

would be you, Madam President. [*Laughter*] I appreciate the fact that you've ushered in an age of reform, and you've opened up a new chapter in the relationship between our country. And as you mentioned, it was my high honor to welcome you to the White House last year and present you with America's highest civil honor, the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

I'm pleased to visit your land. I thank you for the invitation. I thank the Liberian

people for courage and steadfastness and enduring faith in the power of freedom. With your continued determination, there is no doubt in my mind that Liberia will become a beacon of liberty for Africa and the world, and you will forever uphold the "lone star."

May God bless you, and may God bless the people of Liberia.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:34 p.m.

Remarks Prior to a Discussion on Education in Monrovia February 21, 2008

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. Mr. President, Mrs. Bush, fellow Liberians: We have been pleased that with the support of the United States Government to our education rebuilding process, we can now say that we're beginning to see the signs of progress.

Mr. President, today you will be listening to some of the beneficiaries who will be sharing their experience with you. They've been supported through the United States Agency for International Development, the President's Africa Education Initiative. Liberia currently receives assistance for adult learners, primary school students, school infrastructure, teacher training, the accelerated learning program, and improvement of higher education.

Thank you for being here with us. And thank you for all that you do, for helping us to rebuild our educational system.

President Bush. Thank you, Madam President. [*Applause*] Does that mean you want me to speak? [*Laughter*]

President Johnson Sirleaf. You speak a little bit, and I'll introduce the—

President Bush. Okay, good, yes. The President said, we have met four times since she's been President. I said out there at the parade grounds that every time, I'm a better person for it, since she's a—[*ap-*

plause]. This is the last event on the last stop of what has been a comprehensive trip around the continent of Africa. And it's a fitting—fitting that we talk about education as the last subject to discuss.

First of all, I just want you to know that, Madam President, we admire you, and we appreciate your leadership. I particularly appreciate your commitment to liberty and freedom. Now, the problem is, of course, it's one thing to be for freedom, but it's really important to have a healthy, educated group of folks to be able to realize the blessings of freedom.

And so our desire in the United States is to answer the universal call to love a neighbor and to help those—I believe to whom much is given, much is required. A lot has been given the United States of America, and I firmly believe it's in our national interest to help others not only realize the blessings of liberty but to fight disease when we find it and to deal with illiteracy where we encounter it.

And so our initiative on malaria or the AIDS initiative is all aimed at saving lives, which in essence helps save societies. And same thing with our education initiative. And so we really appreciate you all coming to share your message with us. I hope you're not nervous. [*Laughter*] I bet you're

not, because all you got to do is tell us what's on your mind. Just share your stories, and I think people will find that they're most interested.

But what you must know here in Liberia is that the United States of America is with you, and we'll stay with you because we want you to succeed. It's in the interest of the United States of America that Liberia do well. And so, Madam President, we are—[*applause*—we're proud to stand with you. We're not going to tell you what to do because you're plenty competent. I believe African leaders can run African coun-

tries. But I do believe the United States of America can help. And that's exactly what we're going to discuss today, Madam President.

So thank you very much for that introduction. And Laura is thrilled to be here as well. She is the librarian in the family. [*Laughter*]

President Johnson Sirleaf. That's right.

[*At this point, the discussion continued, and no transcript was provided.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:04 p.m. at the University of Liberia.

Interview With Reporters Aboard Air Force One February 21, 2008

White House Press Secretary Dana Perino. So I thought the President and Mrs. Bush would spend a little bit of time with you, with their reflections, on the record. We don't have a lot of time, especially because Ben Feller [Associated Press] is not feeling well.

The President. I would say this is one of the most exciting trips of my Presidency. Exciting because when we first got to Washington, Africa was—parts of Africa were in turmoil; not much had been to arrest disease; there wasn't intense world focus on the continent. The second trip to Africa for me—the fifth for Laura—was a chance to herald courageous people in their efforts to deal with hopelessness. And what really made me happy was that the people of Africa have come to appreciate the generosity of the American people.

I had a couple of goals. One was to encourage people to continue to make difficult choices—democracy is hard work—but also assure them that we'd stay with them if they made the right choices.

Secondly, I wanted to highlight for the American people what the—that great compassionate work is being done. And I'll give

you some—Laura can share some anecdotes too. You know, in the hospital in Tanzania, to see a 3-year-old baby survive a mosquito bite when years earlier probably wouldn't have was a very compelling moment for me.

To have the little orphans in Rwanda put on such a cheerless—a cheery face because somebody is trying to provide them love was inspiring to me. To watch their little guys play tee-ball—all of whom were orphans—against the little school and see how inspired they were. But also see the concern and care of their mentors and coaches was very inspiring to me.

All of these programs are supported by the American taxpayer, and all of them matter. To hear the testimony of these kids and teachers in Liberia about how our aid has helped them regain confidence—I don't know if you all were in there when the mother of three talked about—her husband left her, she said, because she was illiterate, so he just left her with the three kids. And she's a part of this adult literacy program that USAID is helping with. She talked about being able to read, fill out