

FARC/American Hostages

Ms. Orozco. Thank you, Mr. President. There are three Americans held by the FARC now. Do you think President Uribe should achieve the humanitarian exchange, or should he insist in the military rescue?

The President. I trust President Uribe's judgment. And my message isn't to President Uribe; my message is to the FARC, and that is to give up these hostages. You're making it clear to the world the kind of people you are when you take innocent life and hold them hostage. And it's very sad for the families here in America. I'm deeply concerned about their fate.

War on Terror

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, how long is the United States willing for the extradition of the narco paramilitary terrorists that remains in Colombia, because they are part of the peace process?

The President. How long will we wait for the extradition process?

Ms. Orozco. Right.

The President. I'll work with the President on that. That will be a subject matter in my private discussions with President Uribe.

Ms. Orozco. Mr. President, do you think that with the military aid, President Uribe, with the help of United States, is going to be able to win the war against terrorism in Colombia?

The President. I think that a war against terror can be won by firm resolve, plus a alternative to repression, kidnaping, murder, and drugs. And one thing that President Uribe has done is laid out a vision. A lot of people have come in from the jungles, as you know, because they realize there's a better way of life.

We all have a lot of work to do in our respective countries to make sure every person has a good education and good, decent health care. But when people realize there is a better tomorrow, it's much easier for a man of peace, like Uribe, to deal with a difficult problem that he inherited.

Colombia-U.S. Relations

Ms. Orozco. President Bush, what is the best memory that you have of all this time

working with Colombia, so close, having Colombia as one of your main allies?

The President. You know, I think it's the fact that I have a very honest relationship with President Uribe. He loves his country. He is a very strong proponent of Colombia and the people of Colombia. We don't agree on ever single issue, of course, but I do respect his courage, and I respect the fact that he's done a good job in office. And I'm really looking forward to going back to Colombia. I've been, as President, once before. I can't wait to come back, this time, to your beautiful capital city.

Ms. Orozco. Thank you, Mr. President, for your time. We wish you a wonderful and successful trip.

The President. Thank you.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:45 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. In his remarks, the President referred to President Alvaro Uribe Velez of Colombia. He also referred to FARC, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. Ms. Orozco referred to President Hugo Chavez Frias of Venezuela. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Enrique Gratas of Univision

March 7, 2007

Verdict in the Trial of I. Lewis Libby

Mr. Gratas. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this opportunity to talk about the trip and other issues. Yesterday, somebody very familiar to the administration, Lewis "Scooter" Libby, was found guilty of the charges of perjury, lying, obstruction of justice. What is the impact of your administration of this verdict, or your personal feelings?

The President. First, this was a very serious matter. A jury of his peers analyzed the data very seriously and rendered a verdict that must be respected. Secondly, I personally am sad. I'm sad for Mr. Libby and his family. There was a sense of sadness to hear the verdict read for me. And finally, this is an ongoing legal matter; there is more to be done in the courts; and therefore, at this time, it's inappropriate for the administration

to be commenting beyond just what you asked me.

Mr. Gratas. Thank you. Some Senators, one in particular, Mr. Kennedy, is suggesting that you would pardon him. What's your idea?

The President. Oh, I think—as I say, there's an ongoing legal matter. There's a lot of—if you listen carefully, the lawyers are talking about different avenues to approach this particular case. And so I'm pretty much going to stay out of it until the course—the case has finally run its final—the course it's going to take.

President's Upcoming Visit to Central and South America

Mr. Gratas. Thank you. About your trip to Latin America, some critics think that the administration, your administration has neglected—or prior administrations have neglected our Latin American neighbors. This is your fourth trip to Latin America.

The President. Yes, sir.

Mr. Gratas. What do you plan to accomplish?

The President. Well, first of all, I think I plan to accomplish—one—the main thing is to kind of disabuse people of the notion that America doesn't care about the neighborhood. And it troubles me to think that some people in our neighborhood believe we don't care. We do—I care deeply, personally, about Latin America, and our country does. And what I'm going to do is remind people, when I go down, that the American people have been very generous on bilateral aid. We've increased the aid since I've been President from \$800 million a year to \$1.6 billion. And there's ongoing projects. And the important thing for people to understand is that the aid primarily goes for social justice programs—for education programs or health programs.

And the second thing I want to talk to people about is that—the importance of trade. The United States is a big market, and if you're a poor farmer in parts of Central or South America, it seems like it makes sense to be able to sell your product into this market. Why? Because you may get a better price, and it means you can make a better living. And so trade, in my judgment, is posi-

tive, and it's a way to help people be lifted out of poverty.

To summarize, a prosperous and peaceful Latin America is in the interest of the United States.

War Protests

Mr. Gratas. Thank you. I'm sure you're aware of some protests in the countries that you will visit, mainly because of the war in Iraq. Are you concerned about those demonstrations?

The President. I am proud to be going to a part of the world where people can demonstrate, where people can express their minds. It happens quite frequently when I travel around the world. I understand people's concern about war. Nobody likes war. But I've had to make the decisions I made in order to not only secure our people but to deal with threats and to help people be free.

And so I'm not surprised, nor am I angry. It's a part of life when you're the President of the United States.

Democracy in the Americas

Mr. Gratas. Mr. President, in the last 15 months, leftist governments have been elected in many countries—I'll mention three, for example—last ones, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua. Are you worried about this tendency in Latin America?

The President. You know, the thing—first of all, I like the fact that the countries in our neighborhood are free and people get to decide who the governments—who is in the government. I like that. I think it's great. I would be worried if there are policies which ruin economies. That would worry me—in other words, if these governments make decisions that end up making it very difficult for people to make a living and/or for there to be more wealth throughout the society. I would be worried if there's no free press—in other words, if institutions that are necessary for a free society were undermined. I would be worried, of course, if just the basic needs of the people weren't met.

And so I applaud elections. I look forward to these governments responding to the real needs of the people.

U.S. Foreign Policy

Mr. Gratas. President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela has—on many occasions, has called you names, for example, liar, devil, terrorist, things like that. What is your opinion about him? And how do you respond to those insults?

The President. Well, I think it's really important for the people who are observing U.S. reactions and U.S. policy to understand that our policies are not aimed at creating tensions, but our policies are aimed at improving people's lives. And that's really my message down there. There is a lot of anticipation about what my trip means, and it's nothing more than to say, we want to be your friends, and we've got a very strong policy of improving the lives of others.

I've been in politics a long time; there's a lot of name-calling in politics. I've always found the best thing to do is to do what you think is right and move beyond the name-calling.

Immigration Reform

Mr. Gratas. Mr. President, the United States—and this concerns Latin America in general, because most immigrants come from that continent—never before in this country have so many raids against immigrants. Are you planning before you leave office support a plan to legalize so many millions of undocumented workers?

The President. A better way to describe this is, in the Oval Office, I gave a speech about comprehensive immigration reform. And comprehensive immigration reform says that we ought to have a temporary-worker program that recognizes the fact that people are coming to do jobs that Americans aren't doing so they can do so on a legal basis, but not forever.

Secondly, we got an issue with 12 million people that are here—that are here illegally. Now, we are a country of law, and we should expect people to recognize our laws. But I do not think there ought to be instant legalization—that's called amnesty. I think that would be a mistake. But I also recognize, we can't kick people out of the country. And so I'm going to work with Congress, both Republicans and Democrats, and devise a way that is rational and fair.

The current immigration system is not working. It needs to be changed. It needs to be changed for the good of our country, and it needs to be changed for the good of the people that are in our country.

Border Security/Mexico-U.S. Relations

Mr. Gratas. Mr. President, I have to ask this question. You're going to meet with President Calderon of Mexico. How are you going to resolve the difference between the construction of the wall on the border?

