



# THE WHITE HOUSE

PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH

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## Press Briefing by Scott McClellan

The James S. Brady Briefing Room

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1:20 P.M. EST

**MR. McCLELLAN: Good afternoon.** I will begin with one update on a world leader call. The President spoke earlier today with President Aznar of Spain. This is part of the continuing consultation among close friends. The President discussed the situation in Haiti and President Aznar discussed his recent trip to Colombia, as well as the situation in Venezuela and transatlantic relations.

And with that, I will be glad to take your questions. Yes, sir, Terry -- you can go first today.

**Q Thank you.** Can you describe what the United States knows about the conditions under which President Aristide left Haiti? Do we know, did he leave of his own? Was he forcibly --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, that's nonsense. I would just say -- I've seen some of the reports. Conspiracy theories do nothing to help the Haitian people move forward to a better, more free and more prosperous future. Mr. Aristide said in his statement -- it was a little bit more than this, but he said, "Tonight I'm resigning in order to avoid a bloodbath. I accept to leave with the hope that there will be life, and not death."

We took steps to protect Mr. Aristide and his family so they would not be harmed as they departed Haiti.

Q So it's your understanding it was entirely his decision?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q It was not -- and did the United States at any point say that it would not protect him if he stayed? And that there was -- you know, as this threat closed in, that withdrew any idea of supporting him?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't know what that's referring to, Terry. I have no idea what that's referring to.

Q Well, the idea is that some of his security people were told the United States would not protect him if there was trouble.

MR. McCLELLAN: As you will recall, we were actively engaged with our international partners to bring about a democratic, constitutional and peaceful solution to the situation in Haiti. That's where we were. Obviously, there are a lot of events that were of Mr. Aristide's own making that led to the political crisis in Haiti to begin with.

Q Just following on Terry's point, Congresswoman Maxine Waters told us that she had spoken directly with Aristide, who claims that -- over and over again saying he was kidnapped, that the coup was completed by the Americans, they forced him out, they disabled his American security force; basically saying that he did not resign, he was forced out, America completed the coup. How would you characterize those statements?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think I just answered Terry's question to that effect. As I said, it's nonsense. And conspiracy theories like that do nothing to help the Haitian people realize the future that they aspire to -- which is a better future, a more free future, and a more prosperous future. We took steps to protect Mr. Aristide. We took steps to protect his family as they departed Haiti. It was Mr. Aristide's decision to resign, and he spelled out his reasons why.

Q Yes, but there were some third-party reports that were coming out of Haiti, which could be specious, as they go up the telephone chain, but this is coming directly from Aristide. What do you think he's up to here? Is he trying to save face?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't speak for Mr. Aristide, I speak for the President and this administration.

Q Are you denying -- are you denying that he was kidnapped?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, I just said it's complete nonsense. (Laughter.)

Q Why don't you just say it didn't -- it's not true?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think I just did. I just said it's complete nonsense.

Go ahead.

Q What steps were taken to protect him? And could this have been -- well, misconstrued by Aristide?

MR. McCLELLAN: One, again, I've only seen the report that John referenced, so you all might want to check further into that yourselves. But it was Saturday evening that President Aristide's office contacted Ambassador Foley, our ambassador in Haiti. And they asked at that point if Mr. Aristide resigned, would the United States be able to protect him, his family, and his property. And they also asked if we could help facilitate his departure.

Ambassador Foley, at that point, contacted the Department of State and consulted with both Secretary Powell and Assistant Secretary Noriega. And following that consultation, Ambassador Foley called back to Mr. Aristide's office to say that if he decided to leave, the United States could facilitate his departure, and we did.

Q Scott, given the failure of U.S. policy in the past -- not this administration necessarily, but others going way back -- in Haiti to make that a stable, prosperous country, is the President more hopeful now? Has the United States learned lessons from the past?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think you point out something. One, right now, our focus remains on bringing about a democratic and constitutional resolution to the situation in Haiti, and helping to bring about order and stability in the country. We are working on what is in the best interest of the Haitian people, as expressed by the Haitian people.

I think the events that you referenced have been a long time in the making -- the political stalemate which followed the flawed 2000 legislative elections was central to the crisis. But at the most basic level, recent events were rooted in Mr. Aristide's choices as a leader, in the way he exercised the power of his office. And so that's why we pointed out over the weekend that this was a long-simmering crisis, largely of Mr. Aristide's making. He failed to adhere to democratic principles, which contributed to the deep polarization and violence in Haiti, and his own actions called into question his fitness and ability to continue to govern Haiti.

