

that. And this summit comes at an opportune time to reaffirm the benefits of the trading arrangements between our three nations.

Canada and the United States have got a very unique and important relationship, and I really appreciate the chance to spend time with you and visit about these—about the issues of concern.

Finally, the Prime Minister is very articulate on the subject of climate change. And I assured him that my speech in the Rose Garden was a sincere speech, a speech that laid out a strategy that I think will be effective. And I look forward to continuing to work with you on that issue.

But thanks, good to see you.

Prime Minister Harper. It's nice to see you again. Thank you for the warm welcome and hospitality.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Harper spoke in French, and no translation was provided.*]

Prime Minister Harper. I'll just say once again, delighted to be here in New Orleans, originally a francophone city, in fact, founded by New France—

President Bush. That's true.

Prime Minister Harper. —my dad's favorite American city, I was telling him. We discussed a lot of things to do with the border, to do with environment, energy, trade, and commercial relations. And as you've mentioned, we've made some considerable progress on some of these things.

That said, what I appreciate most, what I've appreciated in our relationship over the past couple years, has been the fact that whether we agree or disagree, we're always able to talk very frankly, very upfront. The President has never promised me anything he couldn't deliver, and that's always appreciative—appreciated.

We have some important joint work going on, not just in this continent but around the world, including in Afghanistan. I appreciate your words about Bucharest, and I can tell you our armed forces look very much forward to working in partnership with your people in Kandahar.

So I'm sure we'll have a great summit. And see you again at the G-8. And I feel we've got a few more of these to go through before it's over. [*Laughter*]

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:19 p.m. at the Windsor Court Hotel.

Remarks at a United States Chamber of Commerce Reception in New Orleans

April 21, 2008

I want to thank the band for giving me a chance to relive my youth. [*Laughter*] I've had many a fine day here in New Orleans and a pretty good night too. [*Laughter*] And it's great to be back. I want to thank the U.S. Chamber for hosting this reception in honor of the North American Leaders' Summit between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. And for all of you here from Canada and Mexico, wel-

come to New Orleans, one of America's greatest cities.

I chose to host this summit in New Orleans for a variety of reasons, one of which is, for centuries, this city has been a place where commerce and culture from across the globe have come together, one of the really great international cities in the United States. And once again, New Orleans now steps on the international scene, where it should be.

I want to thank Tom for hosting the deal, and I want to thank all the members of the U.S. Chamber for being here tonight. I thank members of the North American Competitiveness Council for being here—looking forward to meeting with you in the morning.

I want to thank the Governor of the great State of Louisiana, Bobby Jindal, and the first lady for being here. My old buddy the mayor—Mayor Nagin is here. Mr. Mayor, it's great to see you. We have spent some quality time together—[laughter]—including on the deck of the USS *Iwo Jima*; yes, nonalcohol beer for me. [Laughter]

I thank all the State and local officials. I particularly want to say thanks to the Senators from Louisiana for joining us today. Mary Landrieu—thanks for coming, Senator. David Vitter—Senator, it's good to have you here. Thanks for coming. Congressman William Jefferson—thanks for being here, Jeff. Appreciate you being here. I thank the—thanks for coming.

One thing is for certain: New Orleans has come a long way since Hurricane Katrina hit. It—and we've tried to do our part at the Federal level. We spent over \$120 billion to help the Gulf Coast recover. The money has helped rebuild a school system, a dilapidated school system, that is now better than before. The money has helped improve the criminal justice system. The money has helped to rebuild highways. The money has helped to strengthen storm surge protection systems so people can feel comfortable living here.

New Orleans faces immense challenges. There's still a lot of work to be done. But there's a lot of hope in this city. I mean, you can see it in the face of the teachers. You can see hope in the jobs that are being created. There's a lot of entrepreneurial spirit in New Orleans. You can see hope in the fact that people are absolutely determined to rebuild this city better than it was before.

And so for all of you who have contributed to New Orleans's resurgence, I want to thank you on behalf of a grateful nation.

This is an important summit. It gives three friends a chance to come together to discuss our commitment to security and prosperity. It's a chance to reconfirm the need for the three of us to work in harmony together for the good of our peoples. It's a chance to talk about how we can best protect our people and extend prosperity. And one of the best ways to do that is through trade.

The people of Louisiana understand the benefits of trade firsthand. While many sectors of the economy were hit hard by Katrina, exports were a source of strength. And they continue to be in the years since. I don't know if a lot of people know this, but exports from Louisiana surpassed \$30 billion in the year 2007; that would be \$30 billion for the first time ever. And a lot of these exports come through New Orleans, which is a source for jobs and hope.

And the fundamental question is, will we continue to be a nation that believes in free and fair trade? Canada and Mexico are our two most important trading partners. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement took effect, an agreement I strongly support, trade between the United States, Mexico, and Canada has more than tripled, and our economies have grown by more than 50 percent.

One of the challenges for the North American Competitiveness Council is to find unnecessary regulations that prohibit the free flow of trade. And so tomorrow the leaders at the Council will come forth with specific recommendations. And I'm looking forward to hearing them, and I'm looking forward to implementing them.

