

Statement on the Appointment of Douglas V. O'Dell, Jr., as Federal
Coordinator of the Office of Gulf Coast Rebuilding
April 18, 2008

Today I am pleased to select Major General Doug O'Dell to serve as Coordinator of Federal support for the recovery and rebuilding of the Gulf Coast.

General O'Dell is an innovative problem-solver with a wealth of experience in helping the people of the Gulf Coast region. As the commanding general of the 4th Marine Division in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, he employed over 2,700 marines and sailors to evacuate thousands of civilians, deliver essential cargo, and restore basic functions in more than 30 buildings. His strategic judgment during Hurricane Rita enabled troops to deliver relief almost immediately after the storm. He has earned the trust of many in the region, including State and local officials, and is the right person for this important job.

General O'Dell understands the progress made in the Gulf Coast region, the important work ahead, and the great spirit of the people who call that region home. He will build on the efforts of Don Powell to help the people of the region continue to rebuild their lives and their communities. I also want to thank Paul Conway for doing a fine job as Interim Coordinator.

I am pleased to announce as well that I have signed an Executive order to extend the Federal Coordinator position until February 28, 2009. This extension will ensure a seamless transition into the next administration so that the Federal Government can continue to deliver effective, integrated, and responsible support to the people of the Gulf Coast region.

Message on the Observance of Passover, 5768
April 18, 2008

Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the Lord brought you out of it with a mighty hand."

EXODUS 13:3

I send greetings to those observing Passover.

More than 3,000 years ago, God liberated the Children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt and led them on a journey towards the Promised Land. During the holy days of Passover, Jews around the world celebrate this deliverance from oppression

and give thanks to a loving God for His many blessings. Passover is an opportunity for Jewish families and friends to gather to read the Haggadah, share the Seder meal, and remember God's mercy through song and prayer. This eight-day observance brings a message of hope and freedom to the Jewish people.

Laura and I send our best wishes for a joyous Passover.

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this message.

The President's Radio Address April 19, 2008

Good morning. Next week, I will be hosting the North American Leaders' Summit in New Orleans. This event will give me an opportunity to meet with Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Mexican President Felipe Calderon to discuss some of the most significant issues facing our hemisphere and the world.

One of the issues I will be discussing with these leaders is the importance of expanding trade in our hemisphere. Recently, I sent Congress an agreement that would expand America's access to markets in Colombia. Unfortunately, the Speaker of the House has chosen to block the Colombia free trade agreement instead of giving it an up-or-down vote that Congress committed to. Her action is unprecedented and extremely unfortunate. I hope that the Speaker will change her mind. If she does not, the agreement will be dead. And this will be bad for American workers and bad for America's national security.

And here is why. Today, almost all of Colombia's exports to the United States enter duty free. But the 9,000 American businesses that export to Colombia, including nearly 8,000 small and midsized firms, face significant tariffs on their products. The situation is completely one sided. Our markets are open to Colombian products, but barriers that make it harder to sell American goods in Colombia remain. If the free trade agreement were implemented, however, most of Colombia's tariffs on American goods would be eliminated immediately.

There's also a strategic imperative to approve the agreement. By obstructing this agreement, Congress is signaling to a watching hemisphere that America cannot be trusted to support its friends. Over the past 6 years, Colombia's President Uribe has been a steadfast ally of the United States. He's transformed his country from

a near-failed state to a stable democracy with a growing economy. He has partnered with America in the fight against drugs and terror. And he has addressed virtually every one of Congress's concerns, including revising the free trade agreement to include some of the most rigorous labor and environmental protections in history.

He has done all this while his country is under violent assault from a terrorist organization and facing constant intimidation from anti-American regimes in the region. As Canada's Prime Minister Harper has said, "If the U.S. turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could hope to achieve."

Leaders in Congress have made a serious error, but it is not too late to get it right. This week, a long list of senior officials from Democratic administrations and Democrats from previous Congresses signed a letter urging Congress to approve the agreement this year. They wrote, quote, "We feel that the treaty should be considered as soon as possible and that any obstacles should be quickly and amicably resolved." I strongly agree. I believe that if the Speaker allows a vote on the merits, a majority of the House of Representatives will approve the trade agreement. So I urge leaders in Congress to reconsider their position, recognize the stakes at hand, and approve the Colombia agreement as soon as possible.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:35 a.m. on April 18 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on April 19. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 18, but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary