

sion if——

The President. In the first place, I think we're going to be coming out of the recession, particularly with this drop in interest rates. So, I would argue with the people that disagree that we will. Most of the indicators—I think most of the economists, most of the blue-chip forecasters agree with what I've just said.

Secondly, I think dropping interest rates is the best way to stimulate economic growth and to create new jobs and new opportunity. Remind me what was the predicate again—that two million——

Q. The fact that two million more people are unemployed—we can't seem to stimulate the economy no matter what the industries are. And people are already too heavily in debt in this country.

The President. New jobs is the answer, isn't it, then, to those that don't have a job. And the way you get new jobs is you go for a growth agenda like I tried to answer here today. And we will come out of this recession, which isn't, fortunately, as deep as some in the past, and when we do come out of it you're going to see growth. And growth is going to create new jobs. And that two million or whatever the figure is will decline. I'm absolutely convinced of it. That's what's happened in every other recession.

And so the unemployment figures—anytime it's—my view is—they always ask me, what's acceptable unemployment? For the guy who doesn't have a job, nothing. No percentage is acceptable. I will say, historically, the unemployment figures have been a lot worse in this country. And when the recessions that they were part of ended, people went back to work in large numbers.

So, I think the best answer for hope for the people that are unemployed lies in economic growth, new opportunities.

Q. When do you predict the end of the recession?

The President. I can't give you an exact time. But would you settle for a general "sooner rather than later"? [*Laughter*] Because it's going to—wait until you see the effect of these rates. I mean, I don't really know the answer to your question. And if I did, I wouldn't tell you because the last thing a President needs to be doing is predicting interest rate levels or levels of where the stock market ought to be, or something of this—I just couldn't get into it. But I do—I believe, as do most of the forecasters, that the recession will not be a long and deep recession. And I think I'd go with the average of the blue-chip forecasters who seem to indicate that we'll be out of it fairly soon. But I've got to stop short of a definitive date.

Thank you all very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 12:07 p.m. in the Ballroom at the Washington Marriott Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Jim Kennedy, Sandy Duerr, Randy Smith, and Susan Thomas, secretary, president, vice president, and former president of the Society of Business Editors and Writers; Vice President Dan Quayle, Chairman of the Council on Competitiveness; Secretary of Agriculture Edward Madigan; President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico; Senator Lloyd Bentsen; Representatives Dan Rostenkowski and Richard A. Gephardt; Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu of Japan; and U.S. Trade Representative Carla A. Hills.

Remarks at a White House Briefing on Fast Track Authority Extension

May 1, 1991

The President. Thank you all very much. Please be seated. A thousand apologies for keeping you all waiting, but you had the most knowledgeable Fast Track authority

in the country doing the heavy lifting here. Carla, thank you.

But first, thank you all for coming here. I know I've talked to some of you in this

room about my favorite subject these days, but I want to just hit it again, and to those I haven't visited with, just urge you to help us if you possibly can. This Fast Track authority question is absolutely fundamental to our major foreign policy objectives.

And we can't look at it narrowly. We've got to look at in terms of the big foreign policy picture. And I'm not talking just about the importance of getting an agreement with Europe; I'm talking about our friends to the south, about the potential that lies in a democratic South America. And I'm not talking there just Mexico and beyond.

And so, we have here a subject I want to talk about in a little more detail, but I want to put it into that broad foreign policy context. It is in the vital national interest of the United States that we get this Fast Track authority, not just to hammer out a successful conclusion to the GATT round but to get this free trade agreement with Mexico, which will show that we are not discriminating by simply looking one direction, that we recognize the potential of our neighbors to the south who are our friends, and that we want to support the change that is so exciting that's taking place to our south.

So, as you know, and maybe Carla—did you talk about the letters today? Well, I've sent up to the Congress our views on these opportunities that are offered. And maybe you've gotten the details of the response to Lloyd Bentsen, Dan Rostenkowski, and Dick Gephardt to very important letters that we got from them. And they have a constitutional responsibility. They are entitled to our full cooperation and consultation. And I think we've responded, thanks to Carla's leadership, in a very forthcoming way to understandable concerns.

