

energy requires significant investment. It requires investment to keep their sector—the current sector modernized, and as you all know, that as Mexico continues to expand its production in deeper waters in the Gulf of Mexico, that requires even more capital investment. So to the extent that the Government feels comfortable being able to track sources of capital outside of the Government cashflow, to me that would be something that certainly ought to be considered by President Calderon.

And we're fortunate that Canada and Mexico are vibrant energy producers.

Okay? Looking forward to the trip.

Cuba

Q. A final one on Castro?

The President. On Castro? Sure. Sure. The universal Castro question? [Laughter] Can you come up with a unified question?

Q. What role can the countries of Latin America, like Brazil, like other partners in Latin America, can play in the Cuban transition to democracy?

The President. The message, in my judgment, to the world during a transition period, is freedom—that we ought to expect that the Cuban people have the right to express themselves openly without fear of reprisal, to be able to express themselves at the ballot box, and to be able to realize potential as a result of an open economy.

What I hope happens is that we together insist that transition doesn't mean transition from one figure to another, but transition means from one type of government to a different type of government, based upon the will of the people. That will certainly be the position of the United States. We believe the Cuban people ought to make the decision for the future. We believe it ought to be up to the people, the long-suffering people of that island to decide their fate, not the fate—not to be decided because somebody is somebody's brother; the fate ought to be decided because that's what the people want.

And I would hope those who have lived under the blessings of liberty have the same message. *Vamos a ver, cuando*—how long he stays on Earth, that's a decision that will be made by the Almighty. But once that happens, once—you know, Fidel Castro may

live—I don't know, I don't know how long he's going to live—but nevertheless, I do believe that the system of government that he's imposed upon the people ought not live, if that's what the people decide.

Okay. *Gracias*.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 9:03 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva of Brazil; President Tabare Vazquez of Uruguay; President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia; President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Fournier of Mexico; and President Fidel Castro Ruz and First Vice President Raul Castro Ruz of Cuba. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 7. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this interview. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Natalia Orozco of RCN TV of Colombia

March 7, 2007

President's Upcoming Visit to Central and South America

Ms. Orozco. Thank you, Mr. President, for this time with RCN TV Colombia.

The President. Thank you. I'm really looking forward to going to Bogota.

Ms. Orozco. Thank you, Mr. President. I have to start by asking you this. You're arriving to Bogota when President Bush—President Uribe is facing a deep crisis because of—we've got a political scandal. Does this affect the support, the confidence that you have always expressed to him?

The President. No. As a matter of fact, I've been very impressed by how he's handled this latest issue. President Uribe is a very strong leader; he's committed to justice; he believes in fairness; and he's a man who has proven he can get things done. And so my confidence in the President is very high. And I'm looking forward to expressing that confidence about—to not only the people of Colombia but also to the people in my Congress.

Plan Colombia

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, \$4 billion invested in Plan Colombia, but the drug keeps coming to the United States, and the leader of the guerrillas remains at large. Why do you support a second phase of the same Plan Colombia?

The President. Well, thank you for that question. First of all, we've had a lot of successes in working together. I recognize there's still a lot of *drogas* coming here. Part of that has to do with, we still use drugs, and we've got to do a better job of convincing people to stop using drugs. But we've also stopped a lot of drugs from coming. And therefore, I can argue to the Congress and the people that there has been a lot of notable successes. And the truth of the matter is, Colombia has changed to the better as a result of the Plan Colombia. There's still bad activities going on, but it's a lot less than it was before.

Colombia-U.S. Free Trade Agreement

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, public opinion in Colombia, as well as in the U.S. Congress, is divided about the free trade agreement. Will you be ready to reopen those negotiations in order to make it pass?

The President. No, I don't think we want to reopen the negotiations. We've had good, strong negotiations between our respective parties. Obviously if there's some fine-tuning necessary—but we've negotiated good agreements, and I'm going to have to work hard with our Congress, and the President is going to have to work hard to convince the people of Colombia that trade is fair. And if I were a farmer in Colombia or a small-business person in Colombia, I'd want to be in a position to be able to sell my products into a large market like the United States.

And these trade fights are always tough, and I want to make sure, though, that we work to have a world that trades freely and fairly, because it's the best way to eliminate poverty.

