

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:25 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Matt Gehrman, principal, Dobson High School. He also re-

ferred to H.R. 1, approved February 17, which was assigned Public Law No. 111–5.

The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada in Ottawa, Canada February 19, 2009

President Obama. Hello, good afternoon.

Prime Minister Harper. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

[At this point, Prime Minister Harper spoke in French. He then translated his remarks into English, as follows.]

Once again, it is a great pleasure to welcome President Obama to Canada. We are deeply honored that he has chosen Canada for his first foreign visit since taking office. His election to the Presidency launches a new chapter in the rich history of Canada-U.S. relations. It is a relationship between allies, partners, neighbors, and the closest of friends, a relationship built on our shared values: freedom, democracy, and equality of opportunity, epitomized by the President himself.

Our discussions today focused on three main priorities. First, President Obama and I agree that Canada and the United States must work closely to counter the global economic recession by implementing mutually beneficial stimulus measures and by supporting efforts to strengthen the international financial system.

We concur on the need for immediate, concerted action to restore economic growth and to protect workers and families hit hardest by the recession through lowering taxes, ensuring access to credit, and unleashing spending that sustains and stimulates economic activity.

Second, President Obama and I agreed to a new initiative that will further cross-border cooperation on environmental protection and energy security. We are establishing a U.S.-Canada clean energy dialog which commits senior officials from both countries to collaborate on the development of clean energy science and technologies that will reduce greenhouse gases and combat climate change.

Third, the President and I had a productive discussion about our shared priorities for international peace and security, in particular, our commitment to stability and progress in Afghanistan.

This has been a very constructive visit, revealing to both of us a strong consensus on important bilateral and international issues. President Obama, I look forward to working with you in the months ahead to make progress on these issues and build on the long and deep friendship between our two countries and our two peoples.

President Obama. Thank you so much. Thank you. Well, it is a great pleasure to be here in Ottawa. And Prime Minister Harper and I just completed a productive and wide-ranging discussion on the many issues of common concern to the people of the United States and Canada.

I came to Canada on my first trip as President to underscore the closeness and importance of the relationship between our two nations and to reaffirm the commitment of the United States to work with friends and partners to meet the common challenges of our time. As neighbors, we are so closely linked that sometimes we may have a tendency to take our relationship for granted, but the very success of our friendship throughout history demands that we renew and deepen our cooperation here in the 21st century.

We're joined together by the world's largest trading relationship and countless daily interactions that keep our borders open and secure. We share core democratic values and a commitment to work on behalf of peace, prosperity, and human rights around the world. But we also know that our economy and our security are being tested in new ways, and the Prime

Minister and I focused on several of those challenges today.

As he already mentioned, first we shared a commitment to economic recovery. The people of North America are hurting, and that is why our governments are acting. This week, I signed the most sweeping economic recovery plan in our Nation's history. Today the Prime Minister and I discussed our respective plans to create jobs and lay a foundation for growth. The work that's being done by this government to stimulate the economy on this side of the border is welcomed, and we expect that we can take actions in concert to strengthen the auto industry as well.

We know that the financial crisis is global, and so our response must be global. The United States and Canada are working closely on a bilateral basis and within the G-8 and G-20 to restore confidence in our financial markets. I discussed this with Prime Minister Harper, and we look forward to carrying that collaboration to London this spring.

Second, we are launching, as was mentioned, a new initiative to make progress on one of the most pressing challenges of our time, the development and use of clean energy. How we produce and use energy is fundamental to our economic recovery but also our security and our planet, and we know that we can't afford to tackle these issues in isolation. And that's why we're updating our collaboration on energy to meet the needs of the 21st century.

The clean energy dialog that we've established today will strengthen our joint research and development. It will advance carbon reduction technologies, and it will support the development of an electric grid that can help deliver the clean and renewable energy of the future to homes and businesses, both in Canada and the United States. And through this example and through continued international negotiations, the United States and Canada are committed to confronting the threat posed by climate change.

