

The VICE PRESIDENT. The President of the Senate, at the direction of that body, appoints the following Senators as members of the committee on the part of the Senate to escort Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, into the House Chamber:

The Senator from Tennessee (Mr. FRIST);

The Senator from Kentucky (Mr. MCCONNELL);

The Senator from Alaska (Mr. STEVENS);

The Senator from Arizona (Mr. KYL);

The Senator from Mississippi (Mr. LOTT);

The Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBIN); and

The Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER).

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced the Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, His Excellency Banny De Brum, Ambassador of the Marshall Islands.

The Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and took the seat reserved for him.

At 11 o'clock and 4 minutes a.m., the Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms announced Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

The President of the Republic of Latvia, escorted by the committee of Senators and Representatives, entered the Hall of the House of Representatives and stood at the Clerk's desk.

[Applause, the Members rising.]

The SPEAKER. Members of the Congress, it is my great privilege and I deem it a high honor and a personal pleasure to present to you Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia.

[Applause, the Members rising.]

ADDRESS BY HER EXCELLENCY DR. VAIRA VIKE-FREIBERGA, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

President VIKE-FREIBERGA. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of the House of Representatives, honorable Senators, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, it is with deep emotion that I stand within these august walls and thank you for the honor of addressing you on behalf of the Latvian people.

I believe this honor to be bestowed upon me in recognition of Latvia's strivings, sacrifices and extraordinary success in transforming itself from a captive nation under the yoke of a foreign totalitarian regime into a reestablished democracy with a flourishing market economy.

Fifteen years ago, Latvia, along with neighboring Estonia and Lithuania, regained its independence after 50 years of Soviet occupation. The Baltic Singing Revolution achieved this by non-violent means and the sheer courage and determination of the peoples of

these countries. They were ready to face Soviet guns and tanks with nothing but their unarmed bodies and the deep conviction of their rights, knowing full well that, at any moment, these guns and tanks might crush them as they had crushed so many before.

After the collapse of the once powerful Soviet empire, Latvians at long last recovered their fundamental rights and freedoms. They regained the right to forge their own destiny; they recovered the freedom to shape their own future.

For too long the Iron Curtain had kept Europe divided and the nations of the world confronted each other in two opposing camps. We thank the Lord that these times are behind us at last. Dozens of nations have gained or regained their sovereignty. For them, right has triumphed over might, courage has overcome fear, and dignity has replaced humiliation and oppression.

The wave of freedom and democratic reform has been spreading throughout Central and Eastern Europe, extending from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and into the Caucasus. One country after another, with the sad exception of Belarus, has been making a commitment to democracy and has accepted the need for the rule of law and the respect of human rights.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, it is an honor and a pleasure to be addressing you as the elected Representatives of a great country, a mighty world power that has achieved its greatness by building its house on the solid rock of democracy. The United States of America has remained ever faithful to Lincoln's goal of having a government of the people, for the people and by the people.

Born 230 years ago, your great Nation has grown strong by being a warm and welcoming Mother of Exiles as well as a land of hope and opportunity for its own sons and daughters. Among the exiles received in America, there were many Latvians who had fled their native land at the end of the Second World War.

Latvia remains grateful to the United States for opening its doors to a good many of these exiles, who gained the right to live here in peace, justice and liberty, while many of their relatives back home suffered oppression and brutal persecutions. They quickly became loyal and patriotic citizens of America, productive members of your society, many achieving positions of distinction and responsibility.

Latvia remains grateful to the United States for the firm refusal to recognize the illegal occupation of the three Baltic countries. Along with the other formerly captive nations of Central and Eastern Europe, we thank America for its steadfast and courageous stand on freedom and democracy.

You were instrumental in assisting Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania in the withdrawal of former Soviet troops from their territories. The U.S.-Baltic Charter of Partnership of 1998 gave di-

rection to our common goal and vision of the Baltic States joining Euro-Atlantic institutions. We recall the unanimous vote by the United States Senate in support of the latest enlargement of NATO. Since then, the United States has helped to ensure the collective defense of the Baltic airspace. For all this, we are grateful.

Latvia has had the honor of receiving two American Presidents since recovering its independence: President Clinton in 1994 and President Bush last year. We look forward to receiving President Bush again this fall when the 2006 NATO Summit convenes in Riga. We count ourselves fortunate to have the United States of America as a true friend and trusted ally.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, I stand before you as a former exile, who has had the rare privilege of returning to her native land, free and independent again; a former exile who has had the deep satisfaction of helping her country rise like a phoenix from the ashes of oppression. I am the representative of a resilient and stubborn nation whose people have struggled against all odds to preserve their ancient heritage, maintain their language alive, and remain true to their national identity. It has been indeed a privilege to lead this nation while it recovered its rightful place among the world community of free and democratic countries.

