

You know, there's an old Irish proverb that says: "There is no strength without unity." And so on this Saint Patrick's Day, we can all take pride in the way that the United States and Ireland have come together to enrich each other in the world.

My last time as President to have a Saint Patrick's Day with you, *Taoiseach*. Perhaps when we join the ex-leaders club, we'll sit back and put our feet up—[laughter]—and talk about the good old times. In the meantime, I know you're going to sprint to the finish, as am I, for the good of our countries.

Thank you for coming. God bless the people of Ireland and the United States. And now I welcome Ronan Tynan.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:30 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the Dail Eireann John O'Donoghue of Ireland; FDNY Emerald Society Pipes and Drums, who performed prior to the remarks; the United Kingdom's Ambassador to the U.S. Sir Nigel E. Sheinwald; and First Minister Ian R.K. Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness of Northern Ireland. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Prime Minister Ahern.

Remarks at the Jacksonville Port Authority in Jacksonville, Florida

March 18, 2008

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thank you for the warm welcome. It's nice to be back in J-ville. It's an interesting place to come, isn't it? I've been in your stadium. I've been in your church. I've never been on the docks. But if you're interested in trying to figure out one of the reasons why this is one of America's most vibrant cities, you got to come to the docks.

And I want to explain why these docks are important to not only the citizens of Jacksonville but also why what happens here is important to the overall economy in the United States.

Before I do, I do want to thank *Senor Morales*. Thank you for your leading here as the chairman of the Jacksonville Port Authority. Thanks for being the kind of American we love, somebody who comes from abroad, recognizes the great blessings of the United

States of America, and contributes mightily to our success.

I appreciate the executive director, Rick Ferrin. I've just had an interesting tour of this facility by Magnus Lindeback, Captain Magnus Lindeback. [Applause] Magnus, it sounds like some of them have heard of you around here. [Laughter] I'm going to talk about Magnus a little later on. He's a fellow who came to America with a dream and now employs a lot of good, hard-working folks because of goods that are shipped from here to other parts of the world and for goods that are shipped from other parts of the world to here. See, everybody here is working as a result of trade—trade that happens and occurs right here on these docks.

The Governor of the great State of Florida, Charlie Crist, has joined us. Mr. Governor, proud you're here. Thanks for taking time. Two Members from the United States Congress have come—this must be a special occasion—[laughter]—Ander Crenshaw, Congressman from this district, doing a find job, and Congresswoman Corrine Brown. Madam Congresswoman, we're proud you're here.

Daniel Davis, president of the Jacksonville City Council, appreciate you coming. A lot of other State and local officials, port authority employees, Coastal Maritime employees, thanks for greeting me here. Appreciate you coming.

One thing is for certain: This is a challenging time for our economy. You know that; I know that; a lot of Americans understand that. In the short run, the strains on the economy have been caused by the turmoil in the housing market, which has required focused and decisive action. And that's exactly what the Federal Government's doing.

There are problems, but the key is to recognize problems and to act early, which we have done. For example, we brought together what's called the HOPE NOW Alliance. It's a private sector group that is helping large numbers of homeowners refinance their mortgages. We want to help people stay in their homes. And millions of people are going to be affected by this program. And it makes sense to help some person who is creditworthy find the capacity and understand where to refinance. The more people

live in their homes, the better off America is. But no question, there's been an oversupply of housing, and it's going to take time to work through this oversupply.

We also worked with Congress—and I want to thank the Members of Congress—to pass a bipartisan economic growth package. That's Washington-speak for, you're fixing to receive some money. By the way, it's your money to begin with. [*Laughter*] But in the second week of May, there is a substantial amount of money being returned to people in the hopes of encouraging increased consumption. There's also incentives in this piece of legislation passed by both Republicans and Democrats that will encourage small and large businesses to invest. And when businesses invest, as Magnus will tell you, it makes it easier to give people work. Investment equals jobs.

