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do their job. And we moved a Marine group of troops in, secured the port. Remember the first issue was the port? Would the United States act to secure the airport and port? Yes, we did. Would we create the conditions necessary for ECOWAS to move in, and then eventually blue-helmet the operation, which happened yesterday, and that encouraged others to participate along with the United Nations? You bet we did.

Now, we've kept a presence there. We've kept a presence there to help ECOWAS. So we've done everything we said we would do. And the strategy has worked. I recognize there was sporadic fire, or however you want to describe it, yesterday. And I suspect that that may happen on an infrequent basis.

But the process is working. The United Nations will move in. They will help supervise the elections. Hopefully, they will be free and fair. This is a good role for the United Nations. And in the meantime, more troops will be coming in. We worked collaboratively with the United Nations to help sign up nations to blue-helmet—to be blue-helmeted. And so I'm pleased with the progress we have made in Liberia. We have kept our word. We have done exactly what we said we would do.

Q. Just not exactly what you were asked to do.

The President. Well, sometimes, Charlie, we don't do exactly what everybody asks us to do. We get a lot of requests. And in this case, it fit—the strategy was a part of a larger strategy on the continent to help people help, in this case, the regional situation to resolve it.

ECOWAS has done a very good job. President Obasanjo gets a lot of credit for responding and moving Nigerian troops in and providing the command structure along with our help. I think the situation has turned out a lot better than people assumed it was going to, and there's progress still to be done. And the United Nations is now in charge of the process, but we're keeping people there to help with our Nigerian friends.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you all, yes. I guess it's over. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The interview began at 9:30 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House and was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 2 but was embargoed for release until 8 p.m. In his remarks, the President referred to President Mwai Kibaki of Kenya; President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa; President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; Secretary of State Colin L. Powell; President Joaquim Alberto Chissano of Mozambique; former Senator John Danforth, Special Envoy for Peace in the Sudan; and President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria. A reporter referred to former President Charles Taylor of Liberia. Participating in the interview were Martin Mbugua, correspondent, Daily Nation; Kevin Kelley, correspondent, The EastAfrican; Charlie Cobb, senior writer and diplomatic correspondent, allafrica.com; and Esther Githui, international broadcaster, Voice of America Swahili Services. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks at a Reception Honoring Hispanic Heritage Month

October 2, 2003

Thank you very much. *Sientese. Sientese, Embajador.* Thank you for coming. *Bienvenidos. Mi casa es su casa.* I want to thank you all for coming to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month.

You know, this Nation is blessed by the talents and the hard work of Hispanic Americans, and we're really blessed by the values of *familia y fe* that strengthen our Nation on a daily basis. It is fitting we honor Hispanic Americans in our country. It's part of our country—an incredibly important part of our country. I also think it's fitting that the way to honor Hispanic Americans is to revel in the vitality of the Hispanic culture that was displayed today, the music that honors the roots, the rhythm, the life of the Latino.

I appreciate my Ambassador to Mexico, Tony Garza. He's been a long-time friend. He was the secretary of state in the State of Texas. It gave him a chance to learn diplomacy. [*Laughter*] He's a great man and a great friend.

I have asked people from Hispanic heritage to join my administration: Hans Hertell,

who is the Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, is with us. Hans brought his family with him. [*Laughter*]

I've got a Cabinet Secretary *de Cuba*, who is Mel Martinez. I don't know if you know Mel's story. This speaks volumes about our Nation and about Mel's upbringing. In the early sixties, Cuban parents were worried about their sons growing, their daughters growing up in tyranny. They were afraid about what it would be like for a child to grow up in a world in which terror reigned and there was no freedom. And so Mel's parents put him on an airplane destined for the United States of America.

Imagine the choice of a parent—I would daresay there's really only one country, though, that a parent would be feeling comfortable of sending their child to, and that's America, because of what we stand for. Mel is Pedro Pan. He is now in the Cabinet of the President of the United States, which speaks volumes about you, Mel, and volumes about our country as well.