There were two points that our response to the Congress made crystal clear. One is that we've got to seize the opportunities that are afforded by this North American free trade agreement because it's in our interest—the point I made to you. And then the second one is that we are determined—and this is the one of vital importance to Members of Congress and to many in this room—that we're determined to work with Mexico to address the labor and environ-

mental issues that are of common concern.

We also, in these undertakings, make a commitment to negotiate an agreement with all the transition and adjustment provisions necessary to avoid disruptions at home. I would not be pressing this if I felt that this was going to be detrimental to the Americans that needs jobs, or Americans that have jobs. And our response also demonstrates how and why economic growth and enhanced cooperation between our governments—made possible by this North American free trade agreement—help dramatically improve labor conditions and also environmental protection.

I'm sure it won't work the way our critics say. In other words, they say it's going to be bad for American jobs, more people thrown out of work. And they say, bad for the environment. And I don't agree with either of them. In fact, I think we've got very good answers on the opposite sides of those two allegations.

The central issue in the Fast Track debate is whether we're going to remain a leader in opening markets and in expanding trade. Everyone in this room knows that exports are absolutely essential, that they're more vital than ever to our own economic growth. And, look, the stakes are high. Nobody's hiding that fact. There are high stakes in this. And with Fast Track we can complete that Uruguay round.

We've gone through like a roller coaster—ups and downs—as Carla's tried to hammer out an agreement in the GATT that would be good for all of us. And it's been difficult. But I am convinced that we can complete that Uruguay round and also this North American free trade agreement—NAFTA—and lay the bases for our continued competitive success in world markets. And it will carry us well into the next century, in my view. And without Fast Track we're going to lose our ability to achieve these ambitious and important goals. I don't believe protection or isolation or quasi-isolation can do anything other than diminish the growth that is essential in this country, essential to the well-being of all American families.

And I might say today, I was very pleased to see those interest rates come down a little, speaking of growth and getting this

economy going.

In the response that Carla helped fashion and that we sent up today, I've given Congress a personal commitment to close the—to have the best possible cooperation—best possible cooperation and consultation in the NAFTA, in the Uruguay round, and beyond. And beyond, I'm talking about the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative.

I'm giving my assurance that we take the time necessary to conclude agreements in which the Congress, the administration, the private sector, indeed, all Americans can take pride. There's a timeliness here in getting this Fast Track approved. But the very fact that we're rushing and trying and driving to get that done by dates certain does not mean that we have to rush in thereafter to some bad agreement. We're not going to do it. We could have made a bad agreement long ago.

One night I asked the telephone operators here, I said, "Would you please get Ambassador Hills?" It was about 5 or 6 in the evening. But they're so efficient, you know. And the phone answered, "Hellooo"—sound asleep. I'd gotten her—it's 3 in the morning in some foreign country—[laughter]—and back in those days, hammering out, hammering, working hard, trying to eliminate these difficulties. We could have had a bad agreement a long time ago. And she just kept saying no, and had this tough role of moving this thing forward correctly.

So, don't confuse the speed and the urgency of getting this Fast Track authority with the fact that that would lead us to hastily make a bad deal. We're not going to do it. And Carla knows the Congress well, and I know the Congress well, and they are entitled to have us bring back an agreement that we can wholly, enthusiastically endorse. And that's exactly the kind of agreement that I believe we can get.

So, again, I will end where I began: We need your help. And I am fully involved in this. Carla, obviously, is fully involved in it. Our whole Cabinet is energized. We're talking to as many groups as we can. I've been to Texas and to California to visit mainly with Mexican-Americans, but Hispanic groups. There's a lot at stake in this point. And it's something I feel strongly

about in my heart. I don't want anybody to be able to allege that we're using different standards here in setting out agreements—one for the north, one for the south. We're not going to do that. We're not going to do it because it isn't right. And we're going to approach Mexico as the trusted friend and partner that they are. And if there's anybody that deserves this kind of consideration, it is President Salinas in Mexico, who has already made some dramatic changes in that society and in that economy and in his approach to the environment and in his support on the questions of law and order. And he is entitled to a fair shake on all of this, and I am determined that he get it. So, we're going to go forward as best we can.

