

Remarks by
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I would like to welcome President Lee Myung-bak to the first evening event for him here on his visit to the U.S. Now Mr. President, you have probably heard a lot of people talk to you about jet lag. After all, Mr. President, you just got off an airplane. I saw you get off just a few hours ago. I'm sure everyone is telling you are suffering from jet lag. I am sure that Mayor Giuliani, who is sitting next to you, can tell you: there is no jet lag in New York City. This is not a jet lag kind of place.

Mr. President, it is great to have you here. It is great to have you here among so many friends tonight. It's wonderful to see Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. You know, Mr. President, when I arrived back in Korea in 2004, Mr. Ban Ki-moon was the foreign minister, and at the time we had an idea that maybe he could take another job after being foreign minister, and we talked about it and we said "no, I don't think president of Korea is the right position."

I think, Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon has, as we say, landed on his feet.

Mr. President, when we first met you were the mayor of Seoul and I was so honored one day when you invited me to your office and gave me the award of being an honorary citizen of Seoul. But Mr. President, you didn't realize that I was only the second person in my family honored by you because about two weeks before you were honoring the kids who had spent the most time in your new ice-skating rink in front of city hall, and my daughter was one of the honorees. So, my daughter Amy always feels that she is the first honoree of President Lee Myung-bak.

Mr. President, let me tell you that I have spent a lot of time with my president in recent weeks and I can tell you that he is very much looking forward to your visit, he is very much looking forward to talking to you, not only about the problems of the Korean Peninsula but also the problems, the issues and the challenges of Northeast Asia.

But I think beyond that, we have a relationship with the Republic of Korea that goes beyond the Korean Peninsula or Northeast Asia. We have a relationship now that reaches across the globe. I know our president is looking forward to talking to you about issues of mutual concern, whether they are in the Middle East, whether they are in Southwest Asia or throughout the world.

We have a very special relationship. Mr. President, our relationship has been very good for many years. There's no question that the U.S.-Korean relationship is something very special and I think this crowd tonight, this very large group of people here, all feel that very special relationship. But Mr. President we can do more, we can do a lot more, than what we've done up until now.

So Mr. President, if I can very modestly suggest a few things that we can do in the future. One of those things, Mr. President, is that we have to figure out a way that Korean citizens who want to come to the U.S. to shop and spend money—you know, the first thing they do should not be to go to Ambassador Vershbow's embassy (it used to be my embassy, now it's Ambassador Vershbow's embassy). We don't want those people to go to Ambassador Vershbow's embassy and stand in line and wait for a visa. We don't want that anymore. We need to achieve the visa waiver program for Korea and Mr. President, you are in the right place at the right time, and we are going to get that done.

Now there's another thing we're going to get done. I walked into the hotel and I heard these demonstrators saying "No FTA." Let me send a message to those demonstrators: There will be an FTA. The FTA makes sense for America and it makes sense for the Republic of Korea. Maybe we need a bulldozer to get it done. Now we have a bulldozer, and we're going to get it done.

Finally Mr. President, we've got one other little problem. Let me think if I can remember what that problem was. Oh that's right: There's this little place North of the Republic of Korea, I can't remember the name of it right now. We need to get those people to understand that they need to give up those nuclear weapons and join the rest of the world. Mr. President, I don't know if we're going to be able to find the solution, but the one thing I do know is that if we are able to find a solution, we're going to find it together. We're going to look under every stone. We're going to look everywhere. We're going to find that solution. We're going to do it together.

So Mr. President, let me thank you so much for persevering with jet lag, which we all agree does not exist in New York City, and for coming together on this great occasion, all of us together, to celebrate this wonderful relationship. This is among our finest relationships in the world.

Thank you so much for being here.