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proper help from the Federal Government and State government, there will be a better tomorrow.

And so it is with—you know, it is—it's good to be home. I'm just sorry it's under these circumstances.

I do want to say something about the American Red Cross. The American Red Cross is working closely with the emergency rescue efforts. A lot of people are sheltered, and the Red Cross is helping those people who have been displaced from their homes. It is very important for our citizens to support the American Red Cross. You can get on their web page and find a way to contribute. You know, I hope the country does not have disaster fatigue. The Red Cross is a vital part of helping people recover and helping people find the compassionate care that our citizens expect when there's a disaster such as this.

Anyway, Governor, thanks——

Governor Rick Perry of Texas. Very good, sir.

The President. ——for having us.

Gov. Perry. Glad to have you home.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:32 a.m. in the U.S. Coast Guard hangar at Ellington Field. In his remarks, he referred to Representatives Kevin Brady, John A. Culberson, Sheila Jackson-Lee, Ted Poe, and Senator John Cornyn of Texas. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Multi-National Force—Iraq Former Commander General David H. Petraeus

September 17, 2008

The President. The United States is fortunate to have great men and women who volunteer to serve in a time of danger. I have been incredibly impressed by the sacrifice of our troops who have been put in harm's way, and I've been incredibly impressed by the level of leadership for those troops.

General David Petraeus was asked to do a very difficult job, and he did it with distinction and honor. He was a part of the planning for the surge. He implemented the surge, along with a lot of other brave people, and the United States and the world is better off because of it.

And now the General has agreed to be commander of CENTCOM, which oversees the very important part of the world, the Middle East. And I want to thank you for taking on that assignment, General.

Recently, we saw how important it is, with the attack on our Embassy in Yemen. There were some security forces that lost their lives there, and we send our condolences to their families. This attack is a reminder that we are at war with extremists who will murder innocent people to achieve their ideological objectives. One objectives of these extremists is they kill; is to try to cause the United States to lose our nerve and to withdraw from regions of the world. And our message is, is that we want to help governments survive the extremists. We want people to live normal lives. We want mothers to be able to raise their sons and daughters in a peaceful environment so they can realize the hopes and dreams of a better world.

And I want to thank our diplomats who stand in harm's way. I thank our military who stands in harm's way. And I want to thank General Petraeus and his family for being so dedicated to our great country.

General.

General Petraeus. Thanks, Mr. President. Great to be home, sir. And it was a great privilege to serve there with our young men and women.

The President. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:53 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Martin Torrijos Espino of Panama

September 17, 2008

President Bush. Mr. President, thank you for coming. It's—*bienvenidos*.

President Torrijos. Yes.

President Bush. Yes. President Torrijos has been a good personal friend, and he has been a good friend to freedom, prosperity,

and democracy. I've been very impressed by your leadership.

The Panamanian economy is strong. They are implementing now a very strategic decision, which is the—building a parallel canal in Panama. I remember when you first explained it to me there, when I went to visit you, I was most impressed. And then you're here now briefing me that the plans are not only in place, but the operations are beginning soon. And I congratulate you for that.

We've talked about bilateral issues. One key issue, of course, is the free trade agreement between the United States and Panama; Congress needs to get it done. This is important for our—both our nations, it's important for our economies, and it's important for our friendship. And I appreciate you coming to talk to Members of Congress. I think it is most useful.

And so it's a joy to be with you again, and I'm proud to have you here. And I pledge to you that I will continue to work hard on this important agreement—and I will. Welcome.

President Torrijos. Thank you, sir. Thank you. It's always a pleasure talking to you and looking at our bilateral relations. They have grown stronger. There's a lot of issues of cooperation in the agenda, cooperation that will make a difference to common people in Panama: health programs, the regional center that's been established in Panama; educational programs that we're talking; and of course, our commitment to free trade, and, as you said, the commitment that we hope we'll be ready to help in any way to—in the process.

And I just want to thank you for being a friend of the country, being aware of our problem, and reaching out to help the Panamanian people. So thank you, sir.

President Bush. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:54 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Proclamation 8289—Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, Constitution Week, 2008

September 17, 2008

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Americans are united by the ideals of equal justice, limited government, and the rule of law. On Constitution Day and Citizenship Day and during Constitution Week, we remember the vision and determination of the Framers to build a free society, and we celebrate the historical document they created to achieve that goal.

More than two centuries ago, our Founding Fathers gathered in Philadelphia and produced a charter that would promote justice and preserve the liberty of all our citizens. The Founders established three separate branches of Government with a system of checks and balances among them. Ours is the oldest written constitution in the world, and the American experiment remains the world's best hope for freedom.

The Constitution forged the American creed of liberty and equality and has lifted the lives of countless individuals. Whether they are citizens by birth or by oath, Americans share a great tradition of enjoying liberty protected by a constitutional government of their choosing.

On Constitution Day and Citizenship Day, and during Constitution Week, Americans come together and recognize the blessings bestowed upon our great Nation. On this occasion we celebrate the courage of the Constitution's drafters and recommit ourselves to making the United States a more perfect union.

In recognition of the signing of the Constitution and of Americans who strive to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of citizenship, the Congress, by joint resolution of February 29, 1952 (36 U.S.C. 106, as amended), designated September 17 as "Constitution Day and Citizenship Day," and by joint resolution of August 2, 1956 (36 U.S.C. 108, as amended), requested that the President proclaim the week beginning September 17