And so in the second week of May, checks will be coming. And the experts tell me this is going to help with the economic vitality of the country. After all, it's over \$150 billion that is going to be distributed. The plan was voted on; I signed it into law, but it hadn't been put completely into effect yet.

Our financial markets have also been subjected to stress. And the Federal Reserve and the Treasury acted swiftly to promote stability in our financial markets at a crucial time. It was action that was necessary, and I appreciate the leadership of Chairman Bernanke and Secretary Paulson. And they'll continue to closely monitor the markets in the financial sector. And the point I want to make to you is, if there needs to be further action, we'll take it, in a way that does not damage the long-term health of our economy.

In the long run, Americans ought to have confidence in our economy. I mean, there are some anchors that promote long-term—that should promote long-term confidence. Let me give you a few. First of all, the unemployment rate is relatively low. We've got a low unemployment rate here in Florida, low in most parts of the country. We're an innovative society with a flexible economy. But there's a lot of research and development being spent here in America. There are new technologies being developed. Productivity is on the rise. We have a strong agricultural

sector. The small-business sector is vibrant. And people are investing in the United States. And so I understand there's short-term difficulty, but I want people to understand that in the long term, we're going to be just fine. People will still be able to work.

You know, one of the interesting signs of strength is that we're the world's leading exporter of goods and services. I'm not saying we're second place or third place; we're the world's leading exporter. And that's positive, particularly if you're somebody whose job depends upon trade.

Now, we're in the middle of a debate here about trade, whether it's good or not. Well, anybody wondering about the stakes in the trade debate ought to come right here to Jacksonville, Florida, to the docks to see whether or not trade makes sense. According to the most recent data, you move more than 8 million tons of cargo each year. This cargo doesn't move itself. Somebody has to move it from port to port.

I'm sitting in—standing in front of people that are all part of the process, good, hard-working Americans that are putting food on the table for their families because of trade. You handle most—more than—more automobiles than any American port. I don't know if the people of Jacksonville understand that, but think about that. More automobiles are handled at this port than anywhere in the United States of America. You help support more than 45,000 jobs. This port serves as a vital commercial and strategic link to our neighborhood, to our neighbors in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Opening trade has been one of the high priorities of my Presidency. See, I believe trade leads to good jobs. I believe trade is in our interests. When I took office, America had free trade agreements in force with three countries. Today, we have agreements in force with 14 countries. And there are three more agreements pending this year: Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. All three of these agreements are important, and the one with Colombia is especially urgent. And I want to spend a little time talking about the free trade agreement with Colombia and what it means for our national security and what it means for your job security.

We have worked closely with leaders in Congress to seek a path to bring the Colombia agreement up for approval. And we've got a good model to go on. Last year, we worked out a bipartisan approach on a bill implementing a good free trade agreement with Peru, and it was a good bill. And it was one of those bills where people, when they stepped back from politics, realized it made good sense and overwhelmingly approved it. Both Republicans and Democrats voted for that, two of whom happen to be sitting right here.

The Colombia agreement is almost identical to the agreement with Peru, except that the Colombia agreement has even greater economic potential because Colombia has a larger GDP and even greater national security importance because of Colombia's strategic location. The lesson is clear: If Congress can find a way to vote on and improve the Peru agreement, there's no reason it can't do the same for Colombia.

Now, why is it important? Before I get to the importance, I do want to tell you the time is urgent. There must be a vote on Colombia this year. And this agreement is too important to be delayed any longer. So I am reiterating my call on leaders in Congress to act with urgency. I ask members of both parties to ensure that politics do not get in the way of a vital priority for our Nation and, frankly, a vote that will help people who are working here on the docks. You can think in terms of national security interests, but if that doesn't interest you, think about terms of helping folks just like this make a living.

