

And so when Healy presented his bill for Buchanan's portrait, the lawmakers refused to pay. Things are bad when even Congress refuses to spend money. [Laughter]

I want to thank the artists. Sasha, you had it easy; it does not take much to make Laura look beautiful. [Laughter] Anderson had a bigger challenge. [Laughter] And therefore, I needed to find a person who would do the painting that would be a good and forgiving friend. And so I want to thank my buddy—my college classmate Bob Anderson for painting this portrait. It actually looks like me, which is a good sign. [Laughter] You did a fabulous job.

This is not the first time that Bob has painted me. He had a warm-up; he did my portrait for the Yale Club. Recently, I asked him what was different this time around. He said, well, this time around he had to use a lot more gray. [Laughter] I also understood Bob didn't have any difficulty depicting my eyes or my hands, but he had a lot of trouble with my mouth. And I told him, "That makes two of us." [Laughter]

A former Washington resident once said: "Whenever you hear about somebody being done in oil in this town, you can't be sure whether that means painting or boiling." [Laughter] That was a wise observation from a good and decent man, one who has offered me a lot of wisdom and advice throughout my life. And I am proud to have my portrait in the same room as President 41, George H.W. Bush.

It's a humbling experience to be included here among so many extraordinary leaders.

One of the great things about this collection is that visitors can examine the faces of the men who have shaped our Nation's history and study how history has shaped them. In each of their images, we're reminded of the incredible joys and responsibilities that come with the Presidency. Yet in these two centuries of history, we're also reminded that this office and the enduring ideals it represents are greater than any person.

Being the temporary custodian of the office has been a privilege of a lifetime. Over the past 8 years, I have been inspired by the character and courage of our Nation, especially the men and women of our Armed Forces. I have been moved by the compassion of our citizens, from those who mentor a child to those who save lives around the world. Most of all, I've been uplifted by the many Americans who have sent their prayers.

And so, with deep gratitude, I offer my own: For all of you in this room, for the success of our next President and those who follow, and for God's continued blessings on our wonderful Nation.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:15 a.m. at the National Portrait Gallery. In his remarks, he referred to G. Wayne Clough, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; Martin E. Sullivan, Director, National Portrait Gallery; and painter Aleksander "Sasha" Titovets. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included remarks by the First Lady.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority

December 19, 2008

President Bush. I'm thinking about the first time I met you—I think it was in Jordan—and I can't help but reflect on how

far the process has come to bring peace to the Holy Land.

You have done a lot of important and hard work in helping the region understand the importance of two states living side by side in peace. No question, this is a hard challenge, but nevertheless, people must recognize that we have made a good deal of progress. And a lot of it has to do with your leadership, and I thank you.

I was pleased to note that the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution which confirms that bilateral negotiation—the bilateral negotiation process is irreversible, is—and it's a path to a Palestinian state and a path to peace in the Middle East.

And I've been looking forward to this visit. I'm looking forward to getting a briefing on not only the negotiations, the discussions you've had with Israel, but also the fine progress that's being made on the West Bank, which is a credit to your leadership and the leadership of the Prime Minister.

So welcome, sir, and thank you for coming.

President Abbas. Thank you very much, Mr. President. And thank you for finding the time to meet with us during these days. There is no doubt that we will always remember the efforts that you have undertaken to promote the peace process. You were the first sitting President who accepted as a policy the establishment of two states—a state of Israel and a state of Palestine—living next to each other in peace and security. And this policy has become a reality in every corner around the world.

And we also remember very fondly, Mr. President, the great efforts that you have undertaken to convene the Annapolis conference after so many years of absent peace process accords. This conference was attended by representatives from more than 50 countries from around the world and made it a reality that the roadmap would be the way to go.

Also the Annapolis conference talked about and promoted the bilateral direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians over the fundamental and basic

issues. These basic issues, as we all know, they include Jerusalem, settlements, borders, refugees, water, security, as well as prisoners. And of course, you pushed very hard for the two sides to carry out their commitments based on phase one of the roadmap and to carry out their responsibilities. And you were clear about both Palestinian commitments as well as Israeli commitments.

On the basis of your efforts and the convening of the Annapolis conference, two other conferences took place—the Paris and the Berlin conferences. And during the Paris conference, there was an agreement in order to support financially, in a very generous way, the Palestinian Authority. After that, we have seen on the grounds that the West Bank was much calmer, and there was performance on security throughout that part of Palestine. And we also appreciate the efforts that were given to us in the area of security, which helped our own security apparatus to carry out their responsibilities.

Also developments took place on issues in the West Bank, such as progress on security, as well as the economic situation, as well as the social conditions.

There is no doubt that we exerted efforts also to promote the peace process under your leadership during the last year, and together, we put the fundamental, basic things needed for the peace process. There is no doubt that we will continue these efforts and the peace negotiations. But everything will be based on the foundation, and that foundation was laid by you during your time in office. Because we are committed to the peace process, and this is not a slogan or a rhetorical commitment: We are practically committed to the peace process. And we are confident all these efforts will be transferred to the new administration that will continue to do its part regarding the peace process.

Some might say that all these efforts perhaps went in vain. I happen to disagree. I believe that they have cemented the real

principles that carried out the peace process and the negotiations forward. And here I have also to mention the Arab League peace initiative to promote peace, which is actually published today in a number of newspapers, including American newspapers today. And the purpose of this also coincides to cement your vision of two states as well as the principle of land for peace.

We are here today, Mr. President, in order to express our appreciation for your efforts. And we know very well that we would not have been able to go that far in our work without your support and the promotion of the peace process.

I also would like to take the opportunity to thank members of your own administration: Secretary Rice, as well as Mr. Hadley, those people who worked with us tirelessly.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. *Shukran jazeelan.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:28 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of Israel. President Abbas spoke in Arabic, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Extending Generalized System of Preferences Benefits to Kosovo and Azerbaijan

December 19, 2008

Dear Madam Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

In accordance with section 502(f)(1)(A) of the Trade Act of 1974, as amended (the "1974 Act"), I am notifying the Congress of my intent to add the Republic of Kosovo (Kosovo) and the Republic of Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan) to the list of beneficiary developing countries under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) program.

In Proclamation 8272 of June 30, 2008, I designated Serbia as a beneficiary developing country for purposes of the GSP program. On February 17, 2008, Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia. Pursuant to section 502 of the 1974 Act, and having considered the factors set forth in sections 501 and 502(c) of the 1974 Act,

and in light of Kosovo's independence from Serbia, I have determined that Kosovo should be designated as a separate GSP beneficiary developing country.

In addition, having considered the factors set forth in sections 501 and 502(c) of the 1974 Act, I have determined that Azerbaijan should be designated as a beneficiary developing country for purposes of the GSP program.

Sincerely,

GEORGE W. BUSH

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to Nancy Pelosi, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Richard B. Cheney, President of the Senate.