Hector Barreto is with us today, runs the SBA. Where are you, Hector? *Donde esta?* Thank you, Hector. Everybody needs to have a good *abogado.* [*Laughter*] I've got a really good one. [*Laughter*] Al Gonzales is my lawyer and close friend. Eduardo Aguirre is the Director of Citizenship and Immigration Services. Welcome, Eduardo. Gaddi Vazquez—*donde esta,* Gaddi? Where is he? Peace Corps, running the Peace Corps. He's out recruiting new members. [*Laughter*] *Adonde?* Oh, yes, there he is. Gaddi got here a little late. [*Laughter*]

I want to thank these folks for serving our administration so well. We've got ambassadors from around the world here with us today. I am honored that *Embajador* Jose—Juan Jose Bremer *de Mexico esta aqui.* Good to see you, Jose. Hugo Guiliani *de el* Dominican Republic. *Senor Embajador.* Luis Alberto Moreno Mejia *de Colombia. Embajador* Rene Leon from El Salvador, good to see you, sir. Francisco Javier Ruperez *de Espana.* Murilo Gabrielli, who is the Deputy Chief of Mission from Brazil, thank you for coming, Murilo.

I'm so honored that Members of the United States Congress are here with us today. The Senator from the great State of Texas—I emphasize ''the great State of Texas''—John Cornyn. The chairwoman of the Congressional Hispanic Conference, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen from Florida. Mario Diaz-Balart from Florida is with us. Devin Nunes from California—*donde esta* Devin? It's an old trick here in Washington, get your name on the roster, but don't show up. [*Laughter*] At least you get mentioned. [*Laughter*] Bob Beauprez of Colorado is with us. Jon Porter is with us, from the great State of Nevada. Thank you, Jon. Jerry Weller is with us. From Arizona, Rick Renzi is with us. And finally, from New Mexico, Steve Pearce. Thank you for coming. I want to thank you all for being here. It's a good sign that Members of the Congress take an interest in the Hispanic Heritage Month. And I appreciate you coming.

I also want to thank Brian Sandoval, who is the attorney general from the State of Nevada. It's awfully kind for him to come all the way over here. Brian, thank you, sir. I am so pleased that my friend Emilio Estefan is here. Emilio helps put this event on. Emilio puts this event on—or helps us put this event on every year. And it's awfully kind of you to do this. It's good to see you.

I am also honored that Lisa Guerrero is with us. Lisa, thank you very much for serving as the emcee. I appreciate you being on TV on Monday nights too. [*Laughter*]

Carlos Ponce—thank you for coming, Carlos. I appreciate you, Carlos. It's good to see you again. It's good to see you on Monday night as well.

I'm so honored that Father Cutie is here. Thank you very much for leading us in the blessing.

Bacilos, thank you, guys, for being the young stars. The Ambassador turned to me and said, ''These are the young dudes, the young stars of the music scene.'' [*Laughter*] I can see why. Congratulations. Thank you for your leadership.

Alexandre, thank you very much. Fantastic. You know, Alexandre, I love your spirit. It's clear to see your heart and soul, and thank you very much. You were good *tambien, mi amigo de Puerto Rico.* What a voice. Thank you very much.

I am—let me see. I'm probably going to leave somebody out here as we get moving

through here. Victor, thank you. Awesome job. I appreciate you coming.

Obviously, the person who invited the guest list here knows I love baseball. We've got a lot of the baseball stars here. I do love baseball. One of my favorite baseball players of all time is a person who's going to be in the Hall of Fame, and that's Rafael Palmeiro of the Texas Rangers. I want to thank you for coming. And Lynne is here. Thank you for coming, Lynne.

I'm glad you brought your manager with you. He's not exactly a Latino ballplayer, but he's a fine guy, and that's Buck Showalter. Thank you for coming, Buck, and thank you for bringing your family. It's good to see you all.

Magglio Ordonez of the Chicago White Sox is with us. Where are you, Magglio? Yes, thank you, buddy. Congratulations. Great season, yes. We're watching you. We've got the dish upstairs. [*Laughter*] Bartolo Colon—*donde esta* Bartolo? I can see why you can throw it hard. [*Laughter*] *Fuerte.*

Carlos Beltran of the Kansas City Royals—Carlos, good job. *Donde esta* Jose Lima? There he is—Jose. Yes. You're back. [*Laughter*] Congratulations on having a great year. Tino Martinez, Saint Louis Cardinals; Nelson Figueroa of the Pirates. Where's Nelson? Yes, thank you, Nelson. Are you sure you're old enough to qualify? [*Laughter*] Vladimir Guerrero—yes, Vladimir. Glad you're here, Vladimir. Thanks for coming.