In addition to climate change, Prime Minister Harper and I discussed the need for strong bilateral cooperation on a range of global challenges, one of the most pressing being Afghanistan. The people of Canada have an enormous burden there that they have borne. As I men-

tioned in an interview prior to this visit, those of us in the United States are extraordinarily grateful for the sacrifices of the families here in Canada of troops that have been deployed and have carried on their missions with extraordinary valor. You've put at risk your most precious resource, your brave men and women in uniform, and so we are very grateful for that.

There is an enduring military mission against Al Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan and along the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, but we also have to enhance our diplomacy and our development efforts. And we discussed this in our private meetings. My administration is undertaking a review of our policy so that we forge a comprehensive strategy in pursuit of clear and achievable goals. And as we move forward, we intend to consult very closely with the Government here in Canada to make certain that all our partners are working in the same direction.

In April, we'll have a broader dialog with our NATO allies on how to strengthen the alliance to meet the evolving security challenges around the world.

And finally, we look forward to the Summit of the Americas. My administration is fully committed to active and sustained engagement to advance the common security and prosperity of our hemisphere. We will work closely with Canada in advancing these goals and look forward to a meaningful dialog in Trinidad.

As I've said, the United States is once again ready to lead. But strong leadership depends on strong alliances, and strong alliances depend on constant renewal. Even the closest of neighbors need to make that effort to listen to one another, to keep open the lines of communication, and to structure our cooperation at home and around the world.

That's the work that we've begun here today. I'm extraordinarily grateful to Prime Minister Harper for his hospitality, his graciousness, and his leadership. And I'm looking forward to this being the start of a continued extraordinary relationship between our two countries.

Military Operations in Afghanistan

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Prime Minister. I have Afghanistan questions for you

both. Mr. President, General McKiernan requested 30,000 extra troops; your new order calls for 17,000. How likely is it that you will make up that difference after the review you've mentioned? And more importantly, how long can we expect all U.S. combat troops to be in Afghanistan?

And, Mr. Prime Minister, based on your discussions today, are you reconsidering the 2011 deadline for troop withdrawal, and are you also thinking about increasing economic aid to Afghanistan?

President Obama. Well, David [David Jackson, USA Today], the precise reason that we're doing a review is because I think that over the last several years, we took our eye off the ball, and there is a consensus of a deteriorating—that there is a deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. I don't want to prejudge that review. I ordered the additional troops because I felt it was necessary to stabilize the situation there in advance of the elections that are coming up. But we have 60 days of work to do. They—that review, which will be wide ranging, will then result in a report that's presented to me. And from—at that point, we will be able to, I think, provide you with some clearer direction in terms of how we intend to approach Afghanistan.

In terms of length, how long we might be there, obviously, that's going to be contingent on the strategy we develop out of this review. And I'm not prejudging that as well.

I should mention, just to preempt, or to anticipate Prime Minister Harper's—the question directed at him, that I certainly did not press the Prime Minister on any additional commitments beyond the ones that have already been made. All I did was to compliment Canada on not only the troops that are there, the 108 that have fallen as a consequence of engagement in Afghanistan, but also the fact that Canada's largest foreign aid recipient is Afghanistan. There has been extraordinary effort there, and we just wanted to make sure that we were saying thank you.

Prime Minister Harper. Just very quickly, as you probably know, it was just last year that we were able to get through Parliament a bipartisan resolution extending our military engage-

ment in Afghanistan for an additional close to 4 years at that point. As we move forward, we anticipate an even greater engagement on economic development. That was part of the strategy that we adopted.

I would just say this—you know, obviously we're operating within a parliamentary resolution. I would just say this in terms of the United States looking at its own future engagement: We are highly appreciative of the fact the United States is going to be a partner with us on the ground in Kandahar. The goal of our military engagement, its principal goal right now beyond day-to-day security, is the training of the Afghan Army so the Afghans themselves can become responsible for their day-to-day security in that country.

