

Remarks by Richard L. Armitage
Deputy Secretary of State
Statement for the Record
Hearing on the Congressional Gold Medal for Jose Maria Aznar
Subcommittee on Domestic and International Monetary Policy, Trade, and Technology
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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee, Washington is a city of many monuments, including some we walk past every day without really seeing. So it may come as a surprise, certainly to employees of the Department of State, that a bronze Spaniard stands watch over the Main State building. The inscription on the base of the memorial just outside our doors reads: “May this statue of Bernardo de Galvez serve as a reminder that Spain offered the blood of her soldiers for the cause of American independence.”

Americans today need no reminder that Spain once again has offered the blood of her soldiers for the cause. Today, however, the cause is not just independence for America, but also for Spain, for Afghanistan, and for Iraq. Indeed, today the cause is freedom itself, for people all over the world.

The modern Spanish hero who has joined this cause with so much courage, the heir to the spirit of de Galvez, is Jose Maria Aznar, President of the Government of Spain. He is, indeed, deserving of the highest recognition our country can give him and I strongly support awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to President Aznar.

Mr. Chairman, September 11th was a tragic day in the life of our nation, but it was not solely an American tragedy. On that day, citizens of some 90 other nations died in the World Trade Center alone, and in the years since, terrorism has claimed hundreds of lives in countries stretching from Morocco to Australia. When President Aznar spoke before a joint meeting of this Congress last month, he called terrorism a “calculated challenge to the values that are core to humanity: freedom, moral decency, compassion, and respect for the lives of others.”

Indeed, Spain has dealt with that challenge for far too long. Over the past 35 years, the Basque terrorist organization, the ETA [Basque Fatherland and Liberty], has killed more than 850 Spaniards. President Aznar himself narrowly escaped becoming a victim in 1995. I suspect his personal experience only deepened his commitment to doing everything he could to protect the security of all Spain’s people. When President Bush first visited Spain in June of 2001, he made it clear that he shared President Aznar’s commitment and that Spain could count on the full support of the United States.

President Aznar, in turn, offered quick and concrete support for our wounded country in the immediate aftermath of the attacks on September 11th. He has since proven to be a sure and steadfast ally in the global struggle to defeat terrorism. He has expanded our intelligence cooperation concerning al-Qaida and provided access to and information about terrorist suspects. He has worked with the United States and other nations to keep weapons of mass destruction out of the hands of terrorists. Within the EU, he has supported the designation of terrorist organizations and the efforts to freeze their assets. President Aznar has also committed blood

and treasure to both Afghanistan and Iraq, where Spanish forces continue to serve alongside our own.

Perhaps President Aznar's greatest legacy as a world leader, however, is not just what he has stood against, but also what he stands for: the cause of freedom. Throughout his tenure in office, President Aznar has advanced a constructive and democratic vision for the future, one based on prosperity and partnership. The President's agenda has made Spain an important political and economic force in the world and an important partner for the United States. Indeed, President Aznar has helped expand and deepen the bilateral relationship between our two nations, as well as the broader transatlantic relationship. Moreover, under his stewardship, Spain has promoted free minds and free markets around the world, particularly here in our own Hemisphere. Soon, President Aznar will step aside and allow others to build on his tremendous legacy, and even this final decision underscores for the world the true power of democratic governance.

Mr. Chairman, the Congressional Gold Medal is a fitting honor for a great friend to the cause of freedom – for America, for Spain, and for people all over the world. Thank you for giving me the opportunity today to offer my support.