

President Attends International Republican Institute Dinner

Renaissance Hotel
Washington, D.C.

7:09 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you all. Thanks. Please be seated. Thank you for that warm welcome. I thank John for that introduction. John McCain is a man of honor and integrity, and great personal courage -- he's an outstanding chairman for the International Republican Institute. He campaigned with me, for which I was grateful, and one time he said, do you believe in free speech? I said, I do. He said, why don't you get over to the IRI and give one, then? (Laughter.)

It was an honor to meet your mother, John -- Roberta. There she is. Mrs. McCain, it's good to see you. If you're anything like my mother, I'm sure you're telling John what to do -- (laughter) -- if he's anything like me, he's listening to you about half the time. (Laughter.) But thank you very much, John.

I appreciate your president, Lorne Craner. He did a fantastic job in our administration as Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy and Human Rights and Labor -- and he continues to do good work. (Applause.)

I regret Laura is not with us tonight. You probably think she's working on some of her one-liners. (Laughter.) She's actually packing her bags because she's off for Jordan and Israel and Egypt, to continue to deliver the freedom message -- and I can't think of a better messenger. (Applause.)

I want to thank Peter Madigan and John Thain. I want to thank the members of the Congress who are here tonight. I particularly want to say "hello" and thanks to my close friend, Ambassador Jerry Bremer, for his fantastic work in Iraq. Thank you, Jerry, for your good job. (Applause.)

I'm pleased to know that Paul Wolfowitz is with us tonight, President-elect of the World Bank. (Applause.) I'm going to miss him as a part of my administration. But I want to tell you something: The world will be better off with Paul Wolfowitz as the head of the World Bank. (Applause.)

I want to thank the members of the Diplomatic Corps. And I want to thank you for this fine award. I understand a little later on you're going to give an award to a true champion of freedom and that is Pope John Paul II. Everywhere he went, Pope John Paul preached that the call of freedom is for every member of the human family -- because the Author of Life wrote it into our common human nature. And in the end, even the Berlin Wall could not withstand the force of this humble Polish priest, who became the Bishop of Rome -- and a true hero for the ages. Thank you for honoring this good man. (Applause.)

I'm here to thank you for supporting the IRI. And I appreciate the work IRI is doing to advance the cause of liberty. For more than two decades, IRI has been at the forefront of democratic change in more than a hundred countries. You've trained the next generation of leaders, you've strengthened political parties, you've monitored elections, and you're helping to build civil societies. You've made an enormous difference in the lives of millions across the world -- I hope that makes you feel good. The world is safer and freer and more peaceful because of the International Republican Institute. Thank you for your good work. (Applause.)

These are incredibly exciting times. They must be exciting times for you. And they're exciting times for me. They should be exciting times for everybody -- because freedom is making unprecedented progress across the globe. In the last 18 months, we have witnessed revolutions of Rose, Orange, Purple, Tulip and Cedar -- and these are just the beginnings. Across the Caucasus and Central Asia, hope is stirring at the prospect of change -- and change will come. Across the broader Middle East, we are seeing the rise of a new generation whose hearts burn for freedom -- and they will have it.

This is a period of great idealism, when dreams of liberty are coming true for millions. Yet, to achieve idealistic goals, we need realistic policies to help nations secure their freedom, and practical strategies to help young democracies consolidate their gains.

To help young democracies succeed, we need to recognize that freedom movements can create a vacuum. Democratic change and free elections are exhilarating events. Yet we know from experience they can be followed by moments of uncertainty. When people risk everything to vote, it can raise expectations that their lives will improve immediately -- but history teaches us that the path to a free society is long and not always smooth.

During my visit to Europe, I stopped in a country that is now in the early stages of its transition from free elections to a free society, and that's the nation of Georgia. It was a fantastic honor to represent our country in front of thousands of people, and to stand side-by-side with a true lover of freedom, President Saakashvili. It was an unbelievable experience to stand in Freedom Square to celebrate the peaceful revolution that took place 18 months ago. Yet, it has taken nearly 15 years of struggle for the citizens of this young democracy to establish freedom and justice in their country. But I've seen the resolve of Georgia's leaders, and the spirit of the Georgian people. And I can assure you: They have the will to succeed, and the United States of America will help them. (Applause.)

