

The President's News Conference With President Oscar Berger Perdomo of Guatemala in Guatemala City

March 12, 2007

President Berger. Distinguished members of the media, welcome, and thank you for honoring us with your presence. A very fruitful, interesting, and productive day with President Bush. Today's visit to the Department of Chimaltenango, Iximche, the contact that we were able to have with our people, the cultural legacy that we were able to witness together, and that the special meaning that it is together closer to the Guatemalan people, and hear from them of their history with President Bush and Mrs. Bush, has been very important today.

After that very interesting visit, we met with teams of Presidents Bush and Berger, and evidently, on the table were extremely important topics, particularly as regards Guatemala. And we were able to discuss security and our efforts to fight drug trafficking. In that sense, President Bush expressed his full support for—expressed his support, also, for the Maya Jaguar plan that is already in operation, and has told us that he is going to make a regional proposal to fight drug trafficking, regionally, where he is inviting Mexico and the Central American countries to join the United States in that fight. Part of this strategy seeks to train the security bodies that are in charge of fighting drug trafficking and the intelligence that is going to surround these teams, and then be able to identify these sources in a permanent strategy—and I insist, regional strategy—which I think is key: We should no longer work in isolation; we should work jointly, that is, the countries that face this very serious problem.

Likewise, we talked about the Millennium Challenge Account. And Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told us that Guatemala continues to be among the countries that could be elected. In the coming 2 months, we are going to receive a response.

We expect that it might be favorable for Guatemala.

Today President Bush, who is participating in this productive effort, we were able to see how these Guatemalan workers produce the best vegetables in the world and have been able to enter a very important market, particularly the Central American market, the effort of whose integration President Bush is also aware of.

Of course, President Bush's visit brings us closer to the most important and largest economic power and the largest market in the world, with many possibilities, through CAFTA, where we can have—give better access to the U.S. market to Guatemalan produce, where we highlighted snow peas and berries, chili peppers and tomatoes. We had a limitation, and there was—as of a couple of months, we are exporting significant amounts of Guatemalan produce. So we also mentioned support by U.S. Customs to control Guatemalan port and customs services. This gives us a better rating and makes it possible for us to exercise a more efficient trade effort.

We've mentioned to President Bush, and we've invited the United States to become the partner of the Central American Economic Integration Bank—CABEI—one that he favored. And he is well aware of the fact that this bank and its resources are used to build infrastructure, to promote investment, and to give support to governments as well.

I believe that everyone will probably be waiting to hear from the—about the topic of migrants. This is a topic that we discussed at greater length with President Bush during the trip this morning and during this afternoon's meeting. It is a concern for President Bush; it is a concern for the Guatemalans and the 13 million illegal

aliens who are currently living in the United States.

President Bush has confirmed that there are no express instructions to persecute Guatemalan illegal aliens; that is, somebody is acting beyond the scope of the law, he has to be brought before the law. But if—there is no intention to persecute undocumented workers. He has convinced us that the best proposal is the migration law reform. He extensively explained the efforts that the—what the efforts will need to be engaged by the Democratic groups and the Republican groups in the Senate, but that should not be an issue that should be on the agenda next year. That should be taken care of, and he expects that by August, we will have a reform for the immigration act, where a legal status will be considered for those who are already living there and regulations of how to become a legal worker in the United States.

I would like to take this opportunity, President Bush, to thank you for your visit. Guatemala feels honored. We feel highly satisfied and deeply committed with this effort. We have been in the eyes and the minds of the entire world during these couple of hours that we have been sharing with you. And what is most important, I believe that for the people in the highlands of Guatemala today, there was a message of closeness, of rapport with President Bush, and of a hope. Together, we can achieve great things, as Mariano Canu said in Tecpan, where he showed us what he can do with his work team, how he can give added value to the wonderful vegetables of the highlands of Guatemala, to be able to send it to the great U.S. market.

Once again, for President Berger, this has been a wonderful opportunity to have been able to share with Mrs. Bush and President Bush. And for Guatemala, it is a reason for pride. Once again, thank you very much for your visit.

President Bush. *Senor Presidente*, thank you very much for your warm welcome. I agree with you; it's been a great day

for Laura and me. And we really loved traveling with you and Wendy, and it's just a wonderful experience.

