

equality and decency. And one day, Americans will look back at the response to Hurricane Katrina and say that our country grew not only in prosperity but also in character and justice.

Our citizens have responded to this tragedy with action and prayer. We ask God's comfort for the men and women who have suffered so much. We pray that the missing find safe return and those who were lost find holy rest. And we sought the strength of the Almighty for the difficult work that lies ahead.

In the life of our Nation, we have seen that wondrous things are possible when we act with God's grace. From the rubble of destroyed homes, we can see the beginnings of vibrant new neighborhoods. From the despair of lives torn asunder, we can see the hope of rebirth. And from the depth of darkness, we can see a bright dawn emerging over the gulf coast and the great city of New Orleans.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 7:50 a.m. on September 16 in the Cabinet Room at the White House for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on September 17. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 16 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on the Parliamentary Elections in Afghanistan

September 18, 2005

I congratulate the Afghan people and Afghan Government for today's successful parliamentary elections, which are a major step forward in Afghanistan's development as a democratic state governed by the rule of law. Braving deadly attacks and threats of violence, Afghans voted in large numbers for representatives to their new National Assembly and Provincial Councils. We commend the tremendous progress that the Afghan people have made in recent years, and we pledge the full support of the United States as Afghanistan acts to meet the new challenges ahead.

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With the Homeland Security Council and an Exchange With Reporters

September 19, 2005

The President. I just met with my Homeland Security Council to discuss ongoing relief efforts in the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. I have made it clear that I believe it's a national security matter for people to review emergency plans. And so, therefore, I've instructed Secretary Chertoff and folks around this table to work with our local counterparts to make sure that we've got emergency plans in place that will deal with significant disaster. And for the local folks, I urge them to cooperate in a review of these plans. It's important.

Secondly, one of the things that I heard loud and clear on my travels down there was that people are concerned about redtape. And one of the big concerns for the mayors and the Governor of Mississippi, in particular, and the mayors along the gulf coast, was this issue about debris removal—who's responsible, how can we get it done in an effective way. And I want to thank the Secretary for working with Governor Barbour on this issue to expedite a process by which we can start getting some of this debris removed from a part of our country that was just wiped out by this storm; I mean, there are piles and piles of homes and buildings just in rubble. And in order to help this region get rebuilt, first things first, and that's to get rid of the debris. And so we've got a plan in place to cut through the redtape and get this done in an effective way.

On another matter, a couple of other matters—one, I want to congratulate the people of Afghanistan for showing up at the polls and defying the Taliban and those who threaten their lives and say, look, you know, these people supported democracy. It's just another step on their road toward a stable democracy, and we congratulate them.

And as well, I want to welcome the comments of the OPEC and non-OPEC nations, talking about making sure they get enough supply on the markets to help, hopefully, affect the world price of crude oil. I have been concerned about the price at the pump that our folks are paying. Part of that was caused

by the disruptions of Hurricane Katrina. We dealt with that by suspending rules and regulations that enable us to import more gasoline. But part of the cost of gasoline is a result of high crude oil prices, and one way to affect those prices is to conserve, and the other way is to encourage an increased supply. And so I want to thank those countries that are trying to figure out how to get more supply on the market to help relieve some of the pressure.

Be glad to answer some questions. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press] and Adam [Adam Entous, Reuters] will be asking questions today.

New Orleans

Q. Thank you, sir. Thank you. Mayor Nagin in New Orleans has invited people to start returning to that city, when there are lots of Federal officials who feel that it's not safe to do so. Do you feel like you need to step in?

The President. Well, we have made our position very clear. Admiral Allen has made the position very clear, of this Government, and that is that we share the goal of the mayor, but we have got concerns. There are environmental concerns, which Administrator Johnson shared with us today.

Let me give you a real concern that I think everybody ought to pay attention to, and that is this Tropical Storm Rita, which now looks like it's going to head out into the gulf and could track Katrina, or it could head further to the west. But nevertheless, there is deep concern about this storm causing more flooding in New Orleans.

And so Admiral Allen has reflected our—the concerns of this administration. And we want to work with the mayor. The mayor is working hard. The mayor has got this dream about having a city up and running, and we share that dream. But we also want to be realistic about some of the hurdles and obstacles that we all confront in repopulating New Orleans.