Go ahead.

Q Speak now to -- not to Haitian policy, but to American policy in Haiti. Has the President looked back and said, well, you know, my predecessors, maybe even I have made some mistakes? Many people say that the Clinton administration pulled out of Haiti too soon, and that led to the unrest there, enabled Aristide to be more corrupt. Are there lessons that George Bush has learned from the past? Are things going to be done differently now? Is there a reason for more optimism now?

MR. McCLELLAN: Certainly, we learn from the past. We have contributed significant manpower, time and resources to Haiti over the past 10 years, as you pointed out. From 1995 to 2003, we provided more than \$850 million in direct bilateral assistance to Haiti, and more than \$50 million in assistance is planned for this year. We have been an active partner in international efforts to help facilitate the flow of international development funds to support an ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES -- Organization of American States -- presence in Haiti and to stand up a Haitian national police force and the Haitian Coast Guard, and to hold and monitor a series of elections, as well as improving the human rights situation and provide humanitarian assistance to the Haitian people.

And that's why now we are continuing to focus on moving forward toward a better future for the Haitian people. We're working closely with our international partners -- I mentioned the Caribbean Community, and they had a prior action plan, which called on specific steps to be taken to improve the situation.

We'll be working with the Organization of American States. We'll be working with the United Nations. The United Nations just yesterday, passed a Security Council resolution calling for support for these efforts. And so we're all working together to help the Haitian people.

Q And there's not something about Haiti that just makes it a hopeless case?

MR. McCLELLAN: We believe that working with the international community, we can help bring about a more lasting democracy for Haiti's future.

Q Scott, three weeks ago, the administration was stressing the fact that Aristide's was a democratically-elected government. Two days ago, you began saying that Aristide had failed as a leader. What changed over that time period to shift your focus?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, Wendell, I think we always said from the outset, we were working closely with the international community to bring about a constitutional, negotiated and democratic solution to the situation in Haiti. You can go back to the -- at the very beginning when we started talking about this very issue.

And I would point out that our diplomatic efforts, working closely with international partners and through multilateral institutions -- like CARICOM and the Organization of American States and the United Nations -- helped preserve Haiti's constitutional government, stemmed the tide of an armed rebellion, saved lives through humanitarian assistance and quick interdiction and repatriation of migrants, and strengthened the international community's commitment to democracy in Haiti

Q I'm not sure -- I'm not sure that's what I asked. What I'm asking is what changed over that time period to shift your focus?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Your focus initially was on?

MR. McCLELLAN: Our focus was always on a political solution. And it was important -- we always said that it's important that there be a viable, political solution in place. I think other nations stressed the importance of having that in place, and as soon as that was in place, we were prepared to act with our international partners, and they were prepared to act, as well. We achieved a peaceful, democratic, and constitutional resolution to the situation in Haiti.

Q Okay, and if I can go back to --

MR. McCLELLAN: Obviously, there were -- there was -- the rebels had started moving throughout the country. There was ongoing violence. There was an inability to stem the flow of that violence, and the rebels moving on Port-au-Prince. There was actions by Mr. Aristide, as I pointed out, that was largely responsible for leading to the current crisis in Haiti.

Q And if I can follow Terry's question just one more time, did Aristide leave Haiti of his own free will?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q Scott, on that same issue, at least three highly respected persons say they've talked to Jean-Bertrand Aristide, and he said things like, forced to leave by U.S. military, he was kidnapped. We're hearing this on that side. Can you give us the description, the details of everything that happened, since you're saying that he was not kidnapped, or he was not --

MR. McCLELLAN: I just did. I talked about how Ambassador Foley reported back to Mr. Aristide's office. After that, Mr. Aristide consulted with his family about his decision, and it was around 11:00 p.m. when Mr. Aristide -- or his office, at least -- informed us that he would be resigning and leaving the country. He drafted and signed his letter of resignation, which was passed on to the Haitian supreme court. And then he went from the palace to his residence, and then to the airport in the company of his personal security.

Q Under his personal security, no U.S. military presence at all?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, again, the military presence that we had in Haiti at the time was at the

embassy. He went through his own personal security. That's the way I would describe it.