I'm strongly of the view, having led—you know, as a government leader, having been responsible now for a military mission in Kandahar Province, that we are not in the long term, through our own efforts, going to establish peace and security in Afghanistan; that that job ultimately can be done only by the Afghans themselves. So I would hope that all strategies that come forward have the idea of an end date, of a transition to Afghan responsibility for security, and to greater Western partnership for economic development.

Environment

[The reporter spoke in French, and the question was translated by an interpreter.]

Q. Good day. In French for you, Mr. Harper. With regard to the environment, going beyond green technology to—how far are your two countries prepared to harmonize your strategy to reduce greenhouse gases, and how will you reconcile your approaches? They seem different when it comes to the tar sands for instance.

[The reporter then continued in English.]

For you, Mr. President, I can repeat in English. On the part of the—of the environment, beyond research, technology, and science, how far are your two countries willing to go to harmonize your strategies in

terms of greenhouse gas reductions? And how can you reconcile your two approaches when they seem so different, especially considering the fact that Canada refuses to have hard caps, in part because of the oil sands?

Prime Minister Harper. Do you want me to answer first?

President Obama. Please.

[*Prime Minister Harper spoke in French. He then translated his remarks into English, as follows.*]

Prime Minister Harper. Briefly, first of all, really premature to talk about anything like that, anything like harmonization with the United States. The United States has not had a national dialog and debate on its own detailed approach. Obviously, that's something the President's administration will be doing.

What we have agreed to today is a dialog on clean energy, and particularly on the development of clean energy technology. Both of our governments are making large investments in things such as carbon capture and storage and other new technologies designed to fight climate change. We share our document on this clean energy dialog talks about things we can do together to improve the electricity grid in North America. There are all kinds of things we can do together, independent of any American regulatory approach, on climate change.

We will be watching what the United States does very—with a lot of interest for the obvious reasons that, as we all know, Canada has had great difficulty developing an effective regulatory regime alone in the context of a integrated continental economy. It's very hard to have a tough regulatory system here when we are competed with—competing with an unregulated economy south of the border.

So we'll be watching what the United States does. We'll be looking ourselves, for our own sake, at opportunities for harmonization to make our policies as effective as they can. And I don't think the differences are near as stark as you would suggest. When I look at the President's platform, the kind of targets his administration has laid out for the reduction of greenhouse gases are very similar to ours. You say we have intensity; they have absolute. But the truth

is these are just two different ways of measuring the same thing. You can convert one to the other, if that's what you want to do.

So I'm quite optimistic. I'll be watching what's done in the United States with great interest. But I'm quite optimistic that we now have a partner on the North American continent that will provide leadership to the world on the climate change issue, and I think that's an important development.

President Obama. Well, this is not just a U.S. or a Canadian issue; this is a worldwide issue that we're going to have to confront. There are good, sound economic reasons for us to address this issue. You know, to the extent that, on both sides of the border, we can make our economies more energy efficient that saves consumers money, that saves businesses money, it has the added advantage of enhancing our energy security. And we are very grateful for the relationship that we have with Canada; Canada being one of—being our largest energy supplier.

But I think increasingly we have to take into account that the issue of climate change and greenhouse gases is something that's going to have an impact on all of us. And as two relatively wealthy countries, it's important for us to show leadership in this area. I think the clean energy dialog is an extraordinary beginning because right now there are no silver bullets to solve all of our energy problems. We're going to have to try a whole range of things, and that's why sharing technology, sharing ideas, sharing research and development is so important.

Here in Canada you have the issue of the oil sands. In the United States, we have issues around coal, for example, which is extraordinarily plentiful and runs a lot of our power plants. And if we can figure out how to capture the carbon, that would make an enormous difference in how we operate. Right now the technologies are at least not cost-effective.

