

The President's News Conference With President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico in Houston, Texas

April 7, 1991

President Bush. Well, as always, it is a great pleasure to meet with my good friend President Carlos Salinas. He's en route to Canada for a state visit. But this refueling stop has given us a chance to discuss very important issues of mutual concern and interest.

The United States has embarked on an historic task with Mexico and Canada: the creation of a trilateral free-trade agreement which would establish the largest free-trade area in the world. It would involve some 360 million people and a total of \$6 trillion in combined annual output. President Salinas and I are certain that this FTA, this trade agreement, will create jobs and provide opportunities for the citizens of both our countries.

To move forward, we need the United States Congress to extend the Fast Track authority. That authority allows the President to assure our negotiating partners that the free-trade agreement which we conclude at the negotiating table will be the one that will be voted on by the Congress. The Congress has a say. They can vote yes, or they can vote no. But we need to negotiate in a way so that the people with whom we're negotiating know that that is not going to be amended and changed.

I told President Salinas that I am absolutely committed personally, that our administration is committed totally to the free-trade agreement with Mexico and Canada. And I also told him that I am going to work tirelessly to assure favorable action by Congress on Fast Track authority.

The credibility of the United States as a trading partner is on the line here. And I am doing this because I believe it firmly that it is in the best interest of the United States of America. I also believe it's in Mexico's interest. But I am convinced that it is best for America.

President Salinas and I have agreed to take a few questions, but I'd now turn the floor over to him.

Once again, sir, welcome.

President Salinas. Thank you very much for the hospitality extended to us, Mr. President. I would like to say that the bilateral agenda is quite wide, and we took up diverse topics.

One of these issues, no doubt, was a free-trade agreement. We ratified our firm decision to forge ahead and come afloat with a treaty. The area that would then be created would be the major mover in order to promote the economies of the whole continent, and at the same time, it would be an extraordinary means in order to increase and raise our competitiveness to reach levels of the Pacific Basin and Europe.

But this will not be easy. It is a battle between visionary men and women living in sovereign nations with protectionist interests or visionary views.

We reach the conclusion that studies tend to confirm that the benefits that will be derived and that will stem from the free-trade agreement broadly go beyond the disadvantages that one could have. For example, in the United States, thanks to freer trade activities with Mexico, in the last 3 years exports have increased to my country, to Mexico. In the United States, additional jobs have been created of over one-fourth of a million jobs.

Mexico is already growing and developing with stability, and that will now lead to having to export goods from Mexico, not people. That will prevent thousands and millions of Mexicans from having to come to the United States looking for a job. Our objective is to have economic recovery with employment that will not harm the environment and with an increase, a raise, in real salaries.

And I would simply like to conclude by saying that the good climate that we found in Houston 2½ years ago has now been confirmed here today.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Marlin, now what is the time schedule? Because I know we want to take some questions.

Mr. Fitzwater. Just time for a few questions, and they do have to—rather quickly.

President Bush. And what we thought we'd do is alternate, one for me, one for President Salinas. And then we'll try to be fair in the distribution between the visitors from Mexico whom I welcome and the U.S. press corps.

Yes, sir, in the back.

Latin America-U.S. Relations

[At this point, a question was asked in Spanish, and a translation was not provided.]

President Bush. No, that is not so. We are not distracted by Eastern Europe and the Gulf. We had a mission in the Gulf. We have completed that mission. I'm going to bring our troops home. But I hope we have not given the impression that we've lost interest in our own hemisphere.

Indeed, the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative, the Brady plan, the commitment that I am reaffirming here today for this trade agreement with Mexico, my own visit to Monterrey—all of these things, I think, I hope, sent the message to our friends south of the Rio Grande, and not just Mexico but on south, that we are committed to being a good neighbor. And so, I hope I'll have more chance to demonstrate that now that the war is over.

Mexican Environmental Concerns

Q. President Salinas, the head of Sierra Club told a congressional committee last month that in the area where free-trade zones were established, generally, the new development is in an environmental disaster area. There was great concern that a free-trade agreement will worsen the environment and perhaps dilute the gains made by the Clean Air Act in this country. What is your response?