The President. Yes. I will explain to him that our Congress was very worried that not enough was being done on both sides of the border about preventing people from sneaking in. I will explain to him that the border is going to be secured two ways—one, by modernization—but it's more than fence. This is a long border. We're going to have Border Patrol agents, but instead of having a system that encourages people to sneak in, we ought to have a system that says, you're welcome to come in on a legal basis to do work America is not doing. I mean, it makes no sense to have a system that doesn't recognize reality.

Now, that doesn't mean automatic citizenship. There ought to be a different way to become a citizen. But it does say, there are people who are hungry in our neighborhood who want to do work that Americans aren't doing, and there ought to be a legal process to do it so they don't have to sneak across the border. So the best way to secure the border is to have a comprehensive immigration plan.

And it's controversial here in America. But I firmly believe my position is a rational position and the right position, and I'm going to work hard with both Republicans and Democrats in Congress to get the bill this year.

Mr. Gratas. I have 14 more questions in Spanish, but I have no time. [Laughter] Thank you very much.

The President. *Gracias, señor.* [Laughter]

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:55 a.m. in the Map Room at the White House for later broadcast. Mr. Gratas referred to President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Interview With Juan Carlos Lopez of CNN *En Español*

March 7, 2007

President's Upcoming Visit to Central and South America

Mr. Lopez. Thank you for speaking with us. And my first question is about your trip. You're going to Latin America, the longest trip an American President has taken to the region. Why now? Why at this moment when Democrats control the Congress and there are issues that might be in their hands?

The President. Well, thank you for asking that question. This is not my first trip since I've been the President. I have been in—traveling the neighborhood, I think, maybe three other times. But this is a long trip, and the reason why is, I want to remind people throughout our neighborhood that America cares about them. And I bring a message of hope, a message that says, we care about the human condition and a message of accomplishment.

I don't know if you know this or not, but since I've been the President, our bilateral aid to Latin America has increased from 800 million to 1.6 billion. And the reason I say that is, the American taxpayer has been very generous about providing aid in our neighborhood, and most of that aid is social justice money—in other words, it's money for education and health.

And yet we don't get much credit for it. And I want the taxpayers, I want the American people to get credit for their generosity in Central and South America.

Jenna Bush

Mr. Lopez. Your daughter Jenna is writing a book about her experiences in Central America. She will be focusing on a single mother with HIV. Has she been part of your eyes and ears in the region now that she's been there for quite a while?

The President. Well, she is—first of all, I'm very proud of her. She is an accomplished woman. She came back—I haven't seen a lot of her because she's been spending a lot of time in Central America as a UNICEF volunteer—but she came back and talked to me about this young girl that she has befriended. And she's deeply concerned

about alienationists in our world, and is going to try to raise some money to help the education programs there.

To me, her book and her example is what America is all about. We've got compassionate people, and when we find suffering and see income disparity or see poverty, we'd like to help people lift themselves up.

Trade

Mr. Lopez. You've talked about the importance of free trade. Opponents of free trade in Latin America say it's one-sided and favors the U.S. Opponents of free trade in the U.S.—

The President. That's right.

Mr. Lopez. —say it's one-sided and favors those countries. So who's right, and what are you trying to do with this right now?

The President. They're both wrong. The opponents of free trade are wrong, in my judgment, because free trade—a good free trade agreement—and those agreements are signed by administrations and ratified by their elected assemblies—fair trade agreements are beneficial to both, and that's what we want.

All you've got to do is look at the trade between the United States and Mexico after the free trade agreement we signed between Mexico, the United States, and Canada. And the amount of trade has gone up appreciably, significantly.

And I truly believe that one of the most effective ways to eliminate poverty is through free and fair trade. But there's no question, there's protectionist sentiments in the neighborhood and in our own Congress. And I—we got the CAFTA vote by one vote in the House of Representatives, and I'm going to have to work hard to get more free trade agreements through. But the fact that it's hard won't deter me from doing what I think is right.

Mr. Lopez. They say you're exporting American jobs.

The President. Well, that's what Americans say. I look at it differently. I think what we're doing is, we are creating opportunities for business people, small-business people, to be able to sell products in other markets, whether it be U.S. products into Central America or South America and vice versa.