

Remarks at a Lunch Hosted by President Toomas Ilves of Estonia in Tallinn

November 28, 2006

Mr. President, thank you very much, and Mr. Prime Minister, thank you as well for your gracious hospitality. I'm really thrilled to be here in Estonia. I love being in a country that values liberty and freedom. I appreciate being in a country that understands there are duties and obligations beyond her border to help others realize the benefits of liberty and freedom. I'm very proud of your military, and I'm pleased to be in the presence of those who wear the uniform of Estonia. I know our military has great respect for the Estonian soldiers.

I am amazed to be in a country that has been able to effect a flat tax in such

a positive way. I am impressed by the e-governance that you have here in Estonia.

All in all, this has been a very worthwhile and exciting visit for me, and I thank you for your warm hospitality. And I'd like to raise my glass to the leadership of this important country, to our friendship, and most importantly, to the people of Estonia.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 11:42 a.m. in the Estonian Theater. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Andrus Ansip of Estonia. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of President Ilves.

Remarks Following Discussions With President Vaira Vike-Freiberga of Latvia in Riga, Latvia

November 28, 2006

President Vike-Freiberga. Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's been a great pleasure to have the President of the United States here in Riga for the second time in less than 2 years. And I expressed how delighted we are to be receiving him and his delegation here on the occasion of the Riga 2006 summit.

The United States has been our strong supporter all those years when Latvia was not free, has been our supporter after we regained our independence, and I'm most grateful to the United States for the understanding and support we got in our direction and our movement towards NATO. Now that we are fully members, Latvians certainly sleep better at night knowing that they are protected by an alliance that will spare them the sorts of experiences they had in earlier years.

But of course I'm delighted to be welcoming the President of the United States as the representative of what still remains as a shining example of the free world, of the sort of success one can achieve in a country that has been working at its democracy for a long time, that keeps perfecting it. I would hope that Latvia, as well, has the same opportunities; that we can go ahead, have our own choices, make our own mistakes, and do so with the help and understanding and support of fellow nations who share the same values as us.

President Bush. Madam President, thanks for inviting me back to Riga. Our experience was so good the first time that we couldn't wait to get back. I want to congratulate you on hosting this very important NATO summit. You and your Government have done a spectacular job, and I want

to thank the people of Riga for accommodating all the world leaders who have come to this important meeting.

I appreciate very much your strong belief that liberty has got the capacity to transform the world for the good. I thank you and the Latvian people for supporting the young democracies in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

We spent time talking about our bilateral relations. Trade is good between the United States and Latvia, and that's very positive. The President brought up the Visa Waiver Program. She is deeply concerned that the people of Latvia aren't able to travel to the United States as freely as she would like. I fully understand your concerns, Madam President. And to this end,

I'll be sending to Congress a new proposal to make it easier for the citizens of Latvia to come to the United States and, at the same time, for us to share information to make sure that we're able to thwart any type of terrorist activities in our country. And I'm confident we can work this through.

And I want to thank you for working hard on this issue. Every time I've met with you, you brought it up, because you deeply care about the people of your country. I want to congratulate you on your strong leadership, and again, thank you for your very warm hospitality.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 3:40 p.m. at Riga Castle.

Remarks at Latvia University in Riga *November 28, 2006*

Thank you all. *Labdien*. Madam President, thank you for your kind words. Thank you for your leadership, and thank you for your friendship. Mr. Speaker; Mr. Prime Minister; Senator Sessions from the great State of Alabama, who is with us; Marc Leland, my friend from a long period of time; I want to thank the rector of this important university. Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your warm welcome. I'm delighted to be back in Riga.

I appreciate the Latvian Transatlantic Organization, the Commission of Strategic Analysis, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States for organizing this important conference. This is my third visit to the Baltics as the President of the United States, and it's my second visit to this beautiful city. I just can't stay away. I'm thrilled and honored to be back here, and I bring the greetings and good wishes of the American people.

Not far from where we meet today stands Riga's Freedom Monument. It was erected in 1935, during this country's brief period of independence between the two World Wars. During the dark years of Soviet occupation, the simple act of laying flowers at the foot of this monument was considered a crime by Communist authorities. In 1989, the monument was the scene of one of the most remarkable protests in the history of freedom. Hundreds of thousands of people stood together and formed a human chain that stretched nearly 400 miles across the Baltics, from Tallinn in the north, through downtown Riga, and into the heart of Vilnius. By joining hands, the people of this region showed their unity and their determination to live in freedom, and it made clear to the Soviet authorities that the Baltic peoples would accept nothing less than complete independence.

It took more years of struggle, but today, the Baltic nations have taken their rightful place in the community of free nations, and