I appreciate your kindness on this first official visit to your country. Relations between the United States and Guatemala are stronger than ever. We're friends, and that's important. Our countries are fellow democracies. We're partners in trade. We're allies in the cause of social justice. Today President Berger and I discussed some of the ways that the United States and Guatemala can continue to work together to build a more hopeful future for the people in our respective countries.

Guatemala is a strong and vibrant democracy of more than 12 million people. President Berger understands the importance of building a government that is accountable to all its citizens, and I appreciate that commitment. I appreciate the steps you've taken to increase transparency, to reduce corruption, to modernize the civil service, and to help improve Guatemala's record on human rights. You've got strong leadership, Mr. President.

In September, you elect a new President, who will face the task of building on your successes. The United States and the international community will support the people of Guatemala in holding free and fair elections.

Your President and I both believe that a strong democracy requires security from drug lords and violent criminals. So we spent a lot of time talking about that today. I appreciate the fact that you have renewed the fight against the drug trade, that you've worked to eradicate opium poppy, and you fired hundreds of corrupt police officers. That's what leaders do; you find problems and you address them for the good of the people. We appreciate Guatemala's commitment to this work, and we'll continue to stand with you.

President Berger is working with the United Nations to form an international commission to help investigate and prosecute organized crime in Guatemala, and

the United States strongly supports this effort. Our countries are working together to fight transnational gangs. And the President was right: I suggested we think about this issue regionally. You've got to understand that these gangs are able to move throughout Central America and up through Mexico into our own country, and therefore, we've got to think regionally and act regionally.

The first thing we can do is share information so we can help track down gang members, and we can increase communications; we can develop effective ways to protect children from gangs. There's a lot of work to be done, but it first starts with making a sincere commitment to addressing the problem.

Improving education is an important goal for both our nations. We spent a lot of time today talking about education. And the President and First Lady of Guatemala are absolutely committed to extending education's reach beyond just the capital city. And I appreciate that commitment, Mr. President. More than 40 percent of the population of this country is under 15 years old—it's an interesting statistic, isn't it?—which means that a more hopeful future depends on teaching the younger generation the skills necessary to be able to succeed in the 21st century.

And we want to help. We've done some interesting work here, and the American people need to know that our commitment, our bilateral aid in Guatemala, goes toward helping meet education goals. It's in the interest of the United States that there be literate populations in our neighborhood. In the city, in the Department of Iximche, we established a project that helped raise the number of children who complete first grade from 51 percent to 71 percent. It's not a well-known program, but it worked. And this country of mine is committed to helping make these kind of programs successful, Mr. President.

We also want to expand access to health care. Today, as the President mentioned,

we went to Santa Cruz Balanya; it was a really interesting moment. The American people would have been incredibly proud of watching our military folks dispense with basic health care needs to people who needed help. And the people of Guatemala would be especially proud to have seen your military working side by side with our troops to do the same thing. There's a great mission of compassion, and it's making a difference to people's lives.

Imagine not being able to see, and all of a sudden, somebody appears in your life, gives you an eye test, and fits you for glasses so you can see better. Or you have a perpetual toothache, and somebody shows up, in this case in military uniforms, and says, "How can I help?" It is in the interest of the United States to continue these kinds of missions, Mr. President.

It is estimated that we have served more than 160,000 Guatemalans since 2001, providing health care, basic health care needs. And I was sharing with the President a little earlier that we're going to set up a health care training mission in Panama, so that we can train trainers, so that people in Guatemala can come and get just the basic skills necessary to take back to their towns and villages to be able to dispense with basic health care.

The United States and Guatemala trade a lot, especially now that Guatemala has become a full member of CAFTA-DR. President Berger and I believe that CAFTA can spread opportunity, provide jobs, and help lift people out of poverty. We saw how trade can transform the small village of Chirijuyu, part of our experience in traveling with the President was to get outside the capital. It was really, really fun and really heartwarming. As a matter of fact, it was one of the great experiences of my Presidency. The town has grown from subsistence farming to selling high-value crops like lettuce and carrots and celery. As a matter of fact, I got to pack some lettuce. The President and I were hauling boxes

of lettuce; we were putting them in the truck.