So my expectation is, is that this clean energy dialog will move us in the right direction. We're not going to solve these problems overnight, as Prime Minister Harper indicated. We have to complete our domestic debate and discussion around these issues. My hope is, is that we can show leadership so that by the time the international conference takes place in Copenhagen

that the United States has shown itself committed and ready to do its part.

I think the more that we can coordinate in—with Canada, as well as Mexico, a country that has already shown interest in leadership on this issue—and when I spoke to President Calderon, he indicated this is an area of interest to him—the more that, within this hemisphere, we can show leadership, I think the more likely it is that we can draw in countries like China and India, whose participation is absolutely critical for us to be able to solve this problem over the long term.

And, as Prime Minister Harper suggested, there are going to be a number of different ways to go after this problem. You know, we've suggested a cap and trade system. There are other countries who've discussed the possibilities of a carbon tax. I think there's no country on Earth that is not concerned about balancing dealing with this issue on the environmental side and making sure that, in the midst of a severe recession, that it's not having too much of an adverse impact on economic growth and employment.

So we think that we can benefit by listening and sharing ideas. And my hope is, is that we emerge from this process firmly committed to dealing with an issue that, ultimately, the Prime Minister's children and my children are going to have to live with for many years.

North American Free Trade Agreement

Q. Thank you, to both of you. I've got a question for both of you. Mr. President, on Tuesday you said that now is not the time to reopen NAFTA. But your aides said that you would be trying to convince our friends in Canada and in Mexico of the rightness of your position. So, first, did you convince our friends in Canada? And when is the right time to incorporate labor and environmental standards into the main body of NAFTA?

Second, for Prime Minister Harper. Mr. Prime Minister, is there a way for a "Buy American" provision to be compliant with the U.S. obligations under the World Trade Organization?

President Obama. Well, first of all, Jonathan [Jonathan Weisman, Wall Street Journal], I'm

not sure that was my exact quote. I always get a little nervous about responding to quotes without me actually seeing it. I think what I said was, is that now is a time where we've got to be very careful about any signals of protectionism, because, as the economy of the world contracts, I think there's going to be a strong impulse on the part of constituencies in all countries to see if we—they can engage in "beggar thy neighbor" policies. And as, obviously, one of the largest economies in the world, it's important for us to make sure that we are showing leadership in the belief that trade ultimately is beneficial to all countries.

Having said that, what I also indicated was that with a NAFTA agreement that has labor provisions and environmental provisions as side agreements, it strikes me if those side agreements mean anything then they might as well be incorporated into the main body of the agreement so that they can be effectively enforced. And I think it is important, whether we're talking about our relationships with Canada or our relationships with Mexico, that all countries concerned are thinking about how workers are being treated and all countries concerned are thinking about environmental issues of the sort that Emmanuelle [Emmanuelle Latraverse, Radio-Canada] just raised earlier.

So you know, I raised this issue with Prime Minister Harper. My hope is, is that as our advisers and staffs and economic teams work this through; that there's a way of doing this that is not disruptive to the extraordinarily important trade relationships that exist between the United States and Canada.

Now you didn't ask me about the "Buy American" provisions, but since it relates to our recovery package, let me just reiterate—and I said this very clearly before the bill was passed and before I signed it—that I think it was very important to make sure that any provisions that were there were consonant with our obligations under WTO and NAFTA.

And I think that is what we achieved. I recognize the concerns of Canada, given how significant trade with the United States is to the Canadian economy. I provided Prime Minister Harper an assurance that I want to grow trade

and not contract it. And I don't think that there was anything in the recovery package that is adverse to that goal.

Prime Minister Harper. I'll answer both questions as well. First of all, I just think it's important to reiterate that since NAFTA came into force, and more importantly since Canada signed its free trade agreement with the United States in 1988, trade agreements between our two countries have been nothing but beneficial for these two countries. There has been a massive explosion of trade. It was already the biggest trading relationship in the world; it's so much bigger now. And that trade supports, you know, countless millions of jobs.

