemisphere, whether they agree with America or not, to honor the tenets of democracy. And to the extent he doesn't do that, then I believe he should be subject to criticism.

Iraq

Q. President—Iraq. You've been telling people the U.S. is going the right way. But the polls—and you've said you don't follow the polls—the polls say people don't agree with you. Could it be that they're right and you're wrong?

The President. History will prove whether I'm right. I think I'll be right because I do believe freedom is universal. I remember it wasn't all that long ago that 11 million Iraqis went to the polls in the face of terrorist threats, in the face of potential assassination, and said, we want to be free. That was last December.

That sentiment still exists in Iraq. The enemy has got—those who want to stop democracy have got one weapon, and that is the ability to kill innocent life to get

on the TV, to shake our will. And my will is not going to be shaken. You cannot have a President make decisions based upon yesterday's polls. You must have a President who believes in certain principles and is willing to lead based upon a vision for a better future.

And I believe my vision for a better future entails having a democratic Iraq as a friend and an ally and to prevent the stated goals of the enemy from taking place. They want us to leave Iraq so they can establish a safe haven from which to launch attacks on our people again. And I take their goal seriously, and I will use all resources at my disposal in order to protect the American people.

Q. Muchas gracias, Señor Presidente.

The President. Si, por nada.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 3:08 p.m. in the Map Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Vicente Fox Quesada of Mexico; and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Statement on the Death of Caspar Weinberger

March 28, 2006

Caspar Weinberger was an American statesman and a dedicated public servant. He wore the uniform in World War II, held elected office, and served in the Cabinets of three Presidents. As Secretary of Defense for President Reagan, he worked to strengthen our military and win the cold

war. In all his years, this good man made many contributions to our Nation. America is grateful for Caspar Weinberger's lifetime of service. Laura and I send our condolences and prayers to the entire Weinberger family.