

progress in terms of the contents, in terms of the way to build a common market to benefit and integrate all countries.

President Bush. Let me say something about that. First of all, I don't want to dispute, of course, the supposition of your question. But I was asked—I think you asked me at a press conference, would I be pleased to see the date moved up, and the answer is, of course; the sooner we get a free trade agreement for the Americas in place, the better off the continent will be.

However, I recognize reality, and it looks like we're going to be aiming for the date 2005. But big progress has been made. And Ambassador Zoellick went down and met with other leaders in our hemisphere, and we've got the framework for an agreement. And not only that, after the Summit of the Americas, we'll be putting out the agreement, itself, or the framework of the agreement for people to review, so that citizens from all countries—this is the first time this has ever happened—where the citizens will be able to review the contents of the trade agreement.

But I appreciate so very much the President's commitment to free trade. He understands the power of trade, and he understands the promise of free trade. And I believe you're going to hear a strong statement at Quebec City that nations of our hemisphere are bound together by the concept of a free trade agreement. And it will be good for our people.

Thank you all for coming.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:02 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Economy Domingo Cavallo of Argentina. President de la Rúa spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Statement on Flooding in the Upper Mississippi River Basin

April 19, 2001

I know that all Americans share my concern for the displaced families and residents of Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, and Illinois. Yesterday the Mississippi River engulfed

homes and businesses. Even more flooding is predicted in the upcoming days.

Those who live and work along the upper Mississippi are not strangers to the threat of spring floods. Since the 1993 floods, many communities and residents have taken measures to protect themselves and their property. They are to be commended for this preventative work.

At my direction, FEMA Director Joe Allbaugh and his staff are working closely with State and local officials throughout the impacted and threatens areas to closely track the flooding and any further damage. As I travel to Canada for the Summit of the Americas, I will continue to monitor the situation.

Remarks on Departure for Quebec, Canada

April 20, 2001

Summit of the Americas

Good morning. In a few moments Laura and I will depart for Quebec City in Canada to attend the Summit of the Americas. This meeting will bring together leaders from all 34 democratic nations in our hemisphere.

Together we will put forward an agenda to strengthen our democracies, to tackle common challenges, and we will seek to expand our prosperity by expanding our trade. This is an important meeting for the United States. The future of our Nation is closely tied to the future of our hemisphere.

Many Americans trace their heritage to other parts of the Americas, which enriches our culture. Many American businesses are finding growth and trade in the Americas, which expands our economy. And all Americans have an interest in the peace and stability of our closest neighbors.

Our goal in Quebec is to build a hemisphere of liberty. We must approach this goal in a spirit of civility, mutual respect, and appreciation for our shared values. And we must make real progress.

Progress in this hemisphere requires an explicit commitment to human freedom. Only democratic nations can attend the Summit of the Americas. And every nation in our hemisphere, except one, will be there. This is an extraordinary achievement, one that