

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

The President's News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico in Mexico City, Mexico

April 16, 2009

President Calderon. Ladies and gentlemen of the press, of the media, I would like to give the warmest welcome to Mexico, to President Barack Obama, and to the delegation accompanying him. This is an historic event that will inaugurate a new era, a new relationship between our two countries.

Today in the meetings that we have held, we have confirmed the determination of both Governments to consolidate the very, very close contacts and links that join and bring together Mexico and the United States. We have new projects in important affairs, such as security, migration, competitiveness, and global affairs. As never before, we have decided that the fight against multinational organized crime must be based on cooperation, shared responsibility, and in trust, a mutual trust.

Both Governments recognize that the Merida Initiative is a very good starting point in order to strengthen cooperation in security. But we want to go beyond; we want to go further in order to liberate, to free our societies from the criminal activities that affect the lives of millions of people.

We have also agreed to expedite the times so that we can have available the resources for this Merida Initiative. And we have also decided to launch other activities that are in the hands of our Governments. For example, we can adopt new measures for preventing illicit flows at the border, particularly the flow of weapons and of cash. We will also be strengthening our cooperation in information and intelligence in order to more efficiently fight against money laundering.

On the other hand, we have also agreed that both Governments should produce a—propositions—proposals for our cooperation so that we can eventually have reform in the United States with full respect to the sovereign decisions of both Congresses—of both nations, that is. Our Governments will work in this sense to make migration an orderly, respectful process of human rights, a process in which human rights will be respected.

In energy and climate change, we have agreed to work together in order to guarantee a legal framework of certainty, transparency for the future, better use of cross-border resources such as gas and energy. And I have given to President Obama concrete proposals on climate change. One of them has to do with the integration of a bilateral market of carbon emissions, which coincides a lot with proposals that he has made to the U.S. audience, and other cooperation—ways of cooperation in climate change, such as something that Mexico has proposed called the Green Fund.

We have also said that in addition to discussing our goals for carbon emissions that are linked in the fight against climate change globally, we must also act very soon in the design of new instruments, of new tools in order to fight against climate change. That is really the central proposal of the Green Fund.

And in a gesture of recognition, of acknowledgment on this topic, we know that President Obama and his Government have made considerable efforts to provide new arguments to the discussion of this topic. We would also like to thank—to welcome the possibility that Mexico

might be the seat of the 16th U.N. conference on climate change that will be taking place in 2010.

We have recognized and acknowledged, ladies and gentlemen, that Mexico and the United States do not have to compete among themselves, but rather they must be able to take advantage of the complementary nature of their economies in order to compete as partners with regard to other parts of the world. We have the chance to make our region more competitive and to have greater, more agile production.

And we will be working in three areas. First, in the strengthening of the border infrastructure, I have also given to President Obama a proposal to facilitate the economic flows between both countries to improve the quality of life of the residents in the border areas and to foster the development of our two nations through very specific projects with—on infrastructure at the Mexican-U.S. border. Secondly, we believe it is essential to increase our cooperation and customs so that we can have a more efficient trade. And thirdly, we have also proposed to improve our cooperation in regulatory matters regarding tariffs or nontariffs issues that very often make difficult our trade between two countries.

We have agreed with President Obama that we seek agreements to truly improve the economic situation not only of the United States, but of the entire region and the world. We have stated our cooperation to strengthen the democracy of the market and of regional security.

In relation to President Obama's recent security to lift the restrictions for people from the U.S. to travel to Cuba and to be able to send remittances, Mexico acknowledges that this is a very constructive, positive step for the hemispheric relations, particularly for the region.

And finally, my friends, ladies and gentlemen, I want to tell you that I am absolutely convinced that President Obama's visit is just an initial step, the beginning of a relationship between two countries that are friends, neighbors, and must also be partners and allies.

Thank you so much. Thank you so much, President Obama, for your visit.

President Obama. I want to begin by thanking the people of Mexico for their gracious welcome. And I want to thank President Calderon for the hospitality he has shown us as host.

You know, this is my first trip to Mexico as President, and I see this visit, as I know President Calderon does, as an opportunity to launch a new era of cooperation and partnership between our two countries, an era built on an even firmer foundation of mutual responsibility and mutual respect and mutual interest. We had a productive and wide-ranging conversation, and I think we have taken some very important steps down that path.

