

Remarks During a Visit With President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and an Exchange With Reporters in Kennebunkport, Maine August 11, 2007

President Bush. Everybody having a good time here?

Q. Thank you. It's great.

President George H.W. Bush. It's a good day. You're back.

President Bush. Particularly thinking about you, Mark [Mark Knoller, CBS Radio].

Q. Yes, sir.

President George H.W. Bush. Good. Great.

President Bush. Mark, let me ask you, you looking forward to going down to Crawford?

Q. You bet; can't wait.

President Bush. Good. Well, that will be Monday.

Visit of President Sarkozy

Q. Mr. President, what do you expect about France——

President Bush. I expect to be with a friend. I'm looking forward to having him with my family. The best way we can do things—the best way we can send a good signal to President Sarkozy is to invite him here at the family house. I've got a lot of my brothers around, my sister, my daughters. He's going to get a—he's going to figure out what——

President George H.W. Bush. Youngest grandchild made these signs.

The First Lady. Did you see the signs the grandchildren made?

President George H.W. Bush. *Le signe.*

President Bush. What language are you speaking? [Laughter]

President George H.W. Bush. Is that "sign"—*signe*?

Q. *Signe.*

The First Lady. See. He remembered his French.

Q. Mr. President, aren't you disappointed that Mr.——

President Bush. Never disappointed, always upbeat. Feeling good, feeling optimistic about life. Thank you. Thank you. Disappointed about what?

First Lady Cecilia Sarkozy

Q. ——about Mrs. Sarkozy not coming?

President Bush. Of course we are. She's a very dynamic woman. She is—we were looking forward to seeing her as well as the children. And so we're disappointed she's sick, but we understand. That happens sometimes in life.

President George H.W. Bush. Very nice of him to come, having been back to France yesterday.

President Bush. Yes.

President George H.W. Bush. It's amazing.

Visit of President Sarkozy/President Bush's Vacation

Q. Are you surprised the President of France vacations in America?

President Bush. We're pleased he's here. Of course he makes the choice he makes. If people were asking me where I think they ought to vacation, it would be right here in America, where I'll be vacationing, as you know, Monday, starting in Crawford.

President's Vacation

Q. Could you imagine you, or you, sir, as President, vacationing in a foreign country?

President Bush. Of course I could.

Q. Really?

President Bush. Yes, there's some spectacular spots around the world that would be——

President George H.W. Bush. We've done it.

President Bush. ——great places to relax. But as you know, Mark, I'm a fellow—I'm a Texan; I like my place down there.

I like to go down there as much as I can. It's where I can relax. It's also—the job follows you wherever you go; you're always President. And so here we are at my mother and dad's house, enjoying a beautiful Maine day, fixing to sit down with the President of an ally. We're going to have a heart-to-heart talk. We'll be talking about a lot of key issues.

The good thing about President Sarkozy is, you know where he stands; he'll tell you exactly what he thinks. And I hope he'd say the same thing about me.

Q. If he invites you to go to France for a vacation—

President Bush. Of course I would go.

Q. —would you go?

President Bush. Absolutely. Absolutely. Particularly if he could find a place for me to ride my mountain bike. [Laughter]

Q. There are plenty.

President George H.W. Bush. There are plenty of mountains over there.

Q. Yes.

The French Language

Q. Mr. President, could you say something in French?

President Bush. No, I can't. [Laughter] I can barely speak English. [Laughter]

Lunch Menu

Q. Mr. President, what kind of lunch did you—are you going to have?

President Bush. We're going to give him a hamburger or a hot dog, his choice. [Laughter]

The First Lady. We're going to have a traditional family lunch.

Q. Mustard or catsup?

President Bush. It's up to him. We got it all laid out in there. He's got some baked beans. If he'd like some baked beans, we've got that as well.

The First Lady. Native Maine corn too, which is really delicious this time of year.

President Bush. Corn on the cob, real fresh this time of year.

The First Lady. Potato salad—

First Lady Barbara Bush. Coleslaw.

The First Lady. —fresh tomatoes.

President Bush. If he feels like it, he can have him a piece of blueberry pie—fresh blueberries up here in Maine.

Visit of President Sarkozy

Q. Do you think he's bringing cheese here?

The First Lady. We hope so.

President Bush. I think he's bringing good will. He's bringing a good brain, good vision, and good will. I'm looking forward to seeing him.

Visit to Kennebunkport, Maine

Q. Are you going to go fishing?

President Bush. I don't know if we will or not. We've got a—

President George H.W. Bush. We went this morning to check; there's no fish—

President Bush. We may go boating. That's the difference between fishing. I need to spend a little time with him alone. We'll figure out the schedule here in a minute. I've got a—we've probably got 45 minutes of private time that we've got to sit down and talk about some of the key issues of the world. This is a complicated world with a lot of opportunities to bring peace. And no question, when America and France work together, we can get a lot of important things done.

Visit of President Sarkozy/France-U.S.

Relations

Q. What's the main issue you want to address with him?

President Bush. There's a lot of issues, a lot of issues. It's a complicated world.