Q He's saying U.S. military physically forced him --

MR. McCLELLAN: And I just said that's nonsense, April. I've answered this question three times now.

Q Okay, I have another question, somewhat linked. Many persons are saying that the United States government promotes democracy all around the world, but when it came to Haiti, we just walked away.

MR. McCLELLAN: No, actually, we came to a democratic and constitutional resolution of the situation in Haiti. And now we are working to move forward to help the Haitian people realize a better future and a more free future. It was the actions of Mr. Aristide, in large part, that led to the current political crisis in Haiti. I just talked about some of the actions by Mr. Aristide. He failed to adhere to the democratic principles and his obligations called for under the CARICOM plan.

Q After meeting with President Bush last week, the Congressional Black Caucus is now saying they're disappointed, because they did not expect for Aristide to leave.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we have worked with the international community and with multilateral organizations to help bring about a peaceful and democratic and constitutional resolution to the situation in Haiti.

I think you have to -- again, let's put this in context. Sometimes people lose faith in their leaders. Sometimes people lose faith in the ability of their leaders to govern effectively. This is not the first time that this has happened. It certainly happened in our own country.

Q I have two questions for you, Scott. First of all, you say you provided security to get him to the airport. Did he fly out of Haiti in an American plane?

MR. McCLELLAN: It was a contract -- the plane was contracted for, but the United States funded it.

Q Second question: Did the United States decide where to fly him to? I understand he's in the Central African Nation -- and was that his own choice?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, that is his choice, and the choice of the country to which he would choose to travel.

Q Scott, so is that his final destination, then? And did he at any point request to exile in the United States? And, if so, would we have granted it?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, one, in terms of his final destination, that's a decision for Mr. Aristide and the country to which he would choose to travel.

Q Did he ask -- ever request exile in the United States?

MR. McCLELLAN: You can check with the State Department to see if there's anything of that nature. That's not my understanding, but I would double-check that with the State Department.

Q Just on the same time line thing, not to go over it for yet another time, but the resignation letter appears to have been dated Saturday. Is it your understanding that his resignation actually took place

Saturday and that the evacuation of him then took place on Sunday? And, secondly, did I understand you correctly to say that at no point were U.S. forces involved in actually escorting him from the palace or the residence to the airport?

MR. McCLELLAN: It's my understanding that he was in the company of his own personal security team.

Q And only in their company?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, you can double-check with State Department if there's any more, but the whole issue of what you're getting to I've already addressed, I think.

Q And there were no U.S. forces with him on the plane on the way out?

MR. McCLELLAN: I do not believe so. And I would double-check with State Department or others to make sure on that.

Q His resignation took effect when?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I don't know the exact time, but he certainly -- it was around 11:00 p.m. when he informed us that he would be resigning and leaving the country. And that's when he drafted and signed his letter of resignation, sent it to the Haitian Supreme Court, as the constitution calls for. And then that was -- after that period was when he left his residence and went to the airport in the company of his security team.

Q Did Ambassador Foley see him personally that night, Saturday night?

MR. McCLELLAN: You can double-check with State Department. He was certainly in contact with his office that night. The plane arrived at approximately 4:30 a.m. in the morning to take Mr. Aristide and others out of the country. And it departed sometime after 6:30 a.m., Sunday. That's the time line that I have.

Q You said that forces were -- U.S. forces were not involved as he left the --

MR. McCLELLAN: Are we now coming -- we're now taking questions coming back to the same person? Or are we going to keep going around the room?

Q Scott, I'm a little confused, because you said we took steps to protect him as he left Haiti. If our forces were not around him as he left, then what were the steps we took to protect him?

MR. McCLELLAN: You can talk to the State Department about some of those specifics.

Go ahead.

Q Can we stay on Haiti?

Q Can we stay on this topic?

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes.

Q You said earlier that sometimes people lose faith in their leaders. Can you say at what point and on what basis the administration concluded that faith had been lost in Aristide?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think the Haitian people expressed the loss of faith. It was the Haitian people that were expressing a lost faith in the leader of Haiti.

Q And you talked about the principals meeting Saturday --

MR. McCLELLAN: President Aristide acted -- decided to act in the best interest of the Haitian people.

Q Scott, on Haiti?

Q Scott, you talked about the principals meeting Saturday morning. Was the decision made at that meeting, it was time to pull the plug on him?