And I don't think we should also forget the leadership that was established in that. You know, this was about the end of the cold war, and Canada and the U.S. signed the first modern generation trade agreement that really started the proliferation of these types of agreements, which really gave us the growth of the global economy.

Now, you know, I know some aspects of trade invariably cause political concerns, but nobody should think for a minute that trade between Canada and the United States is anything but a benefit between the two of us. And quite frankly, the trade challenges we face are common trade challenges. The trade challenges we face in North America are common trade challenges; they're not problems between our countries.

So I just think it's always important to keep this in mind. The President and I did have a good discussion of his concerns. You know, our position is that we're perfectly willing to look at ways we can address some of these concerns, which I understand, without, you know, opening the whole NAFTA and unraveling what is a very complex agreement. But we had a good discussion on that, and I think—I'm hopeful we'll be able to make some progress.

On the "Buy American" provisions—and let's also be very clear, as well, that in both WTO and NAFTA there are industries and there are ways in which—and there are levels of government at which one can have domestic preferences and purchasing policies. These things are allowed, in some cases, but they are certainly

not allowed without limit. We expect the United States to adhere to its international obligations. I have every expectation, based on what the President has told me and what he's said publicly many times in the past that the United States will do just that.

But I can't emphasize how important it is that we do that. We have agreed in Canada and, you know, all the major countries of the world through the G-20, we agreed to pursue economic stimulus measures—not just to stimulate our own economies but to recognize that we have a synchronized global recession that requires policies that will not just benefit ourselves but benefit our trading partners at the same time. If we pursue stimulus packages, the goal of which is only to benefit ourselves or to benefit ourselves, worse, at the expense of others, we will deepen the world recession, not solve it.

So I think it's critical that the United States has been a leader for a long time in the goals of an open global economy. I think it's critical that that leadership continue. And I'm quite confident that the United States will respect those obligations and continue to be a leader on the need for globalized trade.

If I could just comment on our stimulus package, one of the things we did in our stimulus package was actually remove duties on some imported goods. Now, part of the reason we did that, it's in our own economic interest, but also, as well, it will help stimulate continental and global trade. And this is important for our recovery. We know as a small economy we can't recover without recovery in the United States and recovery around the world. But that's true for all of us these days.

Canada-U.S. Relations/Border Security/U.S. Auto Industry/Economic Stabilization

Q. I have a question for both of you. Mr. President, during your meetings today, did you discuss the possibility of Canada stepping up its stimulus plans? And secondly, for both of you, what do you think the Canada-U.S. relationship will look like in 4 years? What will the auto sector look like? Will the border be thicker or thinner? And will you have a carbon market?

President Obama. See, you stuffed about six questions in there. [*Laughter*] Were you talking to Jonathan? Is that—[*laughter*].

Q. I have more.

President Obama. Yes, I'll bet. Well, first of all, I'll answer your last question first. I expect that, 4 years from now, the U.S.-Canadian relationship will be even stronger than it is today. I expect that you will see increased trade. I think we will see continued integration of efforts on the—on energy in various industries, and I think that's to be welcomed.

I'm a little biased here because I've got a brother-in-law who's Canadian, and I have two of my key staff people who hail from Canada. And I love this country and think that we could not have a better friend and ally. And so I'm going to do everything that I can to make sure that our relationship is strengthened.

You mentioned a couple of specific issues, the idea of thickening of borders. One of the things that I would like to see is—and we—Prime Minister Harper and I discussed this—how we can use some of our stimulus and infrastructure spending that is already being planned around potentially easing some of these bottlenecks in our border. Now, we've got very real security concerns, as does Canada. But I think that it is possible for us to balance our security concerns with an open border that continues to encourage this extraordinary trade relationship in which we have \$1.5 billion worth of trade going back and forth every single day.

With respect to the auto industry, obviously, we are concerned—we're deeply concerned about the current state of the North American auto industry. It is an integrated industry. When we provided our initial Federal help to the auto industry, Prime Minister Harper stepped up and provided assistance that was commensurate with the stake that Canada has in the auto industry.

