

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:50 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on the Death of Brigadier General Francois El Hajj of Lebanon December 13, 2007

I strongly condemn yesterday's assassination of Lebanese Brigadier General Francois El Hajj and extend my condolences to his family and the families of the innocents who were murdered alongside him.

This assassination marks the 12th political assassination or attempted assassination Lebanon has suffered since October 2004. Like the many victims before him, General El Hajj was a supporter of Lebanon's independence and an opponent of Syria's interference in Lebanon's internal affairs. I call on the international community to support the Government of Lebanon in its efforts to bring to justice the perpetrators of these vicious attacks and to stand with the citizens of Lebanon who continue to struggle to safeguard their freedom, sovereignty, and democracy.

This act of terrorism again reminds us of the importance of the international tribunal established by the U.N. Security Council earlier this year and of the urgency

of ensuring that the tribunal is fully funded and capable of commencing its operations as soon as possible, to begin holding accountable those responsible for this systematic campaign of murder against Lebanon's most ardent patriots. We must work together to support and strengthen an independent and democratic Lebanon.

This attack comes as Lebanon is seeking to choose a new President. The United States supports the efforts of the democratically elected Lebanese Government and the Lebanese Armed Forces to maintain the sovereignty and stability of Lebanon before the Presidential elections. As Lebanon seeks to select a President democratically and in accordance with its Constitution, interference by the Syrian regime and its allies, aimed at intimidating the Lebanese people, must end. The people of Lebanon deserve the opportunity to choose their leaders in freedom and without fear.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters December 14, 2007

The President. Good morning. I just finished meeting with members of my Cabinet. I am proud of this team. I appreciate their service to the country. We discussed the priorities that we're working on to meet the needs of the American people. We're talking about the business that remains on Capitol Hill.

I want to thank the Senate and congratulate the Senate for passing a good energy bill, and now the House must act. Congress

also must move quickly to pass legislation to protect middle class families from the burden of the Alternative Minimum Tax, without raising taxes. And Congress must pass legislation to ensure our intelligence professionals can continue to effectively monitor terrorist communications.

And Congress must move forward with spending legislation to fund the day-to-day operations of the Federal Government so

that the Cabinet Departments can provide essential services for the American people.

Because Congress did not pass any spending bills by the end of the fiscal year—with the exception of one—many essential services are now being funded under what's called a continuing resolution. This is a bill that keeps the Federal Government running on a temporary basis while lawmakers work out their differences.

In recent days, lawmakers have made some important progress in working out such differences. I'm pleased to hear that they are close to reaching agreement on a budget. There are a lot of details left to be worked out, and I hope they will pass a bill that is fiscally responsible and does not raise taxes. I also understand that Congress may provide a downpayment on the war funding I requested, without artificial timetables for withdrawal.

These are encouraging signs. Unfortunately, Members of Congress have not been able to complete their work by today, when the current continuing resolution expires. So last night Congress passed another continuing resolution that will fund the Government for one more week, and I just signed the resolution.

I hope Congress will use the additional time productively. I urge them to pass a clean spending package that meets the reasonable spending levels I have put forward, without gimmicks, without policy riders that could not be enacted in the ordinary legislative process, and with much-needed funding for our troops in combat.

It would be disappointing if Members of Congress did not finish their work by the holidays. But if they don't, they should not carry the unfinished business of 2007 into the new year. Instead, they should pass a 1-year continuing resolution that does not include wasteful spending or higher taxes. And they must ensure that our troops on the frontlines have the funds and resources they need to prevail.

I'll take a couple of questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

Major League Baseball

Q. Mr. President, on the Mitchell report, sir, do you think that the baseball players actually mentioned in the report should be punished?

The President. A couple of reactions to the Mitchell report, as you know, I'm a baseball fan. I love the sport; I love the game. Like many fans, I've been troubled by the steroid allegations. I think it's best that all of us not jump to any conclusions on individual player's name, but we can jump to this conclusion: that steroids have sullied the game, and players and the owners must take the Mitchell report seriously. I'm confident they will.

And my hope is that this report is a part of putting the steroid era of baseball behind us. You know, I—in the State of the Union a couple of years ago, I addressed the issue of steroids, and the reason I did so is because I understand the impact that professional athletes can have on our Nation's youth. And I just urge our—those in the public spotlight, particularly athletes, to understand that when they violate their bodies, they're sending a terrible signal to America's young.

Toby [Tabassum Zakaria, Reuters].

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, what was Kim Jong Il's message to you in response to your letter to him? And what was—what is your response to him?

The President. Well, first, I'm—you know, I got his attention with a letter, and he can get my attention by fully disclosing his programs, including any plutonium he may have processed and converted that into whatever he's used it for. We just need to know.

As well, he can get our attention by fully disclosing his proliferation activities. We have laid out a way forward. And I say "we": There's four other countries that have joined us; we've got what's called the six-party talks. And the five of us agree that there's a way forward for the—Kim

Jong Il, and an important step is a full declaration of programs, materials that may have been developed to create weapons, as well as the proliferation activities of the regime.

Thank you very much.

Q. Oh, don't stop now.

The President. I had a—well, I've got freezing Cabinet members out here. [Laughter] They're whispering; you can't hear their whispers. [Laughter] I can just feel their vibe saying: "I'm envious. They're all wearing these expensive coats, and here we are." [Laughter]

I hope you enjoyed the holiday bash as much as I did. I noticed some of the silverware is missing. [Laughter] We'll be taking a full inventory. [Laughter] Happy holidays.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:32 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman Kim Jong Il of North Korea. He also referred to H.J. Res. 69, which was assigned Public Law No. 110–137. A reporter referred to former Sen. George J. Mitchell, author of a report to the commissioner of baseball on the use of illegal performance-enhancing substances in Major League Baseball.

Remarks With President Alan Garcia Perez of Peru on Signing the United States-Peru Trade Promotion Agreement Implementation Act December 14, 2007

President Bush. Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated. Good afternoon. *Buenas tardes.* President Garcia, thank you for being here.

Peru and the United States are strong partners, and today we're making that partnership even stronger. In a few moments, I'll have the honor of signing a bill that approves the vital free trade agreement between Peru and the United States. The bill will help increase opportunities for workers, ranchers, farmers, and businessmen in both our countries.

I want to thank the many Members of Congress, both in the House and the Senate, who came together to get this bill passed. I particularly want to thank the Members of Congress who are here today: the ranking member of the Ways and Means, Jim McCrery from Louisiana; Wally Herger from California; and Kevin Brady from the great State of Texas. [Laughter]

I appreciate members of my Cabinet who have joined us today: the Secretary of State, Condi Rice; Hank Paulson, Secretary of the Treasury; Secretary of Com-

merce Carlos Gutierrez; Ambassador Sue Schwab, USTR; former Ambassador—I guess you still call him Ambassador, but he used to work for us—Rob Portman is here as well. [Laughter] And the reason the members of the Cabinet are here is because this administration is firmly committed to free and fair trade. We believe it's in the interest of the United States.

I want to thank John Walters as well, who is with us today. He's a member of the Cabinet; there he is. I want to thank Chuck Conner, Acting Secretary of the Agriculture; Steve Preston, U.S. Business Administration.

I welcome our Peruvian guests. I thank the Ambassadors from countries in our neighborhood; I'm glad you're here—Ambassadors from El Salvador, Honduras, Chile, Mexico, Canada, Guatemala, Dominican Republic. I thank the Ambassadors and other representatives from countries who have pending free trade agreements before the United States Congress: the Ambassador from Colombia, Panama, and as well the Republic of Korea.