It's difficult to overstate the depth of the ties between our two nations or the extraordinary importance of our relationship. It's obviously a simple fact of geography that we share a border, and we've always been bound together because of that geography. But it's not just that shared border that links us together. It's not only geography, but it's also culture, it's also the migration patterns that have taken place that have become so important.

Our deep economic ties mean that whenever—whatever steps that we're going to take moving forward have to be taken together. And that's why we worked hard, hand in hand, at the G-20 summit. And that's what we will continue to do at the Summit of the Americas and beyond so that we can jumpstart job creation, promote free and fair trade, and develop a coordinated response to this economic crisis.

We also discussed our shared interest in meeting an immigration challenge that has serious implications for both the United States and for Mexico. My country has been greatly enriched by migration from Mexico. Mexican Americans form a critical and enduring link between our nations. And I am committed to fixing our broken immigration system in a way that upholds our traditions as a nation of laws, but also as a nation of immigrants. And I'm committed to working with President Calderon to promote the kind of bottom-up economic growth here in Mexico that will allow people to live out their dreams here and, as a consequence, will relieve some of the pressures that we've seen along the borders.

We also discussed what our nations can do to help bring a clean-energy future to both countries. This is a priority for the United States. I know it's a priority for President Calderon. And I want to commend him for the work that he's already made in cutting greenhouse gas emissions, the commitment that he's made even though Mexico is not required to do so under the Kyoto Protocol. And together, we're establishing a new bilateral framework on clean energy and climate change that will focus on creating green jobs, promoting renewable energy, and enhancing energy efficiency. I look forward to strengthening our partnership in the upcoming Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate and in next year's U.N. climate negotiations, which I hope will be held here in Mexico.

Now, as essential as it is that we work together to overcome each of these common challenges, there's one particular area that requires our urgent and coordinated action, and that is the battle that's taking place with respect to the drug cartels that are fueling kidnappings and sowing chaos in our communities and robbing so many of a future, both here in Mexico and in the United States.

I have said this before; I will repeat it: I have the greatest admiration and courage for President Calderon and his entire cabinet, his rank-and-file police officers and soldiers as they take on these cartels. I commend Mexico for the successes that have already been achieved. But I will not pretend that this is Mexico's responsibility alone. A demand for these drugs in the United States is what is helping to keep these cartels in business. This war is being waged with guns purchased not here, but in the United States. More than 90 percent of the guns recovered in Mexico come from the United States, many from gun shops that line our shared border.

So we have responsibilities as well. We have to do our part. We have to crack down on drug use in our cities and towns. We have to stem the southbound flow of guns and cash. And we are absolutely committed to working in a partnership with Mexico to make sure that we are dealing with this scourge on both sides of the border.

And that's why we're ramping up the number of law enforcement personnel on our border. That's why, for the first time, we are inspecting trains leaving our country, not just those entering it. That's why our Department of Homeland Security is making up to \$59 million available to defend our common border from this threat to both of our countries.

Now, as we discussed in our meeting, destroying and disrupting the cartels will require more than aggressive efforts from each of our nations. And that's why the United States is taking the following steps: We've begun to accelerate efforts to implement the Merida Initiative so we can provide Mexico with the military aircraft and inspection equipment they need when they need it.

Yesterday I designated three cartels as significant foreign narcotics drug traffickers under U.S. law, clearing the way for our Treasury Department, working together with Mexico, to

freeze their assets and subject them to sanctions. My National Homeland Security Adviser, who is here, General Jim Jones, as well as my Homeland Security Secretary, Janet Napolitano, and my top adviser on homeland security and counterterrorism, John Brennan, are all meeting with their Mexican counterparts to develop new ways to cooperate and coordinate their efforts more effectively. In addition, as President Calderon and I discussed, I am urging the Senate in the United States to ratify an inter-American treaty known as CIFTA to curb small-arms trafficking that is a source of so many of the weapons used in this drug war.

Now, there are some of the common challenges that President Calderon and I discussed in our meeting and that we're going to be working on to overcome in the months and years ahead. It will not be easy, but I am confident that if we continue to act as we have today, in a spirit of mutual responsibility and friendship, we will prevail on behalf of our common security and our common prosperity. So I think that this is building on previous meetings that we've had. In each interaction, the bond between our Governments is growing stronger. I am confident that we're going to make tremendous progress in the future. Thank you.

