

Ladies and gentlemen, the Vice President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:10 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

Statement on Senate Finance Committee Action on Fast-Track Trading Authority Legislation

October 1, 1997

I am pleased that the Senate Finance Committee, with overwhelming bipartisan support, has reported out legislation that renews the partnership between the President and the Congress in reaching trade agreements, a negotiating authority every President has had since 1974. To keep the American economy strong, we must continue to break down unfair foreign trade barriers to our goods and services. This legislation

will allow us to tear down those barriers and help American businesses and workers compete and win in the global marketplace. I look forward to working with the congressional leadership to build on the bipartisan spirit we saw in the Senate Finance Committee today and to secure passage of this important legislation this year.

Remarks Announcing a Food Safety Initiative and an Exchange With Reporters

October 2, 1997

The President. Thank you, Mr. Vice President, Secretary Shalala, Deputy Secretary Rominger, Cathie Woteki, Dr. Friedman, all the representatives of the groups that have helped us come to this day.

Our Government made a fundamental promise to the American people of a bountiful and safe food supply way back at the beginning of this century. It is a promise that we have had to renew our commitment to periodically over the years and a promise that needed a lot of work when I became President. From the day I took office, I worked very hard to honor that commitment, to make our food supply the world's safest, even safer.

In 1993 the Vice President's National Performance Review recommended an overhaul of our food safety procedures so that we could use the best scientific technology available in inspection methods to make sure that we had put in the best preventive controls to keep our food supply the world's safest.

Since then, we have taken major steps. We first put in place rigorous new safety standards for seafood, meat, and poultry products, throwing out archaic and ineffective methods of in-

spection that had not been updated for nearly a century. We've required slaughterhouses to test for deadly *E. coli* and salmonella bacteria. We've begun developing new safety standards for fruit and vegetable juices. We've strengthened our system of guaranteeing that our drinking water will remain safe and improved public health protections for pesticide uses on food. And we brought a host of Federal agencies together to boost food safety research, education, and surveillance efforts around our Nation. In so doing, we're using the world's best science to help prevent food contamination tragedies before they happen, to make sure our supply of food is as safe as it can be.

Today, our food supply remains the world's safest, but we can't rest on those accomplishments. We have to do more. At the time when Americans are eating more and more food from around the globe, we must spare no effort to ensure the safety of our food supply from whatever source. Today I want to tell you the new steps we're taking to ensure that our fruits and vegetables, including those imported from other countries, meet the highest health and safety standards.

First, I'm asking Congress to give the Food and Drug Administration the power and the obligation to ban the importation of fruits, vegetables, and other foods from countries whose safety precautions do not meet American standards. This new law would be similar to a law that already requires the United States Department of Agriculture to keep meat and poultry from countries with inferior food safety systems out of our stores.

In my next budget, I will provide enough funds to ensure that the FDA can fully implement this new legislation by dramatically expanding its international food inspection force. With these efforts, we can make sure that no fruits and vegetables cross our borders, enter our ports, or reach our dinner tables without meeting the same strict standards as those grown here in America. Our food safety system is the strongest in the world, and that's how it's going to stay.

I'm also directing the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Agriculture to work together in close cooperation with the agricultural community to develop the first-ever specific safety standards for the growing, processing, shipping, and selling of fruits and vegetables. These standards will address potential food safety problems throughout the production and distribution system, and they'll improve the sanitation and safety practices of all those seeking to sell produce in the United States market.

I'm asking Secretaries Shalala and Glickman to report back to me within 90 days with a complete schedule for developing these standards within a year. I'll also ask them to submit a comprehensive plan to improve the monitoring of food safety programs abroad, to help foreign countries upgrade their safety precautions and toughen food inspections at the border.

Being a parent is perhaps the toughest job in the world. Our parents deserve the peace of mind that comes from knowing the food they set before their children is safe. With today's new actions, we can help make their jobs much easier.

And, again, let me thank all of those who were involved in this effort as I sign this order. Thank you very much.

[At this point, the President signed the memorandum on the food safety initiative.]

The President. Thanks.

Line Item Veto

Q. Mr. President, will you be using the line item veto—

The President. Excuse me?

Q. Will you be using the line item veto on any of the appropriations bills that you've just passed—that you've just signed?