President's Upcoming Visit to Central and South America

Ms. Orozco. Are you concerned about the influence that President Chavez is gaining in

the region? As many experts have said, is your trip also an answer to that?

The President. No, my trip is a chance to tell the people of Colombia and Uruguay and Brazil and Guatemala and Mexico that the United States cares deeply about the human condition. My budget this year has got—or last year has \$1.6 billion of bilateral assistance. Much of that money is spent on social justice programs—programs like education and health care.

You know, oftentimes, people really don't understand the United States, and my trip is to really explain to people that we believe in education for all; we believe in human rights and human dignity; we believe in prosperity. And the people of this country have been very generous in their help and support to people.

Ms. Orozco. But are you concerned about the influence of Mr. Chavez in the region?

The President. Each country is going to have to make up their own mind about the systems of government. To the extent that people feel like they can nationalize companies, I think is a mistake. I'm very much in favor of open systems, free press, the right for people to assemble and express their mind.

My trip, however, is all aimed at explaining to the people of South and Latin America that good foreign policy for the United States is to promote a prosperous and peaceful neighborhood.

Cuba

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, today, have you the feeling that the policy applies to Cuba has done any good for the Cubans in the island?

The President. I think the worse thing that's happened for the Cuban people on the island is the fact that they're not free. And my position is, it is important for people to be free, and that if there is a transition to a new way in Cuba, it's got to be decided by the Cuban people. They should be allowed to freely assemble; they should be allowed to speak their minds; there ought to be strong rule of law. My position has been, and will continue to be, that a free Cuba is what is necessary for the people of Cuba.

FARC/American Hostages

Ms. Orozco. Thank you, Mr. President. There are three Americans held by the FARC now. Do you think President Uribe should achieve the humanitarian exchange, or should he insist in the military rescue?

The President. I trust President Uribe's judgment. And my message isn't to President Uribe; my message is to the FARC, and that is to give up these hostages. You're making it clear to the world the kind of people you are when you take innocent life and hold them hostage. And it's very sad for the families here in America. I'm deeply concerned about their fate.

War on Terror

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, how long is the United States willing for the extradition of the narco paramilitary terrorists that remains in Colombia, because they are part of the peace process?

The President. How long will we wait for the extradition process?

Ms. Orozco. Right.

The President. I'll work with the President on that. That will be a subject matter in my private discussions with President Uribe.

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, do you think that with the military aid, President Uribe, with the help of United States, is going to be able to win the war against terrorism in Colombia?

The President. I think that a war against terror can be won by firm resolve, plus a alternative to repression, kidnaping, murder, and drugs. And one thing that President Uribe has done is laid out a vision. A lot of people have come in from the jungles, as you know, because they realize there's a better way of life.

We all have a lot of work to do in our respective countries to make sure every person has a good education and good, decent health care. But when people realize there is a better tomorrow, it's much easier for a man of peace, like Uribe, to deal with a difficult problem that he inherited.

Colombia-U.S. Relations

Ms. Orozco. President Bush, what is the best memory that you have of all this time

working with Colombia, so close, having Colombia as one of your main allies?

The President. You know, I think it's the fact that I have a very honest relationship with President Uribe. He loves his country. He is a very strong proponent of Colombia and the people of Colombia. We don't agree on ever single issue, of course, but I do respect his courage, and I respect the fact that he's done a good job in office. And I'm really looking forward to going back to Colombia. I've been, as President, once before. I can't wait to come back, this time, to your beautiful capital city.

Ms. Orozco. Thank you, Mr. President, for your time. We wish you a wonderful and successful trip.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:45 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia. He also referred to FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Ms. Orozco referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Enrique Gratas of Univision

March 7, 2007

Verdict in the Trial of I. Lewis Libby

Mr. Gratas. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity to talk about the trip and other issues. Yesterday, somebody very familiar to the administration, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, was found guilty of the charges of perjury, lying, obstruction of justice. What is the impact of your administration of this verdict, or your personal feelings?

The President. First, this was a very serious matter. A jury of his peers analyzed the data very seriously and rendered a verdict that must be respected. Secondly, I personally am sad. I'm sad for Mr. Libby and his family. There was a sense of sadness to hear the verdict read for me. And finally, this is an ongoing legal matter; there is more to be done in the courts; and therefore, at this time, it's inappropriate for the administration