

where a lot of the discussions are taking place, Steve. And I think we can find a rational way forward, somewhere in between automatic citizenship and kicking people out of the country. It's in our interests we do so. I mean, we are a nation of law, and therefore, if we can change the law for the better, we ought to do so.

And so, Mr. President, back to the man's question over there, I'm optimistic. But he helped—his question was somewhat insightful—well, very insightful, because what he pointed out was the legislative challenges that we face. He also made it clear in his question that the administration is very much involved with working with Republican Senators to help find common ground between Republican Senators and Senator Kennedy, who is emerging as the lead Senator on the Democrat side.

I will tell you, if we can find that common ground, we have a very good chance of getting the bill out of the Senate, because Senator Kennedy is one of the best legislative Senators there is. He can get the job done. I know firsthand, because we reformed our education system, Mr. President, with his help in 2001. Not to slip in another issue, but we do need to get No Child Left Behind reauthorized, and I'm looking forward to working with Senator Kennedy on the reauthorization.

President Calderon. Yes, I do have family in the United States, and what I can tell you is that these are people who work and respect that country. They pay their taxes to the government. These are people who work in the field; they work with—in the fields with vegetables. They probably handle that which you eat, the lettuce, et cetera. These are people who respect the United States. These are people who have children, who want these children to be educated with respect for the land where they live and with respect for Mexico. I have not seen them in a long time and do not know their migratory status.

I am from Michoacan, and in Michoacan, we have 4 million people, 2 million of these Michoacanos are in the States. We want them to come back; we want them to find jobs here in Mexico. We miss them. These are our best people. These are bold people; they're young; they're strong; they're tal-

ented; they have overcome tremendous adversity—who are working so that they can come back to their country someday.

And I'm saying this for all Mexicans, not only those Mexicans that I am related to by blood, by land, soil, air. And I want to say that I am fighting so that instead of having our people cross the border to find work, we want investments to cross the border and come over here.

The U.S. economy is capital intensive. We are labor intensive. We can give democracy to our people if we find sound basis so that we could also find those factors which can give jobs to our people. I have said this, and I will continue to say this: I hope—and I hope that someday, everybody will believe as I do. I believe in work. I believe that I will see all of these people coming back, and embrace them knowing that, well, that we live in countries that defend liberty and freedom.

Thank you so much to all. Have a nice day.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 10:04 a.m. at the Fiesta Americana Merida. In his remarks, he referred to Margarita Esther Zavala Gomez del Campo, wife of President Calderon. A reporter referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela; and Secretary of Foreign Relations Patricia Espinosa Cantellano of Mexico. President Calderon and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Joint Statement by the United States of America and Mexico

March 14, 2007

Mexico and the United States, as proud and sovereign countries, today reiterate their conviction that the shared values of democracy, transparency, rule of law, and respect for human rights are the solid foundation on which the increasingly rich and complex networks that link their economies and societies are based.

Presidents Felipe Calderon and George Bush resolved during their first official meeting in Mexico on March 13 and 14, 2007 in

Merida, Yucatan, to strengthen the partnership between two friendly neighbors. They agreed that government to government relations are but one small measure of the interaction between our two great countries. Our ties are deeper and wider: they are societal, economic, cultural, and familial.

During their meeting, the Presidents reviewed the wide range of issues of the bilateral relationship and the cooperation undertaken by their governments in order to promote productive and mutually beneficial relations between Mexico and the United States. The Presidents identified new opportunities to work together in order to improve the quality of life of their peoples as well as to make North America the most prosperous, secure and competitive region in the world.

In this vein, the Presidents acknowledged that economic growth and job creation are vital to reducing poverty and inequality and improving the quality of life. They emphasized the centrality of expanding trade between the United States and Mexico as the basis for our shared prosperity. They recognized the need for our governments to work together to speed and facilitate the secure and ever-expanding movement of legitimate goods and people across our shared border, including the development of new infrastructure and the more efficient use of existing infrastructure, where possible.

In seeking to enhance North American competitiveness based on the twin pillars of security and prosperity, the Presidents also underscored their awareness regarding the need to work together to facilitate the transition to full free trade in such areas as agricultural products. To this end, the Presidents agreed to intensify the discussions within the framework of the bilateral working group on corn and dry beans.

