

## Statement on the Formation of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration

*December 14, 2007*

I applaud the recent formation of the National Council of the Damascus Declaration in Damascus, Syria. The brave men and women who formed this council reflect the desires of the majority of Syrian people to live in freedom, democracy, and peace, both at home and alongside their neighbors in the region.

The Syrian regime continues to hold hundreds of prisoners of conscience and has arrested more than 30 national council members in the past few days. All those detained should be released immediately.

The Syrian regime continues to deny its citizens fundamental human rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and the right to elect a representative government responsive to their needs. The formation of the national council is an encouraging sign to all people who support freedom and democracy. We support the national council's principles of nonviolent struggle and open membership to all the people of Syria who believe the time has come for change.

## Statement on Senate Confirmation of James B. Peake as Secretary of Veterans Affairs

*December 14, 2007*

I am pleased that the Senate unanimously confirmed Dr. James Peake to serve as Secretary of Veterans Affairs. Dr. Peake is a decorated veteran, highly skilled physician, and proven leader who has devoted his career to serving America's men and women in uniform. His decades of expertise in combat medicine and health care management have provided him with a thorough understanding of the Department's responsibility to care for America's veterans.

One of his first tasks as Secretary will be to ensure that my administration con-

tinues to swiftly implement the recommendations of the Dole-Shalala Commission on Wounded Warriors. I am confident that he will build upon our record of improving care, reducing bureaucracy, and ensuring that our veterans receive the benefits they deserve.

NOTE: The statement referred to former Sen. Robert J. Dole and former Secretary of Health and Human Services Donna E. Shalala, Cochairs, President's Commission on Care for America's Returning Wounded Warriors.