

the reasons why I worked so hard on Medicare reform, was to make sure that we fulfilled our promise to the elderly. But I don't like plans that move people from—encourage people to move from private medicine to the public, and that's what's happening under this bill. And so I'm looking forward to working with the Congress to make sure the bill does what it's supposed to do.

Listen, thank you all for your time. I enjoyed it.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:45 a.m. in the James S. Brady

Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Sen. Robert J. Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, Co-chairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia; President Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad of Iran; President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority; and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this news conference.

Remarks on Presenting the Congressional Gold Medal to the Dalai Lama *October 17, 2007*

Madam Speaker and Senator Byrd; Mr. Leader; members of the congressional delegation, particularly Senators Feinstein and Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen; Senator Thomas—God rest his soul; distinguished guests, particularly our friend Elie Wiesel; and Your Holiness: Over the years, Congress has conferred the gold medal on many great figures in history, usually at a time when their struggles were over and won. Today Congress has chosen to do something different. It has conferred this honor on a figure whose work continues and whose outcome remains uncertain.

In doing so, America raises its voice in the call for religious liberty and basic human rights. These values forged our Republic. They sustained us through many trials, and they draw us by conviction and conscience to the people of Tibet and the man we honor today.

Nearly two decades have passed since the Dalai Lama was welcomed to the White House for the very first time. Members of both of our political parties and world leaders have seen His Holiness as a man of faith and sincerity and peace. He's won

the respect and affection of the American people, and America has earned his respect and affection as well.

As a nation, we are humbled to know that a young boy in Tibet—as a young boy in Tibet, His Holiness kept a model of the Statue of Liberty at his bedside. Years later, on his first visit to America, he went to Battery Park in New York City so he could see the real thing up close. On his first trip to Washington, he walked through the Jefferson Memorial, a monument to the man whose words launched a revolution that still inspires men and women across the world. Jefferson counted as one of America's greatest blessings the freedom of worship. It was, he said, “a liberty deemed in other countries incompatible with good government and yet proved by our experience to be its best support.”

The freedom of belief is a yearning of the human spirit, a blessing offered to the world, and a cherished value of our Nation. It's the very first protection offered in the American Bill of Rights. It inspired many of the leaders that this rotunda honors in

portraits and in marble. And it still defines our way of life.

Consider where we gather today. This great symbol of democracy sits quietly near a Catholic parish, a Jewish synagogue, a Muslim community center, a Greek Orthodox cathedral, and a Buddhist temple—each with faithful followers who practice their deeply held beliefs and live side by side in peace. This diversity is not a source of instability, it's a source of strength. This freedom does not belong to one nation, it belongs to the world.

One of the tragic anomalies of the past century is that in an era that has seen an unprecedented number of nations embrace individual freedom has also witnessed the stubborn endurance of religious repression. Americans cannot look to the plight of the religiously oppressed and close our eyes or turn away. And that is why I will continue to urge the leaders of China to welcome the Dalai Lama to China. They will find this good man to be a man of peace and reconciliation.

Throughout our history, we have stood proudly with those who offer a message of hope and freedom to the world's down-trodden and oppressed. This is why all of us are drawn to a noble and spiritual leader who lives a world away. Today we honor him as a universal symbol of peace and tolerance, a shepherd for the faithful, and a keeper of the flame for his people.

I congratulate His Holiness on this recognition. I'm so honored to be here with you, sir. Laura and I are—join all Americans in offering the people of Tibet our fervent prayer that they may find days of prosperity and peace.

And now I ask the Speaker and Senator Byrd to join me for the gold medal presentation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:51 p.m. in the Rotunda at the U.S. Capitol. In his remarks, he referred to Nobel Prize winner, Holocaust survivor, and author Elie Wiesel.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia

October 18, 2007

President Bush. It is such an honor to welcome back to the Oval Office the President of our friend and ally Liberia. Madam President, thanks for coming. Thanks for your very strong spirit and your deep desire to enhance democracy and improve the lives of your people in Liberia.

We had a good discussion. I want to emphasize a couple of points that we discussed. First of all, we are committed to helping you relieve your debt. This weekend, IMF will be meeting in Washington, DC, and it's very important for our friends in the IMF to recognize that debt relief is—for Liberia is a part of our agenda, and I would hope that they would help you

with debt relief. I think it's important. And so Secretary Paulson will be taking that message to the IMF.

Secondly, I want to thank you very much for your dedication and focus on helping the children of Liberia get a good education. You've worked extremely hard to encourage parents to send their children to school, and we want to help you to the extent that you ask for help. The United States believes it's important that young boys and girls get a good education not only here in America but around the world. And the President is committed to universal education in Liberia and have made great strides since the days of your civil strife.