Assault Weapons Ban/Border Security

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Mr. President, as well. President Obama, as a candidate for your office, you said that you wanted to see the assault ban weapon—the ban on assault weapons reinstated. Your Attorney General has spoken in favor of this. Mexican officials have also spoken in favor of it. But we haven't heard you say that since you took office. Do you plan to keep your promise? And if not, how do you explain that to the American people?

President Obama. Oh—

Q. And, President Calderon—I'm sorry—if I may, would you like to see this ban reinstated? And have you raised that today with President Obama? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, first of all, we did discuss this extensively in our meetings. I have not backed off at all from my belief that the gun—the assault weapons ban made sense. And I continue to believe that we can respect and honor the second amendment rights in our Constitution, the rights of sportsmen and hunters and homeowners who want to keep their families safe to lawfully bear arms, while dealing with assault weapons that, as we now know, here in Mexico, are helping to fuel extraordinary violence—violence in our own country as well.

Now, having said that, I think none of us are under any illusion that reinstating that ban would be easy. And so what we've focused on is how we can improve our enforcement of existing laws, because even under current law, trafficking illegal firearms, sending them across a border, is illegal. That's something that we can stop.

And so our focus is to work with Secretary Napolitano, Attorney General Holder, our entire Homeland Security team, ATF, border security, everybody who is involved in this, to coordinate with our counterparts in Mexico to significantly ramp up our enforcement of existing laws. And in fact, I've asked Eric Holder to do a complete review of how our enforcement operations are currently working and make sure that we're cutting down on the loopholes that are resulting in some of these drug trafficking problems.

Last point I would make is that there are going to be some opportunities where I think we can build some strong consensus. I'll give you one example, and that is the issue of gun tracing. The tracing of bullets and ballistics and gun information that have been used in major crimes, that's information that we are still not giving to law enforcement as a consequence of provisions

that have been blocked in the United States Congress, and those are the areas where I think that we can make some significant progress early. That doesn't mean that we're steering away from the issue of the assault guns ban, but it does mean that we want to act with urgency, promptly, now. And I think we can make significant progress.

President Calderon. Thank you for your question. I want to say that, in effect, on this topic—not only on this topic, but on many of the other thorny topics of relations between U.S. and Mexico, we have had an open, frank, trusting conversation between President Obama and myself. We have spoken of assault weapons. He is well aware of our problems, and we have described it as it is.

From the moment that the prohibition of—on the sale of assault weapons a few years ago, we have seen an increase in the power of organized crime in Mexico. Only in my administration, in the 2 years and 4 months, we have been able to see—or rather we have seized more than 16,000 assault weapons. And in the efforts we have made to track their origin—and President Obama has referred to that—we have seen that nearly 90 percent of those arms comes from the United States—those weapons come from the United States. There are about 10,000 sales points in the U.S.-Mexico border—only at the border.

On the other hand, I do believe that our relationship—the new era we must build in our relationship between Mexico and the United States must be one with trust and respect. And we definitely respect the decision of the U.S. Congress and of the U.S. people in this regard, because they are very well aware of President Obama and his Government's willingness to move forward on these issues.

We know that it is a politically delicate topic because Americans truly appreciate their constitutional rights, and particularly those that are part of the second amendment. I personally believe that as long as we are able to explain clearly what our problems in Mexico are, then we might also be able to seek a solution that—respecting the constitutional rights of the Americans, at the same time, will prevent—or rather avoid that organized crime becomes better armed in our country. But we have to work on it. We have to work on it. But we fully respect the opinion of the U.S. Congress, and we know that there's a great deal of sensitivity regarding this topic.

But there are many, many things that we can definitely move forward in. For example, in armament, it is not only a matter of seeing whether we can change the legislation on assault weapons—we have already said what our position is—but we might also be able to see whether they can apply existing legislation in Mexico and the United States on armament. For example, in Mexico it's a matter of enforcement with the Export Control Act. For example, the Export Control Act—this is in the United States; I'm sorry—prohibits the export of weapons to those countries where those weapons are prohibited. And that is the case of Mexico. If we actually comply with the U.S. law—or rather if everybody complies with the U.S. law that prohibits the sale of these weapons and their export to Mexico, we can move a great deal forward.

