

One of the reasons why this economy is robust is because taxes are low. And in order to keep making sure that this economy grows, we've got to keep them low. After all, people are working here in America. We've had 49 consecutive months of uninterrupted job growth, which is a record. And we intend to keep breaking

that record by good fiscal policy here in Washington, DC.

I want to thank you all for your briefing. Thanks for coming by.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:04 p.m. in Room 3015 of the New Executive Office Building.

Remarks in Miami, Florida October 12, 2007

The President. Thank you all. Thank you. Thank you for the warm welcome. It's great to be in Miami. I've been looking for my little brother. [*Laughter*] He must have finally found work. I thank—[*laughter*]. Just kidding, Jeb.

I thank the Center for Hemispheric Policy and the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce for sponsoring this event. And I appreciate you all coming. I appreciate the support that you give for enterprise here in south Florida.

I know you know that—as business leaders and foreign policy thinkers, that one of the pivotal issues facing our country is expanding trade and investment. And that's what I want to talk to you about today. And it's a timely message because Congress has some important decisions coming up. I've made up my mind about the importance of trade and investment, and now Congress is going to have to make up its mind about trade and investment, especially when it comes to free trade agreements with Peru, Panama, and Colombia.

These agreements will level the playing fields for businesses, workers, and farmers here in the United States. These agreements will help our friends in neighborhoods, and help them lift them out of poverty. These agreements will counter the false populism promoted by some nations in the hemisphere. These agreements will strengthen the forces of freedom and de-

mocracy throughout the Americas. I urge the congressional leaders to pass these three Latin American agreements as soon as possible.

And I appreciate you giving me a chance to come here and explain why they're important.

I want to thank my friend Senator Mel Martinez for introducing me. I appreciate his willingness to serve in the United States Senate. I know this is a nonpartisan meeting, but let me just tell you, he's doing a fine job.

I want to thank three members from the congressional delegation who are here, the Diaz-Balart boys—Lincoln and Mario—as well as Ileana Ros-Lehtinen. I'm honored you all are here. Thanks for coming.

I appreciate so very much Manny Diaz for joining us today. Mr. Mayor, I'm honored you are here. I thank you for your time. I want to thank the other State—[*applause*—thank the State and local officials who have joined us. I really appreciate former Secretary Donna Shalala, who happens to be the president of the University of Miami, for sponsoring this event. I thank Hank Klein, the chairman of the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce, as well for hosting this. And I thank my friend Chuck Cobb, who's the chairman of the Florida Free Trade Area of the Americas, Inc., which is a group of citizens concerned about free trade.

We meet at an historic time for this country's economy. Last week, we learned that September was America's 49th consecutive month of job creation—that's the longest uninterrupted period of job growth on record. And just yesterday, we learned that the American economy set new records for exports in a single month. More exports support better and high-paying jobs, and that's important for our citizens to understand. People who work for companies which export have a higher paying job than someone who doesn't. And so I believe strongly, to make sure that the historic records we've set in the last couple of days continue, that we've got to expand trade.

In Miami, you know what I'm talking about. You see, you see the value of trade every day. This city is known as the "Gateway to the Americas." Your openness to Latin America has helped make this city a vibrant center of culture and commerce and enterprise. People who know something about Miami understand the importance of trade to this city's future. Last year, \$72 billion in trade passed through the Miami area, and nearly half of it went to our neighbors in the south. That trade helped the greater Miami economy grow at 6.7 percent in 2005; that's more than twice the national average. And the unemployment rate here has dropped to 4.1 percent; that is below the national average.

I think the case for trade is unmistakable in Miami, and we need to make that case all over the country. I've come to a place that has benefited from trade so others around the country can understand it can happen in their areas as well. Expanding trade and investment has been a commitment—longstanding commitment of the United States. I'm not the first President to ever stand up and say, we need to expand trade. As a matter of fact, Presidents from Eisenhower to Kennedy to Reagan and Clinton have worked to seize the opportunities of free and fair trade. Opening up foreign markets for America's goods and services has been a high priority of my

administration. In January 2001, America had free trade agreements in force with just three countries. Now we have agreements in force with 14 countries, including 7 in Latin America.

