

paid jobs in Mexico as an essential component of any comprehensive strategy to address this phenomenon and agreed on the need to continue advocating an approach to comprehensive immigration reform.

The Presidents also agreed to explore opportunities for people-to-people exchanges, especially in education, as a central tool in fostering greater understanding between our two countries. In this context they stressed that the investment Mexico and the United States make in human capital must be considered an essential component of their efforts to promote North America's competitiveness and economic growth with justice and security for our peoples.

Finally, Presidents Calderon and Bush reiterated their conviction that the future

of Mexico and the United States—and of the whole North American region—is now, more than ever, a shared future. Our commitment to the advancement of democracy, the respect for human rights, the promotion of free markets, the rule of law, security, sustainable development, and expanding opportunity for all, they underlined, will contribute to the consolidation of a prosperous, just, and peaceful future for all citizens in the Americas.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this joint statement. An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Vice President Adil Abd Al-Mahdi of Iraq March 15, 2007

President Bush. It is such an honor to welcome the Vice President of a free Iraq to the Oval Office.

Mr. Vice President, I appreciate your courage. I don't know if the citizens of my country know, but the other day, a killer tried to take your life. And fortunately, you sit here, and you speak with enthusiasm and optimism about the future of your country.

One of the reasons why—the main reason why I've reinforced our troops in Iraq is to give leaders such as yourself the opportunity to do the hard work of reconciliation. I appreciate very much the progress that you're making. I know it's hard work. It's hard work to overcome distrust that has built up over the years because your country was ruled by a tyrant that created distrust amongst people.

But you, Mr. Vice President, are showing strong vision and a vision of peace and reconciliation. And I welcome you to the

Oval Office. I thank you for your courage, and I thank you for the conversation we've had.

Vice President Abd Al-Mahdi. Thank you. Thank you, President. Thank you for receiving me, and the present occasion to thank you personally and to thank the American people for all the support you've given to Iraq, the sacrifices. Also, I visited yesterday some soldiers in the hospital, and I saw their high spirit. They had, really, better morality than I had, talking about their mission.

We are working hard together. Our security plan is marking some points. We are not finished, but we are doing better than expected in this plan. This will not solve the whole problem; the reconciliation process will take our political agenda forward. We are working on many issues: the hydrocarbon law, which we approved in the Cabinet; we are working on a de-Baathification

law, and it will be presented later. We are working on so many things.

So really, I want to take this occasion to thank all Americans—the United States, you, Mr. President, the Congress, the administration—for all the sacrifices, effort,

assistance given to help my country. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner March 15, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. I had the honor of representing our great country over the past week in five different countries in our neighborhood, but I must tell you, it sure is good to be home. And it sure is good to be with you all. I'm proud to be standing with strong leaders like John Boehner and Roy Blunt. I thank you all for recognizing that it's in the best interest of the United States of America that John Boehner become the next Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Some of you may not know about my early political career: I ran for the United States Congress in 1978 in west Texas. I came in second place in a two-man race. *[Laughter]* The campaign obviously didn't turn out the way I hoped it would, but things worked out okay in the end. The key is to learn from every election and to come back stronger. And with your help, that's exactly what we're going to do in 2008.

I appreciate the character of the men and women on the Republican side of the United States House of Representatives. I've gotten to know them well over the last 6-plus years. But tonight I think it's appropriate we remember the life of a good man and a devoted public servant, Congressman Charlie Norwood. He fought lung cancer, he's in our thoughts and prayers, and we send our very best to Gloria and their family.

I appreciate the fact that you invited Laura, John. It's a smart move to invite her; actually, she was Boehner's first choice. *[Laughter]* She is still traveling, but she sends her love and her respect. I know I'm not very objective, but I firmly believe Laura, in all due respect to my mother, is the finest First Lady our country has ever had. Well, mom was pretty good too, mom was pretty good too. She's still telling me what to do, for all you mothers out there.

I want to thank Congressman Tom Cole, who is the chairman of the NRCC. I've known Tom a long time. He comes from right north of Texas. The NRCC has got one competent, smart, able person in Tom Cole, and I appreciate you serving, Tom. I really thank Devin Nunes, from California, for his leadership in this dinner tonight. Devin, it's good to see you; thank you for being here. I know I mentioned his name once; I'm going to mention it again—the House Republican whip, Roy Blunt from Missouri, is doing a fine job. I appreciate you, Roy. I'm proud to be with Cantor, Putnam, Granger, McCotter, Carter, and all the rest of the Members of the House of Representatives. Thanks for coming; appreciate you being here.

But most of all, thank you all for supporting this good group of folks. Obviously, it takes support like yours to get us back in the majority, but it also takes good ideas and takes people who are willing to stand