

we do not produce. This is why trade is so important to us. Costa Rica is a very open economy, is the second-largest open economy in this hemisphere, after Chile. And this is why CAFTA is important to us, and this is why we're so determined to approve CAFTA, ratify CAFTA in our congress as soon as possible. And we are in the process of initiating negotiations with the European Union about free trade agreement with the whole of Europe, the European Union.

Concerning education, this is my priority. Peace was my priority 20 years ago; now it's education. I was asking President Bush that his program, No Child Left Behind, could be applied in many Latin American countries. You are all aware that what explains our failures, among other things, is

the fact that average schooling in Latin American countries is only 6½ years, and that explains the social inequality and the poverty of our people.

So at the beginning of the 21st century, we're going to spend more on education, which is my dream and my determination to spend as much as 8 percent of GDP on education. We are simply condemning our children to remain poor as their grandfathers, and this is something that certainly the people of Latin America don't deserve.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Glad you're here. Good job.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:41 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Members of Congress *December 6, 2006*

I've just met with Members of Congress from both political parties. My message is this: I want to work with the Congress; I want to work with people in both parties, so that we can send a message to the American people that the struggle for freedom, the struggle for our security is not the purview of one party over the other. The American people want us to work together, and my intention is to do just that.

Today the Baker-Hamilton commission, the Iraq Study Group put out what I thought was a very interesting report. There's some very good ideas in there. Not all of us around the table agree with every idea, but we do agree that it shows that bipartisan consensus on important issues is possible; really important for the American people to know that there are people of good will here in town willing to set aside politics and focus on the security of this country and the peace of the world.

And I want to thank you all for taking time out of your schedules to come. It means a lot to me, and I think it means a lot to the American people, to recognize that there are people in this town who are concerned more about the security of this country than they are about the security of their own political positions. And I'm proud to be with you. And I want to thank you for your thoughts. I take your comments very seriously. I take your ideas very seriously. And it's important to me that we continue to hear from the Congress as we fashion a way—a new way forward in Iraq, a new look, to achieve our objective of a country which can sustain itself, govern itself, defend itself, and be an ally in this war against extremism and terrorism.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:27 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Statement on Senate Confirmation of Robert M. Gates as Secretary of Defense

December 6, 2006

I am pleased the Senate has overwhelmingly voted to confirm Dr. Robert Gates as the next Secretary of Defense. In his confirmation hearing, Dr. Gates demonstrated he is an experienced, qualified, and thoughtful man who is well respected by members of both parties and is committed to winning the war on terror. Throughout his career, Dr. Gates has transformed the organizations he has led and

empowered them to successfully address complex issues. I am confident that his leadership and capabilities will help our country meet its current military challenges and prepare for emerging threats of the 21st century.

I thank Chairman Warner and Ranking Member Levin for leading dignified and constructive hearings, and I thank the Senate for moving quickly on this nomination.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom

December 7, 2006

President Bush. Thank you all. Please be seated. I just had a good visit with Prime Minister Tony Blair. I appreciate you coming back, Mr. Prime Minister. I always enjoy our discussions. And I appreciate your clear view that we are confronted with a struggle between moderation and extremism, and this is particularly evident in the broader Middle East.

I talked about my recent trip to Jordan, where I talked to Prime Minister Maliki. I briefed the Prime Minister on my visit with His Eminence, Mr. Hakim, one of the major political players in Iraq. We discussed the report I received yesterday from the Iraq Study Group, a report chaired by Secretary of State—former Secretary of State James Baker and former Congressman Lee Hamilton. I told the Prime Minister I thought this was a very constructive report. I appreciated the fact that they laid out a series of recommendations, and they're worthy of serious study. I also updated the Prime Minister on the reviews that are being conducted by the Pentagon and the State Department and our National

Security Council. I talked to him about the consultations I'm having with the United States Congress.

We agree that victory in Iraq is important. It's important for the Iraqi people; it's important for the security of the United States and Great Britain; and it's important for the civilized world. We agree that an Iraq that can govern itself, defend itself, and sustain itself as an ally on the war on terror is a noble goal. The Prime Minister and I seek a wide range of opinions about how to go forward in Iraq, and I appreciate your opinions and your advice.

The increase in sectarian attacks we're seeing in and around Baghdad are unsettling. It has led to much debate in both our countries about the nature of the war that is taking place in Iraq. And it is true that Sunni and Shi'a extremists are targeting each other's innocent civilians and engaging in brutal reprisals. It's also true that forces beyond Iraq's borders contribute to this violence. And the Prime Minister put it this way, he said, "The violence is