

with a creed of hard work and independence and enterprise. Don has always represented those qualities for me. Now he will represent those qualities for America.

Mr. Secretary.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:32 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary Evans' wife, Susan Marinis Evans. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Secretary Evans.

### Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada and an Exchange With Reporters *February 5, 2001*

*President Bush.* It's my honor to welcome the Prime Minister of our closest friend to the White House. This is the first visitor I have received since I've been the President. We've just had a very good visit. We talked about a lot of subjects, and I confirmed to the Prime Minister that America appreciates our friendship, appreciates our trading partner. We share a long border, and it's been a peaceful border.

I assured him that we will consult and keep him abreast of decisions that we make here that will affect Canada and peace in the world. And I look forward to not only reaffirming our friendship with the country; I look forward to developing a friendship with this good man right here. So it's an honor to welcome you here, sir.

*Prime Minister Chretien.* Thank you very much, Mr. President. For me, it's a great pleasure to be the first foreign leader to come and visit with you. But we feel it's a kind of a cousin coming to visit, because you know, we are two neighbors for so long, 4,000 miles of border, with no problems, big problems. Whenever they were our problems, we can talk, consult, and try to find an acceptable solution.

So I can tell the press that it was a very friendly meeting and a very productive meeting. We covered a lot of areas and look forward for a very good period with President Bush. On behalf of the Canadians, I want to wish you the best luck in your job. You're at the beginning, and

I know that you will be successful. And when you need us, we'll be there, and we hope that when we need you, you will be there.

*President Bush.* Thank you, sir.

*Prime Minister Chretien.* Mr. President, if you will allow me in French, now, we had a very good meeting. This is the first time that I had a state visit—President Bush. We talked about many, many issues. We talked about our bilateral relations. We talked about other leaders and other people, and I think that the beginning of our personal relationship is a very good one.

#### *Canada-U.S. Relations*

*Q.* Mr. President, what issue do you think will be the one that will be the biggest test of the leadership in the next 6 months?

*President Bush.* For me as the President, in regards to Canada?

*Q.* Yes.

*President Bush.* Convincing Congress to promote free trade throughout our hemisphere. A free trading hemisphere is going to benefit Canada and will benefit the United States, and we've got a lot of work to do—for me to do—to get fast-track negotiating authority.

We're going to have a summit in Quebec, and I'm looking forward to being hosted by the Prime Minister, here, and the whole notion is to promote free trade and open markets around the hemisphere.

*Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.*

Q. Mr. President, there is an impression that you might prefer Mexico over Canada. Do you have a preference for either country?

*President Bush.* I've got a preference for friends. And the Canadians are long-standing friends of the United States. Mexico is an important country, as well, and I look forward to a meeting with President Fox in a couple of weeks. My preference is for friendly relations in our hemisphere.

I want the people of my country to understand that a foreign policy priority of my administration will be this hemisphere. And it's so important for the United States not to neglect the hemisphere. My first meeting is with the Prime Minister. Shortly thereafter, I'll be meeting with the President of Mexico. And we have great opportunities in this hemisphere to spread prosperity throughout. And it's going to be to our nations' mutual benefit when that happens.

*2000 Presidential Election*

Q. Mr. President, what did you think of the Prime Minister's comments and those by the former Ambassador here last year that left the impression Canada might have felt it would have been easier to work with Al Gore than with you?

*President Bush.* I didn't pay attention to it, if he said that. I'm going to prove him wrong. But as for our discussions today, I didn't have any impression whatsoever that the Prime Minister came with any preconceived notion except one thing, that I will promote friendly relations with Canada.

*Canada-U.S. Relations*

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, considering your good relations that you had with President Clinton plus what you said in 1993 about relations with President Bush—first President Bush and then Prime Minister Mulroney, how do you expect your relations with President George W. Bush to be?

*Prime Minister Chretien.* Our relations will be very good. President Bush is the President of the United States; I'm the Prime Minister of Canada. We have common interests; we'll have different interests. And as we said before, it's very good to have these relations, and it's very good that Canada be seen as an independent country.

*President Bush.* Hold on. I've got a very important answer to give. The question was fishing. *[Laughter]* We talked about fishing, and I would hope someday to be able to go catch small-mouthed bass on the Prime Minister's—as he called it, the equivalent of Camp David. I could use a few techniques when it comes to fishing for small-mouthed bass. And one day, if all works out well, he can come down and catch large-mouthed bass on my ranch. *[Laughter]*

Q. Golf? Any plans to play golf together?

*President Bush.* If he gives me enough strokes. *[Laughter]*

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:15 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vicente Fox of Mexico. A reporter referred to former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada. After the Prime Minister's opening remarks, he spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.