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Remarks Following a Meeting With President Valdas Adamkus of Lithuania *February 12, 2007*

President Bush. It's my honor to welcome a personal friend and a friend of freedom and peace to the Oval Office. Mr. President, I respect you, I respect your country. Lithuania has been a country whose history has been one of great tragedy. You yourself have lived through that tragedy. And it's so refreshing for a person like me to talk to somebody and to strategize with somebody who knows the great blessings of living in a free society.

The example of your country is an important example for the world, and that is that freedom is universal, that those of us who have the benefits of living in a free society must prevent a country such as yours from ever again being subjected to the tyranny of a few. You know full well the suffering that your relatives went through.

And therefore, I find it—I'm not surprised that in a struggling democracy like Afghanistan, your country has stood up bravely to support the Karzai Government and the people of Afghanistan. And I thank you. And I thank the citizens of your country for your willingness to contribute to peace by helping a young democracy survive. I thank you very much for your support for the people of Iraq. It's hard work in Iraq. But nevertheless, it is inspiring to know that Lithuania has said, "We want to help the people realize the blessings of a free society."

We talked about a lot of issues. We talked about energy independence. I was very pleased by the strategy that you and others in the Baltics are working to achieve, to achieve energy independence. We share the same objectives here in America, and

I look forward to working with you, as new technologies become available, to make us all less dependent on oil and natural gas.

Secondly, the President was quite adamant about visa waiver. I can understand your strong position, Mr. President. I thank you very much for your clarity of thought. There should be no doubt that here in the Oval Office that President Adamkus represented the will of the majority of Lithuanian people, when discussed visa waiver and his desire for the people of his country to be treated like most of the other people in the European Union. I assured him we'll work with Congress to get a fair piece of legislation forward as quickly as possible so we can deal with this issue once and for all.

All in all, I'm so grateful that you and the First Lady came by to say hello here in the Oval Office. And I know Laura was very much looking forward to entertaining your good wife over there at the Residence. I thought the business session here went very well in a very constructive way. And again, I welcome you back to the Oval Office.

President Adamkus. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I believe the visit is just reconfirmation of the Lithuanian people for what we stand for. And I believe there is no doubt that our commitments—international commitments, joining United States, actually based on the principles, principles which were the guiding light for us during the very difficult times of the Soviet occupation, almost for a half of the century.

But at the same time, like I indicated to you, knowing what it means to be free and knowing, I mean, that this freedom still is not available in some part of the world, this is why we are with our, I would say, meager resources, but standing by you in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in Kosovo. And definitely, we are going to stand shoulder with shoulder just to make sure that the remaining people who cannot even enjoy today those kind of privileges—free speech, respect for human rights—would be given to them.

So I want to just thank you once again, I mean, for the support we are receiving. We are going to work together, especially in developing situations like we just mentioned during our conversations here, about

the latest statements in Munich. I believe this is not going to sway away the free people from the—I mean, its ideals, the direction we are going together, and I think that in the final outcome will be—this is what we dream about; this is for what the American people stand for, for centuries, and the day is coming.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

President Adamkus. Thank you very much.

President Bush. Appreciate you being here. Thank you all. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:02 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan.

Remarks at a Celebration of African American History Month February 12, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Welcome to the White House. I'm so pleased that you all have joined us for the 81st celebration of African American History Month. During this special month, we reflect on the many ways African Americans have shaped our Nation's history, and we honor outstanding achievements by our fellow citizens.

One of those achievements took place two Sundays ago in Miami, Florida—took place at a football game. [*Laughter*] It might just have been a game for some, but for a lot of folks, it was a moment, an historic moment. And we congratulate Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith for their strong leadership and their example they have set. That's an achievement.

I'm also proud to be here with another football coach who deserves a lot of credit, Sylvester Croom, who is the head football coach from Mississippi State University. His achievement is the first African American coach in the Southeastern football league—

Southeastern Conference. He was picked because he's a strong leader and a fine man. And I thank you for blazing trails.

I'm proud to be here with Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State. So last night on this very stage, we celebrated Abraham Lincoln, and we welcomed Doris Kearns Goodwin, who wrote a book called "The Team of Rivals." Abraham Lincoln surrounded himself with fine Cabinet officers, all of whom wanted one thing—his job. [*Laughter*] Not so fast, Madam Secretary. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate so very much Members of the Congress for joining us: First, the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Charlie Rangel. That's an achievement. [*Laughter*] I'm looking forward to working with this achievement to get some things—[*laughter*—to get some things done. He's a good man and a smart guy. Senator Norm Coleman from Minnesota—Senator, thank you for coming.