I also know your general manager really well. He's a really good guy, isn't he? Omar Minaya, *mi amigo*. Thank you for coming, Omar. And congratulations. I knew you'd make it all along. You're probably wondering why I didn't make you general manager of the Rangers, but nevertheless—[*laughter*]—Omar is the general manager of the Montreal Expos. He really does a great job, and I've known Omar a long time. He's a great baseball guy. More important, he's a good person. I'm really proud to have you here.

Just to show you that we're multisport people here, it is my honor to welcome Carlos Arroyo. Carlos, I want to thank you very much for coming. He's the basketball player for the Utah Jazz. Carlos.

Katie, thank you very much for leading us in the anthem. You've got a beautiful voice. You've got a lot of poise and a lot of talent, and we're honored that you're here with us today. Thanks for coming. We're really glad you're here. And thanks for bringing your little brother. I hope he's nice to you all the time. [*Laughter*]

The contributions of the Hispanic community have made this country stronger and better. Today we honor the contributions with the entertainment we had here in the East Room. I don't know if you know this, but this is a common occurrence for the Bush administration, to honor men and women of Hispanic descent, to honor their presence and listen to their talents. But this has happened throughout the years in the White House.

There's been some interesting moments here. Pablo Casals was a Spanish-born cellist. He lived in Puerto Rico. He performed for two Presidents—catch this—the first was Theodore Roosevelt in 1904 and the second was John Kennedy in 1961—57 years in between his first and second visit. Nevertheless, he graced this room and this house.

We've also had Jose Limon. He's a modern dancer—Edward Villella to my family's friend Gloria Estefan. You should have brought her. [*Laughter*]

One Hispanic entertainer we remember in a special way today is the Queen of Salsa, Celia Cruz. She was an unforgettable performer who fled Cuba in 1960. She became a U.S. citizen and spent the rest of her life sharing the rhythms of her homeland with people all around the world. Celia Cruz passed away 3 months ago. We miss her, and we honor today to welcome her husband, Pedro. *Bienvenidos.*

We are not only blessed with the culture of the Hispanic in America; we're also blessed by the fact that our country is strengthened because of the spirit of hard work and enterprise. It's part of the Latino culture. We see the spirit in thousands of small businesses and the careers of business people all across our country. One of the most vibrant parts of our economy is the small-business sector, and one of the vibrant parts of the small-business sector is the Latinos who own small businesses, really one of the great success stories of America.

Tell you a story about Lou Sobh, who is with us today. In 1960, he left Mexico, no money, and he couldn't speak the language. He came to America. He didn't—he couldn't speak the language at all, so he worked, and he taught himself English. He ended up becoming a janitor in a department store, a hard worker. He had a dream, and he was working toward his dream. He served in the United States Army. He got out of the Army, and he had a dream to open up his own car dealership. Today, he owns 14—not one car dealership but 14 car dealerships. He employs 800 people. He's got three car franchises in Mexico. He's living proof of the American Dream—an incredibly important part of our Nation, the Latino spirit of hard work and drive and enterprise. And Lou, I want to congratulate you for being a success and setting an example. Thank you for coming, sir.

Today, as we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, we also must take pride in the generations of Hispanic Americans who have served in America's Armed Forces, served to protect and defend a nation they love. Forty-two Hispanic Americans—42—*quarenta y dos*—have earned the highest military decoration, the Medal of Honor. That's a lot. Today, men and women of Hispanic heritage continue to serve and sacrifice in the defense of freedom. They have our respect, and they have our gratitude.

Earlier this year, at the National Naval Medical Center, I had an amazing experience. Eduardo was there. I had the chance and privilege of meeting a patriot, Master Gunnery Sergeant Guadalupe Denogean. Sergeant Denogean is an immigrant from Mexico. He has served in the Marine Corps for 25 years. Last spring, he was wounded in combat in Basra, Iraq, and he was sent back for treatment. They asked Sergeant Denogean, did he have any requests? He said he had two. He wanted a promotion for the corporal who helped rescue him, and the second request is he wanted to be an American citizen.

I was there the day Sergeant Denogean took his oath of citizenship. Eduardo administered the oath. In a hospital where he was recovering, this son of Mexico raised his right hand and pledged to support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America. What made that moment amazing to me is that he had kept that oath for decades before he took it. I'm proud of the sergeant. I'm proud to call him citizen. I'm proud to call him fellow citizen to America.