The road has not been easy. Renewing independence was just the first step. We still had to rebuild a country, not just starting from scratch, but only after clearing away the rubble left by the previous system. Just 15 years ago, we had to make the transition from a stagnant, state-planned, command economy to a workable, liberal, free-market economy. It was a formidable challenge. While we were fortunate in regaining our independence without significant bloodshed, our inhabitants did pay a heavy economic and social price for their freedom. They were ready to do so because they understood that this was an investment in a better future.

Overcoming years of constant change, uncertainty and adaptation, Latvia has become a success story. An unfinished story by all means, especially as concerns the standard of living of our people, but a success story nevertheless. Last year, Latvia's economy grew by more than 10 percent, and this year my country continues to maintain the highest economic growth rate on the European continent. We are on our way, ready to share our experience and pass it on to others.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, what has helped Latvia and its Baltic neighbors succeed where so many others are failing, in spite of not just years, but decades of help and encouragement of every kind?

It was above all the faith of the Baltic nations in the values of freedom and democracy. It was their firm and

irreversible determination to build a new and better future for their children and grandchildren. They wanted to rejoin the free world from which they had been cut off for half a century.

What urged us on was our ardent desire to make up for lost time, and to catch up to those Western European countries that had enjoyed the freedom of growing and thriving ever since the end of the Second World War. The desire to join NATO and the European Union became a force driving us forward, as strong as the force driving us away from the past under Soviet dictatorship. This clear sense of purpose allowed us to transform our institutions and to reform our economy.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, the challenge, ever since the fall of the Soviet empire and the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, has been to rebuild a Europe whole and free, a Europe free of dividing lines, of feudal dependencies, of imperialist spheres of influence; a Europe free from bloodthirsty ideologies and from murderous fanatics. We need a Europe without walls, barriers, exclusion or prejudice, a Europe in which every nation would be afforded equal dignity and would be treated with equal respect. All Europeans, after all, are part of the same Old Continent, and all of them need to work together to make it eternally new.

Such a Europe is not and must not be a counterforce to the influence of the United States. It is and must continue to be an ally and a partner. All Europeans share the fundamentals of the same broad cultural heritage, a heritage that is also shared by Americans.

This heritage includes outstanding achievements as well as resounding failures. A common European space of peace and stability, of economic growth and prosperity is the best guarantee that the Europe of the 21st century will never again repeat the errors and the horrors of the 20th. We have seen the depths to which Europe could sink as well as the heights to which it could rise. Never again should we allow such horrors as the Holocaust to be repeated. We need to aim for the heights and to help each other achieve them.

Yet it is perfectly true that Latvia, along with other Central and Eastern European countries, feels a special bond of friendship and affinity with the United States. We might as well admit it. We, who had lost our liberty, look up to those who are ready to defend it. But if the bond of trust and friendship between the U.S. and the newer members of the EU and NATO is to be deepened, strengthened and maintained, we do need more face-to-face contacts between our peoples. We need more possibilities of visits and mutual exchanges. I trust that the U.S. Congress will find a nondiscriminatory solution for extending the Visa Waiver Program to all its allies in a united Europe. Such a step would be broadly welcomed as a signal of growing maturity in the alliance between our nations.

We are partners, even though we differ in size, in influence, in power, in resources. We are partners even while having different opinions on certain issues. That, after all, is the whole point of living in democracies. Any disagreements must not steer us off our common course of consolidating peace and security in the world.

My country sees Europe's transatlantic partnership with the United States as essential for our common security as well as for maintaining the security of the world at large. The U.S. has been a trusted partner whenever European liberties were endangered and proved it through the sacrifice of the lives of its soldiers. Throughout the decades of the Cold War, Western Europe was kept safe under the protection of NATO and through the significant role of American military capability.

This coming November, Latvia will host the 2006 NATO Summit in its capital city of Riga. This will be a summit about the rejuvenation and the transformation of NATO, which remains the most powerful and effective military alliance in the whole world. We need a strong and vibrant alliance, able to face up effectively to the challenges of our age. The nature of threats may change, but the danger they pose does not.