Almost every new democracy has gone through a period of challenge and confusion. In Slovakia, the Velvet Revolution was followed by a period of neo-authoritarian rule before freedom firmly took hold. In Romania, the communist regime was toppled in 1989 -- and today the post-communist leadership is still dealing with the legacy of corruption they inherited, as they work to build a vibrant democracy. In Ukraine, citizens waited 13 years after independence for the Orange Revolution that solidified the democratic gains. All these countries still have much work to do, but their people are courageous, and their leaders are determined -- and with our help they will prevail. (Applause.)

And as we push the freedom agenda, we must remember the history of our own country. The American Revolution was followed by years of chaos. In 1783, Congress was chased from Philadelphia by angry veterans demanding back pay -- and the Congress stayed on the run for six months. Our first effort at a governing charter, the Articles of Confederation, failed miserably -- it took several years before we finally adopted our Constitution and inaugurated our first President. It took a four-year civil war, and a century of struggle after that, before the promise of our Declaration was extended to all Americans.

No nation in history has made the transition from tyranny to a free society without setbacks and false starts. What separates those nations that succeed from those that falter is their progress in establishing free institutions. So to help young democracies succeed, we must help them build free institutions to fill the vacuum created by change. Democracy takes different forms in different cultures. Yet we know that in all cultures, successful democracies are built on certain common foundations -- and they include the following rights:

First, all successful democracies need freedom of speech, with a vibrant free press that informs the public, ensures transparency, and prevents authoritarian backsliding.

Second, all successful democracies need freedom of assembly, so citizens can gather and organize in free associations to press for reform, and so that a peaceful, loyal opposition can provide citizens with real choices.

Third, all successful democracies need a free economy to unleash the creativity of its citizens and create prosperity and opportunity and economic independence from the state.

Fourth, all democracies need an independent judiciary to guarantee rule of law and assure impartial justice for all citizens.

And, fifth, all democracies need freedom of worship, because respect for the beliefs of others is the only way to build a society where compassion and tolerance prevail.

These are the foundations that sustain human freedom. Societies that lay these foundations not only survive, but thrive. Societies that fail to do so often find they have built their future on sand instead of rock -- and risk sliding back into tyranny. So we have a great responsibility: We must help these young democracies build the free institutions that will protect their liberty and extend it to future generations.

To help young democracies succeed and build these institutions of liberty, we must enlist the help of many individuals and institutions: non-governmental organizations have a role to play; the United States government has a role to play; and the world's free nations all have important roles to play.

To build free institutions, we're counting on groups like IRI. As more and more people rise up to demand their freedom, the world is seeing a proliferation of democratic transitions. For IRI, and others in the business of promoting democratic change, this is good news -- it means you are in a growth industry. We need you to continue your vital work to help ensure free and fair elections across the world. At the same time, we also need you to focus your skills and experience on what comes after the elections are over, and the media has left, and the world's attention has turned elsewhere.

As new democracies emerge, we need you to help civic associations in those countries transform from regime opponents to issue advocates -- so they can press legitimate governments for essential reforms. We need you to help the democratic reformers you have trained make the transition from dissidents to elected legislators -- by teaching them how to build coalitions, and set legislative agendas, and master unfamiliar skills, like constituent service. We need you to help businesses in new market economies organize trade associations and chambers of commerce, so they can promote pro-growth economic policies. And we need you to teach newly-elected governments the importance of building public support for their policies and programs -- as well as how to effectively deal with a free news media. By helping people build these institutions and develop the habits of liberty, you are helping them transform new democracies into lasting free societies.