President Obama has made recent decisions in the last few weeks, and we value them and appreciate them, for example, to reinforce the operational capability of U.S. border agencies in order to comply with this legislation and with other laws, in order to review the flows of entry not only into the United States, but also the outgoing flows, outgoing from the U.S., to make sure that there is no illicit money, in strict compliance with United States legislation. I think these are very important steps.

But there is a problem, and only as long as we build on this trust and we clearly explain to citizens of both countries how we must find a solution, we will be able to achieve one. We do so respectfully, presenting our position, knowing full well how the U.S. people feel about this and being fully respectful of the sovereign decisions that the United States might make or that any other country might make.

One more thing I forgot to mention: One other thing we can do is to track the weapons that we have in Mexico. If we manage to detect weapons sold illegally in the United States in violation of this law on the control of weapons exports, or if, in the United States, they can have—probably move forward on a good registry of armament or on the prohibition of certain massive sales of weapons, for example, to a hunter or to a common citizen—we know that these people do not usually buy hundreds of rifles or assault weapons or of grenades—if we can move forward in those areas, I do believe that security both of Mexico—both of the United States and Mexico will improve, because those weapons are pointing against Mexican people and Mexican officials today.

But crime is not only acting in Mexico; it is also acting in the United States. Organized crime is acting in both countries. And I do hope that those weapons that are sold today in the United States and are being used in Mexico, I hope the day will never come in which they will also be used against the North American society or against U.S. officials, just like they are now being used in Mexico.

Mexico-U.S. Relations and Drug Control Cooperation

Q. Good afternoon, Presidents. You are going to share 4 years of an administration, and there can be an in-depth change in this fight against organized crime in these 4 years. As of today, how can we establish the concrete objectives that in 2012 will allow us to say, fine, a new era began between Mexico and the United States back then?

Particularly I'm addressing this to you, President Obama. In addition to the chance that you will invest your political capital in being able to stop the flow of these weapons to Mexico, what can we hope for? How—what can we expect to see in terms of arresting the drug lords, the kingpins in the U.S.? Because there are laws against corruption, but this is enabling now; in other words, the U.S. market is now the biggest for drugs. And a former President of Mexico, ex-President Fox, said that in the back they have only gotten little pats in the back from his predecessors. Can we hope for more from your administration?

And to you, President Calderon, with this new era, how can you measure the detention, the arrest of drug lords in the United States and also putting a stop to the flow of weapons? How can you measure this?

President Obama. Well, I think that we can measure this in terms of the reduction in violence, in the interdiction of drugs, in the interdiction of weapons coming south, in the dismantling of the financial structures that facilitate these drug cartels, in the arrest of major drug kingpins.

So I think we know how to measure progress. The challenge is maintaining a sustained effort. And as I said, something that President Calderon and myself absolutely recognize is that you can't fight this war with just one hand. You can't just have Mexico making an effort but the United States not making an effort. And the same is true on the other side.

I think both our efforts have to be coordinated; both of our efforts have to be strengthened. I've made some very concrete commitments, already sending additional

resources, already making additional investments. These are measurable in millions and, ultimately, billions of dollars over several years. And I believe that President Calderon has used enormous political capital to deal with this issue.

Obviously, the Mexican people, particularly along the borders, have suffered great hardship. And as a consequence, if we partner effectively—and that's why I brought many of my top officials on this trip to interact with their counterparts—I'm confident that we're going to make progress. Now, are we going to eliminate all drug flows? Are we going to eliminate all guns coming over the border? That's not a realistic objective. What is a realistic objective is to reduce it so significantly, so drastically, that it becomes once again a localized criminal problem as opposed to a major structural problem that threatens stability in communities along those borders and that increases corruption and threatens the rule of law. That's the kind of progress that I think can be made.

And so we're going to work as hard as we can and as diligently as we can on these issues, always mindful, though, that the relationship between Mexico and the United States cannot just be defined by drugs. Sometimes there's a tendency for the media to only report on drug interdiction or immigration when it comes to U.S.-Mexican relations. And one of the things that we talked about is the extraordinary opportunities for us to work together on our commercial ties, on strengthening border infrastructure to improve the flow of goods, on working on clean energy, which can produce jobs on both sides of the border.

So we're going to stay very focused on this. We're going to make this a top priority, but we just always want to remember that our relationship is not simply defined by these problems; it's also defined by opportunities. And that's what we want to take advantage of as well.

