

Elections in the United Kingdom

Q. Mr. President, what's your reaction to the British election?

The President. Well, I think it's obviously a big vote for change. I think it's a validation of the themes that Mr. Blair struck. I think it once again proves that the people do not want political parties and political leadership tied to the rhetoric of the past. If you go back to the section of President Roosevelt's speech to the Commonwealth Club that I quoted—in 1932—yesterday, he said that if you have new times, you have to have new policies. You don't have new values, but you do have new directions. And so I thought it was a case where the people made that decision.

I must also tell you though that this is my first chance to comment on this, and I'm looking forward to serving with Prime Minister Blair. He's a very exciting man, a very able man. I like him very much. But I also think that the people of the United States and the people of Great Britain should know that John Major represented that nation very well in the world. I have obviously no experience and no judgment about what happened domestically, because I wasn't there and I'm not a British citizen, but in all of our dealings over these last 4 years

and several months, I was profoundly impressed by his patriotism, by his willingness to take tough decisions, especially in Bosnia where they were with us all the way. And so the British people can be proud of this stewardship.

And the Conservatives had a good, long run. Nothing lasts forever, and they were in for a very long time. But I hope that Prime Minister Major and I hope the British people will always feel a great deal of pride in what they did in the way they related to the rest of the world in his stewardship because I was very impressed by it. And I also was impressed by the fact that he had the courage to start the peace process in Northern Ireland. And I hope and pray, now that the British election is over, that Prime Minister Blair will take up the torch, that the IRA will declare a cease-fire, and that we can get back on the road to resolving that problem. It is high time, and I can tell you, that's what the people of Northern Ireland want.

Thank you.

Note: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to newly elected Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.

Remarks on Departure for Mexico and an Exchange With Reporters
May 5, 1997

The President. Good afternoon. As you all know, I'm about to leave on a weeklong visit to our closest southern neighbors, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean. It's the first of three trips I'll take in our hemisphere over the next year. I'd like to say a few words about what I hope to accomplish and why the Americas are so important for our own security and prosperity in the 21st century.

Little more than a decade ago, our neighbors were plagued by civil wars and guerrilla insurgencies, coups and dictators, closed economies and hopeless poverty. Now we face a far different moment, a moment of truly remarkable possibility. Every nation in our hemisphere but one has embraced both free elections and open markets. The region's growing economies have become our largest trading partners. Already we

export twice as much to the Americas as to Europe and nearly half again as much as to Asia.

A partnership is emerging between the United States and the Americas based not only on history, geography, and culture but increasingly on shared interests and values and a shared commitment to a common future. More than ever before, we are working with our neighbors on the basis of mutual respect to make a difference on issues that matter most to people in their daily lives: creating good new jobs by opening markets and spurring growth, improving education to prepare our people to succeed in the global economy, making our water clean and the air clean for our children, facing up to problems we cannot defeat alone like drugs, crime, and corruption.

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But while the trend in the Americas is positive, clearly the transition is not complete. If we want citizens to make a lasting commitment to democracy, peace, and open markets, we must support them in gaining confidence that they have made the right choice.

Three years ago, at our historic Summit of the Americas in Miami, the leaders of this hemisphere mapped out a concrete plan to lock in the democratic gains the Americas have made and to see that they work for all of the people. This week we will continue to advance that plan. Together, we can strengthen the institutions of democracy and promote respect for human rights. We can broaden the benefits of open and fair trade. We can shore up the stability of nations that have renounced war. We can combat the drugs and crime and environmental degradation that threaten all our futures. And we can open the doors of education to more, so that they can have the skills they need to make the most of their own lives.

It is fitting that this trip should begin in Mexico. We share one of the broadest and deepest relations of any two nations on Earth. Beyond the 2,000-mile border that joins us, beyond the strong bonds of trade that benefit both our people, we must cooperate as never before to find common solutions to common problems.

Our partnerships with Mexico and with the other nations should be the foundation of our own freedom, stability, and prosperity in the 21st century, an engine for economic growth

and jobs, a sword in the fight against transnational threats that respect no borders, an example to the world that democracy and open markets actually deliver for those who embrace them. If we continue to shape the future of our hemisphere, the Americas will prosper and so will America.

Thank you.

Director of Central Intelligence Nomination

Q. Mr. President, given the frustrations of what Tony Lake went through for his nomination, are you confident that George Tenet will sail through on his nomination—confirmation process?

The President. I believe he will be confirmed. I sure do.

Flood Aid Legislation

Q. Mr. President, while you are gone, the House and Senate are going to take up the legislation regarding the flood aid. Are you still threatening to veto that? Do you still feel a need to, especially with the budget deal?

The President. I have no reason to change the position I adopted.

Q. But people are waiting for that aid.

The President. That's right, and that's why Congress ought to pass it unencumbered.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:21 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

Message on the Observance of Cinco de Mayo, 1997

May 5, 1997

Warm greetings to everyone celebrating Cinco de Mayo.

The life of our nation has been continually renewed and strengthened by the many different people who choose to come here and become our fellow citizens. Each brings a part of his or her own heritage, which over time becomes part of our common heritage. As we seek to become a more united people, we must not forget our roots, for they remind us of who we are and of what we have to share with others.

This year, as we celebrate the 135th anniversary of the Mexican Army's triumph at the Battle of Puebla, we realize anew how much our nation has been enriched by the people and culture of Mexico and how closely our futures are intertwined. The U.S.-Mexican relationship is one of the closest our nation has today, and it is most appropriate that my visit to Mexico should begin on Cinco de Mayo.

On this day devoted to victory, pride, and independence, let us rededicate ourselves to strengthening the bonds of friendship and partnership between Mexico and the United States.