

and religious institutions have brought forth faith and discipline, community and responsibility over two centuries for ourselves and enabled us to live together in ways that I believe would not have been possible. We are, after all, the oldest democracy now in history and probably the most truly multiethnic society on the face of the Earth. And I am convinced that neither one of those things would be true today had it not been for the importance of the first amendment and the fact that we have kept faith with it for 200 years.

What this law basically says is that the Government should be held to a very high level of proof before it interferes with someone's free exercise of religion. This judgment is shared by the people of the United States as well as by the Congress. We believe strongly that we can never, we can never be too vigilant in this work.

Let me make one other comment if I might before I close and sit down and sign this bill. There is a great debate now abroad in the land which finds itself injected into several political races about the extent to which people of faith can seek to do God's will as political actors. I would like to come down on the side of encouraging everybody to act on what they believe is the right thing to do. There are many people in this country who strenuously disagree with me on what they believe are the strongest grounds of their faiths. I encourage them to speak out. I encourage all Americans to reach deep inside to try to determine what it is that drives their lives most deeply.

As many of you know, I have been quite moved by Stephen Carter's book, "The Culture of Disbelief." He makes a compelling case that today Americans of all political persuasions and all regions have created a climate in this country in which some people believe that they are embarrassed to say that they advocate a course of action simply because they believe it is the right thing to do, because they believe it is

dictated by their faith, by what they discern to be, with their best efforts, the will of God.

I submit to you today, my fellow Americans, that we can stand that kind of debate in this country. We are living in a country where the most central institution of our society, the family, has been under assault for 30 years. We are living in a country in which 160,000 school-children don't go to school every day because they're afraid someone will shoot them or beat them up or knife them. We are living in a country now where gunshots are the single leading cause of death among teenage boys. We are living in a country where people can find themselves shot in the crossfire of teenagers who are often better armed than the police who are trying to protect other people from illegal conduct. It is high time we had an open and honest reaffirmation of the role of American citizens of faith, not so that we can agree but so that we can argue and discourse and seek the truth and seek to heal this troubled land.

So today I ask you to also think of that. We are a people of faith. We have been so secure in that faith that we have enshrined in our Constitution protection for people who profess no faith. And good for us for doing so. That is what the first amendment is all about. But let us never believe that the freedom of religion imposes on any of us some responsibility to run from our convictions. Let us instead respect one another's faiths, fight to the death to preserve the right of every American to practice whatever convictions he or she has, but bring our values back to the table of American discourse to heal our troubled land.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:15 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. H.R. 1308, approved November 16, was assigned Public Law No. 103-141.

Remarks on Governors' Endorsements of NAFTA and an Exchange With Reporters

November 16, 1993

The President. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Vice President, and thank you to all

the Governors who are here and to the many Governors who are not here who have helped

us in this battle to pass NAFTA.

I think I should say by way of sort of a parenthesis at the outset of my remarks, in reaction to Governor Thompson's eloquent comments about the Rose Bowl, that in view of the wisdom of the voters in Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin in the last election, this administration has no position on that football game. [Laughter]

You know, I looked at the Governors who are here with me, and I had to think—I actually counted. We are about equally divided back here between Democrats and Republicans. And I think it is an interesting statement that these who have come here and those who are not here who have also endorsed this agreement are more or less equally divided in about the ratio the parties hold of gubernatorial offices. And the reason for that is that if you're a Governor today, a big part of your job is keeping the job base you have, trying to find more jobs, and when you lose jobs, trying to replace them as quickly as possible.

It's not unusual to see a Governor who actually knows huge numbers of employers by name, who's been in, in my case, literally hundreds of manufacturing facilities and different small businesses and who understands how businesses rise and fall and how they fit within the economy of the State, the Nation, and the globe. The job of Governors is to create jobs, to keep jobs, to enhance the economic base and the economic security of our people.