President Salinas. We are committed with a clean environment. We don't want our children to paint the sky gray without any stars because they cannot see the stars. That is why any new jobs, any new employment that has been created in Mexico will have to abide by very stringent laws for the protection of the environment. Not only firm and stringent laws but firm and stringent enforcement of these laws. We have much to do still, very little time for having started

with this, but that is our commitment.

President Bush. We'll take one for me—let's see—for President Salinas on the Mexican journalist side. Then I'll go for one for me on the American side. Oops, wrong guy. Well, you're going to miss my instructions. Go ahead, though. [Laughter]

Free-Trade Agreement

[At this point, a question was asked in Spanish, and a translation was not provided.]

President Bush. I've heard people say that the arguments are not convincing. I disagree with them. So, it is my mission now to lead our whole administration and those in the Congress who are now strongly in support of the free-trade agreement—and that includes, I might add, some of the key Democrat leaders in the Congress who are supporting us—it is now our mission, collective mission, to make this clear to the rest of the country and thus to the United States Congress that it is in our interest. The arguments are good. We are going to increase jobs in this country. We are going to have fewer border difficulties, which we all know exist, once we get this agreement through.

But we have some tough opponents in this country. Some elements in organized labor are fighting it, and they are wrong. And I'm going to take them on head-on-head because I know that this is in the best interest of our country.

So, we've got a big selling job to do, but we're not alone in this fight. We've got the facts on our side and we also have some of the key Democratic leaders in the United States Congress who are highly respected and who will join in this because they know that expanded trade is good for both sides.

But I want to use this answer here just to once again reiterate my strong personal commitment. And I hope that will help. And we will be enlisting all the help we can get in the Congress because we're in for a battle. We're not under any illusion about that.

Now, for President Salinas. Do you want one from the American side for me?

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, yesterday you seemed hopeful that Iraq's tentative acceptance of the U.N. conditions for a cease-fire would finally mean an end to the war for U.S. troops. But there don't appear to be any guarantees that's going to be the case for the Iraqi people. Is there any effort by the United States to use the U.N. mandate to restore order in Iraq, or are you, in a sense, being forced to tolerate a declared peace in the midst of chaos and even civil war there?

President Bush. Well, I think you've seen the U.N. be very effective by having its rather stern but proper resolutions adopted. And I think the main thing is to get them put into effect, and I hope that that then will have a calming effect inside of Iraq itself. But I've made clear my position. I stated it from the very beginning. We have not expanded our objectives. We are not going to expand the use of U.S. forces; indeed, I want them to come out, and they will be coming out as soon as possible.

But the U.N. can very well have the kind of additional role that your question asks about. And we will be in consultation with others at the United Nations to see whether the U.N. can again, once again, enhance its peacekeeping function, a function that only recently has come to be affecting events in a beneficial way. Only recently has the peacekeeping function come forward as something that has some teeth in it. And we saw that through the Gulf.

Now, I would like to see that peacekeeping function activated again to help on this matter. You have some interesting debate at the U.N., however, in terms of the internal affairs of a country. But when you have a refugee problem of this enormous consequence, then that comes under the heading of United Nations business. So, through that, perhaps, we can try to enhance the peace, bring peace back to this troubled land.

But I want to make clear one more time: There was never any indication on the part of this administration or this President that we were going to expand our objectives to put troops or use force in Iraq. We've fulfilled our objectives, and now what we've got to do is fulfill our concerns about the

innocents that are suffering—the Kurds and the Shiites in the south and those in Baghdad themselves—by doing what the United States has always done, trying to be a catalyst for healing the wounds. And there are a lot of wounds, a lot of people hurting.

Our airlifts started. I was just telling the President I was very pleased, we've already dropped 72,000 pounds of MRE's, this food and water, to stranded refugees. So, I think world opinion also, Norm [Norman Sandler, United Press International], on this one can help. I think people are so outraged that there may be ways we can bring pressure through the U.N. or elsewhere on this regime inside Iraq.

