

Remarks to Reporters Following a Meeting With the House Republican Conference

September 14, 2006

Thank you very much. It's an honor to meet with the Capitol press corps, and a few White House—a few White House folks scattered in. Just had a great visit with House Members—House Republican Members. I talked about a lot of issues and answered questions. I thanked them for the House Armed Services Committee passing a very important piece of legislation in a bipartisan fashion that will give us the tools and wherewithal to protect this country. I reminded them that the most important job of Government is to protect the

homeland, and yesterday they advanced an important piece of legislation to do just that. I'll continue to work with Members of the Congress to get good legislation so we can do our duty.

It's nice seeing you all. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:44 a.m. at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to H.R. 6054, the “Military Commissions Act of 2006.” A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Roh Moo-hyun of South Korea and an Exchange With Reporters

September 14, 2006

President Bush. Welcome to the White House. I will give an opening statement; the President will give an opening statement; we will answer two questions a side.

Mr. President, thank you for coming. The relationship between the United States and South Korea is a strong and vital relationship. Today we talked about how to strengthen our commitment to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. All our discussions began with the notion that our alliance is important to security and peace in the Far East. I thank the President, the South Korean Government, and the people of South Korea for sending troops into Iraq to help that young democracy realize the benefits of liberty.

We reaffirmed our commitment to the six-party talks so that we can peacefully deal with the North Korean issue. We talked about our economic relations and the importance of a free trade agreement to benefit our respective peoples.

And finally, the President talked to me about a visa waiver policy. He strongly advocated the need for there to be a visa waiver for the people of South Korea. I assured him we will work together to see if we can't get this issue resolved as quickly as possible.

We've had a very friendly and very meaningful dialog, and I'm glad you came, Mr. President. Please.

President Roh. First of all, I would like to offer my sincere condolences and sympathies, and those of the Korean people, for the tragedy of 9/11, which struck 5 years ago.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

President Roh. I would like to also reiterate our support for the war against terror and of President Bush, the people of the United States. And we stand with you, President Bush, and the people of America in your fight against terror.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

President Roh. Prior to our summit meeting, we have closely coordinated the agenda and issues of interest. And on this basis, we had very sufficient and very satisfactory talks.

And President Bush spoke about the three issues that we discussed. If I may add to one of them, of the wartime operational control, I was very happy that the President reassured me of the continued commitment of the United States for the defense of the Korean Peninsula.

As for the remaining issue of timing of the transfer of OPCON, we agreed that this is not a political issue; this is an issue that will be discussed through the working-level talks. And we will continue to work together on this issue.

And also, the President and I agreed to work together for the restart of the six-party talks. And as for specific steps that we can take before the resumption of the six-party process, our ministers and staff will be consulting closely.

And, Mr. President, I would like to thank you again for the open and understanding that you have shown in these difficult issues.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters]—I mean, Nedra [Nedra Pickler, Associated Press].

“Military Commissions Act of 2006”

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Your former Secretary of State endorsed the plan to block the terror suspect interrogation legislation that you have proposed. He says it would raise doubts about the moral basis for the U.S. fight against terrorists and would put U.S. troops at risk. Does this hurt your efforts?

President Bush. We have proposed legislation that will enable the Central Intelligence Agency to be able to conduct a program to get information from high-value detainees in a lawful way. And that idea was approved yesterday by a House committee in an overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion. It is very important for the Amer-

ican people to understand that in order to protect this country, we must be able to interrogate people who have information about future attacks.

So the question I ask about any piece of legislation is, will the program provide legal clarity so that our professionals will feel comfortable about going forward with the program? That’s what I’m going to ask. And I will resist any bill that does not enable this program to go forward with legal clarity. And there’s all kinds of letters coming out, and today, by the way, active duty personnel in the Pentagon, the JAG, supported the concept that I have just outlined to you. This is an important program for the security of this country. And we want to work with Congress to make sure that the program can go forward. If there’s not clarity, if there’s ambiguity, if there’s any doubt in our professionals’ minds that they can conduct their operations in a legal way, with support of the Congress, the program won’t go forward and the American people will be in danger.

President Bush. Mr. President.

U.S. Armed Forces in South Korea/North Korea

[At this point, a question was asked in Korean, and no translation was provided.]

President Bush. Okay, I’ll interpret the question for you. [Laughter] “How come you look so beautiful in your blue tie, Mr. President?” [Laughter]

No, he asked about operational control and the date—the appropriate date of operational control. My message to the Korean people is that the United States is committed to the security of the Korean Peninsula. Decisions about the placement of our troops and the size of our troops will be made in consultation with the South Korean Government. We will work in a consultative way at the appropriate level of government to come up with an appropriate date.