Q. Iran?

President Bush. One thing—sure. Absolutely, we'll talk about Iran. But, yes, I had a very good visit with the President in Germany, and I was very impressed—impressed with his vision, impressed with his leadership skills. Appreciated very much the involvement of the French Government in helping get the nurses out of Libya. And

I think we can work well together. And that's going to be good for the people of France and the people of the United States, and it's going to be good to help in the spread of peace.

France-U.S. Relations

Q. Do you see it as a time to start new relations with France, Mr. President?

President Bush. We've had good relations with France. Obviously, there's been disagreements, but just because you have disagreements on particular issues doesn't mean you have—not going to have good relations. I respect the French a lot and——

Q. ——new Government give a new leeway to——

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you. I respect the French people; I respect the history of France. We have had disagreements—on Iraq, in particular—but I've never allowed disagreements to not find other ways to work together. The previous administration and my administration worked very closely on Lebanon, and I'm looking forward to building on the progress—here comes the President.

Thank you for the press conference. Chalk it up as a guy who's trying to reach out and be friendly to the fourth estate—that would be the press.

[At this point, *President Sarkozy* arrived.]

Q. Mr. Sarkozy——

President Bush. Do you want to say a few comments? They just asked me about your wife, and I said how disappointed we were, but we fully understand.

Do you want to ask him a couple of questions? He's never shy around the press.

Visit of President Sarkozy

Q. Mr. Sarkozy, what's the message you bring to the American President and to the Americans?

President Sarkozy. I came to visit the United States on holiday, on vacation, like 900,000 French do every year. It's a great

country. I'm very happy to be here. The United States is a close friend of France, and I'm very glad to be able to meet with the President of the United States here today.

France-U.S. Relations

Q. A new page in the history between the two countries?

President Sarkozy. I just finished reading a biography of Lafayette, and I wanted to tell President Bush about that. The U.S. and France have been allies and friends for 250 years. When the—at the birth of the United States, France chose the side of the U.S.—there were 4 million Americans at that time, and France was the friend of the Americans. Afterwards, when we, the French, were involved in the war, the West were on our side. And on the east coast, we see a lot of cemeteries with small white crosses in the—on the French coast—and those are young Americans who came to die for us. And that is a lot more important than Mr. Sarkozy or Mr. Bush, because after Mr. Bush, after Mr. Sarkozy, we'll continue to be the friends of the Americans.

The U.S. is a large, big democracy. It's a country of freedom, and it's a country that we've always admired because it's the country that brought a constitution and freedom to the world. And France is friends with democracies, not with dictatorships.

Do we agree on everything? No, because maybe even within a family there are disagreements, but we are still a family. And we may be friends and not agree on everything, but we are friends nevertheless. That's the truth.

President Bush. Beautiful. Thank you. We've got to go eat a hamburger. We've got to go eat a hamburger.

President Sarkozy. Cecilia called Mrs. Bush this morning——

The First Lady. Yes, we talked this morning.

President Sarkozy. —I went back to France, yes, for the Cardinal's funeral. I know that—therefore, I know very well that the distance between the U.S. and France is relatively small. [*Laughter*] And as I came back, I realized that my wife and two of my children have a sore throat. And if they—George will say that I brought them—[*laughter*].

President Bush. Thank you all. Thank you.

President Sarkozy. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:47 a.m. at Walker's Point. President Sarkozy referred to Jean-Marie Cardinal Lustiger, former Archbishop of Paris, who died on August 5. President Sarkozy and a reporter spoke in French, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks Following a Visit to the Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center

August 13, 2007

Thanks for coming. It's an honor for me to be here with Senator Bob Dole and Secretary Donna Shalala, Secretary Jim Nicholson and Deputy Secretary Gordon England. I appreciate the opportunity to come to a building full of compassion, a place of expertise, where people are dedicating their time and efforts to help those on active duty and those who have served before.

Any time there is any doubt in anybody's mind that our veterans are not getting excellent care, then we in Government have a duty to deal with those doubts. I have asked Secretary Gates and Secretary Nicholson to review their respective Departments and the interface of their Departments—the Defense Department and the Veterans Department—to make sure that any doubt as to whether or not a veteran or one on active duty gets the best care is—does so.

I also asked Senator Dole and Secretary Shalala to lead a nonpartisan, independent Commission to identify areas where we can do better and, more importantly, come up with solutions as to how to deal with those problems. The Commissioners conducted a very serious and lengthy review of our military and veterans health care systems, and

they submitted recommendations to me at the end of July. After Senator Dole and Secretary Shalala briefed me on their recommendations, I then directed Secretaries Gates and Nicholson to study and, more importantly, implement the recommendations, so we can ensure our severely wounded servicemembers that—and their families that they will receive the best possible care.

We've got great health care for our wounded. We just want to make sure that the system is seamless and that the families are treated with the utmost of care during these difficult moments. Secretaries Gates and Nicholson and their Departments are working hard to make sure their Agencies talk to each other and collaborate. Equally importantly, they're looking at the recommendations that the Dole-Shalala Commission put forward, and they're implementing them. In other words, the Commission did really good work. The Commission's recommendations are solid, and therefore, to the extent that we can move without congressional law, we will do so. And not only will we do so, we will keep the Commissioners abreast of the progress we are making.