Q. When you talk about an additional role, is that a role for the U.N. as policemen, essentially, internally in Iraq?

President Bush. No, I don't think you're going to see that. I don't think the United Nations will take such action. But I think there's a way that we can be helpful in the ways I've talked about. But I don't think you're going to see a police role in downtown Baghdad. I am pleased that the international force, the Blue Helmet, the United Nations international force, will be in place soon.

And I will use this opportunity to say to the American people, those young men and women of ours that are in southern Iraq are coming out just as soon as possible. And we're talking about days, not weeks or months, in terms of my fulfilling that commitment to the American people.

Free-Trade Agreement

Q. This is a question on trade for President Salinas. Perhaps Mexico now is one of the most open economies, much more so than the U.S. economy. You, President Salinas, have asked in various fora for reciprocity, reciprocal actions for this opening that Mexico is undertaking. Irrespective of it, or while we wait for the negotiation to take place, is there any commitment on the part of the U.S. in order to pay back or to match that opening that Mexico is undertaking?

President Salinas. This is more a question for President Bush than for me. [Laughter]

President Bush. He asked you. [Laughter] Thank heavens!

President Salinas. But I would say that

the objective in negotiating this free-trade agreement is reciprocity to a unilateral attitude. And more than having an addition or a subtraction of arithmetic operations, it is more a matter of taking up a vision, a view, in the medium term and in the long term. What is truly at stake is that a decision is being made as to what will happen with North America by the end of this century or beginning of the coming century.

We have to be competitive, vis-a-vis Europe and the Pacific Basin. And the only way of being it is by being together. And otherwise, it is not a matter of losing jobs for Mexico but spending the rest of your life buying Japanese or European products. So, as you can see, this is an exceptional, historic opportunity, and it will be very difficult for it to be repeated.

President Bush. Marlin, did you say one more?

One more. Charles [Charles Bierbauer, Cable News Network]?

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, you've repeatedly said that you have not encouraged the Kurds and the Shiites to rise up with the expectation that the U.S. would be in there fighting with them. And yet the Kurdish representatives this morning on one of the talk shows are saying that that's clearly the impression they got from listening to the Voice of Free

Iraq, which they understood to be supported by the U.S. Would you clarify just what the role the U.S. played in running that radio station?

President Bush. No, I don't have the details on it. But I will reassert, I never in any way implied that the United States was going to use force beyond the mandate of the United Nations.

Thank you all very—

Q. Well, is that because that station could be an embarrassment to you, sir?

President Bush. No, I just don't know the details of it. I just don't know the details of it. And if it had anything—

Q. Were they naive?

President Bush. Well, I mean, you call it whatever you want. They were not misled by the United States of America. And that is now I think very, very clear. I went back and reviewed every statement I made about this, every single one. And there was never any implication that the United States would use force to go beyond the objectives which we so beautifully have achieved. None. And I hope that helps clarify it.

Thank you all very much.

Note: President Bush's 79th news conference began at 11:51 a.m. in the Briefing Room at Ellington Field. President Salinas spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. Marlin Fitzwater was Press Secretary to President Bush.

Remarks at a Meeting With Hispanic Business Leaders in Houston, Texas

April 8, 1991

Thank you all very much. And Miguel, thank you for your leadership for the Greater Houston Partnership. And to all of you who managed to get through security and struggle in here, why—[laughter]—apologies for the delay, but I'm sure glad to see you.

Even though these lights are bright, I can see many, many friendly faces out there, people with whom I've worked for one cause or another over the years. You have

this wonderful way of making a guy feel at home. So, thank you for coming. Lionel Sosa, I love those ads. They're terrific. I believe they're going to be very effective. And I thank you for your energy and your expertise and also would thank all of those who were helping you on this project.

To my old friend Bob Mosbacher, our able Secretary of Commerce, I'm glad to see him. He's slightly jet lagged out, having just returned from Japan on yet another