Unfortunately, if we can just talk about trade around America, I don't know what it's like here in Miami, but when you're discussing trade around America, you hear troubling signs. There is a protectionist sentiment that are—is beginning to gain strength in America and in Congress. Recent trade agreements have passed by slim margins. Deals that were really good for the American economy barely passed the Congress. Advocates of economic isolationism in Congress have claimed the agreements I've just talked about would be "bad for American workers." One Congressman offered this prediction: If the agreements passed, "U.S. college grads will increasingly see a future in flipping hamburgers." That's the kind of rhetoric we're dealing with when it comes to whether or not this Nation ought to be confident and open up markets for goods and services around the world.

The results of the agreements are beginning to come in, and they're proving the critics wrong. In the 4 years since we implemented a free trade agreement with Chile, American exports to that country have more than doubled. In the 4 years since we implemented a free trade agreement with Singapore, American exports to that country have increased by about 50 percent. And in just 1 year since we began implementing a free trade agreement with Central America and the Dominican Republic, American exports to that region have grown by 13 percent.

And meanwhile, the U.S. economy has continued to grow and job expansion has been strong and hourly wages are on the rise and the job market for college graduates is bright. When trade expands, American workers gain because our workers are making products for people around the

world who want to buy products that say “Made in the U.S.A.”

Congress now has an opportunity to build on the success by passing new free trade agreements with Peru, Colombia, and Panama. Today, all three of these countries enjoy duty-free access to U.S. markets for virtually all their products. They’re shipping their goods our way, and most of those products enter America duty free. Yet when we ship our products their way, most of our products face significant tariffs. Our free trade agreements would knock down many of these barriers and level the playing field for our businesses and farmers and workers. Together, these agreements would expand access to 75 million new customers with a combined GDP of \$245 billion. This May, my administration and Democratic leaders in Congress came together to forge a bipartisan consensus to consider these trade deals. And now it is the time to move forward with these progrowth, prodemocracy agreements.

And the stakes are high. As Congress debates, people across the hemisphere are watching to see if America will uphold its commitment to free and fair trade. In a recent letter to congressional Democrats, former Secretary Shalala—and I thank you for your leadership on this issue—and dozens of her Democratic colleagues wrote this: “Latin America is up for grabs. We fully recognize that asking the United States Congress to vote on these trade agreements is politically charged. Nonetheless, rejecting these agreements would set back regional U.S. interests for a generation. We must not walk away now.”

Others who signed the letter include former Senators Bob Graham, Sam Nunn, and Bennett Johnston, as well as many others from the Clinton administration. Those who signed the letter are absolutely correct. Members of both parties in Congress should view these trade agreements for what they are, an historic opportunity to strengthen our economy at home and advance democracy and prosperity throughout

our hemisphere. And Congress should approve these agreements soon, so that people across the Americas can see the benefits.

The first new Latin American trade agreement that my administration completed is with Peru. This agreement has great promise because Peru has one of the fastest growing economies in South America. Last year alone, Peru’s economy expanded by 8 percent. And with greater prosperity in both our countries, trade between the United States and Peru has doubled over the past 3 years.

The free trade agreement with Peru would ignite even greater opportunities for both our nations. It would be especially beneficial to businesses and workers and farmers here at home. The free trade agreement would immediately eliminate most of Peru’s industrial tariffs as well as many of the barriers to U.S. agricultural exports. It would also provide new market access and fair treatment to U.S. companies that provide services and invest in Peru. Here’s what that would mean. If you’re a Miami company exporting electronics to Peru, you would go from paying thousands of dollars in tariffs on the products you shipped to no tariff at all. In other words, your product would become more competitive. It would make it more likely you’d be able to sell into a new market. It would instantly make the products affordable. It would give our businessperson more money to invest here at home. The workers would be more likely able to keep their jobs.

A free trade agreement with Peru would strengthen our partnership with an important democracy in South America. Last year, Peru held two rounds of free and fair elections. And through their representatives, the Peruvian people have made it clear they want to increase their ties to the United States. The Peruvian Legislature passed the free trade agreement by an overwhelming margin. And now the United States Congress should show America’s commitment in return by passing the Peru

agreement quickly and with a strong bipartisan majority.