The Presidents recognized the continued threat to both nations posed by organized crime and drug trafficking, especially their associated violence, which do not respect borders. They underlined that the important efforts of the Mexican Government to confront organized crime head-on, as one of the most important priorities of its own domestic agenda, would benefit from increased support from and cooperation with the United

States. In this connection, they reiterated their commitment to intensify cooperation and information sharing between the law enforcement agencies of Mexico and the United States, especially along the border region. The Presidents stressed their commitment to increase bilateral cooperation to target criminal organizations, fight arms trafficking, which fuels the violence of criminal organizations, as well as drug trafficking, including methamphetamine and precursor chemicals, and illicit financial activities, including bulk currency smuggling across our borders.

The management of the U.S.-Mexican border is a shared responsibility. Our common fight against organized crime must be accompanied by cooperative actions in other areas which will also promote the security, prosperity and well-being of our border communities. Improved communication and information-sharing at all levels will allow us to continue to transform the border into a region of growing and shared prosperity.

Recognizing that the border region encompasses a remarkable diversity in landscape and native species, the Presidents acknowledged the need to continue efforts to protect our shared natural resources, including air and water, through binational cooperation.

The Presidents recognized that immigration across our common border vitally links both countries, involves shared responsibilities, and represents one of the most critical issues for the future well-being of both our peoples. In this regard they underscored the need to encourage productive investment aimed at creating more and better paid jobs in Mexico as an essential component of any comprehensive strategy to address this phenomenon and agreed on the need to continue advocating an approach to comprehensive immigration reform.

The Presidents also agreed to explore opportunities for people-to-people exchanges, especially in education, as a central tool in fostering greater understanding between our two countries. In this context they stressed that the investment Mexico and the United

States make in human capital must be considered an essential component of their efforts to promote North America's competitiveness and economic growth with justice and security for our peoples.

Finally, Presidents Calderon and Bush reiterated their conviction that the future of Mexico and the United States—and of the whole North American region—is now, more than ever, a shared future. Our commitment to the advancement of democracy, the respect for human rights, the promotion of free markets, the rule of law, security, sustainable development, and expanding opportunity for all, they underlined, will contribute to the consolidation of a prosperous, just, and peaceful future for all citizens in the Americas.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this joint statement. An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Vice President Adil Abd Al-Mahdi of Iraq

March 15, 2007

The President. It is such an honor to welcome the Vice President of a free Iraq to the Oval Office.

Mr. Vice President, I appreciate your courage. I don't know if the citizens of my country know, but the other day, a killer tried to take your life. And fortunately, you sit here, and you speak with enthusiasm and optimism about the future of your country.

One of the reasons why—the main reason why I've reinforced our troops in Iraq is to give leaders such as yourself the opportunity to do the hard work of reconciliation. I appreciate very much the progress that you're making. I know it's hard work. It's hard work to overcome distrust that has built up over the years because your country was ruled by a tyrant that created distrust amongst people.

But you, Mr. Vice President, are showing strong vision and a vision of peace and reconciliation. And I welcome you to the Oval Office. I thank you for your courage, and I thank you for the conversation we've had.

Vice President Abd Al-Mahdi. Thank you. Thank you, President. Thank you for receiving me, and the present occasion to thank you personally and to thank the American people for all the support you've given to Iraq, the sacrifices. Also, I visited yesterday some soldiers in the hospital, and I saw their high spirit. They had, really, better morality than I had, talking about their mission.

We are working hard together. Our security plan is marking some points. We are not finished, but we are doing better than expected in this plan. This will not solve the whole problem; the reconciliation process will take our political agenda forward. We are working on many issues: the hydrocarbon bill, which we approved in the Cabinet; we are working on a de-Baathification bill, and it will be presented later. We are working on so many things.

So, really, I want to take this occasion to thank all Americans—the United States, you, Mr. President, the Congress, the administration—for all the sacrifices, effort, assistance given to help my country. Thank you.

The President. Thank you, sir. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:55 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

Remarks at the National Republican Congressional Committee Dinner

March 15, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for the warm welcome. I had the honor of representing our great country over the past week in five different countries in our neighborhood—but I must tell you, it sure is good to be home. And it sure is good to be with you all. I'm proud to be standing with strong leaders like John Boehner and Roy Blunt. I thank you all for recognizing that it's in the best interest of the United States of America that John Boehner become the next Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Some of you may not know about my early political career—I ran for the United States Congress in 1978 in west Texas. I came in second place—in a two-man race. [Laughter] The campaign obviously didn't turn out the way I hoped it would, but things worked out okay in the end. The key is to learn from