

the United States and for the U.S. administration. It is a joint success story. We are building a democratic Kosovo, affirmative action for the minorities. We'll develop economic—Kosovo economically. We'll have excellent relations with all our neighbors and in the future, with Serbia.

As a sovereign and democratic country, we want to be part of NATO and part of the EU and have excellent relations with the United States. This is our pledge; this is our responsibility; this is our vision.

And thank you very much again.

**President Bush.** Yes, sir. Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:57 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President Sejdiu and Prime Minister Thaci spoke in Albanian, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

### Remarks at a Dinner Honoring Current and Former United States Olympic Athletes

July 21, 2008

Ladies and gentlemen, Laura and I are thrilled to have you here. Welcome to the East Room of the White House. Chairman Ueberroth; Mr. Secretary—the Veterans Affairs Secretary Peake; Members of the Congress; members of the 2008 United States Olympic and Paralympic teams; Mayor of Chicago, who will be hosting the 2016 Olympics; Ambassadors; supporters of the Olympics; distinguished guests: We're really glad you're here.

I also do want to recognize Seldom Scene. They're the bluegrass band that will be playing after dinner in the Rose Garden.

In a few weeks, the athletes here and others will participate in one of the greatest traditions in the world of sports. You're going to travel halfway around the globe; you'll step onto the field of competition; and you will represent the United States of America at the 2008 Olympics. And we're really excited. And not only we're excited, but people who have worn the USA uniform before are excited with you. And we welcome all the previous Olympians who are with us today, and I want to thank you for coming.

And you're not going to be alone in Beijing because you're going to be accompanied by

the hopes and pride of millions of Americans. There's going to be a lot of folks in Beijing to watch you, including Laura and me. And I cannot wait to cheer you on. All the room have devoted years to training and preparation. You've developed the self-discipline that defines a champion. And you've proven yourself worthy of representing the Nation.

The tradition you're carrying on is long and it is noble. It turns out, when the first American Olympians traveled to the 1896 games in Athens, Grover Cleveland lived here in the House. The Oval Office had yet to be built. In those 112 years that have passed, we have been reminded time and again that the Olympics are not just a chance to celebrate our greatest athletes, they're an opportunity to demonstrate the strength of the human spirit.

We were reminded of this truth in 1936, when Jesse Owens won four Gold Medals at the Berlin Olympics. We're reminded of the truth in 1972, when 80,000 spectators filled Munich's Olympic Stadium to honor 11 Israeli athletes and coaches killed by a cowardly act of terrorism. And we were reminded of this truth in 2002, when a tattered American flag recovered from the ruins of the World Trade Center entered the Olympic Stadium in Salt Lake City and displayed to the world the resolve and resilience of our country.

Those of you who will be competing in this year's games in Beijing are continuing a proud tradition of athletic excellence and a proud tradition of representing our country with honor and dignity.

We wish you luck. We wish you endurance. And we wish you victory. And now—[*applause*]. And before I ask Peter Ueberroth to join us, I would like to propose a toast to the Olympic athletes, past and present, and to the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Peter V. Ueberroth, chairman, U.S. Olympic Committee; Secretary of Veterans Affairs James B. Peake; and Mayor Richard M. Daley of Chicago, IL.

## Remarks at a Celebration of Colombian Independence Day

July 22, 2008

*Gracias.* Thank you. *Sientese. Gracias. Buenos días. Bienvenidos a la Casa Blanca.* I am pleased to welcome you to the gathering of the 198th anniversary of Colombia's independence, which was celebrated last Sunday in grand style. Colombia and the United States have a long history of close ties. As many of you may know, Colombia supports [supplies]\* America's primary source of energy, a resource that many Americans use, and we thank you for your coffee. [Laughter]

I'm proud that the Secretary of Agriculture is with us, Eddie Schafer; Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez; Chief of Staff Bolten; Director John Walters, the Office of Drug and—of National Drug Control Policy; other members of my administration who are concerned about making sure our relationship with Colombia is strong and vibrant.

I appreciate very much the Members of the Congress who have come today: Dreier, Herger, *y* Diaz-Balart. Thank you all for coming. Thank you for showing your solidarity with the people of Colombia.

I appreciate very much the *Embajadora de Colombia*—Ambassador Barco, thanks for coming. Carolina Renteria is with us, of the Cabinet—the President's Cabinet; welcome. Hector Morales, the Ambassador to—of the United States to the Organization of American States; Camilo Ospina, Ambassador of Colombia to the Organization of American States; Luis Moreno, proud Colombian citizen, president of the Inter-American Development Bank—*hola*, Luis. Representatives of LULAC, I am so proud of the resolution you recently passed. Thank you for your strong statement.

And after this brief *discurso*, I'll be welcoming Jorge Celedon *y* Jimmy Zambrano to entertain us with some songs.

Before we do, though, I want to—got some comments I'd like to make.

The anniversary of Colombia's independence falls only a couple weeks after America's Independence Day celebration. And that's appropriate, because our two nations have

much in common. Like the United States, Colombia gained its independence when a band of patriots rallied together against a distant monarchy. Like the United States, Colombia was unified in its earliest days by a daring general who became the country's first President. And like the United States, Colombia built a new government around the rule of law and the notion that liberty was an unalienable right.

Our countries have shared a strong bond from the very beginning. In 1822, President James Monroe was one of the first heads of state to recognize Colombia's independence. And that same year, America became one of the first countries to establish a new diplomatic mission with that republic. From those strong foundations we built a lasting friendship on a mutual respect for liberty and a commitment to a more peaceful world.

This friendship has endured through good times and bad. Less than a decade ago, it looked as if peace and freedom were on retreat in Colombia. The country was in the grip of drug cartels and kidnapers. The Marxist terrorist network known as the FARC threatened to overthrow the democratically elected government. These were tough times for our friend. Our two nations launched an ambitious program that helped rescue Colombia from the brink of becoming a failed state.

Plan Colombia, which started under my predecessor, made it clear that the United States would support the Colombian Government's efforts to modernize its military, to fight terrorists and drug kingpins, to expand educational opportunities, and provide Colombians with alternatives to a life of terror and narcotrafficking. The Colombian Government has taken the lead on this bold plan, and the United States has been proud to help. And today, Plan Colombia is working.

One of the main reasons for Plan Colombia's success is the courage of Colombia's President, President Uribe. President Uribe has taken bold stands to defend our shared democratic values. He has been a strong and capable partner in fighting drugs and crime and terror. He's demonstrated that he is deeply committed to providing a better future for the people of his country.

\* White House correction.