President Calderon. Thank you, President. I agree a great deal with you, and I fully thank you for your support and understanding in this very difficult topic. I think the question is very relevant. I see a big opportunity for President Obama and myself, since we are going to be sharing the next 4 years as heads of our administrations; I see a big opportunity here.

And on this issue, what I hope to see at the end of my administration is, actually, many things. One is a reduction in the levels of criminal activities in our countries related to organized crime, which is also related to drug trafficking; they go hand in hand. We have a strategy with short-, midterm, and long-term objectives.

In the short term, for example, we have set out to recuperate the security and tranquility of our citizens, particularly in those areas that have been harder hit by the crime. And this is where we have the joint operations where we are mobilizing not only our federal police but also the army; and this, regardless of the fact that it is not an easy matter and it hasn't been and it can change as—in the course of time, but at least we begin to see fruitful results in some areas.

For example, in the last quarter—or rather compared to the last quarter of last year, our first quarter of this year, there is already a drop of 27 percent in criminal activities. That is as an average for the entire country. Only in Ciudad Juarez—as of the joint operation that we launched in February—between February and March, violent deaths in Ciudad Juarez, crime-related—violence related to crime dropped by 80 percent.

Of course, I understand that the spectacular nature of some of these operations has really attracted worldwide attention. But with a very difficult crime rate that we had last year, despite them, crime in Mexico was 10.7 deaths because of crime for every 100,000 inhabitants. It is less

than what it is in Guatemala, El Salvador, Colombia, Venezuela, or Brazil in Latin America, and it is also a lower number than the crime rates of many U.S. cities.

I believe one issue has to be, of course, that we have to cut down on crime in Mexico, for sure, but, number two, I hope, in the course of time, to be a safer border and a more efficient border. As long as—if we are able to stop the flow of drugs, illicit money, and weapons, we will have greater progress both in the United States and Mexico. And one way to measure this is by appreciating and valuing the technological capabilities, particularly of nonintrusive detection at the border, so that for those who do want to make business and do want to trade, that the border is open, and those who want to commit crime, the border will be a closed area. One way to measure this—and here U.S. cooperation is essential—is to have the right technology, particularly nonintrusive technology that will enable us to have safe borders. And the initiative—the Merida Initiative is very much focused on this.

Now, in the midterm, we would like a renewal of our police forces in Mexico. At the end of my administration, I would like to be able to have a new federal police that will be worthy of the citizens' trust and that will be efficient. And here U.S. cooperation is also fundamental. Why? Well, because on our side we are cleaning our house; we are sweeping everything from top to bottom so that all the police forces at the—from the top officials at the Attorney General's office, the army, the navy, that all officials in Mexico, all police officials, that we can truly trust in their honesty, and that at the same time, technologically, they will be top-notch as the rest of the world in investigation, in databases. We want a scientific police, one that is very well-trained in technology, and U.S. help will be very welcome and it will be essential.

We also have a judicial plan for oral trials. And I think that as we fulfill these objectives, many of them have already—are part of our agreement on safety, security, and protection. With a shared responsibility that we now have with President Obama and his team, we are certain that we will reach these objectives, and that our strategy, which is the correct one, will have many more possibilities of achieving success, and that at the end of our administration we will have a Mexico, a United States, that are much safer and freer of violence—violence free, rather.

Of course, drug trafficking cannot be ended by decree. As long as there is a supply, a high—or rather, is high demand, there will be a high supply. But what we can control is the effect of criminal activities in society to stop the actions of organized crime. And we can also act preventively in order to bring down the consumption of drugs in the United States and in Mexico too, which also begins to be a problem of great concern to us.

Cuba

Q. Mr. President, thank you. Mr. President.

President Obama, you said in an op-ed that was out today that your new Cuba policy was part of an effort to move beyond the frozen disputes of the 20th century. Why then is it so limited? Why not open the door for all Americans to visit Cuba? And what will you say to your colleagues at the Summit of the Americas who want you to do more?

And, President Calderon, what do you think the United States should do more and—on Cuba in order to improve relations with the region? Thank you.

President Obama. Okay. Well, first of all, I don't think that we should dismiss the significance of the step that we took. We eliminated remittance restrictions and travel restrictions for Cuban Americans who have family members in Cuba. For those families, this is

extraordinarily significant. For the people in Cuba who will benefit from their family members being able to provide them help and to visit them, it's extraordinarily significant. We took steps on telecommunications that can potentially open up greater lines of communication between Cuba and the United States.