I agree with the President that the issue should not become a political issue. I have talked to our Secretary of Defense about making sure that the issue is done in a consultative way and at the appropriate level of government, and that's how we will end up deciding the appropriate transfer of operational authority.

Did he ask you a question?

President Roh. Yes, that was a very good answer. Thank you, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. Hope everybody else agrees with it.

President Roh. As for the question about the common and broad approach being talked about between our two countries for the restart of the six-party talks, I must tell you that we are at the working level of consulting very closely on this issue, but we have not yet reached a conclusion. And this issue is very complex, so I would be hesitant—and it would be difficult for me to answer the question at the moment.

The important thing to remember, that South Korea now faces the issue of North Korean nuclear issue. And this, I would say, is one important issue that we're facing. On the other hand, the United States has a host of other issues to deal with: the Iran/Lebanon crisis; the war in Iraq. So what is important to remember is that—the fact that we are consulting closely on the North Korean nuclear issue, and we are consulting on ways to restart the six-party process. And I believe this is the important point, that this is, in fact, very meaningful that the United States is devoting much of its efforts to resolving the North Korean issue. This is very significant for the Korean Government.

President Bush. Thank you. Caren.

North Korea's Participation in the Six-Party Talks

Q. Mr. President, North Korea has refused to engage in the six-party talks for nearly a year. What's the incentive to get them back to the table?

President Bush. No, I appreciate that. First and foremost, the incentive is for Kim Jong Il to understand there is a better way to improve the lives of his people than being isolated; that stability in the region is in his interest, the ultimate interests for the people of North Korea to be able to benefit and for families to be able to have food on the table.

His refusal to come back to the six-party talks has really strengthened an alliance of five nations that—who are determined to solve this issue peacefully, but recognize a threat posed by a country in the region armed with a nuclear weapon. If he were to verifiably get rid of his weapons programs, there is clearly a better way forward. And that is the message we've been sending to the North Korean Government through the six-party talks.

Final question. Do you want to call on somebody?

South Korea-North Korea Relations

[*A question was asked in Korean, and no translation was provided.*]

President Roh. As for your question, that there is a concern in Korea that the United States will take further sanctions against North Korea and whether this will jeopardize the chance of a successful six-party process, my answer is that we are working very hard on restarting the six-party talks. That is what the President and I have discussed this morning, and this is not the appropriate time to think about the possibility of a failure of the six-party process. So this is my answer.

And my Government has taken certain measures. And although—because we do not want to hurt the inter-Korean relations, we do not label this—these measures as sanctions; we are, in fact, taking measures tantamount to sanctions after the North Korean missile launches. This is—we have suspended rice and fertilizer aid to North Korea, and this is, in fact, similar to sanctions in its effect.

And we are, in fact—this measure of suspension of aid to North Korea, I believe, is in line with the implementation of the U.N. security resolution on North Korea. And as for other sanctions you have mentioned by the United States, these are being done in line with the U.S. law enforcement. And so we would be—we would not delve into this at this time.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea. A reporter referred to former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell.

Statement on the Death of Ann Richards *September 14, 2006*

Laura and I are deeply saddened by the passing of Governor Ann Richards of Texas. Ann loved Texas, and Texans loved her. As a public servant, she earned respect and admiration. Ann became a national role

model, and her charm, wit, and candor brought a refreshing vitality to public life. We extend our sympathies to Ann's family and friends. Texas has lost one of its great daughters.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Earmark Reform *September 14, 2006*

I applaud the House of Representatives for voting again this week in support of greater transparency and accountability in Government. H.R. 1000 [H. Res. 1000]* would shine a brighter light on earmarks by requiring disclosure of the sponsors of

each provision. This reform would help improve the legislative process by making sure both lawmakers and the public are better informed before Congress votes to spend the taxpayers' money.

Statement on Senate Passage of Port Security Improvement Legislation *September 14, 2006*

Today the Senate passed legislation to strengthen my administration's efforts to secure our ports and detect dangers before they reach America's shores.

By furthering our coordination with responsible countries throughout the world, the "Port Security Improvement Act of

2006" will help secure the global supply chain and help ensure the smooth flow of commerce into and out of the United States. I am pleased this bill codifies several administration efforts that have already substantially improved security at our ports, including the Container Security Initiative,

* White House correction.