I met Mariano Canu. See, I talked about this man, Mariano Canu, in my speech in Washington, DC. I'd never met him, but I was intrigued by his story about how a fellow had gone from being a subsistence farmer, just scratching out a living, barely making it, the father of six kids wondering whether or not they would have a future, and then he organized an organization of small farmers called *Labradores Mayas*. And they came together and became more efficient, and then they found markets. They found markets throughout Central America as a result of CAFTA, and into the United States as a result of CAFTA.

And the guy is making a living. He's making more than a living; he's built a thriving enterprise. You should have seen the look on his face, about how proud he was to show to the President of his country and the President of the United States the great progress being made.

As the President mentioned, I'm working with the United States Congress on comprehensive immigration reform. He asked me about an incident that took place up in Massachusetts the other day. I said, "Yes, we're going to enforce the laws in our country, just like you should enforce the laws in yours." It is against the law for somebody to hire somebody who is in our country illegally to work. And therefore, the deportations took place as a result of law enforcement enforcing the law. This wasn't—they didn't say, "Oh, maybe there's Guatemalans there; let's go get them." That wasn't what happened, just so you know. You've got to understand that when we enforce the law, we do so in a fair and rational way. It just so happened that Guatemalans were working there illegally.

He also mentioned to me that there's some conspiracies about how children are being left behind in Guatemala. *No es la verdad*. That's not the way America operates. We're a decent, compassionate country. Those are the kind of things we do

not do. We believe in families, and we'll treat people with dignity. And the system needs to be fixed. And so we spent time talking about our strategy to get comprehensive immigration reform out of the Congress.

As I told the President, it seems like to me, we've got to get this done by August. I hope so. I don't want to put a timetable on the legislative process. Timetables are generally meant to be broken. We don't believe in timetables, but I do believe in pressing hard and working with Democrats and Republicans to get it done, Mr. President. And we want there to be a rational way for people to come and do jobs Americans aren't doing. We don't want people to feel like they have to get stuffed into the back of a truck and pay exorbitant fees to *coyotes* to come and try to realize dreams. There's got to be a better system.

And I told him the biggest problem in the debate is going to be what to do with the people who are already in our country illegally. And I explained to him, there will not be amnesty, automatic citizenship; it's just not going to happen. Nor is it feasible to try to kick everybody out of our country. That's not possible. And so I'm going to work with members of both parties to find a rational middle ground to have a comprehensive plan, Mr. President. It's important to you, but it's important to the United States of America to do this as well.

We also talked about adoption. I don't know if my fellow citizens understand this, but there are a lot of U.S. families who adopt babies from Guatemala—thousands of babies. This year, it is very important for the United States and Guatemala to implement the Hague Convention on adoptions to help protect children and families during the adoption process. We found common ground on that issue. And I appreciate your strong stand, Mr. President, and I assured the President we would follow through ourselves.

I can't thank you enough for your leadership. I appreciate the vision you have for

your country. When you speak, you speak with passion, because you care deeply about the future of Guatemala, and you care deeply about the people of Guatemala. It's an honor to be with you. It's been a joyful trip for us. I'm looking forward to the dinner that you're hosting for Laura and me. I'm not going to talk too long because I might get too hungry. [Laughter] But thank you for your time.

President Berger. Thank you, Mr. President. Very nice—[inaudible]. Thank you. Thank you, President Bush. I have here a note where I'm asked to make reference to the members of the media who are going to ask questions.

Go ahead, Francisco.

Illegal Immigrants

Q. President Bush, good afternoon. Mr. President, deportations continue. At the end of 2006, and only a week ago, this practice of deporting, of arresting immigrants and beginning a process of deportation, continued. In Guatemala, information of abuse of authority and lack of respect for the right of the Guatemalan immigrants has been disseminated. My question is, now that you are in Guatemala, is there a commitment from your country to the 13 million Guatemalans to cease these deportations since you expect to have a comprehensive immigration reform?

President Bush. The commitment is, people will be treated with respect, but the United States will enforce our law. It's against the law to hire somebody who is in our country illegally, and we are a nation of law.