And so I think what you saw was a good-faith effort, a show of good faith on the part of the United States that we want to recast our relationship. Now, a relationship that effectively has been frozen for 50 years is not going to thaw overnight. And so having taken the first step, I think it's very much in our interest to see whether Cuba is also ready to change. We don't expect them to change overnight. That would be unrealistic. But we do expect that Cuba will send signals that they're interested in liberalizing in such a way that not only do U.S.-Cuban relations improve, but so that the energy and creativity and initiative of the Cuban people can potentially be released.

I mean, we talk about the ban on U.S. travel to Cuba, but there's not much discussion of the ban on Cuban people traveling elsewhere and the severe restrictions that they're under. I make that point only to suggest that there are a range of steps that could be taken on the part of the Cuban Government that would start to show that they want to move beyond the patterns of the last 50 years.

I'm optimistic that progress can be made if there is a spirit that is looking forward rather than backward. My guidepost in U.S.-Cuba policy is going to be how can we encourage Cuba to be respectful of the rights of its people: political speech, political participation, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom to—of travel. But, as I said before, I don't expect things to change overnight. What I do insist on is that U.S.-Cuban relationships are grounded with a respect not only for the traditions of each country but also respect for human rights and the people's—the needs of the people of Cuba.

And so I hope that the signal I've sent here is, is that we are not trying to be heavy-handed. We want to be open to engagement, but we're going to do so in a systematic way that keeps focus on the hardships and struggles that many Cubans are still going through.

President Calderon. I would not pretend to give advice or suggestions to President Obama on this matter or any other. Let me just say what I personally believe—or rather, what I believe about the Cuban reality. The question that has to be posed, rather, is whether the U.S. embargo on Cuba has worked. The reality is that the embargo has been there long before we were even born, and yet things have not changed all that much in Cuba. I think we would have to ask ourselves whether that isn't enough time to realize that it has been a strategy that has not been very useful to achieve change in Cuba.

I do think—I share fully the idea—we do not believe that the embargo or the isolation of Cuba is a good measure for things to change in Cuba. On the contrary, the reality that we see there is that the reality has not changed. And it's because of internal factors, mostly, of course, but also because of external reasons, such as the embargo. Because of that, the Cubans have become impoverished.

I greet—I welcome the measures that President Obama has taken in order to change this attitude and to try to attempt—and the attempt must be appreciated—to change the policy towards Cuba little by little. But what is clear to me is that we both share the same ideals. I think we would both like to see the world living at some point under a full democracy, a world with full respect for human rights, with no exceptions whatsoever. We would like to see a world

working, with people being able to take care of their families, to live in peace, and those principles that must protect humanity. That we do share.

We also share the idea that each nation must be respected in its own decisions. It's like we were saying a moment ago when we were talking about the prohibition of assault weapons. Of course, we do not want those weapons to be out in the streets, but at the same time, we want those decisions to come from the people themselves and to be self-determinant. And it's the same for Cuba. But I believe that the steps President Obama has taken are very positive.

Mexico is a good friend of Cuba, and Mexico is also a good friend of the United States. We want to be a good friend of Cuba and of the United States. We want both things. And we know that one day, the day that these principles we believe in prevail, that day we will be able to be neighbors, the three of us, the United States, Cuba, and Mexico.

What are the principles we believe in? Democracy, human rights, but also liberty, property, trade—free trade, free economy. And I think as long as those principles can function and bring benefits to the Cuban economy, then things can begin to change. We cannot change anything that has already taken place in the past, but I am certain that as heads of state, we can do a lot to try to make a different future, both for the world, both for our countries, and also in relation to Cuba.

I told President Obama—that the best of luck in this panorama that is now so totally different from what U.S. policy has been in the past. I hope for the best, and I hope that more expeditious steps could be taken so that we can move forward in this regard, and that everything will be done with good understanding. And as Mexico can contribute in any way for two of our friends to work out what they have between themselves, I hope that we can contribute. And if our best contribution is just to maintain our respect and our—that is fine.

