

## Remarks Following a Meeting With Secretary of Defense-Designate Robert M. Gates

December 5, 2006

*The President.* Good morning. I just had a breakfast with my nominee to be the Secretary of Defense, Bob Gates. Bob Gates will be a fine Secretary of Defense. I appreciate the fact that he's getting a hearing today in the United States Senate. I hope for a speedy confirmation so he can get sworn in and get to work.

Those who wear the uniform know they'll have a friend in Bob Gates in the Defense Department. He admires our military; he respects those who have volunteered to serve our country. He's going to do an excellent job for us.

Again, Bob, I thank you for agreeing to serve.

*Secretary-designate Gates.* Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

*The President.* Best of luck up there on Capitol Hill. Good luck to you.

*Secretary-designate Gates.* Thank you.

*The President.* Thank you all.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:48 a.m. in the Diplomatic Reception Room at the White House.

## Remarks Following a Meeting With the Iraq Study Group

December 6, 2006

I just received the Iraq Study Group report, prepared by a distinguished panel of our fellow citizens. I want to thank James Baker and Lee Hamilton and the panel members for spending a lot of time on this really difficult issue. And I thank you for coming into the White House today to give me a copy of this report.

I've told the members that this report, called "The Way Forward," will be taken very seriously by this administration. This report gives a very tough assessment of the situation in Iraq. It is a report that brings some really very interesting proposals, and we will take every proposal seriously, and we will act in a timely fashion.

The commission is headed up to Congress, and I urge the Members of Congress to take this report seriously. While they won't agree with every proposal—and we probably won't agree with every proposal—it, nevertheless, is an opportunity to come

together and to work together on this important issue.

The country, in my judgment, is tired of pure political bickering that happens in Washington, and they understand that on this important issue of war and peace, it is best for our country to work together. And I understand how difficult that is, but this report will give us all an opportunity to find common ground, for the good of the country, not for the good of the Republican Party or the Democrat Party, but for the good of the country.

We can achieve long-lasting peace for this country, and it requires tough work. It also requires a strategy that will be effective. And we've got men and women of both political parties around this table who spent a lot of time thinking about the way forward in Iraq and the way forward in the Middle East, and I can't thank them enough for your time. You could be doing a lot of other things. You could have had

a lot more simple life than to allow your Government to call you back into service, but you did allow us to call you back into service, and you've made a vital contribution to the country. Our fellow citizens have got to know that it is possible for people of good will to come together to help make recommendations on how to deal with a very serious situation.

And we applaud your work. I will take it very seriously, and we'll act on it in a timely fashion. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:58 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to James A. Baker III and Lee H. Hamilton, cochairs, Iraq Study Group. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

## Remarks Following Discussions With President Oscar Arias Sanchez of Costa Rica *December 6, 2006*

*President Bush.* Mr. President, welcome. I'm glad to welcome you back to the White House. I appreciate the very important discussions we had. Our discussions started with the bilateral relationship between the United States and Costa Rica. It is an important relationship. It's an important relationship when it comes to trade; it's an important relationship when it comes to interchanges between our governments and our peoples.

Mr. President, you spent a lot of time talking about the importance of education, and I respect you for that, and I appreciate your emphasis on education. And we will investigate ways to determine whether or not the United States can help, if you so desire, on matters of education. And I congratulate you on being very successful in educating the younger children of your country. And I, again, admire your focus on extending the education through all grades in Costa Rica.

Secondly, we spent time on CAFTA. It's an important initiative for this administration. I appreciate your dedication to the issue of trade. The President understands full well that trade is the best way to help reduce poverty around the world, and so he made it clear to me his deep desire

for the United States to take the lead on the Doha round of the trade discussions, which I assured him we would.

I appreciated very much your advice, Mr. President, on the neighborhood in which we live. I thank you for your clear vision when it comes to forms of government. And I appreciate you sharing with me your insights as to the different countries and different leaders and how best that we can work together to achieve peace and stability.

It's an honor to have you here, sir. You represent a fine country that a lot of Americans have had firsthand knowledge with. And I'm proud to welcome you.

*President Arias Sanchez.* Well, thank you, Mr. President, for your time. This room is familiar to me. I visited the Oval Office in the past, during the Reagan years and when President Bush was President. I was telling President Bush that in the past, every time I came to the White House, it was not to talk about Costa Rica, but about Nicaragua, and I'm very happy that we had a chance to talk about Costa Rica this time.

And as he just mentioned, my country is a small country. We produce what we do not consume, and we consume what