The best way to solve the concerns of the citizens of Guatemala—listen, I fully understand that the citizens of Guatemala are concerned about their relatives or friends who are in the United States. And I appreciate that. The best way to address the concerns inherent in your question is for me to work with Congress to get a comprehensive bill. And I'm optimistic we can do so. It's going to be tough work—

don't get me wrong—but I believe we can get a comprehensive bill out of the Congress.

And I think you'll find that—let me say, I certainly hope you'll find that people who are in the—that are interfacing with our Government are treated with respect and decency. That's certainly the instructions. Now, I'm sure they don't want to be sent home, but, nevertheless, we enforce laws. And I readily concede the system needs to be changed, and I hope I can convince the majority of both the House and the Senate to change the law in a rational way.

Massimo [Massimo Calabresi, *Time*].

Congressional Action on Immigration Reform

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. May I extend good wishes to your father's health.

President Bush. Thank you.

Q. You've spoken throughout this trip about the—

President Bush. That's actually a kind gesture. Thank you.

Q. You've spoken throughout the trip about the need for comprehensive immigration reform. It's been a big subject here in Guatemala City. Can you provide a little more detail, sir, if you would, about how you intend to overcome congressional opposition? There is opposition in both parties, specifically at the moment. A bill has been expected for some time now. You've been working with Senators, and your staff have been working with Senators. Is there a holdup? How are you tackling the problem at the moment, sir?

President Bush. Yes. No, I appreciate that. He's referring to the process at this point in time, about why hadn't a consensus bill in the Senate began to emerge. And it's because this is a complicated issue that requires both parties learning to work together on this issue. I believe it is, first of all, incumbent to find, as best as possible, a coherent Republican position in the Senate. And that's where we're spending a lot of time right now. And then, as I

understand it, Senator Kennedy will be carrying the bill on the Democrat side, and then once we can get a coherent Republican position, one that most Republicans are comfortable with, then we'll start working with the Senator.

As you know full well that if we don't have enough consensus, nothing is going to move out of the Senate. And if nothing moves out of the Senate, nothing is going to happen in the House. And so therefore, the initial stages of getting a bill that meets objections is time consuming, but it is worth it and necessary in order for us to be able to address the concerns, many of which were expressed during the last debate on immigration reform.

Now, I'm optimistic, I really am. I believe we can get something done, and I believe we're beginning to find consensus. I think there is pretty widespread consensus that there ought to be a temporary-worker plan that says, you can come legally to the United States to do a job Americans are not doing, for a period of time. That will help a lot of the Guatemalan citizens. It will mean somebody, first of all, doesn't have to sneak in the country in the first place and pay a *coyote* or buy forged documents or sleep in some sleazy place hiding from authorities until you're able to make destination. You'll be able to come in, in a rational way.

Secondly, that once you're in the United States, if you have to come home to be with your family, you'll be able to do so in a legal way; in other words, you'll be able to come back and forth without fear. Now, you won't be able to—there will be a time limit on the amount of time, and that's part of the negotiations.

The hard issue, as the President noted and I just talked about, was what to do with the people who've been in our country for more than a limited period of time. And that's a difficult issue, and it's one that's got a lot of politics in the country. The idea of giving someone automatic citizenship is just not acceptable. It's not ac-

ceptable to a lot of people in our country, and, Massimo, you understand that. And yet the fundamental question is, how do you design a system that doesn't raise those fears? And yes, obviously, he didn't like my answer. Oh, you did like it? Well, good. [Laughter]

My dad had been ill, and he kindly brought greetings, for which I am grateful.

Legislative Agenda on Immigration Reform

Q. Thank you, sir. That was very specific. That's a lot, though. Do you think you can get that done by August?

President Bush. Well, I—you know, August is a date that I was musing about, and that date came to mind because I understand how difficult it can be coming down the stretch in the legislative session in a calendar year, because the appropriations bill—you're learning more about this than you probably want to know—but the appropriations bills begin to crowd out the calendar in the latter part of the year. And they can consume a lot of time.

And therefore, my hope is—it's certainly not a promise, but my hope would be—that we'd be able to get something out of the Senate and then into the House, and something—then they can work the conference in the fall. That would be the hope.

And—but I'm not the person that sets the calendar. I'm just a simple member of the executive branch. [Laughter] It's the legislative branch that decides the calendar.

And—go ahead.