We have just received the report back from GM and Chrysler in terms of how they intend to move forward. My economic team is in the process of evaluating it. One thing we know for certain is that there's going to have to be a significant restructuring of that industry. And as that restructuring takes place, one in which

all parties involved—shareholders, creditors, workers, management, suppliers, dealers, as all of those parties come together to figure out what is a sustainable and vibrant auto—North American auto industry, it's going to be very important for our Government to coordinate closely with the Canadian Government in whatever approach that we decide to take. And we are committed to doing that.

And finally, with respect to stimulus, I think that, as Prime Minister Harper mentioned, Canada has put in place its own stimulus package. We obviously are very proud of the recovery act that I recently signed, not only because it provides a short-term boost to the economy and provides relief to families that really need help, but I think it also will lay the groundwork for long-term growth and prosperity.

We were talking earlier about the issue of the electric grid. The potential that exists for creating ways of delivering energy from wind and solar across vast plains to get to urban areas and populated areas is enormously promising. That's why we are investing billions of dollars to help jump-start that process.

And so we think we've taken the right approach to not only get the economy moving again and to fill domestic demand as well as global demand, but also I think Prime Minister Harper is taking the same approach. And to the extent that as we go to the G-20 summit, that we are saying the most significant economies in the world all taking these steps in concert, then more—the more likely we are that we're going to be able to slow the recessionary trends, reverse them, and start growing the economy again, which ultimately is the bottom line for both the Prime Minister and myself—making sure that Americans, Canadians have good jobs that pay good wages, allow them to support a family and send their kids to college, and let their children aspire to new heights.

So I think we're going to continue to coordinate as closely as possible to make sure that we are helping families on both sides of the border.

Prime Minister Harper. You did ask several questions. I'll try and touch on a few of them. On stimulus, first of all, it's important to

understand that Canada's economic stimulus package is very large. It's certainly larger than the kind of numbers the IMF was talking about in the fall with the provincial action that we will bring in to our stimulus spending—will be close to 2 percent of GDP for this year, a percent and a half for next year. This is not as large as the stimulus package in the United States. But the issues in the United States are different, and in fairness, they are bigger than in Canada.

Let me just give you a concrete example of the difference; I could talk about housing, or the banking sector. But the American stimulus package contains a significant money—a significant pot of money being transferred to lower levels of government to deal with health care. Well, in Canada, as you know, we already have permanent health care transfer arrangements with our Provinces before this economic crisis, so not all of these things are directly transferable to the Canadian experience. But by any measure, ours is a very large stimulus program.

As the President mentioned, we talked about today how we can use our investments in infrastructure to focus specifically on border infrastructure that we share. We know well at Detroit/Windsor and elsewhere in Canada that the growth of our trade is straining our border infrastructure that's independent even of security demands. So there may be things we can do there jointly in the name of economic stimulus that are beneficial for the long term.

The statement lays out today a whole bunch of initiatives we're undertaking, and I think President Obama mentioned them. Beyond border infrastructure, we have joint action going on on the auto sector. We were working closely with the out-coming administration. We will be continuing to work with President Obama's administration on what is an integrated industry needs an integrated solution.

We are engaged in Afghanistan. We talked about that at length. We are launching a clean energy dialog on one of the most important challenges of the next decade, and that is climate change. So you know, I see a range of initiatives that will carry us forward for many years.

I do want to address two specific things, though, you raised—one is border thickening,

and one is kind of 4 years from now. On the thickening of the border, I just want to make this clear—and I want to make this clear to our American friends—not only have we since 9/11 made significant investments in security and security along our border, the view of this Government is unequivocal: Threats to the United States are threats to Canada.

There is no such thing as a threat to the national security of the United States which does not represent a direct threat to this country. We as Canadians have every incentive to be as co-operative and alarmed about the threats that exist to the North American continent in the modern age as do the Government and people of the United States. That's the approach with which we treat the border. Obviously, we've been concerned about the thickening of the border.