MR. McCLELLAN: Time to -- I'm sorry. You have the statement that was put out by, under my name on Saturday. And I think that addressed the question at that time.

Q Scott, in --

MR. McCLELLAN: Is this on Haiti?

Q Yes, it is. Yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: Okay.

Q Yes. In 1994, a fleet of what I recall was more than 50 U.S. Navy ships, including carriers, was sent to Haiti to restore the exiled President Aristide, who was a public advocate of "necklacing." And my question, has the White House heard any expression of regret or apology for this from President Clinton? And I have a follow-up.

MR. McCLELLAN: Les, we're focused on this administration, and moving forward for the Haitian people. That's where our focus is. If you have questions about a previous administration, you can direct it to other people.

Q Scott, how does the President believe we can stop the problem of out-sourcing that is sending --

MR. McCLELLAN: We're staying on Haiti. I'll come back to you if you have other questions. Do you have Haiti --

Q Yes, it's on -- back on your time line. Who is it that gave permission for the plane to land in Haiti? Was that Aristide, himself?

MR. McCLELLAN: Gave permission for the plane to land at the airport?

Q Gave permission, presumably, yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: You can double-check with our embassy or with State Department on that matter.

Q Well, it would be a crucial question, if it was done with the Aristide or his government's --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, look -- but, I mean, the question here goes to the larger question that Terry asked at the very beginning, which I said was absolute nonsense, and how that does nothing to help bring about a more free and better and more prosperous future for the Haitian people.

If you have more detailed specifics like that, you can direct it to the embassy or the State Department.

Q Scott, on Haiti, there are stories that he's going to be going to South Africa, ultimately. Do you have any information?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think I just addressed that, but I said that that's a decision for Mr. Aristide and the country to which he would want to travel.

Q Also, there are numerous reports that he's absconded with quite a bit of money. Does the U.S. know anything about that?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't have any details on that.

Haiti?

Q Yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: Go ahead.

Q You said -- two questions, one of them factual. You said that to your knowledge there were no U.S. forces on the plane with him as he left.

MR. McCLELLAN: That's right.

Q You also said that the United States took steps to protect him as he left.

MR. McCLELLAN: Right, right.

Q I know Kathleen asked you this and you said check with State, but obviously --

MR. McCLELLAN: That was one of the things that he asked, initially, when I spelled out the time line.

Q But you must -- you wouldn't have said it if you didn't have some knowledge of what those steps were --

MR. McCLELLAN: I've talked to the State Department and our embassy folks about this, and so --

Q I'm asking what --

MR. McCLELLAN: And you can direct that -- well, you can direct that question to the State Department or the embassy about specific steps. But I think, obviously, you have to get a plane in there and get a plane out of there safely. So --

Q So he was directly protecting the plane, not the person?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, no -- no, as I said, Ken, you can talk to the State Department and get more

specifics on that, or to the embassy.

Q Second question on Haiti, a little -- a short time ago you said that -- you said that Aristide departed from the democratic path. That could certainly be said with equal justice of the opposition that has been opposing him violently over the last two weeks.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, there's -- let's make a distinction here. You have some of the gangs and armed thugs, then you also have the democratic opposition, and then you have the government of Haiti. So let's make that distinction. And I would point out that it was Mr. Aristide, himself, who armed some of the gangs to help -- in order to bring -- you know, to have more control over the Haitian people.

Q I understand that. All I'm saying is that there is an armed opposition that's been trying to drive him out of power. Why wasn't the United States' message to that armed opposition, look, we may share some of your concerns about Aristide, but you need to wait two years for the next presidential election, put down your --

MR. McCLELLAN: We continue -- well, no, we urged an end to the violence. We urged all parties to work together to bring about a peaceful, political solution. We worked very closely with the Caribbean Community, with the Organization of American States, with France and Canada and the United Nations. There is an international community team that was working together on these efforts to bring about a viable political solution, so then we could send a team in there and provide a security presence as we worked to bring about more order and stability in the country for the Haitian people, and help to provide humanitarian assistance. That remains a high priority for us, as well.

Q Why wasn't a part of that political solution waiting until the next election? A lot of other things, as well -- but wait until the next election --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think I pointed out how sometimes people lose faith in their leaders. And I think you saw the Haitian people losing faith in their leader. It was a leader that was not adhering to his obligations under the CARICOM plan, was not adhering to his democratic principles that were enshrined in the constitution. You have now a democratic constitutional process that is working, that is moving forward. So we helped preserve a democratic and constitutional government by the action that we took, along with the international community.