The second of the new Latin American trade agreements that my administration completed is with Colombia. Colombia is home to 44 million potential customers, more than the population of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and North Carolina put together. After years of hardship, Colombia's economy is strong and growing, with 6.8 percent expansion last year alone. Colombia is now our fifth largest trading partner in Latin America. And Colombia is the largest market for U.S. agricultural exports in South America.

The free trade agreement would open up Colombia's growing economy to our producers. It would immediately eliminate tariffs on more than 80 percent of American industrial and consumer goods exports. It would provide significant new duty-free access for American crops. The effects would be far-reaching. In Colombia, families would enjoy higher standards of living thanks to more affordable American products and more reliable access to our markets. Here at home, about 8,000 U.S. companies that export to Colombia would find new buyers for their goods and services. And for the first time in history, they would be able to compete in Colombia on a level playing field.

The strategic implications of this agreement are as important as the economic benefits. Colombia is one of America's strongest allies in the Western Hemisphere. It has been under assault by a formidable network of terrorists and drug traffickers, which has put its democracy at risk. In recent years, Colombia's democratically elected President has taken courageous steps to stop drug traffickers and rein in paramilitary groups and enforce the law.

The United States has supported President Uribe's efforts through an initiative called Plan Colombia, which was launched by President Bill Clinton and strongly supported by my administration. The results are striking. Since 2000, kidnappings and ter-

rorist attacks and murders have all dropped substantially. Convictions have increased. Colombia has extradited hundreds of drug traffickers and terrorists to the United States. And the Colombian people are taking back their country from the narco-terrorists.

Some in Congress have expressed concern over violence in Colombia, particularly attacks on trade unionists. President Uribe takes these concerns seriously, and he has responded decisively. He's established an independent prosecutors unit to investigate and punish homicides against labor unionists. He's allowed the International Labor Organization to station a permanent representative in Bogota. He's worked to offer young Colombians better alternatives to a life of violence and drugs, including the new jobs and economic opportunities that would come from a trade agreement with the United States.

Colombia's record is not perfect, but the country is clearly headed in the right direction and is asking for our help. Both Houses of the Colombian Legislature have expressed overwhelming support for the trade agreement with the United States. And now they're waiting to see if we will uphold our end of the deal. If Congress were to reject this committed ally, we would damage America's credibility in the region and make other countries less willing to cooperate in the future. As Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada put it, "If the United States turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could hope to achieve." By its bold actions, Colombia has proved itself worthy of America's support, and I urge the United States Congress to pass this vital legislation as soon as possible.

The third of the new Latin American trade agreements that my administration completed is with Panama. Panama has the fastest growing economy in Central America, with a growth rate of more than 8 percent last year. Our nations have strong

ties dating back to the construction of the Panama Canal. Trade has always been a key part of our relationship. Last year alone, our nations exchanged nearly \$3 billion worth of goods.

The free trade agreement with Panama will build on this vibrant trade relationship. It will immediately eliminate tariffs on 88 percent of our industrial and consumer goods exports to Panama. It will open a new market for American farmers and ranchers, including fruit growers here in Florida. It will increase access to Panama's service sector, including its key financial services market. It will open opportunities for American businesses to participate in the Panama Canal expansion project. This is a good agreement, and we will continue to work closely with Congress and the Government of Panama to address the issues necessary to get it approved.

Collectively, these three trade agreements have the potential to boost our economy and strengthen our allies and spread prosperity throughout our region. We want people to be prosperous in our neighborhood. It's in the interests of the United States that prosperity spread throughout the—Latin America and South America. And yet many of our citizens feel uneasy about competition, and they worry that trade will cost jobs. You know, I understand why. I understand that if you're forced to change a job halfway through a career, it can be painful for your family. I know that. And that is why I'm a big believer in trade adjustment assistance that helps Americans make the transition from one job to the next.

