

In general, I'd like to say that I'm very satisfied with my visit, and I consider this as instrumental in the future development of Azerbaijan as a modern, secular, democratic country. We share the same values. We are grateful for United States assistance in promotion of political process, process of democratization of our society, and very committed to continue this cooperation in the future.

Thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Bush. One final word. I forgot to mention, I do want to congratulate the President and the First Lady on the marriage of their daughter this weekend. It's a major sacrifice for the President to be here during the planning phases of the wedding. And we wish you and the First Lady all the best, and more importantly, we wish your daughter all the best.

President Aliyev. Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:49 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad; Gen. George W. Casey, Jr., USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and President Aliyev's wife, Mehriban Aliyeva, and daughter, Leyla Aliyeva.

Remarks Following a Meeting With North Korean Defectors and Family Members of Japanese Abducted by North Korea

April 28, 2006

I have just had one of the most moving meetings since I've been the President, here in the Oval Office. I met with a mom and a brother who long to be reunited with her daughter and his sister. They're apart because the North Korean Government abducted the child when she was a teenager. And all the mom wants is to be reunited with her daughter.

It is hard to believe that a country would foster abduction. It's hard for Americans to imagine that a leader of any country would encourage the abduction of a young child. It's a heartless country that would separate loved ones, and yet that's exactly what hap-

pened to this mom as a result of the actions of North Korea. If North Korea expects to be respected in the world, that country must respect human rights and human dignity and must allow this mother to hug her child again.

I talked to a family, a young North Korean family that escaped the clutches of tyranny in order to live in freedom. This young couple was about to have a child, and the mom was 5 months pregnant when they crossed the river to get into China. They wandered in China, wondering whether or not their child could grow up and have a decent life. They were deeply concerned about the future of their child; any mother and father would be concerned about their child.

They had to wander because they did not want to have their child grow up in a society that was brutal, a society that did not respect the human condition. By the grace of God, they found safe haven. Their child was born and now safely sits here in the Oval Office.

I talked to a courageous man who escaped from North Korea. He was in the North Korean military. He saw firsthand the brutal nature of the regime, and he couldn't—his heart could no longer take it. He followed his conscience and escaped. He speaks for thousands who have escaped North Korea and thousands who live inside the country; he speaks eloquently about the need for their freedom and for them to be treated decently.

The world requires courage to confront people who do not respect human rights, and it has been my honor to welcome into the Oval Office people of enormous courage: a mom; a mother and dad of a young child; a former soldier; a brother. And so I welcome you here. We're proud you're here. I assure you that the United States of America strongly respects human rights. We strongly will work for freedom so that the people of North Korea can raise their children in a world that's free and hopeful and so that moms will never again have to worry about an abducted daughter.

May God bless you all. Thanks for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:39 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sakie Yokata, mother, and Takuya Yokata, brother, of Megumi Yokata, a Japanese woman abducted by North Korean authorities;

and Kim Guang Choel and Lee Seong Hee, who defected from North Korea, and their daughter, Kim Han-Mee.

Remarks on the National Economy and an Exchange With Reporters

April 28, 2006

The President. Thank you very much for joining us today. I'm joined by my two top White House economic advisers. The reason why is because we've had some very positive economic news today: The Commerce Department announced that our economy grew at an impressive 4.8 percent annual rate in the first quarter of this year. That's the fastest rate since 2003. This rapid growth is another sign that our economy is on the fast track.

The good news comes on the heels of two other important economic indicators reported earlier this week: New home sales surged forward by nearly 14 percent last month; consumer confidence reached its highest level since May of 2002. This confidence is largely driven by the many jobs being created in our country—5.1 million since August of 2003.

This good news cannot be taken for granted. With gas prices on the minds of Americans, we need to keep our foot on the pedal of this strong economy. The surest way to put the brakes on our economic growth would be to raise taxes or spend too much of the people's money here in Washington. That's why I'm going to continue to work with Congress to make the tax relief that helped spur this economic growth permanent. That's why I'm going to work with Congress to restrain the Federal Government's appetite for spending. And that's why I'm going to work with Congress to make this country less dependent on foreign sources of oil.

I commend America's workers and small-business owners, innovators and educators for contributing to the strong economic health of our Nation. I will continue to pursue progrowth policies so that opportunity reaches every American neighborhood and every American family.

With that, I'll be glad to take a couple of questions.

Q. Mr. President—

The President. Excuse me, please. Jennifer [Jennifer Loven, Associated Press].

Iran

Q. Thank you, sir. The IAEA says that Iran is not in compliance with the Security Council. What sort of sanctions do you—would you like to see and—that could bring Russia and Chinese support?

The President. The IAEA statement is an important statement. It reminds the nations of the world that there is an ongoing diplomatic effort to convince the Iranians to give up their nuclear weapons ambitions. It reminds—it should remind the Iranians that the world is united and concerned about their desire to have not only a nuclear weapon but the capacity to make a nuclear weapon or the knowledge to make a nuclear weapon, all of which we're working hard to convince them not to try to achieve.

I will consult and continue to consult with our allies on this issue. I spoke to Chancellor Merkel this morning about this issue. She will be coming to Washington next week. We will continue discussions about how we can continue to maintain a united front. It's very important for the Iranians to understand there's a common desire by a lot of nations in this world to convince them, peacefully convince them, that they ought to give up their weapons ambitions.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Fuel/Energy

Q. Thank you, sir. You mentioned gas prices; would you go along with an effort by some Senate Republicans that could levy a significant tax on oil companies' profits? And does it bother you that the oil companies are racking up these record profits when people are paying \$3 a gallon?

The President. My attitude is that the oil companies need to be mindful that the American people expect them to reinvest their cash flows in such a way that it enhances our energy security. That means pipeline construction for natural gas deliveries. That means expansion of refineries. That means exploration in environmentally friendly ways. It also means investment in renewable sources of energy. And that's what the American people expect. They also expect to be