And I would point out that the request for the security presence was at the request of the interim government of Haiti.

Q Scott?

MR. McCLELLAN: Go ahead, Nora.

Q If Aristide resigned at 11:00 p.m., why didn't Dr. Rice call the President until 1:30 a.m.?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, this -- I think you're talking about the time in Haiti at the point -- and, obviously, she called him a short time after that.

Q But that's several hours afterwards. Was there something in between --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I don't think so. I think it was -- again, contacts were being made and she informed him pretty soon after.

Q So you mean 11:00 p.m., Haiti time?

MR. McCLELLAN: I believe so, but I would have to double-check that, Bob.

Q Scott, why did President Aristide contact the United States about his decision to resign and not the OAS or the U.N. and ask for them to --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, he did inform the embassy. As I pointed out, he talked to Ambassador Foley. His office talked to Ambassador Foley.

Q Why the U.S. and why not one of the international agencies that's been working --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think for the reasons that I stated, that he wanted to make sure that his family -- he and his family would be protected, his property would be protected. For the reasons that I stated.

Q Couldn't those other agencies have protected him?

MR. McCLELLAN: You would have to ask -- you can ask him.

Q Scott, this is related to Haiti. The President has made a very big deal in the context of the war on terrorism to promote democracy around the world. Given the administration's track record on Haiti, on Venezuela, when Hugo Chavez was in some difficulty, on Taiwan and others, isn't there a contradiction that needs to be explained?

MR. McCLELLAN: How?

Q In terms of not sufficiently supporting democratic government.

MR. McCLELLAN: We are supporting democracy, and we are supporting the constitutional process in Haiti by the actions that we're taking. In fact, we're working through the international community. This is a multinational effort that has been underway. The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution supporting the efforts. It was important that there be a viable political solution in place before we could go in with the international community in a multinational security force to bring about order and stability in the country.

Q Scott, one more on Haiti?

MR. McCLELLAN: Go ahead.

Q How safe do you think Ambassador Foley and the Americans at the embassy are?

MR. McCLELLAN: We take all those precautions. That's why we had a team of Marines that went in there -- over a week ago, I guess -- to provide security to the embassy and to the people in the embassy.

Q Do you have a count on how many Marines are in there now?

MR. McCLELLAN: You can direct those questions to the Pentagon.

Haiti still?

Q Yes, Scott, on Haiti. You mentioned that about \$50 million in aid was planned for Haiti this year. Is there any thought being given to increasing that amount to beef-up its economic structure, or anything? Or anything as a result --

MR. McCLELLAN: There's nothing to report at this point, Roger. I just would reemphasize to everybody here that this marks a new chapter for the people of Haiti, and it marks a new opportunity for the people of Haiti to build a better, more hopeful, more free and more prosperous future. This is a time for the Haitian people, with the help and support of the international community, including the United States, to seize this opportunity to rebuild their country and end years of deep polarization and violence. And that's where our focus is.

Q Do you know what kind of aid that is, \$50 million?

MR. McCLELLAN: The State Department could give you a breakdown of that.

Haiti? Are we off Haiti? Okay, we're off Haiti, go ahead.

**Q Do you have any** reaction to the European Union imposing millions of dollars in sanctions, beginning today, on U.S. goods, until the Congress repeals the export tax break bill?

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm not sure if they -- I mean, they are scheduled to be imposed today -- the tariffs, that is, that you referenced. And over the next year they grow and impose an increasing burden on American exporters and their workers. We urge Congress to act quickly and replace the FSC ETI with tax provisions that end the threat of these tariffs and promote the competitiveness of American manufacturers and other job-creating sectors of the United States economy.

The relevant congressional committees have reported out legislation to comply with the WTO ruling. The Senate Majority Leader will attempt to bring this legislation to the floor, beginning this week. And we commend the efforts and support in moving this process along. We've been working closely with Congress to comply with the ruling.

Q Do you think there's a consensus in Congress on how to move on this -- from the Senate?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, they're two different chambers, as you know, that have acted on legislation to comply with the ruling, and now we will continue working closely with Congress and we urge them to act quickly and replace those -- the FSC ETI with tax provisions that end the threat of these tariffs.