NATO is not only about protecting its members within their own borders. We are ready to work closely with the United States and other willing partners to aid those strife-ridden countries whose fragility is a bane for their own people and a threat to the rest of the world. Right now, Latvia is contributing to international peacekeeping operations in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Bosnia, in Kosovo, and elsewhere. Latvia's contribution is proportionately one of the largest in the world in terms of the country's size and available financial resources.

From its very inception, NATO has been more than just a military alliance. That is why more and more nations are expressing their desire to join it. We support the strivings for freedom, democracy and the rule of law of countries struggling with the after-effects of imposed totalitarianism. Latvia supports Ukraine and Georgia in their endeavors to establish closer relations with NATO. We encourage the member states of the alliance to formulate concrete and enhanced forms of cooperation between NATO and these two countries at the Riga summit. We firmly believe that an open door policy must be maintained for the admittance of future member states.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, one nation with which Latvia shares a common border, as well as a complicated history, is Russia.

Last year marked the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. This victory brought freedom to one half of Europe, but not to the other. After being Hitler's partner for 2

years, Stalin had joined the Allies in ridding Europe of this bloodthirsty tyrant. In recognition of that role and in homage to the immense losses and casualties that the Russian people endured during the Second World War, I accepted the invitation of the President of the Russian Federation and traveled to Moscow on May 9 of last year.

But I also pointed out that this victory over one despot still kept the other one in power. For the people of Latvia, one foreign occupation was only replaced by another. No one gained freedom under Stalinist tyranny and the oppression of totalitarian Communism. This is not rewriting history. These are plain facts. The simple acknowledgment and recognition of them would go a long way toward strengthening trust, understanding, and good neighborly relations between our nations.

Latvia, for its part, stands ready for developing a friendly, future-oriented, and pragmatic relationship with Russia as an important neighbor of the EU. We stand ready for an active and meaningful political dialogue based on mutual respect, noninterference, and the true respect for human rights.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Representatives of the American people, as a permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, the United States of America has a crucial role to play in the international arena. The United States has been a beacon of liberty ever since its foundation. The United States has become a world power by giving free rein to the creativity, the initiative and the energy of its people by fostering their entrepreneurial spirit. But the United States has become a world leader only to the extent that it has not been indifferent to the fates, the aspirations and the opinions of other nations.

For if no man is an island, neither is any country alone and self-sufficient. All of us, large and small, are interlocked, intertwined, and interdependent. If we want peace in the world, if we want international cooperation, persuasion is as important as imposition by force. Smaller and weaker nations want to be meaningfully included in decisions that will affect us all. They want to be respected. When they clamor for multilateralism, nations are really saying: Listen to me. I want to be heard.

Of course, among all this clamor, it may be hard to find a common denominator. It is not always easy to achieve a common purpose. We see this all too clearly in the difficulties that the United Nations is experiencing in bringing about all the reforms agreed to in principle during the General Assembly of their 60th anniversary year.

As a Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on the reform of the United Nations last year, I was pleased that the General Assembly managed to agree in principle on the necessity for sweeping and fundamental reforms.

The new Peace-Building Commission was created, which we need for diffusing long-lasting conflicts. Too often in the past, the U.N. has been unable to prevent genocide and lasting bloodshed: in the Congo, in Rwanda, in the former Yugoslavia, and now in the Darfur region of Sudan.

One of the U.N.'s fundamental roles lies in the defense of human rights. The newly created Human Rights Council must become more credible and more effective than the commission that preceded it. Its best way to gain credibility would be by starting with a thorough and unbiased evaluation of the human rights record of its own newly elected council members.

Only through a concerted international effort based on consensus and cooperation will the world community be able to overcome a number of other pressing global challenges. The degradation of our planet's environment is truly a global problem, as is the spread of epidemic disease. Most dangerous of all is the continuing and growing gap between the developing and developed nations. The great divide between North and South, between haves and have-nots is as dangerous as the divide between Eastern and Western blocs ever was during the Cold War. We have to do our utmost to reach the U.N.'s millennium goals of reducing poverty in the developing world.

Brutal and unrelenting poverty is a scourge, unsolved in spite of decades of massive international aid and countless well-meant programs. Clearly, the quality of governance in aid-receiving countries has a crucial role to play, as well as their readiness to foster reforms and progress. But the quality of aid-providing efforts also needs to be improved. We need better international coordination of results-oriented programs, which should be constantly monitored for their effectiveness.