President Berger. I would like to say that, in fact, the Guatemalan people would have preferred a more clear and positive response, no more deportations, so to say. But, as the President has said, there is a legal framework that needs to be respected. But historically, I think that we have never been so close to finding a solution to this problem as now.

I was very pleased to hear President Bush say that this is a problem that they

also have. It is not only a problem for migrants, it is a problem for the American citizens who have—and a problem that has to be resolved. We have never before been as close as we are at this time of seeing a light at the end of the tunnel and, in a near future, in getting the undocumented status changed for 13 million illegal aliens who are living in the U.S.

Narcotics and Drug Trafficking/Death of Salvadoran Congressmen

Q. Good afternoon, President Bush and President Berger. President Bush, in Guatemala, there is a very serious problem of drug trafficking. You talk about a regional strategy to tackle it. I would like to ask you to expand on this topic, also taking into account that the latest reports produced by the United States on Guatemala have not been very favorable. And also, the issue of drug trafficking has led to very serious security problems in Guatemala. The latest was the murder of three Salvadoran Congress Members. The U.S. is also participating in this investigation. How far will the U.S. cooperation go? Because there is also the request for a mini-Colombia Plan to face it.

President Bush. Yes. The drug trafficking is very serious—a serious problem for the United States, and so—most of the drugs end up in the United States, which really says that we need to do a better job of convincing our citizens not to use drugs. If demand for the drugs went down, it could make it more difficult for the drug traffickers to find markets.

Secondly, drug trafficking is a serious problem because narcotrafficking destabilizes areas. It's in our interests, in our country, to promote prosperity and peace and stability. Narcotraffickers promote instability and tensions, which make it hard for the general populous to become prosperous. It also turns out, narcotraffickers oftentimes leave behind the poison as they head to other markets; in other words, the

local population can become deeply affected by *drogas*.

And so this is a serious issue. We've had experience in dealing with one state that obviously had to deal with the potential of narcotraffickers undermining democracy, and that's Colombia. This is—in my judgment, the best way to deal with this problem and to convince others throughout our country that it makes a lot of sense to commit assets is to think regionally, because as the President mentioned, he said, one of the interesting dynamics that's taking place here is that people and goods are moving quite freely across borders. Well, if people and goods are moving quite freely, drug traffickers will be moving quite freely. And there's kind of almost a borderless domain for these people.

And therefore, thinking regionally—and that includes the United States and Mexico and Central America. Now, I'll bring this up with President Calderon tomorrow, about how we can work constructively. A lot of this has to do with sharing of information; in other words, we pick up pretty good information at times. After all, the United States, oftentimes, is the endpoint, is the end of the distribution chain. And sometimes our DEA or folks can trace back movements of drugs, which might then be able to help the region be able to disrupt and affect.

Look, I am a “if they break the law, arrest them” person. I think we ought to go find these people and bring them to justice. And it's tough, because the richer they become, the more lethal they become and the more dangerous they are to democracies. And that's why there needs to be a collaborative effort, the details of which will emerge as we continue to strategize. But step one is to share information.

As to the Salvadorans, of course, I'm deeply concerned about their death, as is the President. And we have sent, I think, four FBI agents down here to help with forensics and to help track down the leads, so that wherever those killers may light,

the authorities can go get them. And that's what we need to do.

But this is a serious issue, and we spent a lot of time talking about it.

Elaine [Elaine Quijano, Cable News Network].

This will be your last question, Mr. President, and then we can start thinking about dinner, *la cena*. *Que vamos a comer?*

President Berger. Tortillas.

President Bush. Tortillas? *Que bueno*. [Laughter]

President Berger. We have tortillas with guacamole and beans.

President Bush. *Con almuerzo, hoy*.

Border Security/Immigration Reform/Trade

Q. Thank you. President Bush, your decision to sign legislation authorizing construction of a fence along the U.S.-Mexico border was not viewed positively here in the region. How would you respond to critics who feel that that sent a message that Latin Americans are not welcome in the United States?

And, President Berger, what are your thoughts on the idea of a fence, the U.S. border policy in regard to a fence?