Any of these Governors will tell you that it is difficult to hold onto this job if your voters don't believe you have a clear economic program and that your State is moving in the right direction against all the odds. Many of us have served in very difficult economic times, with high unemployment rates caused by all kinds of factors. But we always found that the people of our State wanted us to have a theory about how the economy works and how we were going to get more jobs. That is what these folks do for a living.

So I am especially honored to have these Governors here and to have their support because they understand on a bipartisan basis that a big part of America's national security involves the ability to create economic security for our people. They further understand that the only way to have economic security is to compete and win in the global economy.

As I have said many times and I want to say here on the eve of this great vote, every

wealthy country in the world today is having trouble creating new jobs. Productivity increases, which are necessary to compete in the global economy, in the short run sometimes cause difficulty in creating jobs because a more productive worker means fewer people can produce more products and services. Therefore, if you want more jobs at higher wages in this world, you have to have more customers. There is no way around that.

No one has seriously advanced the proposition that the United States can grow jobs and raise incomes, our most urgent economic priority, without having more customers for our products and services. The Governors understand that. That is why they do not seek to run away from change or to shield their people from change but instead to embrace it, to compete and win. That is the great message that must be carried to the Congress over the next 24 hours as the Members prepare for this vote.

This really is a vote about whether we're going to try to hold onto yesterday's economy or embrace tomorrow's economy. It's about the past and the future. You know, if I could wave a magic wand and return every American to absolute job security with no competition at all, I might do that although I'm not sure our country would be better off. At least more and more people think that that is a possibility as you hear this NAFTA vote. And I'm telling you folks, these Governors understand that is not a possibility.

Governors have stood at the doors of plants when they closed. I have stood by plants and shaken hands with workers, hundreds of them, when they walked off the job for the last time. If I thought that this was going to cost the American people jobs, I would not be for this agreement and neither would these Governors. Our work is putting Americans to work.

Now, in the last 10 months, with the deficit down, with inflation down, with interest rates down, this economy has produced more jobs in the private sector than in the previous 4 years. And every American can tell you that's very fine, but it's nowhere near enough. We cannot get more jobs in this economy until we have more customers for our products and our services.

Tomorrow the Congress has simply got to vote for hope over fear, for the future over the past, they've got to vote for confidence in

the ability of the American people to compete and win. These Governors are closer to their workers than any other public officials in the country. They know we can compete and win. So do I. And tomorrow I think the House of Representatives will say the same thing.

Thank you very much.

NAFTA

Q. Mr. President, you have stressed bipartisanship here. But Lane Kirkland says that you have really abdicated the leadership of the Democratic Party with your all-out campaign.

The President. My job is to try to lead the United States and to try to help this country move forward and to do what I think is right to get that done. I do not believe we can grow this economy without expanding our trade. I'm doing the job that the people elected me to do, to try to expand the economy.

Q. Can you explain about the political cover, as it's been described, that you're offering Members of Congress, Republicans and Democrats, in terms of NAFTA not being a legitimate political issue in the 1994 campaign?

The President. I have told all Members of Congress who vote for this that I will do everything I can to defend this vote and to say that a vote for this agreement should not be the basis for defeating any Member of Congress without regard to party. And I believe that.

Q. Mr. President, Ross Perot has accused you of giving away billions of dollars in taxpayers' monies to buy votes in favor of NAFTA. And he says that what you're doing makes the scandal in New Jersey look like peanuts. What do you say about that?

The President. I say that the Vice President, first of all, disposed of most of Mr. Perot's arguments pretty well the other night. The Members of Congress who come to me and ask me for things have asked me to help their people. The people that I've talked to in Congress have been nobly motivated. Most of them have taken great risks and, as you heard, were threatened on national television with their very political life by Mr. Perot the other night to vote for this. When they come to see me, they want to know things like: Is this job training package going to be really adequate? How do I know the members of my district are going to have access to job training programs? What are you going to do to ensure that the environmental standards will be kept? And how quickly will we see in-

vestments in cleaning up the environment along the border?