**Q Scott, talk** about democracy in Iraq as they go for the new constitution, which countries are playing a role, and also what role the United Nations is playing, after all those spying roles - against the U.N. Secretary General and all that.

Also, finally, there's hardly any democracy in the Muslim or Arab worlds. Why then going after those countries or kingdoms that's pressing their people by force and under dictatorships, under kingdoms?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, actually, we are working with other countries to promote freedom and democracy in the Middle East. I'd refer you back to our greater Middle East initiative that the President outlined.

In terms of Iraq, I think it's important to point out the recently agreed to transitional law, the interim constitution, by the Iraqi Governing Council. They will sign this interim constitution on Wednesday. It

represents a significant step forward toward a free and democratic Iraq. Democracy is taking root in Iraq, and this is a major step forward for the Iraqi people.

Q What kind of government is that -- is it Afghanistan style, or Europe style, or American style, or Asia --

MR. McCLELLAN: That's up to the Iraqi people to decide the future of their government. But this interim constitution, that was approved unanimously by the Iraqi Governing Council, is an historic day for the people of Iraq. It has a bill of rights that is the cornerstone of that constitution, and it protects individual rights. It provides for freedom of religion and worship, the right to free expression, to peacefully assemble, to organize political parties, and to form and join unions. It guarantees the right to peacefully demonstrate, and it calls for people to be treated equally under the law. So it's an historic day for the Iraqi people, and you're seeing democracy take root in Iraq now.

Q Do you think that will be the end of violence and terrorism?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, again, there is still some former regime members and foreign terrorists who are in the country who are enemies of freedom and democracy in Iraq. They're enemies of the Iraqi people. We continue to take the fight to those holdouts and foreign terrorists and bring them to justice. The Iraqi people, themselves, are doing more and more to provide for their own security and they are the leading contributor to their own security.

**Q In Ed's question** about Haiti, he brought up Venezuela. The pro-Castro government of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela is coming under increasing pressure to agree that recall election or to resign. Chavez has complained of American meddling in internal Venezuelan affairs and has threatened to cut off oil to -- oil shipments to the United States. What is it that we are doing to -- that he is accusing us of? Are we doing any of these --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, talking about democracy, there is a democratic constitutional process underway in Venezuela. And that's where the focus should be. The focus should remain on the efforts by the Venezuelan people to exercise their constitutional and democratic rights, and on the efforts to try to resolve the political polarization through a transparent and internationally monitored presidential recall referendum.

The Organization of American States, including the United States, is working in Venezuela to monitor those events. And that's where the focus should be.

Q It seems like the observers have kind of reached their limit now, and it's my understanding that they're going to leave.

MR. McCLELLAN: We continue to support the democratic constitutional process in Venezuela --

Q Are we going to help Hugo Chavez the same way that we helped Aristide?

MR. McCLELLAN: Different situations.

**Q Scott, let me** just briefly ask you about tomorrow's homeland security observance. Can you give us an idea what to expect there? And does the President think that establishing Homeland Security has really transformed America's ability to defend the homeland in the way that he really intended when it started out?

MR. McCLELLAN: The Department of Homeland Security has taken some significant steps to make America more secure and make -- and protect the American people. The best way to win the war on terrorism continues to be to take the fight to the enemy and bring them to justice before they can carry out their attacks. But we also must work to make sure that we are doing everything we can to protect the American people here at home. And we are taking unprecedented measures to secure the homeland and be prepared to respond to any terrorist attack that may come.

That is why the Department of Homeland Security was created. It was the largest reorganization of federal government in 50 years. And what it did was take 22 agencies and put them together to make sure that their number one priority was protecting the homeland and protecting the American people.

And so we have made significant progress in our efforts to secure the homeland. Our Homeland Security officials are working 24/7 to make sure we are doing everything we can to protect the American people. We will not rest. And this is our highest responsibility, the protection of the American people.

**Q Scott, how does** the President believe we can best stop the very serious problem of outsourcing and sending so many American jobs overseas? And what is the reaction to the Clinton \$160 million Presidential Library's ordering nearly \$1 million worth of cabinets from Scotland?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, you just stated something, I'll let that stand where it is. The President is focused on creating as robust an environment for job creation here at home. Our focus is -- our focus --

Q But he's focused on jobs --

MR. McCLELLAN: Les, let me finish. Let me finish. Our focus is on creating jobs here at home. And one way to do that is to promote free and fair trade around the world. Free trade is an important part of strengthening our economy and expanding job growth here at home. So the President is committed to opening markets around the world. American workers are the best in the world and they can compete with anybody in the world when there is a level playing field.