Immigration Reform/Trade

Q. Good afternoon. For President Obama: Mr. President—[inaudible]—as U.S. Senator in 2006, voted in favor of the approval of the construction of the border wall. I would like to know, and I think Mexicans would like to know, what is your real commitment of your administration to present a new migratory—a comprehensive migratory reform? What would be its scope? And when would you approve this reform?

And on free trade, on NAFTA, it seems that because of the last events there's not a great deal of interest in the U.S. to apply or to comply with all the items in NAFTA. I would like to ask President Calderon whether you spoke of some of those issues during your conversations, whether you addressed the migratory issue and some of the NAFTA issues?

President Obama. Well, first of all, with respect to the immigration issue, I think you—it would be useful to point out that I also voted twice for comprehensive immigration reform that would have provided a pathway for legalization and an improvement of the orderly process of migration into the United States.

I've said before that we have to have a comprehensive approach, recognizing that the United States has a very legitimate concern. If you've got hundreds of thousands of people from other countries coming into the United States without anybody knowing who they are, who, when they arrive, can often be exploited and, because they're not protected by various laws, undermine the wages of U.S. workers, those are legitimate concerns on the part of the United States people and the United States Government. And so working effectively with the

Mexican Government to create an orderly border is very important, and there are a whole host of strategies that we need to pursue.

What I've also said is that for those immigrants who are already in the United States—and by the way, we focus a lot on Mexicans who have come into the United States, but the number of immigrants from Central America, from Ireland, from Poland are substantial as well; it's not—this is not just an issue with respect to Mexico—with—for those immigrants who have put down roots, may have come there illegally, I think they need to pay a penalty for having broken the law. They need to come out of the shadows, and then we have to put them through a process where, if they want to stay in the United States, they have an opportunity over time to earn that opportunity for a legal status in the United States.

Now, we came close to getting that kind of reform done several years ago, and then it became politicized. And my whole goal is to remove the politics of this and take a very practical, commonsense approach that benefits people on both sides of the border and creates a secure and safe border so you don't have people who are dying in the deserts as a consequence of a disorderly and illegal migration process. I think that's a goal that President Calderon and I share and one that we discussed during our bilateral meeting.

With respect of trade, Mexico is one of our largest trading partners. The amount of commerce that flows back and forth creates wealth in Mexico, and it creates wealth in the United States. I have said repeatedly that I'm in favor of free trade. I know that there has been some concern about a provision that was placed in our stimulus package related to Mexican trucking. That wasn't a provision that my administration introduced, and I said at the time that we need to fix this, because the last thing we want to do at a time when the global economy is contracting and trade is shrinking is to resort to protectionist measures.

My team is working with President Calderon's team to resolve this issue. I'm hopeful that we can resolve it in an effective way. It's not helpful to a number of U.S. producers who are interested in selling into Mexico and are fearful that they may be subject to countervailing tariffs or retaliation. So we're going to see if we can get this fixed. But I can tell you that President Calderon and I are entirely on the same page in believing that we can create greater opportunities for trade and strengthen our commercial relationships between our two countries.

I have said before in the past, and I will continue to say, that as part of the NAFTA framework, that it would make sense for labor and environmental provisions to be enforceable within that agreement, rather than just be viewed as a side agreement. But I recognize that we are in a very difficult time right now economically on both sides of the border, and that those kinds of negotiations are going to need to proceed in a very careful and deliberate way, because we don't want to discourage trade; we want to encourage trade right now. So I'm confident that our administrations are going to be able to work together, and it's going to be to the benefit both of Mexico and the United States.

President Calderon. We spoke at length on migration and on trade, and particularly on the economy in general between both nations. President Obama is well aware, is very knowledgeable about the problem, and his position in favor of a comprehensive migratory reform is well known. I would simply repeat the idea—or refrain the idea that we share the objective of achieving an orderly, legal, productive migration between both countries.

I have said, and I maintain, that as a Mexican, as President of Mexico, it doesn't make me particularly happy to see our people risk their lives going across a border, because I know that

with every migrant that leaves, we have the best of our people leaving; the youngest, the most courageous, the strongest, the hardest working, they are the ones that are leaving. Because I have seen in many communities here in Mexico, and particularly the state I come from, Michoacan, where there are phantom towns now, where there are only the elderly, children, women, and no one else is left there.