Those are the kinds of substantive questions that we've been asked to hammer out and work through and give assurances on. I think that is the job of a Member of Congress. I don't feel badly about that at all.

Q. Mr. President—

Q. Mr. President—sorry.

The President. Go ahead. Both of you. [Laughter]

Q. Isn't there a danger, Mr. President, these kind of side deals you've had to make on sugar, citrus, wheat can end up undermining the very thing you tried to do with the trade agreement?

The President. No.

Q. Why not?

The President. Well, the side agreements we made on agriculture were just like the side agreements we made on the environment and on the labor standards. They don't undermine the fundamental things in the agreement. The Mexican tariffs come down. The barriers to trade go down. The Mexicans have access to nationwide investment in their country. We win; they win. The big things in the agreement are still wholly intact, and as a matter of fact, I think it's a much better deal than it was a year ago.

Q. How do you feel about this bipartisan coalition? There was an extraordinary joint whips committee meeting yesterday. When all the votes are being counted in the middle of the rollcall, do you really trust Newt Gingrich with what may be the future of your Presidency?

The President. First of all, I wouldn't even characterize it that way. I believe that Newt Gingrich believes in NAFTA just like I do. And I believe he wants it to pass. And do I trust him to do everything he can to deliver every vote he can? You bet I do.

And let me say that, you know, we can't win for losing around here. I mean, when we were voting on the budget, you were asking me wasn't it terrible we didn't have any Republicans voting with us. I like the idea of people in the two parties working together when they agree. I do not like the idea that any party's, either party's discipline would prevent people who agree with one another from working together toward the national good. I think that's what the American people want us to do. I think they want us to disagree when we disagree, to agree when we agree, but not to let our labels keep us

from working together.

So this has been an immensely rewarding thing for me to work with the Republicans who agree with us on this issue. Mr. Bonior has worked very hard with the Republicans who agree with him on the issue, and I would like to see more of it in America. I think that our country would work better if we could work out agreements and work together in a constructive way, particularly on issues that affect our national security.

When I was a boy, looking at Washington from afar, growing up, the normal thing was for the Republicans and Democrats to work together on foreign policy because everyone understood that was our national security. Well frankly, folks, a lot of these economic issues are our national security today. And I hope we'll see a lot more of this bipartisanship.

Q. Do you have the votes?

The President. We're getting there. I never say that until they're counted, you know, but I feel good today. We're getting there.

Q. Mr. President, a lot of people have characterized this as a test of your Presidency. And the stakes seem to have been ratcheted up, particularly in the last few days, to the point where one Senator was quoted as saying your political future is at stake and, at the very least, the future of any political programs you want to enact. Do you think that is an exaggeration, or are the stakes really that high?

The President. I think the stakes for our country are high. What happens to me is not nearly as important as what happens to the country. Thursday morning I'll wake up, and I'll get on that plane and go to the APEC meeting and do the best I can for America. A month from now people may be concerned about something else. But what I want to emphasize is the importance of this to our country.

I want to make, in closing, since this is my last shot, one argument that none of us have made yet again this morning. And that is that NAFTA is the gateway to all of Latin America, to 700 million people. It is an insurance policy against protectionism in the rest of the world. And it is an enormous lever for us to convince our friends in the Pacific region and our friends in Europe to complete the worldwide trade agreement, the GATT round, by the end of the year so we can continue to expand the global economy.

Yes, sir.

Q. Mr. President, your opponents on this issue, Mr. Gephardt, for instance, say that if NAFTA fails they will immediately offer to renegotiate it with you, to revive it. If NAFTA does not pass tomorrow night, is it dead, or are you going to immediately try to work with them to renegotiate it?

The President. They're missing the point. They can renegotiate with me all they want. They can't renegotiate it with the Mexicans. I think the Government of Mexico has made it quite clear that this trade agreement includes environmental concessions and labor concessions on their part, which I think are good for them, by the way, but never before put into a trade agreement by any nation ever. I think it is clear what they will do is to look to other nations to make other deals. You see, even the Canadians said today that if we voted it down, they'd try to make a separate agreement with Mexico. I feel quite sure that other nations will as well.