President Bush. I did sign legislation modernizing our border. It was more than just fence; it was infrastructure—kind of a novel infrastructure, like detection devices, berms. We've got a very long border, and it needs to be enforced. It needs to be enforced not only to stop *coyotes*, but it needs to be enforced to stop drugs. It needs to be enforced to stop potential terrorists, and it needs to be enforced to stop arms—by the way, arms that sometimes go the other way—I'm told. And so we've got to have border. That's what countries do; they enforce their borders.

And so we modernized the border. It was more than just fence. And I understand it sent a signal that said, you're not welcome. Quite the contrary: People are welcome, but under the law. There are thousands of people in our country who are not citizens who are there legally. The

question is, what do we do with people who have been there over years, the result of a law that isn't working well? And I've already given that answer.

I will also explain that part of convincing people that a comprehensive plan can work is to assure the American people that we're doing our duty by enforcing law. In other words, a lot of citizens said, "You just don't care about whether or not we have a border that's secure." And the Congress responded by saying, "Of course, we care." It is the first step toward a comprehensive bill. In other words, people in Congress were saying, "Let us do something about border enforcement, and then let's go comprehensive." I hope that's what they're saying.

In other words, that's what I'm pressing them to say. Okay, we've responded to the needs of border enforcement; there are people being sent back. As a matter of fact, I think it's interesting—and frankly, I didn't anticipate this—that the good press corps of Guatemala, reflecting the concerns of the Guatemalan people, and the President of Guatemala reflecting the concerns, asked me about deportations. I mean, that was a primary concern. It means that something is—the law is being enforced, is what that means.

The American people need to be persuaded, Elaine, that the Government takes our responsibilities seriously, which then will make it easier to convince reluctant Members of Congress to come up with a comprehensive plan.

Now, I've always been for a comprehensive plan. You might remember, if you look back at some of my speeches—I know you didn't listen to any of them, but you might want to go back and read them. [Laughter] Well, that's not fair. Okay, anyway, but I've always felt it was important. And I learned firsthand how important it was as the Governor of Texas. I used to say, family values do not stop at the Rio Grande River and

that people are coming to do jobs Americans are not doing because they want to feed their families. That's why I said that.

By the way, the reason why trade is important in helping the programs like *Labradores Mayas* is that I also believe most citizens in Guatemala would rather find meaningful jobs at home instead of having to travel to a foreign land to work. And therefore, the more we can enhance prosperity in our neighborhood, the more we can encourage trade that actually yields jobs and stability, the less likely it is somebody who is worried about putting food on the table for their family will be coming to the United States.

Anyway, I thank you for your interest on the topic, Mr. President. It's been a wonderful press conference. Thank you.

President Berger. I would like to close with that topic: the American Dream for everyone. And we can have that American

Dream in our own countries by promoting education, by improving infrastructure, by implementing CAFTA, which is a very interesting tool to produce and to export and also to attract investment and generate jobs. I would believe that we are firm along those lines and that the American Dream is going to be the dream for all the Americans living in the American Continent.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you all.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:37 p.m. at the National Palace. In his remarks, he referred to Wendy Widmann de Berger, wife of President Berger; and President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico. President Berger and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Welcoming Ceremony in Temozon Sur, Mexico March 13, 2007

President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico. Your Excellency, Mr. George W. Bush, President of United States of America, Mrs. Laura Bush, and distinguished members of the staff accompanying President Bush: I hope you are all welcome to Mexico. We're very pleased with your visit because it reflects your interest upon our country, and it allows us to dialog about our complex bilateral agenda.

For many reasons, the relationship with the United States of America is a most important relationship for Mexico, but also the relationship with Mexico is a most important relationship for the United States of America. This is what you have expressed, Mr. President, in a meeting like this one when you expressed some years ago that there is no relationship all over

the world that is most relevant to the United States than that one that you have with Mexico. Unfortunately, the terrible happenings against the United States people made that in a very understandable way, the priorities changed. Nevertheless, I believe that it is now time to retake the spirit of those words and to direct our relationship toward a path of mutual prosperity. We are countries and friends as people with our prospective place and a shared future that I am certain that we can reach for mutual benefit.

I come originally from the State of Michoacan, one of the States that has endured tremendously with migration. And I know the pain of the families when they split and also of all those towns where the elderly are remaining alone. I also know that Mexicans lose in each migrant the best