To build free institutions, the United States government has responsibilities. To help meet this goal, since taking office my administration has provided more than \$4.6 billion for programs to support democratic change around the world -- and we have requested over \$1.3 billion for these efforts in our 2006 budget. Our 2006 budget also requests \$80 million for the National Endowment for Democracy -- more than double NED's budget when I took office. The reason I bring this up is I want you to understand that we have funding, but we will focus that funding to help new democracies after the elections are over.

We must also improve the responsiveness of our government to help nations emerging from tyranny and war. Democratic change can arrive suddenly -- and that means our government must be able to move quickly to provide needed assistance. So last summer, my administration established a new Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization in the State Department, led by Ambassador Carlos Pascual. This new office is charged with coordinating our government's civilian efforts to meet an essential mission: helping the world's newest democracies make the transition to peace and freedom and a market economy.

You know, one of the lessons we learned from our experience in Iraq is that, while military personnel can be rapidly deployed anywhere in the world, the same is not true of U.S. government civilians. Many fine civilian workers from almost every department of our government volunteered to serve in Iraq. When they got there they did an amazing job under extremely difficult and dangerous circumstances -- and America appreciates their service and sacrifice. But the process of recruiting and staffing the Coalition Provisional Authority was lengthy and it was difficult. That's why one of the first projects of the new Office of Reconstruction and Stabilization is to create a new Active Response Corps, made up of foreign and civil service officers who can deploy quickly to crisis situations as civilian "first responders." This new Corps will be on call -- ready to get programs running on the ground in days and weeks, instead of months and years. The 2006 budget requests \$24 million for this office, and \$100 million for a new Conflict Response

Fund. If a crisis emerges, and assistance is needed, the United States of America will be ready. (Applause.)

This office will also work to expand our use of civilian volunteers from outside our government, who have the right skills and are willing to serve in these missions. After the liberation of Iraq and Afghanistan, Americans from all walks of life stepped forward to help these newly liberated nations recover. Last summer a Lancaster, Ohio police officer named Brian Fisher volunteered to spend a year in Baghdad training Iraqi police. Brian says, "The Iraqi people have been under a dictatorship and now they are moving toward democracy, and I want to do something to help." What a fantastic spirit that Brian showed. But he's not alone. Last May, a Notre Dame Law School professor named Jimmy Gurul helped train 39 Iraqi judges, some of whom will conduct the trials of Saddam Hussein and other senior members of his regime. Because of efforts of people like him and Brian, these trials will be fair and transparent.

These are ordinary Americans who are making unbelievable contributions to freedom's cause. And the spirit of the citizenship of this country is remarkable, and we're going to put that spirit to work to advance the cause of liberty and to build a safer world. (Applause.)

We're improving the capacity of our military to assist nations that are making democratic transitions. In Iraq and Afghanistan our men and women in uniform are serving with unbelievable courage and distinction -- and they make this country incredibly proud. The main purpose of our military is to win the war on terror; is to find and defeat the terrorists overseas, so we do not face them here at home. A major goal of our military is to train Iraqi and Afghan security forces, so these nations can defend their people and fight the terrorists themselves. But at the same time, America's Armed Forces are also undertaking a less visible, but increasingly important task: helping these people of these nations build civil societies from the rubble of oppression.

In Afghanistan, U.S. and coalition forces are deploying provincial reconstruction teams in remote regions of that country. These teams are helping the Afghan government to fix schools, dig wells, build roads, repair hospitals, and build confidence in the Afghan government's ability to deliver real change in people's lives. In Iraq, soldiers of the 1st Cavalry Division launched "Operation Adam Smith" -- provided Iraqi entrepreneurs with small business loans, taught them the important skills to run a business -- like accounting and marketing and writing business plans.

To give our military more resources for this vital work, we are rebalancing our forces -- moving people out of skills that are in low demand, such as heavy artillery, and adding more military police and civil affairs specialists that are needed in these types of situations. By transforming our military, we will make our Armed Forces faster, more agile and more lethal -- and we will make them more effective in helping societies transition from war and despotism to freedom and democracy.