I would point out to you that because of the policies that we are pursuing, you have more companies coming to -- foreign companies coming to America, investing here, and hiring American workers because they are the best workers in the world.

And so we will -- we will continue to work to expand trade. We will also make sure that -- and this is important -- we are in a changing economy. We see that our economy is growing strong and continues to pick up steam. But there is more to do. And in a changing economy, we need to make sure that our workers are prepared to fill the jobs of the 21st century. There are a lot of high-growth sectors in our economy, such as the health care sector. And we need to make sure workers are trained with the skills to fill those high-paying, high-skilled jobs. Wages are up. There is still more to do to strengthen our economy, and that's why the President is continuing to urge Congress to act on his six-point plan.

Q Scott, following on that, if I could? Does the President agree with the argument made by some economists that the effect of outsourcing on the overall job market in America is negligible and may, in fact, lead to more high-paying jobs in this country?

MR. McCLELLAN: John, I think we've been through this issue, when this came up a couple weeks ago, and I think I addressed it at that point.

Q But since then, some economists are going back and looking at the statements that have been made

and saying what's the kerfuffle about, because this really does have a negligible impact on American jobs and may, in fact, lead to the creation of more high-paying jobs here in America.

MR. McCLELLAN: And the President is focused on creating jobs here at home. And I just talked about where our focus is. That's where the President's focus is.

Q Does the President take some comfort in that argument? Does he agree with that argument?

MR. McCLELLAN: The President believes it's important to create jobs here at home. I'll let economists speak for themselves.

Q Scott, the Supreme Court has referred to Justice Scalia a request that he recuse himself from a case about Vice President Cheney's energy task force, because of their recent duck hunting trip. Have you a reaction to this?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think that I'll leave it to the Justice to address that matter, as he has.

Q Scott, there have been reports that the White House is pushing for an athletic summit on steroids, and that the players' associations have been pushing against that. Do you have anything to --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, obviously, you heard the President talk about that important issue in the State of the Union address, and the importance of addressing that matter in sports. And he remains committed to it.

In terms of discussions that may be going on about future events, those may just be some staff-level discussions. I don't know -- I don't know of anything that's planned at this point.

Q Is there --

MR. McCLELLAN: I've looked. I don't know of anything that's planned at this point.

**Q Scott, back on** the EU tariffs for a moment. You said that there was an increasing burden on American exporters if it continued on. Is the White House concerned, is the President concerned, then, that it might have an impact on port jobs? Or is it large enough, or have -- would it have a consequence of raising, perhaps, the unemployment rate? Is it that severe?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, where our focus is, is on working with Congress to make sure we're complying with the ruling. That's where our focus is. So I think others can analyze all the different economic impacts of it.

Go ahead, Helen.

**Q Is the President** in favor of extending the ban on assault weapons? Is he in favor of child-safety locks? And is he in favor of suing gun manufacturers for injured -- by injured people?

MR. McCLELLAN: There are several questions within that one. I would point out that when it comes to crimes committed with guns, that the President believes the best way to crack down on such crimes is to strictly enforce our laws. And that's exactly what this administration has done. Federal firearms prosecutions have increased 68 percent in the past three years. Federal gun prosecutions have increased significantly every year under Project Safe Neighborhoods, which is an initiative the President outlined

early in this administration. In fact, he talked about it during the campaign.

But Project Safe Neighborhoods is the President's comprehensive strategy to vigorously enforce existing gun laws and deter gun violence. And it is an effort that coordinates with federal, state and local law enforcement prosecutors and community leaders to reduce crimes committed with guns. And it provides locally based programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Now, in terms of -- you brought up the gun manufacturing liability issue. The President views that as a lawsuit reform issue. It's about stopping frivolous lawsuits. The President believes that the manufacturer or seller of a legal product should not be held liable for the criminal misuse of that product by others. So I think this is part of our efforts to stop lawsuit abuse and bring some more sanity to our civil justice system.

Q Thank you.

MR. McCLELLAN: Thank you.

END 2:00 P.M. EST