Q. Mr. President, what are you learning from this intensive campaign? Are there a lot of disappointments? And do you have any unusual surprises?

The President. There haven't been any disappointments. Actually, what I'm learning from this campaign is that an awful lot of people really love this country and many Members of Congress are literally willing to put their political careers on the line tomorrow night to do what they think is right, even though they're not quite sure their voters agree with them yet. Every Member we get who's in a difficult district, who's voting for this is doing it because he or she believes that it's in the interest of their constituents even if they haven't quite persuaded them yet. And it's been a deeply moving thing for me.

I also would tell you all that we've had a lot of close votes up here, but we're moving the ball forward in this country. It is hard to do hard things. And sometimes hard things win by narrow margins. But America is going through a period of real change and ferment at a time of great difficulty for millions of our citizens. So the fact that this is tough, it should be exhilarating to all of us who are carrying forward. It's just our responsibility to take the tough fight and go forward.

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, on one other topic, are you willing to give up military exercises in South

Korea in exchange for nuclear inspections in North Korea?

The President. I'm not at liberty even to comment on that now. The negotiations are going on, and I don't think I should comment. I'll have more to say about that, I hope, in the next few days.

One last question. Go ahead.

Canadian Agricultural Subsidies

Q. Have you decided to ask Canada to change its grain pricing policies? And are you prepared to seek tariffs or quotas, if they don't, on durum wheat?

The President. First of all, I don't think I should prefigure my conversation with the Prime Minister of Canada. I'm going to have my first meeting with him in just a couple of days, and we're going to discuss some of the issues outstanding between us, including the differences

both of us have with each other's definition of what constitutes fair trade in agriculture. The Prime Minister has made an interesting suggestion, which is that we ought to try to reach agreement on what does or doesn't constitute a subsidy, something which was not done before our agreement with Canada was developed. And that is what led to a lot of this misunderstanding because they have things that our farmers consider to be significant subsidies that are indirect. So we're going to meet and visit about that when we get out to the Pacific. Right now, we've got to pass NAFTA.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. at the North Portico to the West Wing at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Tommy G. Thompson of Wisconsin.

Remarks on the House of Representatives Action on the North American Free Trade Agreement and an Exchange With Reporters *November 17, 1993*

The President. Thank you very much. Just a few minutes ago the House of Representatives voted to approve the North American Free Trade Agreement. NAFTA will expand our exports, create new jobs, and help us reassert America's leadership in the global economy. This agreement is in the deep self-interest of the United States. It will help make working Americans, the world's most productive workers, winners in the world economy.

I want to thank the lawmakers of both parties who gave their support to NAFTA. Many of them, as everyone knows, showed real courage in voting their consciences and what they knew to be in the best interest for their Nation. I want to thank all the citizens who worked so hard for this, the business leaders, especially the small business leaders, the spokespersons for the NAFTA fight, including Lee Iacocca who's here with us tonight.

I want to say a special word of thanks to the members of the Cabinet who labored so hard and long, especially Mickey Kantor, our Trade Ambassador, for his tireless effort on the side agreements and to lobby this through, and

the Secretary of the Treasury, who is a native of south Texas and who understands so clearly why this is in our interests. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Vice President Gore for bringing home the message to the American people in his superb debate performance.

Tonight's vote is a defining moment for our Nation. At a time when many of our people are hurting from the strains of this tough global economy, we chose to compete, not to retreat, to lead a new world economy, to lead as America has done so often in the past. The debate over NAFTA has been contentious. Men and women of good will raised strong arguments for and against this agreement. But every participant in this debate wanted the same things: more jobs, more security, more opportunity for every American. And so do I.

I thank those who worked with us. I thank especially the people who organized the grass-roots effort in our behalf, Bill Daley and former Congressman Bill Frenzel. I also thank the passionate defenders of the working people who oppose NAFTA for exercising their right to speak out. And they were right to speak out