The United States has an opportunity to continue a trading agenda. As a matter of fact, we have an opportunity with three important countries: Colombia, South Korea, and Panama. Interestingly enough, all 3 of these countries are among Louisiana's top 10 foreign markets for exports.

These agreements will be good for New Orleans's workers and businesses. And the mayor recognized that. He wrote a leader to our Speaker—or wrote a letter to our Speaker, who is the leader in the Congress, and here's what he said: "Each of the future free trade agreements would provide unique opportunities for the city of New Orleans to increase international economic development."

Unfortunately, we had a setback in a very important free trade agreement with Colombia. The Speaker made a decision to block the free trade agreement. It's unfortunate decision, and the deal is dead unless she changes her mind. And that's bad for American workers, and it's bad for our security, and it's bad for the people here in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The economic argument for free trade with Colombia is very clear. Almost all Colombian products now enter America duty free, yet many of our products face steep tariffs in Colombia. Now think about that. All I suggest is that we level the playing field, that we be treated just like we treat others. Our products into Colombia face a tax, a tariff, which makes them more expensive. It makes it harder for our small businesses and farmers to be able to sell into Colombia, yet their products come here virtually duty free. And so by approving this deal, it will level the playing field, but more importantly, it will help our entrepreneurs and help our workers.

There's another cost because of congressional inaction, and that is, Colombia is one of our strongest allies in our neighborhood. And it's important to support our friends. And it's important to send a clear message

that we stand for rule of law and democracy, which is precisely what President Uribe believes in. He's fighting these terrorists and these narcotraffickers. He has strengthened the rule of law. He's protecting his labor leaders. He is a strong, solid leader.

Yet if we turn down this deal or if this deal does not go forward, it would send a variety of messages: One, America can't be counted on to stand next to its friends; two, it will embolden the voices of false populism in our neighborhood; and three, it will make it harder for President Uribe to do what is necessary to make sure Colombia is a safe place for people to live. I fully understand that this is a tough political vote for some, but it's about time America sets aside petty politics and focuses on doing what's right for the United States of America.

So thanks for letting me come by, and thanks for hosting this very important meeting. I am confident the Prime Minister of Canada and the President of Mexico will really enjoy their stays in New Orleans. They will find what I have found, that it's a city not only of good food, good cheer, but it's a city of really fine people. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:36 p.m. at Gallier Hall. In his remarks, he referred to Thomas J. Donohue, president and chief executive officer, U.S. Chamber of Commerce; Supriya Jindal, wife of Gov. Piyush "Bobby" Jindal of Louisiana; Mayor C. Ray Nagin of New Orleans, LA; Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada; and President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico.

The President's News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada in New Orleans

April 22, 2008

President Bush. Thank you all. Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome to the great city of New Orleans. Thank you all for coming as well. New Orleans is one of America's really top cities. And they, the people of New Orleans, appreciate the help you gave them right after Hurricane Katrina, and so I want to thank you very much for that. New Orleans has always been a crossroads for our continent. And today, there's no better place for our nations to look forward to a bright future, and that's what we're here to do.

I—one of the things our—you know, people ask, well, does it make sense for Mexico, Canada, and the United States to meet? Absolutely, it makes sense. We're neighbors. A prosperous neighborhood is in our interests; a secure neighborhood is in our interests. And we share common values. So I'm not surprised we've had good meetings. Plus, we like each other. It's easy to work with leaders who are straightforward and honest, tell you what's on their mind, and who care deeply about the people of their countries and who are problem-solvers. And that's how I have found this meeting and the previous meetings we've held.

We talked about trade. Mexico, Canada, and the United States made a bold decision in the early 1990s. Our countries decided to reduce our trade barriers through the North American Free Trade Agreement. That was a visionary move by previous leaders, a move that has benefited all three of our countries a lot. Trade has tripled. Our economies have grown by more than 50 percent.

Now is not the time to renegotiate NAFTA or walk away from NAFTA. Now is the time to make it work better for all

our people. And now is the time to reduce trade barriers worldwide.

And so we spent time talking about the Colombia free trade agreement. Canada is negotiating a Colombia free trade agreement. Mexico has a free trade agreement with Colombia. And a lot of folks are waiting for the United States Congress to bring this issue up and pass it. It makes no sense to me to say that Colombia goods can come into our country duty free, yet our goods can't go into Colombia duty free. And yet that's the case.

An agreement with Colombia would level the playing field, and a failure to pass an agreement would send a terrible signal to our neighborhood. The Speaker of the United States Congress has killed this bill unless she gives us a date certain for a vote. It is a bad decision on her part, and it's bad for our hemisphere to have the United States of America turn its back on a mutual friend like Colombia.

We're working to make sure we reduce regulations and to add—to make sure that our small businesses and farmers and producers are able to move product in a way without a bunch of government regulations in between. And it's not easy work, because obviously we want to maintain high standards and work for good safety precautions. Yet we're making progress.

And we've charged others to continue to work; like, Carlos Gutierrez and my Cabinet will work on issues with his counterparts for more harmonized standards to reduce the cost of producing cars and trucks throughout our entire market. In other words, you've got different regulations in different countries that make it difficult to compete globally and cause our products to be more expensive than they should be.