Let me talk a little bit about the national security implications from this vote. In Colombia, President Uribe is waging an active battle against terrorists who are seeking to overthrow his nation's democracy. This terrorist network is known as FARC. It pursues Marxist objectives through bombing, hostage-taking, and assassination. Much of its funding is derived from drug trafficking. Attacks by the FARC have killed or injured more than 1,000 civilians since 2003. These are brutal people, and they're ruthless people. And they'll use all kinds of means to achieve their objectives. FARC terrorists have held three American citizens hostage in jungle camps for more than 5 years, making

them the longest held American hostages anywhere in the world.

The challenge posed by these terrorists is compounded by the hostility and aggression of some of Colombia's neighbors. The regime in Caracas has railed against America, has forged an alliance with Communist Cuba, has met with FARC leaders in Venezuela, has deployed troops to the Colombian border. In the process, regime leaders have squandered their oil wealth and left their people to face food shortages.

Recently when Colombian forces killed one of the FARC's most senior leaders, they discovered computer files that suggest even closer ties between Venezuela's regime and FARC terrorists than we previously knew. Colombia officials are investigating the ties, but this much should be clear: The United States strongly supports, strongly stands with Colombia in its fight against the terrorists and drug lords.

President Uribe has remained focused on strengthening Colombia's democracy. Over the past 6 years, kidnappings, terrorist attacks, and murders of labor activists have all dropped by more than 75 percent. Police are on the streets. Tens of thousands of paramilitary fighters have been demobilized. And Colombia's murder rate has fallen substantially.

At the same time, Colombia's economy has shown strong growth. Poverty and unemployment have declined. Trade and investment have increased substantially. That's what we want. We want less violence in our neighborhood and more prosperity in our neighborhood. We want our neighbors to be prosperous.

President Uribe has been an unshakeable partner for the United States. He's answered to hundreds of requests to extradite criminals to our country. And with the assistance from Plan Colombia, a program first supported by President Bill Clinton and continued under my administration, he's cracked down on drug trafficking. He constantly speaks out against anti-Americanism. By any measure, he has been one of our most reliable and effective allies. And this trade agreement is the way to signal our strong support for President Uribe. It's the way to help this country develop more momentum toward peace.

Despite the record of success, some in Congress claim Colombia needs to do more before a trade agreement—the trade agreement can be approved. But this is unrealistic, and it is unfair. If Members of Congress truly want Colombia to make further progress, then it makes no sense to block the very measure that would make progress more likely.

Our fellow citizens have got to know that across the hemisphere and across the globe, people are waiting to see what the Members of Congress will do. In other words, this isn't just one of these isolated votes that gets no attention outside of Washington. This is a vote that is being observed very carefully by people across the world. Voices from near and far are urging Congress to make the right decision. Members of Congress from both parties travel to Colombia. They have seen firsthand the progress that President Uribe is making. Business leaders from many backgrounds, along with current and former Senators, Congressmen, mayors, diplomats, National Security Council people, Cabinet members from both parties—I emphasize, from both parties—support this agreement.

In other words, it's just not me talking. There's a lot of people who understand the importance of this agreement. Our allies have made their position clear. I want the Members of Congress to hear what the Prime Minister of Canada, Stephen Harper, said. He said: "If the U.S. turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator can hope to achieve." Those are wise words and words worth listening to. Congress needs to listen to the voices, and they need to pass this important piece of legislation.

The national security benefits are only part of the cause for this agreement. Both our economies stand to gain as well. Today, virtually all exports from Colombia enter our country duty free. And yet many U.S. exports going to Colombia face heavy tariffs. Goods coming from Colombia, duty free; our goods going to Colombia get taxed. That doesn't seem fair to me. I know the folks here understand that if you reduce tariffs, it's more likely we'll send more goods. Doesn't it make sense for Congress to say to Colombia, treat

America the way we treat you, which is precisely what this trade deal does?

A banana grown in Colombia enters the United States duty free. An apple grown in Pennsylvania or an orange grown in Florida is subject to a 15-percent tariff when it's exported to Colombia. Doesn't it make sense for the Federal Government to try to eliminate that tariff? I think it does. If you're growing oranges, it does. If you're growing apples, it does. And if you're shipping goods and services—or goods from this port to Colombia, it makes sense to make it easier to ship more goods.