The worldwide spread of terrorism as well as the growing signs of intolerance and xenophobia in many countries underscore the urgent worldwide need for a meaningful and sustained dialogue between civilizations. As already recognized at the Millennium General Assembly of the United Nations, our common goal is to overcome the prejudice, misperceptions and polarization that stand as barriers to better understanding and consensus among members of different races, religions and cultures.

Due to the enormous importance of nuclear nonproliferation, the world's democracies should maintain a coherent position regarding the nuclear program of Iran. We welcome the recent joint initiatives by the United States, the United Nations Security Council and the European Union to offer a constructive solution to the Iranian nuclear issue and hope that the Iranian leadership will respond in kind.

The longstanding conflict in the Middle East remains a major source of world tensions. We fully empathize with the desire of the Jewish people to

live on their ancestral land in security and at peace with their neighbors. We also wish to see a free and prosperous Palestinian state coexist, peacefully, side by side with the State of Israel. For this to be achieved, the Hamas-led Palestinian administration must abide by previously signed international agreements. There is no other way.

Education could play an important role in immunizing our societies against the dangers of extremism and prejudice. Children should not be raised in hatred; societies should have more constructive goals than the endless cultivation of grievances and the stark division of the human race into "us" and "them."

Every society has experienced some dark events in its history, at times as victim, at others as perpetrator or collaborator. We must inform our children of our past mistakes, so that these may never be repeated again. An objective evaluation of the legacy of the past will free us to address the challenges of the future. We in Latvia believe in the importance of research, remembrance, and education, even on the most sensitive issues. This includes the crimes of the Holocaust while Latvia was under Nazi German occupation, as well as the crimes committed in the name of Communism under the Soviet occupation regime.

It is also the duty of each country to preserve its historic, cultural, and religious heritage. Latvia is a country with a multiethnic and multireligious mosaic. We are proud of our ethnic communities and of the contributions that their sons and daughters have made to Latvia's human, economic, and cultural development. As a pluralistic and flourishing democracy, we enjoy freedom of religion and have been gradually renewing the houses of worship of different faiths, including the many desecrated Lutheran churches, desecrated in Communist times. Soon after recovering our independence, we received a visit by Pope John Paul II. Last month, the Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Aleksey II, paid a historic visit to my country. Just recently, with the support of the U.S. Government and the family of the late Latvian-born painter Mark Rothko, I attended the reconsecration ceremony of a reconstructed Jewish synagogue in the city of Daugavpils.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, distinguished Members of Congress, fanaticism and extremism remain a scourge of humanity, as they have been for many centuries. Violence and hatred continue to plague many nations and block their road to achieving progress. Greed, opportunism, and brute force oppress many peoples and deny them the most basic of human rights. Yet just as clearly, the world also knows charity, compassion, and the desire for kindness. Human beings everywhere are capable of change, and change for the better.

Again and again in history, we have seen the victory of freedom over tyr-

anny, exploitation and chaos. It may take decades, as it did for Latvia, but we did gain the freedom that is ours by right. We know the value of freedom and feel compassion for those who are still deprived of it. We know the price of freedom, for we have paid for it, and we would be ready to do it again and again.

Every nation on Earth is entitled to freedom. It is a dream that must be kept alive, no matter how long it takes or how hard it is to achieve. We must share the dream that someday there won't be a tyranny left anywhere in the world. We must work for a future where every nation on Earth will have thrown off the shackles of injustice and of oppression, and where every person on Earth will enjoy the same rights and liberties that now are the privilege of the more democratic and the more developed countries. It will take time, it will take effort, but it must happen. And it will happen all the sooner the better we learn to work for it and plan for it, all of us, large and small, together.

[Applause, the Members rising.]

At 11 o'clock and 40 minutes a.m., Her Excellency Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, President of the Republic of Latvia, accompanied by the committee of escort, retired from the Hall of the House of Representatives.

The Assistant to the Sergeant at Arms escorted the Acting Dean of the Diplomatic Corps from the Chamber.

JOINT MEETING DISSOLVED

The SPEAKER. The purpose of the joint meeting having been completed, the Chair declares the joint meeting of the two Houses now dissolved.

Accordingly, at 11 o'clock and 41 minutes a.m., the joint meeting of the two Houses was dissolved.

The Members of the Senate retired to their Chamber.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER. The House will continue in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

□ 1225

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. BOOZMAN) at 12 o'clock and 25 minutes p.m.

PRINTING OF PROCEEDINGS HAD DURING RECESS

Mr. PITTS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that the proceedings had during the recess be printed in the RECORD.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.