

Week Ending Friday, April 27, 2001

Remarks Prior to Discussions With Central American Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters in Quebec, Canada

April 20, 2001

The President. I want to thank the Presidents from some of the Central American countries for coming here. It's my honor to say once again hello to the President of El Salvador, the President of Panama, and the President of Honduras. Thank you all very much. I look forward to wide-ranging discussions on the benefits of trade, the need for us to continue to think about how best to have in place measures that will help in the case of future natural disasters, ways to continue to cooperate on issues of trafficking of people and arms and drugs.

So I look forward to a very fruitful discussion. I'm honored you all are here. *El placir es mio.*

I'll try to answer a few questions. Sandra [Sandra Sobieraj, Associated Press], have you got something?

Quebec Demonstrations

Q. Sir, the protests have really flared up outside. What do you have to say to the protesters?

The President. Well, if they are—if they're protesting because of free trade, I would say I disagree. I think trade is very important for this hemisphere. Trade not only helps spread prosperity, but trade helps spread freedom. And so I would just disagree with those who think that trade—somehow trade is going to negatively affect the working people and people for whom hope doesn't exist in some places. So we need trade. And I am convinced that the leadership that I met with agrees. And we can work together, because they understand that working together we can bring prosperity throughout our entire hemisphere.

Secondly, I would hope that those out there expressing their opinion realize how important it is for the United States and Canada and Mexico to extend our agreements beyond our borders, to Central America and South America, where it's important to keep our neighborhood intact and to have a strong neighborhood. And these are our neighbors.

I grew up in a world where if you treat your neighbor well, it's a good start to developing a wholesome community. So I understand some people don't like trade; I just strongly disagree with them.

Trade Promotion Authority

Q. Mr. President, what are you telling summit leaders when they ask you how likely are you to get fast-track?

The President. Well, first of all, they understand that trade promotion authority, or fast-track, will be very important for us in order to make sure that we can fulfill our hopes to have a free-trading hemisphere. But we also can and will discuss bilateral agreements or agreements with groups of countries. So it's a dual-track strategy.

I hope Congress understands the hope and promise of trade promotion authority. It's important for the President to have trade promotion authority. It will make it a lot easier for us to complete the agreements that we're all discussing here in summits such as this.

Press Secretary Ari Fleischer. Final question.

Q. Mr. President, when you met with the President of Brazil—

The President. You again.

Q. Yes, it's me again—and the other Andean leaders, were they—just following up on fast-track—the fact that you don't have fast-track, did they express that as a concern?

The President. Well, not really. They were more interested in, one, our commitment to the neighborhood. Secondly, they were—we spent a lot of time talking about

drugs and drug trafficking, and I assured them I understood that our Nation must do a better job of reducing demand and, at the same time, working with the Andean nations to eradicate supply.

An issue that came up, and one that I was aware of is that Plan Colombia could have the opportunity to spread the problems to neighboring countries outside of Colombia. And therefore, we have to put together an Andean initiative which recognizes that. And thirdly, that relations are—that we must have relations beyond just drug eradication. In other words, that we've got to work together to make sure the education systems in our respective countries fulfill their promise, that legal reforms are needed in some parts of the world.

And so we had a very wide-ranging discussion, and I was most pleased, by the way, that the President of Brazil joined in the discussion, because it was—I thought it was a very good signal of his understanding the importance of the Andean region. And he plays a very—his country plays a very important part and a very important role in that part of the world.

Q. Thank you.

The President. You got your wish. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 5 p.m. in the Montcalm Room at the Loews el Concorde Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to President Francisco Flores Perez of El Salvador; President Mireya Moscoso of Panama; President Carlos Flores of Honduras; and President Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brazil. Prime Minister Said Wilbert Musa of Belize; President Miguel Rodriguez of Costa Rica; President Arnoldo Aleman of Nicaragua; and President Alfonso Antonio Portillo of Guatemala also participated in the discussions. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at the Summit of the Americas Working Session in Quebec April 21, 2001

Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. *Amigo y amigos*, it's an honor to be here. First, Mr. Prime Minister, I want to thank you for your warm hospitality, and I want to thank all

those folks in your government who have worked hard to make this conference a success. My fellow Presidents and Prime Ministers and leaders of our hemisphere's 34 democracies, it is a great honor to be here.

We have a great vision before us, a fully democratic hemisphere bound together by goodwill and free trade. That's a tall order. It is a chance of a lifetime. It is a responsibility we all share.

Quebec City is a fitting place for us to begin. Many of the great cultures that have shaped our hemisphere converge in this city. Before Champlain ever sailed the St. Lawrence he sailed the Caribbean, visiting Mexico and Colombia, Puerto Rico and Panama. As a matter of fact, he was one of the first to propose a canal from the Atlantic to the Pacific so that trade may prosper. During the 400 years since Champlain's travels, our hemisphere, united by geography, has too often—too often—been separated by history of rivalry and resentment.

But we have entered a new era. The interests of my nation, of all our nations, are served by strong, healthy democratic neighbors, and are served best by lasting friendships in our own neighborhood.

My country, more than ever, feels the ties of kinship, commerce, and culture that unite us. And I'm proud to have the privilege so early in my administration to meet with all the leaders of this hemisphere's democratic countries.

Our task is to take the vital principles shaped at Miami and Santiago and translate them into actions that directly benefit the people we answer to. I'm here to offer my own ideas. I'm here to learn and to listen from voices—to those inside this hall and to those outside this hall who want to join us in constructive dialog.

The single most important thing we will do here is to reaffirm that this summit is a gathering of, by, and for democracies, and only democracies. Today, freedom embraces the entire hemisphere, except for one country. And we look forward to the day when all this hemisphere's peoples will know the benefits and dignity of freedom. José Martí said it best: *La libertad no es negociable*.

We also understand that democracy is a journey, not a destination. Each nation here,