That's why I talk about level the playing field. They estimate this will help 9,000 U.S. companies export to Colombia, most of which are small and midsize companies. Level the playing field is going to help hundreds of thousands of employees who work at these companies. And level the playing field will create new opportunities for exporters and dock workers who ship heavy machinery and glass and chemicals and electronics and paper and other products to Colombia from this port—people just like the folks seated right here.

Earlier today I had a chance to tour this company with Magnus Lindeback, Captain Magnus Lindeback. The man is living the American Dream. You talk to Magnus, he's about as proud an American as you can find. He might not have been born here, but he loves it here. And he loves the people that work with him, and he's very proud of the fact that this company has grown from 2 employees to over 250. And he cares about each and every employee.

And here's why the Colombia free trade agreement matters to a—are you small or midsize? I'd call you—oh, midsize. You say small; I say midsize. Okay, small. [Laughter] Here's why it matters to a small-sized/midsize company like Coastal Maritime. [Laughter] Coastal Maritime—about a quarter of its cargo goes to Colombia. So in other words, if you're somebody wondering whether you're going to have a job and a fellow comes along and says, "Would you like to be able to sell more goods to Colombia? After all, a quarter of your revenues go to Colombia," I think the answer ought to be, yes, we want to be able to access more of

Colombia. We're good at what we're doing now.

They send, by the way, mining equipment, bulldozers, and cranes. Magnus doesn't make the cranes and bulldozers and mining equipment. He just ships it. But somebody in America is making the cranes, and somebody in America is making the bulldozers. And so when you think about trade, you're not only thinking about dock workers who are working good jobs because of trade, but somebody has got to make the products that the people in Colombia are buying as well.

If Colombia approves the free trade agreement, Coastal Maritime estimates that the volume of products they ship to Colombia would increase by 20 to 50 percent in a short period of time. Magnus says he's going to use the extra revenues for two purposes: to reinvest in technology and equipment—like that crane we—a guy tried to get me to drive over there—*[laughter]*—I told him I was a history major—*[laughter]*—and he wants to raise wages for his workers.

I want to quote Magnus: "Trade is our entire business. All our workers depend on it. An increased volume of cargo to Colombia would be tremendous from us because the more cargo we have to handle, the more revenue is generated."

American exporters aren't the only ones who will benefit. The free trade agreement will guarantee permanent duty-free access to the U.S. market for businesses in Colombia. And why is that important? Because it will help them attract investment and stimulate growth. It will lead to additional opportunities at a port such as this. The more prosperous our neighborhood, the more commerce there will be. And the more commerce there is, it's more likely to pass through a port just like this. We want people doing well. We want programs that are good for small businesses and farmers. And that's exactly what this vote will be. And it's important. And it's an important vote for the United States Congress to understand. It's in our national security interests and economic security interests.

And during this time of economic uncertainty, when consumer spending and investment is slowing down, it's important to understand the role trade has made for our

economy. Last year, exports accounted for more than 40 percent of our total growth. That's good news. Export is continuing. This January, exports were up more than 16 percent over last January. If you're worried about the economy, it seems like you ought to be sending a clear signal that the United States of America will continue to trade, not shut down trade. And that's what this Colombia vote says.

And once Congress approves the free trade agreement with Colombia, they can—then they can approve one with Panama. And once they finish one with Panama, then they can do one with South Korea. All these agreements are important. These agreements to important to enhance our friendship, but these are good for our economy.

Now, I fully understand that trade makes people nervous. It doesn't make these folks nervous because they understand the benefits firsthand. And in a political year, you hear all kinds of things about trade. One of the things people say is that people lose their jobs because of trade. Well, in the manufacturing sector, sometimes that's right, but a lot of times it's a result of productivity increases. In other words, technology changes, and one worker can produce three times as much as he or she used to be able to, and therefore, same output with fewer workers.