Did you tell them about Salinas' commitment to the environment?

Ambassador Hills. Not your story—

The President. Well, the story is really beautiful because what it is—and it really touched me as a grandfather of thousands. [Laughter] But I know some of you will be as moved by it as I was. I mean, this man is committed. He has shut down the largest polluting refinery in Mexico over the—and had to fight to do this, had to fight special interests to get this done. And he did it because of the commitment to the environment.

But the story that he tells is about how the children in Mexico, particularly Mexico City, when they paint a picture of the sky at night, it's gray or black. And he said, "I want these children to paint the sky with stars in it." And he is determined that they do, that you don't have a 6-year-old in the first grade who never sees the stars because of the environmental pollution. And it's a commitment. I mean, that's an emotional portrayal of his commitment that he has subsequently demonstrated in many, many ways.

So, I've got to convince the Members of Congress on these questions of labor, questions of the environment. We've got to explain that Mexico's economic success—it isn't a threat to us, it's an opportunity. It's an enormous opportunity. I just got a question over there about the—questions on the border. I'm from Texas, and I know some of the border problems and I know, in the

past, how we kind of fenced with each other about these border problems that exist, whether it's people that come here illegally or whether it's the drug question.

But I can tell you from the bottom of my heart that we're getting superb cooperation. That isn't to say we don't have a ways to go. But we want to work with these people in that way. They're our friends. They're our future, in a sense, because we have an enormous potential market there and on below. And we're committed to the democracy that is sweeping most of South America.

So, I get very intense on this question because I really believe it is in our interest. And as people struggle to improve their societies, we ought to be in there helping. And it will help Mexico, but it will also help the United States.

So, on these technical questions that are of understandable concern to the labor unions or to the environmentalists, we un-

derstand their concerns, and Carla has done a superb job of answering those concerns.

Again, we need you. This is a team effort. It is not going to get done by the most able Trade Representative we have, by the President, by any individual member of the Cabinet. We've got to get this done by people like yourselves weighing in where you can with these Members of Congress. And I pledge to you that I will go the extra mile because I am absolutely certain it is in the best interest of this country we all love so much.

Thank you very, very much.

Note: The President spoke at 2:49 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to U.S. Trade Representative Carla A. Hills, Senator Lloyd Bentsen, Representatives Richard A. Gephardt and Dan Rostenkowski, and President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico.

Remarks to Agriculture Groups and an Exchange With Reporters May 2, 1991

The President. Well, let me just say first, welcome to the White House. I want to take this opportunity with the Secretary here and leaders in American agriculture—and I use that term advisedly—here in the White House to publicly acknowledge the very positive response that we've received from key Members of the House and Senate on this legislation, this Fast Track question. I am confident that the growing support for Fast Track is evidence of a fundamental confidence, a confidence in our country that we can compete vigorously in the global economy.

And I want to take this opportunity to say we're approaching this in a nonpartisan manner. I am grateful to Senator Bentsen, the chairman of the Finance Committee, Congressman Rostenkowski, the head of the Ways and Means Committee, for their support and for their positive reception to our Fast Track action plan.

I also want to single out the majority lead-

er—I'm not trying to position him on this, but he went all the way down to Mexico in a spirit of honest inquiry to meet with President Salinas. We are trying to respond to the questions that he has appropriately raised, and he's committed to carefully review our plan, and I think that's good. I think that's the proper spirit and approach to this matter, and we are going to work very, very hard to expand markets, not just for agriculture but for the working men and women all across this country.

So, that was what I wanted to say. And now I want to hear from you all in just a minute after we are left alone. [*Laughter*]

Fast Track Legislation

Q. Are you going to win on the Fast Track vote?

The President. Yes, we're going to win. But we're not overconfident; we're not bragging about it. But we're going to work very, very hard. But we are in this to win.