Through the lives of people like Sergeant Denogean and Lou and Celia Cruz, it is clear that the American Dream belongs to *todos.* It's for everybody, not just a few. And that's the greatness of our country. It's the spirit of America. And it's important that this generation and future generations keep that dream alive.

We've got to make sure that hard work is a place that is respected and rewarded. We must make sure that our entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs from all walks of life have the opportunity to dream and work hard and realize their ambitions. We must make sure that the dream of homeownership is available for every citizen in our country. We must make sure that every child gets educated, that the public schools educate every single child, those whose parents may speak English, those whose parents may not yet speak English. Education belongs to everybody. High standards belongs to everybody. We must challenge the soft bigotry of low expectations in American public schools.

We're proud of our country. We're a strong country. We're militarily strong, and I'll keep us that way. But our wealth isn't really found in our military or our pocketbooks. The true strength of America is found in the character of the American people, in the courage of the people, the creativity of our people, and in the compassion of our people.

As Governor, and now as President, I've seen the character of America and the character of millions of Hispanic Americans who make our Nation a better place. The warmth and the vitality of the Hispanic culture, the energy and faith of Hispanic men and women are great gifts to America.

I want to thank you all for coming to celebrate those gifts. *Que Dios los bendiga a todos, y que Dios bendiga a los Estados Unidos.* Thank you for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:35 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary Murilo Gabrielli, head

of the Cultural and Public Affairs section, Brazilian Embassy in Washington, DC; Lisa Guerrero, FOX Sports broadcast journalist; Carlos Ponce, actor and television personality; Father Alberto Cutie, Telemundo network talk show host; Latin music group *Bacilos*; Brazilian musician Alexandre Pires; Lynne Palmeiro, wife of baseball player Rafael Palmeiro; Edward Villella, founding artistic director and chief executive officer, Miami City Ballet; and entertainer Gloria Estefan. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Statement on House of Representatives Passage of Legislation Banning Partial-Birth Abortion

October 2, 2003

I applaud the House for passing the ban on partial-birth abortion so soon after the Congressional conferees completed their work. Today's action is an important step that will help us continue to build a culture of life in America. I look forward to the Senate passing this legislation so that I can sign this very important bill into law.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik and an Exchange With Reporters

October 3, 2003

The President. Thank you all for coming. I'll make a couple of statements. I'm going to ask Bernie Kerik to make a statement, and I'll answer two questions before I go to Milwaukee.

First, I want to welcome Bernie Kerik to the South Lawn and to the Oval Office. We just had a fascinating discussion about what he did in Iraq, what he saw in Iraq. He can speak for himself. But let me characterize it this way, that he went to help the Iraqis organize a police force. He showed up at times of chaos and confusion. Because of his leadership, his knowledge, and his experience, he was able to stand up a police force in Baghdad in a very quick period of time. I think he told me he opened up 37 different precinct stations——

Mr. Kerik. Thirty-five.

The President. ——35 different precinct stations. They activated and trained 35,000 Iraqi police force. And that's important because the ultimate solution to the security issues in Iraq is for the Iraqi citizens to manage their own affairs.

Bernie went there and made a big difference. And for that our Nation is very grateful. We appreciate it a lot.

Mr. Kerik. Thank you.

The President. We're going to start training police officers in Jordan soon. As well, tomorrow, 750 new Iraqi army soldiers will graduate from training. Part of our strategy is to enable the Iraqis to protect themselves. Mr. Kerik can speak to this, but in a very short period of time, we're making great progress. Iraq is becoming more secure, and that is good. It is good for our overall mission because a free and peaceful Iraq will mean that America is more secure.

I'll make one other comment, then Bernie will say a few words.

Mr. David Kay reported to the Nation. I want to thank him for his good work. He is a thoughtful man. He and his team have worked under very difficult circumstances. They have done a lot of work in 3 months, and he reported on an interim basis.

The report states that Saddam Hussein's regime had a clandestine network of biological laboratories, a live strain of deadly agent botulinum, sophisticated concealment efforts, and advanced design work on prohibited longer range missiles. The report summarized the regime's efforts in this way, and I quote from the report:

"Iraq's WMD programs spanned more than two decades, involved thousands of people, billions of dollars, and was elaborately shielded by security and deception operations that continued even beyond the end of Operation Iraqi Freedom."

That is what the report said. Specifically, Dr. Kay's team discovered what the report calls, and I quote, "dozens of WMD-related program activities and significant amounts of equipment that Iraq concealed from the