But whatever the case is, the question is, what should we do about people who aren't working? One alternative is to say, it's all cause of trade; let's quit trading. Then people here lose work. The other opportunity is to focus on good educational programs. You know, we could cut ourselves off, or we could have faith in our capacity to compete and focus on helping individuals. I choose the latter.

I believe strongly that we can help people gain extra skills with smart programs. That's why my budget requests \$3 billion to educate and prepare workers for the 21st century. I'm a big believer, Governor, in community colleges. I think our community colleges are great places for people to gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. So rather than resort to protectionism and say, let's shut down our trading opportunities, why don't we resort to education to give people the skills necessary to fill the jobs for the

21st century here in the United States of America?

Now, you're going to hear the word trade adjustment assistance talked about in Congress. And these two Congress folks understand what I'm talking about. That basically says that we're going to have education programs aimed at helping people find skills. And I'm a supporter. And I believe it's important that trade adjustment be a component of our trade policy. I look forward to working with Congress to reform it and to reauthorize it, to make sure it does the job that it could do—is supposed to do—just like I'm looking forward to signing those trade bills, particularly starting with the one from Colombia.

I—so I've come here as a vivid reminder to people in Congress who wonder whether or not trade is positive for America. It is. It's economically a good deal for our country. And I do have confidence that Congress will get it right. It may take a little persuading. It's going to take a lot of hard work. Oh, it may take some of you having to write letters to your Senators and Congressmen to remind them that trade is good. Confident nations are free traders.

But trade also means making sure we get treated right, that they treat us the way we treat them. That's all we're asking. That's what this agreement says: Just treat us fairly. Because America can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere, as long as the playing field is level.

And so I've come to talk about our economy and a key issue facing you. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to be in your midst. I'm proud of the work you do here. And may God bless you and God continue to bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:13 p.m. at the Blount Island Marine Terminal. In his remarks, he referred to Ricardo Morales, Jr., chairman of the board of directors, Jacksonville Port Authority; and Magnus Lindeback, chief executive officer, Coastal Maritime Stevedoring, LLC. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of these remarks.

Remarks on the War on Terror in Arlington, Virginia

March 19, 2008

Thank you all. Deputy Secretary England, thanks for the introduction. One boss may not be here, but the other one is. [*Laughter*] I appreciate your kind words. I'm pleased to be back here with the men and women of the Defense Department.

On this day in 2003, the United States began Operation Iraqi Freedom. As the campaign unfolded, tens and thousands of our troops poured across the Iraqi border to liberate the Iraqi people and remove a regime that threatened free nations.

Five years into this battle, there is an understandable debate over whether the war was worth fighting; whether the fight is worth winning; and whether we can win it. The answers are clear to me: Removing Saddam Hussein from power was the right decision, and this is a fight America can and must win.

The men and women who crossed into Iraq 5 years ago removed a tyrant, liberated a country, and rescued millions from unspeakable horrors. Some of those troops are with us today, and you need to know that the American people are proud of your accomplishment, and so is the Commander in Chief.

I appreciate Admiral Mullen, the Joint Chiefs who are here. Thanks for coming. Secretary Donald Winter of the Navy; Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte is with us. Admiral Thad Allen of the Coast Guard is with us. Ambassador from Iraq is with us; Mr. Ambassador, we're proud to have you here. Soldiers, sailors, marines, airmen, and coast men—coast guard men, thanks for coming; thanks for wearing the uniform. Men and women of the Department of State are here as well.

Operation Iraqi Freedom was a remarkable display of military effectiveness. Forces from the UK, Australia, Poland, and other allies joined our troops in the initial operations. As they advanced, our troops fought their way through sandstorms so intense that they blackened the daytime sky. Our troops engaged in pitched battles with Fedayeen Saddam, death squads acting on the orders of Saddam Hussein, that obeyed neither the