

who cares deeply about the people of Panama.

I can remember very fondly my visit to your country. I remember going to the Panama Canal, and I was impressed by the operations, impressed by the scope of the Canal. And you told me that, for the good of the world, "We're going to build an adjunct to the Canal." And I said, "Well, that's an ambitious agenda." And then, sure enough, as you sit here now, you tell me it's going to come to be. So I congratulate you on having a vision, and I congratulate you on being a leader.

I'm impressed by the economic statistics that we talked about. You told me that you care deeply about your people and you want them working, and they're working. The unemployment rate is down. Commerce is beginning to expand. And that's positive news for Panama, it's positive news for Central America, and it's also good news for us in America.

I appreciate so very much your desire to work out any differences we have on a free trade agreement. I am committed to a Panamanian free trade agreement because I believe it's in the interest of the United States that we have a free trade agreement with your vital country. And I assure you that we'll work in good faith to get an agreement done, and I will call upon the United States Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, to support this deal that will help both nations.

We had an interesting discussion about biofuels. I reminded the President that I said in the State of the Union Address that the United States is committed to having

about 35 billion gallons of alternative fuels as a part of our fuel mix within a 10-year period of time. Biofuels means ethanol, or biofuels means fuel derived from palm.

It just so happens, Panama has got the capacity to make a lot of biofuels. And I believe your capacity to make biofuels and our desire to use biofuels will make an interesting match as we work to become less dependent on oil and better stewards of the environment.

And so I appreciate so very much your vision on that issue as well. I'm looking forward to working with you. And once again, *bienvenidos aqui*.

*President Torrijos Espino. Gracias, Presidente.* Thank you.

I'm very pleased and recognize your commitment for pushing the free trade agenda and trying to finish the free trade agreement with Panama and the rest of the Latin American countries. And also, I'm very satisfied to know that Latin America is still a very important part of your international agenda, with your trip that's coming next, and of course, all the cooperation that we can have in research of biofuels will help all of our countries be less dependent on oil, have more opportunity for our economies to grow.

So it's been, as always, a very sincere and a very fruitful meeting with you, President.

*President Bush. Gracias, amigo. Gracias.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 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 United States Ambassador-Designate to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker February 16, 2007

*The President.* I just had a lengthy conversation with our nominee to be the Am-

bassador from the United States to Iraq. I've gotten to know Ambassador Ryan

Crocker during my time as President because he's been—fulfilled a very important mission for the United States, and that is the Ambassador to Pakistan, where he served ably and served well. And I'm confident I picked the right man to be our new Ambassador in Iraq.

The Ambassador will follow General David Petraeus into Iraq. So now we've got a new military commander and a new head of our diplomatic mission there. These are two competent individuals who will help us implement our new strategy in the country of Iraq. And that new strategy has said that we're going to help this young Iraqi Government be able to sustain itself and defend itself by enforcing security in the capital city.

I was telling the Ambassador that I had a visit today with Prime Minister Maliki via secure SVTS. I was pleased that he's meeting benchmarks that he had set out for his Government. One of the benchmarks was to move Iraqi troops into the city of Baghdad—troops that will be complemented by our own troops. He is meeting those obligations. A second such benchmark is that he would change the rules of engagement so that criminals, regardless of their religion, would be brought to justice in equal fashion. He is meeting that benchmark. Thirdly, he passed a budget, of which \$10 billion is available for reconstruction. He said he would do that; the budget has been passed; he has met that benchmark. And that's good news for the Iraqi people, and it should give people here in the United States confidence that this Government knows its responsibilities and

is following through on those responsibilities.

And so the Ambassador heads into a really important assignment, carrying a message of hope to the Iraqi people that the United States wants them to succeed, and a message of urgency to the Iraqi Government that our patience is not unlimited and that we expect that Government to perform. And as I said, I was able to tell the Prime Minister how much, how closely we're watching, that we've got a good, new man coming as Ambassador, and that we appreciate the fact that he's beginning to meet the benchmarks that he set out for his people.

Mr. Ambassador, Godspeed, and thank you.

*Ambassador-designate Crocker.* Thank you, sir. Pleased to have your confidence.

*The President.* Thank you.

By the way, we're looking forward to quick Senate confirmation. He's had his hearing. And of course, when I call him "Ambassador," it's not Ambassador to Iraq—it's Ambassador-designee to Iraq—but Ambassador now in Pakistan. And the Senate needs to confirm him as quickly as possible so he can join General Petraeus and do the job.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq.

## The President's Radio Address *February 17, 2007*

Good morning. Today I would like to talk to you about an urgent priority for

our Nation: confronting the rising costs of health care.