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For Immediate Release
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President Bush Meets with President Vike-Freiberga of Latvia

Riga Castle
Riga, Latvia

[In Focus: Global Diplomacy](#)

3:40 P.M. (Local)

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[Presidential Remarks](#)
[Audio](#)
[Photos](#)

PRESIDENT VIKE-FREIBERGA: Well, ladies and gentlemen, it's been a great pleasure to have the President of the United States here in Riga for the second time in less than two years. And I expressed how delighted we are to be receiving him and his delegation here on the occasion of the Riga 2006 summit.

The United States has been our strong supporter all those years when Latvia was not free, has been our supporter after we regained our independence, and I'm most grateful to the United States for the understanding and support we got in our direction and our movement towards NATO. Now that we are fully members, Latvians certainly sleep better at night knowing that they are protected by an alliance that will spare them the sorts of experiences they had in earlier years.

But of course I'm delighted to be welcoming the President of the United States as the representative of what still remains as a shining example of the free world, of the sort of success one can achieve in a country that has been working at its democracy for a long time, that keeps perfecting it. I would hope that Latvia, as well, has the same opportunities; that we can go ahead, have our own choices, make our own mistakes, and do so with the help and understanding and support of fellow nations who share the same values as us.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Madam President, thanks for inviting me back to Riga. Our experience was so good the first time that we couldn't wait to get back. I want to congratulate you on hosting this very important NATO summit. You and your government have done a spectacular job, and I want to thank the people of Riga for accommodating all the world leaders who have come to this important meeting.

I appreciate very much your strong belief that liberty has got the capacity to transform the world for the good. I thank you and the Latvian people for supporting young democracies in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

We spent time talking about our bilateral relations. Trade is good between the United States and Latvia, and that's very positive. The President brought up the visa waiver program. She is deeply concerned that the people of Latvia aren't able to travel to the United States as freely as she would like. And I fully understand your concerns, Madam President. And to this end, I'll be sending to Congress a new proposal to make it easier for the citizens of Latvia to come to the United States, and at the same time, for us to share information to make sure that we're able to thwart any type of terrorist activities in our country. And I'm confident we can work this through.

And I want to thank you for working hard on this issue. Every time I've met with you, you brought it up, because



you deeply care about the people of your country. I want to congratulate you on your strong leadership, and again, thank you for your very warm hospitality.

END 3:42 P.M. (Local)

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