In other words, I believe there is a role for the Federal Government, and that is, when a person loses a job because of trade, there's help for that person and family, help to get that person a new education—the community college system, for example, to be able to train that person for jobs which actually exist. Additional college enhances a worker's productivity. And when your productivity is enhanced, so your

wages go up. And so rather than focus on—only on the risks or the negative, I think it's important for this country to focus on the much larger benefits of trade. We'll help those whose—lost a job because of trade. But it's important for our country to understand, trade yields prosperity, and prosperity means people will more likely be able to find work.

In the debate ahead, Members of Congress should keep in mind the American businesses and workers and farmers who will gain, who will benefit from a level playing field for their goods and services. They should keep in mind that American consumers will enjoy more choices and better prices that come with trade. They should keep in mind the millions in our hemisphere who will be lifted out of poverty. And above all, Members of Congress should have confidence in the ability of the United States to compete in the world. And they should show that confidence by approving these trade agreements with bipartisan votes.

In addition to these agreements, my administration will continue working to promote trade in other ways. At the national level, we will work closely with Congress to pass a landmark free trade agreement with South Korea. This agreement alone is projected to add more than \$10 billion to our economy, and like our agreements in Latin America, it would strengthen our relationship with a democratic ally in a critical part of the world. At the regional level, we're seeking broad trade agreements in the Americas and Asia Pacific. And at the global level, we're pushing hard for a successful conclusion to the Doha round of trade talks, which has the potential to lower trade barriers across the world.

All of this will bring us closer to a world that lives in liberty, a world that grows in prosperity, a world that trades in freedom. In our hemisphere, that means an Americas where democratic nations work together to advance peace and justice and security; where the opportunity to succeed is as real

in Lima as it is in Los Angeles, in Bogota as it is in Boston; where the opportunity for people to realize dreams is just as real in Panama City, Panama, as it is in Panama City, Florida. [Laughter]

And the vision I have for our hemisphere includes a free and democratic Cuba. [Applause] Thank you. Sit down. Thank you.

Audience member. Viva Bush! [Laughter]

The President. I'm not through yet. [Laughter]

In Havana, the long rule of a cruel dictator is nearing an end. As Cuba enters a period of transition, nations throughout the hemisphere and the world must insist on free speech, free assembly; they must insist that the prisoners in Cuba be free, and ultimately, we must insist on free and competitive elections. [Applause] *Sientese.* [Laughter]

I appreciate all you're doing to help make the vision of a free and prosperous Americas possible. That's why I've come to thank you. As business leaders who invest in new products and trade with your neighbors, you add to the vitality and dynamism of this region, and that helps our

country. As scholars, people who study how to advance freedom and peace and prosperity, you've helped people understand the benefits of free trade, and I appreciate what you're doing.

I ask you to do one thing more, and that is to make sure your voices are heard to Members of the United States Congress. You don't need to worry about these three; don't waste your time. [Laughter] But there are people who need to hear from you. I would ask you to tell them that the free trade agreements with Peru, Colombia, and Panama are essential to our economy. I would ask you to remind them they are essential to our security, and I'd ask you to tell them that they're important for our moral interests.

Thank you for giving me a chance to come by. I appreciate you. *Que Dios los bendiga.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 2 p.m. at the Radisson Miami Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Gov. Jeb Bush of Florida; and President Fidel Castro Ruz of Cuba.

Statement on Representative Ralph S. Regula's Decision Not To Seek Reelection October 12, 2007

Ralph Regula is a distinguished public servant who has dedicated his life to helping the citizens of Ohio's 16th Congressional District and our Nation. As a sailor, teacher, and legislator, he has worked tirelessly to make America stronger.

While serving for over three decades in Congress, Ralph has returned weekly to his family farm and never lost sight of the issues that matter most to the people of Ohio. He has long had a commitment to creating jobs, strengthening schools, sup-

porting small businesses, and protecting Ohio's natural treasures. As the longest continuously serving U.S. Representative in his State's history, Ralph will retire with the respect of his peers and the appreciation of his constituents.

Laura and I are grateful for his service and appreciate his friendship. We wish Ralph, Mary, and the entire Regula family all the best.