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Remarks Following a Meeting With President Sebastian Piñera Echenique of Chile

June 4, 2013

President Obama. I want to welcome President Piñera and his delegation to the Oval Office. It gives me an opportunity to return the extraordinary hospitality that they showed during my visit to Santiago and the wonderful warmth that the Chilean people extended to me and my delegation during my visit.

Obviously, we've got strong relationships throughout the hemisphere, but the relationship between the United States and Chile is as strong and as important as any of the relationships that we have. Chile has been on a remarkable growth trajectory over several decades, and the progress that it's made in terms of strengthening its economy, pulling people out of poverty, establishing a strong manufacturing and industrial and service base, its strong exports sector are all proof of the talents of the Chilean people, but also Chile's embrace of democracy and human rights and a market economy. And as a consequence, Chile has become not only a leader in the hemisphere, but also a leader in the world.

President Piñera's outstanding leadership has continued and enhanced this process, and he and I have had an excellent relationship in a number of multilateral settings.

Today we had a wide-ranging discussion. Some of the topics were very specific: for example, the process whereby we anticipate Chile being able to achieve a membership in the Visa Waiver Program that will facilitate the freer flow of people between our two countries and, I know, is one of President Piñera's highest priorities.

We discussed the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a high-standard, a high-level trade agreement with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region, which is the most dynamic and fastest growing region of the world. And Chile has been an excellent partner with us in trying to bring this multilateral trade agreement to a close.

I congratulated President Piñera on the work that Chile is doing in the Pacific partnership, in which Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru are joining together to create not only economic integration, but also educational and scientific exchanges that will not only enhance each member country, but also are pointing the way for a model of economic development and growth throughout the region that I think a lot of people are paying attention to.

And we also discussed the ways in which the United States and Chile can continue to strengthen its people-to-people exchanges and continue to deepen our cooperation on areas like energy that are so important to the continued prosperity of our people.

So overall, I think that the relationship between the United States and Chile is extraordinarily strong. I want to thank President Piñera for his friendship and his leadership. I'm confident that during the remaining year in which he's in office, he's going to accomplish even more for the Chilean people and continue to project Chile on the world stage as a very positive force for good. And I hope that he has found this visit here to the United States useful.

I look forward to an opportunity at some point to returning to Chile, one of my favorite visits during the course of my travels. And I look forward to a lot of good work in the years ahead.

So thank you very much, Mr. President.

President Piñera. Well, thank you very much, President Obama. You know that you are always welcome in Chile. Your visit was a very important one, not only for Chile, but for the whole hemisphere.

We have confirmed once again that the United States and Chile, we share the same values: our commitment with democracy, human rights, rule of law, our market-oriented economy, our commitment with world peace. And therefore, we will keep collaborating with the U.S. in strengthening and promoting these values all over the world.

Of course, we discussed many different aspects; one of them was the Trans-Pacific Partnership. And Chile is fully committed, not only with a Chilean agreement and create the largest free trade zone in the world, which would be the case if the Trans-Pacific Partnership is approved, but also we want to approve it within the timeframe that we have set.

So we hope that in the near future we will be able to make the progress necessary to get that Trans-Pacific Partnership deal done.

On the other hand, we have a free trade agreement with the U.S., was signed in 2004. Since then, we have more than tripled our trade with U.S. The U.S. has a very significant surplus in its trade with Chile; we are very happy with that. But it's not only in trade. We're interested in many other things. That's why this conversation has been extremely helpful, because we have discussed other issues like economy—the education, clean renewable energies, science, technology. In all those areas, we have a lot to learn from the U.S., and we have a lot to collaborate with the U.S.

We are very happy that we have signed special agreements with two States: with California and with Massachusetts. And therefore, I would like to emphasize, President Obama, that we are following what you are doing in the U.S. Of course, it has been a difficult task, because the world is going through difficult times. But we are very optimistic that the U.S. economy is picking up. It's growing. It's creating jobs. And that's good for the U.S. people, but also for the whole world.

A little bit in Spanish.

[*At this point, President Piñera made remarks in Spanish, and no translation was provided.*]

President Obama. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:05 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

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