You know, in our judgment—and we'll have some time to talk about this as—as we move along in our respective Governments. We're looking at—the key is to look at how we can deal with security in a way that does not inhibit commerce and social interaction. That is the real challenge. But let there be no—and that's where thickening of the border concerns us—but let there be no illusion about the fact that we take these security concerns as seriously as our American friends.

In terms of big picture, you know, I think this would be the safest prediction in the world: That today Canada and the United States are closer economically, socially, culturally, in terms of our international partnerships than any two nations on the face of the Earth—closer friends than any two nations on the face of the Earth. And I think we can safely predict that in 4 years time, we will be in exactly the same spot.

What we can do with that in the meantime—and what I'm sure President Obama will want to do with that—is to take that close relationship that is so deeply integrated when it comes to things like trade and military and defense considerations, things where we have not only established a close friendship, but where we have established models that others who want to pursue close friendships have used around the world—that we can take those things and we can continue to lead in the

future. We can continue to show how two countries can work together in ways that pursue global cooperation and integration to mutual benefit.

And as we all know, one of President Obama's big missions is to continue world leadership by the United States of America, but in a way that is more collaborative. And I'm convinced that by working with our country, he will have no greater opportunity than to demonstrate exactly how that model can operate over the next 4 years.

President Obama. And let me just say that, to echo what the Prime Minister said, we have no doubt about Canada's commitment to security in the United States as well as Canada. Obviously, we've got long-lasting relationships around NORAD, for example, and the same is true with respect to border security. There's been extraordinary cooperation, and we expect that that will continue.

And Prime Minister Harper is right. It's a safe bet that the United States and Canada will continue to enjoy an extraordinary friendship,

and together I think we've got an opportunity to show the world that the values that we care about—of democracy, of human rights, of economic growth and prosperity—that these are values that the world can embrace, and that we can show leadership. And I'm very much looking forward to working with this Government and all Canadians in order to promote these values.

I want to also, by the way, thank some of the Canadians who came over the border to campaign for me during the election. [*Laughter*] It was much appreciated. And I'm looking forward to coming back to Canada as soon as it warms up. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2:46 p.m. at Parliament Hill. In his remarks, the President referred to President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico; and his brother-in-law Konrad Ng. A reporter referred to Gen. David D. McKiernan, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan.

Remarks to the United States Conference of Mayors *February 20, 2009*

Thank you everybody. Thank you. Please have a seat. Thank you so much. Whenever I have the opportunity to meet with mayors, I think about how I got my start doing what you do each day: working with folks at the local level and doing our best to make a real impact on the lives of ordinary Americans. And that's just another reason why I'm so happy to welcome all of you here today.

I want to offer—take a little personal prerogative here and welcome my own hometown mayor, my friend Rich Daley. His steady leadership has proven again and again that the American city can be a place of boundless opportunity and a source of solutions to our public problems; he has made a deep and lasting difference in the quality of life for millions of Chicagoans. I'm surprised he's still talking to me because I stole Arne Duncan from him—[*laughter*]*—*but I am confident that he will continue to make great strides.

I see friends from all over the place; some old friends—well, not old in years, but people who I've known a long time. My other hometown mayor, Mufi, it's great to see you all the way from Honolulu. I've got Mayor Riley and others who are in attendance; Shirley Franklin, doing great work; and Mayor Villaraigosa and Mayor Dellums from—we've got the California contingent. So I'm grateful to all of you.

And I think all of you understand that we meet at such an urgent time. Last night, I signed an Executive order establishing the White House Office of Urban Affairs. And I've chosen Adolfo Carrion to be its first director. Adolfo wrote a real success story in the Bronx as borough president, and now he's going to be working with all of you to write our next success stories in cities across the country.

He's going to be responsible for coordinating all Federal urban programs, and I've asked him to set up an advisory council with mayors and other urban leaders so that we can