The President. Well, let me say, I have received only—I've received one memorandum from my staff on one bill. And that came in late last night, so I haven't read it. But I will consider it—as the bills come in, I will ask for a review of the potential uses by specific bill and make judgments as we go along. I have nothing to report at this time, because I have received only one memorandum, and I haven't read it.

2000 Decennial Census

Q. What about the census, sir? Do you have any concerns concerning the Commerce bill and the particular ways that the money will be used for the census?

The President. Well, my feeling is that we ought to do the census as well as we can. I don't think this is a complicated issue. The National Science Foundation has recommended this statistical sampling method. The man who did President Bush's census says that it's the only way to get the most accurate count. I just want to do whatever the Census Bureau believes, the full-time professionals believe is the most accurate thing to do.

I think that's a heavy constitutional responsibility we have, to conduct a census that is as accurate as possible based on what the professionals say. This ought to be a professional, not a political judgment. And that's the position I will take throughout.

Q. Mr. President, did the Democratic Party send money to the States because of Federal election law restrictions?

Q. Mr. President, there are fresh fruit and vegetable producers that are saying—

The President. Well, wait a minute. I'll take both of them. Go ahead first.

Food Safety

Q. There are fresh fruit and vegetable producers that are saying that you're acting with this action as the world food police and that your actions here today are unwarranted and that's going to complicate the trade environment.

The President. Well, I hope it doesn't complicate the trade environment. But you know, it seems to me that we have no higher responsibility than to protect the health and safety of our citizens, and everyone who has been following all of your reporting over the last 4 or 5 years knows that we have had continuing challenges in food safety. We have millions of people who get sick every year. And we're not trying to unfairly target foreign producers of food into our market. We don't ask them to meet any standards we don't meet. And indeed, if you look at the actions of this administration over the last 4 years, when we started, I think you can make a compelling case that we started working on things that were problems coming out of the American market first. So I just don't think that's right.

I don't want it to complicate the trade environment, but I'm not interested in trade in things that will make the American people sick.

1996 Campaign Financing

Q. Mr. President, did the Democratic National Committee send money to the States in order to get around the Federal spending limits that went along with accepting Federal money for the national campaign, sir?

The President. It's my understanding that everything the Democratic National Committee did had the prior approval of the lawyers. If they cleared it all in advance, then it was per-

fectly legal. And when this issue was raised about a year ago, the exact issue, I believe that that was clarified at that time. I'm sure that they had legal advice that they followed, and I believe the Republicans said that they did some of the same things and also had prior legal clearance.

Q. Mr. Clinton, do you feel that Mrs. Reno—she's been advised to go forward with the 90-day investigation into the fundraising calls of the Vice President—and perhaps Mr. Gore would like to comment, too—

The President. I think that—

Q. —do you feel that the 90-day investigation would be helpful?

The President. Well, if you read the statute, she can consider certain things in the 90-day period that are not permitted in the 30-day period. But I think this is a legal question, and it should be done based on an independent legal review with no pressure from the outside, from me, or from anyone else. And that's the way I intend to keep it, at least on my part.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:59 a.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Catherine Woteki, Acting Under Secretary of Agriculture for Research, Education, and Economics; and Michael A. Friedman, Lead Deputy Commissioner for Operations, Food and Drug Administration.

Memorandum on the Food Safety Initiative

October 2, 1997

Memorandum for the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Secretary of Agriculture

Subject: Initiative to Ensure the Safety of Imported and Domestic Fruits and Vegetables

American consumers today enjoy the safest food supply in the world, and I am proud of my Administration's record in this area. We have taken significant steps to ensure that we maintain the safest food possible. We have put in place improved safety standards for meat, poultry, and seafood products, and we have begun the process of developing enhanced safety standards for fruit and vegetable juices. We have

also expanded research, education, and surveillance activities through coordinated efforts of all agencies involved in food safety issues. Together, these measures will greatly improve the safety of the Nation's food supply.

We need to build on these efforts, and today I ask you to do so by focusing on the safety of fruits and vegetables. Although the produce Americans eat is very safe, we can and must do even better, especially at a time when Americans are eating more fruits and vegetables from all over the world. Last year, 38 percent of the fruit and 12 percent of the vegetables consumed by Americans came from overseas. We