Q. Will you express that concern yourself to the mayor?

The President. Well, I just did, but, as well—absolutely. Secretary—“Secretary,” I call—Andy Card, former Secretary, and now Chief of Staff Card is reaching out to him—has reached out to him earlier. But listen,

Admiral Allen is our man on the ground. Admiral Allen speaks for the administration. He is—and the mayor knows our position. But I repeat, and the mayor needs to hear it, and so do the people of New Orleans, our objective—listen, I went there, and stood in Jackson Square to say, we want this city to re-emerge. As I said, I can't imagine America without a vibrant New Orleans. It's just a matter of timing, and there's issues to be dealt with. If it were to rain a lot, there is concern from the Army Corps of Engineers that the levees might break. And so, therefore, we're cautious about encouraging people to return at this moment of history.

Adam.

North Korea

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Given what you've said in the past about North Korea's record of noncompliance, what makes you think that this time North Korea will abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons?

The President. Five nations, in working with North Korea, have come up with a formula which we all hope works. Five nations have spoken and said it is not in the world's interest that North Korea have a nuclear weapon. And now there's a way forward. And part of the way forward is for the North Koreans to understand that we're serious about this and that we expect there to be a verifiable process. In other words, they have said, in principle, that they will abandon their weapons programs. And what we have said is, “Great, that's a wonderful step forward, but now we've got to verify whether or not that happens.”

It was a positive step yesterday. It was a step forward in making this world a more secure place. And I want to thank our other partners in the six-party dialog, you know, by working together. The question is, over time, will all parties adhere to the agreement?

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Haley Barbour of Mississippi; Vice Adm. Thad W. Allen, USCG, U.S. Coast Guard Chief of Staff; and Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand

September 19, 2005

President Bush. It's been my honor to welcome the Prime Minister of Thailand back to the—to Washington. Thank you for coming, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Thaksin. Thank you.

President Bush. Laura and I were just talking the other evening about what a wonderful visit we had to your country when you hosted APEC. It's reminded me—when I was thinking about that visit, reminded me of our close friendship. The Prime Minister is a person who believes in markets and free enterprise and freedom. And I'm really, really pleased he's here.

We had a—we talked about a lot of subjects. One subject that I'm particularly interested in is avian flu and the need for our countries to work together. Thailand is a leader in putting systems in place that will track the virus as it attacks different birds and watches very carefully to make sure that there's no bird-to-human transmission in his country. He's willing to work in the neighborhood, for which I'm grateful. All of us need to be mindful of this potentially devastating disease. And we've got a good friend and a very thoughtful leader when it comes to that subject.

We talked about North Korea. We talked about the neighborhood. We talked about our economies. We would like to get a free trade agreement concluded here as quickly as possible, and the Prime Minister made that very clear to me.

All in all, it was a very good visit, covering a lot of subjects, and I'm not surprised, because I'm visiting with a good friend.

So, welcome, Mr. Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Thaksin. Thank you, Mr. President. It's my pleasure to visit Washington, DC, again. It's my third time during Prime Ministership—and this trip I have been—discussed with the President about the bilateral and also the regional—in Asia as well. And we had a very good conversation.

I committed to President Bush that we are pressing ahead with the FTA, and also we will work closely with U.S. by drafting the

plan of action in the cooperation between our two countries and also with the third country as well if the two countries would like to work together with, in helping or in working with other countries.

I also want to welcome the President to meet with the ASEAN seven during APEC meeting in November in Korea.

President Bush. Finally, I do want to thank the Prime Minister and His Majesty for sending relief supplies to our folks that have been affected by Hurricane Katrina. This good country has just come through a tsunami, and they're on their way to recovery. And yet they were able to, through their—because of their generous hearts, ship help. And so thanks very much, and please thank His Majesty for his generous contribution to the folks down there.

Thank you, sir. Appreciate it. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:52 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to King Phumiphon Adunyadet of Thailand.

Joint Statement by President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat of Thailand

September 19, 2005

President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Thaksin Chinnawat met today to reaffirm the strength of the U.S.-Thai alliance and the importance of bilateral cooperation in regional and global affairs. Both leaders recognized the special and enduring bonds between the two countries as well as between the American and Thai people, demonstrated most recently by the close cooperation following last December's devastating tsunami and after Hurricane Katrina. President Bush expressed his admiration for the resilience and determination of the Thai people and government in rebuilding areas affected by the tsunami and pledged continued U.S. assistance. The President noted Thailand's effort to mobilize support for an establishment of a regional tsunami early warning system.

Prime Minister Thaksin once again expressed his profound condolences for American casualties and the devastation from Hurricane Katrina. President Bush expressed his