To build free institutions, all free nations have responsibilities. We know that democracies do not forment [sic] terror or invade their neighbors. Democratic societies are peaceful societies -- which is why, for the sake of peace, the world's established democracies must help the world's newest democracies succeed.

The United States will continue to call upon our friends and allies across the world to help in this noble cause. And today, many nations are stepping forward with practical help. And some of the most active countries are those who have had recent experience with tyrants themselves. Hungary has established an International Center for Democratic Transition to share its experiences with emerging democracies. Lithuania is now preparing to deploy a provincial reconstruction team in Western Afghanistan. Slovakia is bringing Iraqi political leaders to their country, to show them firsthand how a nation moves from dictatorship to democracy. With the help of IRI, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia are working to -- with civil society leaders in Belarus to bring freedom to Europe's last dictatorship. (Applause.)

Bahrain and Jordan, the Czech Republic and Britain and Italy are hosting hundreds of Iraqi judges, so they can study modern legal techniques that will help Iraq establish the rule of law. Many nations are

contributing troops for stability operations. In Afghanistan, 40 countries have forces on the ground, and NATO has taken charge of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul. In Iraq, 30 nations have forces deployed, and NATO is helping to train army officers, police and civilian administrators of a new Iraq.

This is incredibly important work. And I will remind the leaders of free countries how important its work is. (Applause.)

And it's not easy work -- it's tough work, as we're seeing in the Middle East, freedom often has deadly enemies -- men who celebrate murder, incite suicide and thirst for absolute power. By working together to aid democratic transitions, we will isolate and defeat the forces of terror -- and ensure a peaceful world for generations to come.

Today, much of our focus is on the broader Middle East, because I understand that 60 years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in that region did nothing to make us safe. If the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation and resentment and violence ready for export. The United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East; a strategy that recognizes the best way to defeat the ideology that uses terror as a weapon is to spread freedom and democracy. (Applause.) And we're beginning to see the effects of this new approach.

Iraq and Afghanistan have held free elections, and are now building free societies. In Afghanistan, they have for the first time a democratically elected president, and they are now seeing the rebirth of civil society in a place that until recently had only known the terror of the Taliban. Iraqis now have an elected Transitional National Assembly, a new prime minister, and they are on their way to writing a new constitution for a free Iraq. In this vital work, Iraqis and Afghans have the support of the American people -- and, thankfully, the support of the International Republican Institute.

The Palestinian people have gone to the polls and have chosen a leader committed to negotiation instead of violence. And now we must help them build free institutions that will be a foundation for lasting peace. I've asked Jim Wolfensohn to help President Abbas build a modern economy and lasting political institutions. If we want to have two states living side-by-side in peace, the world must insist that the Palestinians develop the institutions necessary for a free, democratic society to grow and emerge. (Applause.)

Egypt will hold its first multi-party presidential election this fall. The success of this important step can be advanced by the presence of international monitors, and by rules that allow for a real campaign. In Lebanon, the citizens of that nation rose up to demand their independence, and will vote in elections that are set to start at the end of this month. Those elections must go forward with no outside influence. And when the Lebanese people have chosen their leaders, the world's free nations will be there to help them build a lasting democracy.

In these countries, and across the world, those who claim their liberty will have an unwavering ally in the United States. (Applause.) This administration will stand with the democratic reformers -- no matter how hard it gets. We have a responsibility to build a more peaceful world. And we know that by extending liberty to millions who have not known it, we will advance the cause of freedom, and the cause of peace. And we're confident -- we are confident in the future because we know that the future belongs to freedom.

And we know the tree of liberty begins as a sapling -- vulnerable to violent winds and gathering storms. Yet if nurtured and protected, it will grow into a mighty oak that can withstand any storm -- and when it does, the very winds that once threatened it will carry its seeds across borders and barriers, to take root in still other lands.

We will encourage freedom's advance, we will nurture its progress, and we will help the nations that choose it to navigate the pitfalls that follow. This is the challenge of a new century. It is the calling of our time. And America will do its duty.

May God bless you all. Thank you. (Applause.)

END 7:36 P.M. EDT