So I am working hard to create in Mexico the conditions, the opportunities of work, of employment for our people here in Mexico. That is really the only way out that can put a stop to migration. I think that is the best way out, to create opportunities and employment in our country. But in the meantime, President Obama is very clear on what the problem consists of, and it's very important to establish those instruments that will enable people to come out of the shadows, as he himself has said, and to—that our region can gradually become more orderly, more legal, and better migration flows.

I think the two of us share the idea that trade produces benefits on both sides of the border. Not only are there many Mexican workers that depend on their exports to the United States today—by the way, in a very delicate situation that we're going through because of the economic situation, the drop in the U.S. industry is very co-related to the drop in our Mexican industry—but there are also many workers in the United States that depend on the purchases that we make of U.S. products. Today, Mexican consumers are among the best buyers of U.S. products. Few consumers in the world buy as many U.S. products as we do here in Mexico.

So we must protect trade. And the best way of doing so is to allow it to flow naturally, with no restrictions. So beyond—going beyond the autonomous decisions that every country can take and the legitimate exercise of the rights that are part of the pacts and agreements that we have in order to protect free trade, I agree with President Obama, we have to go further. We have to go beyond in order to improve trade between both our countries. And we do not want to restrict it. We can come to agreements. We might have certain differences. I believe that we can move a great deal forward in labor and environmental issues, but it concerns me that to reopen those things that have been proven to work well can merely create further obstacles and worsen the situation we have today.

Our focus today on practical matters, and this is why—let me just mention three things that I believe we can work on. One is infrastructure at the border. I have talked to President Obama; I have shown him a list of 200 infrastructure projects of a larger or smaller scale that can generate employment both in the U.S. and Mexico at the border and improve our competitiveness at the border. So we have focused on six projects of border bridges, border crossing points that can lead to further employment and prosperity for our people.

The second item is customs cooperation that will enable us to have better cooperation, more expeditious cooperation, with no drop in productivity, to maybe have one single customs form—whether we're talking about exports or imports from one country to another—to have one single form that will allow us to reduce bureaucracy and make trade more expeditious.

And then also, third, concrete measures to have a harmonization of standards. Certain U.S. products, for example, need to have the units measured in pounds, and here we need them measured in kilos or in grams; we need to be able to have standards. If certain requirements differ from—in our two countries, I think we have to work towards a harmonization of these requirements. So these practical matters that seem to be minor are actually quite important. And I think they can truly help us.

And let me wrap up by saying that one of the things we emphasize is that both of us are going through economic problems because of this international crisis that we're undergoing. But if we act intelligently, we will understand that if we improve the North American competitiveness as a region that entails Canada, United States, and Mexico, if we improve the competitive conditions of our entire region, vis-a-vis other regions such as Asia or Eastern Europe or the rest of Latin America, then I do believe we will be able to come out of this problem much, much faster. Trade means opportunities; it equal opportunities of employment and of prosperity for our peoples always, always, and particularly today in these times of crisis and economic difficulties.

President Obama is undergoing tremendous efforts to improve things in the United States, and he is exercising in international leadership to face this economic situation. We firmly support on our side this situation, doing everything we can in order to revert this critical situation. And I do believe one way to do it is by strengthening trade not restricting it.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 4:29 p.m. at Los Pinos. In his remarks, the President referred to Secretary of Homeland Security Janet A. Napolitano; and Attorney General Eric H. Holder, Jr. President Calderon and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Mexico, President Calderon.

Locations: Mexico City, Mexico.

Names: Brennan, John O. ; Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; Holder, Eric H., Jr.; Jones, James L., Jr.; Napolitano, Janet A.

Subjects: Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Commerce, international : Global financial markets :: Unrest; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Commerce, international : North American Free Trade Agreement; Cuba : Democracy and human rights issues; Cuba : Relations with U.S.; Cuba : Travel restrictions; Cuba : U.S. policy changes :: Remittances and communications regulations; Cuba : U.S. policy changes :: Telecommunications and media regulations; Defense and national security : Border security; Drug abuse and trafficking : Foreign Narcotics Kingpin Designation Act; Drug abuse and trafficking : Interdiction efforts; Environment : Climate change; Environment : Kyoto Protocol; Environment : Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate; Homeland Security, Department of : Funding; Homeland Security, Department of : Secretary; Immigration and naturalization : Citizenship; Immigration and naturalization : Illegal immigration; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Justice, Department of : Attorney General; Law enforcement and crime : Federal Assault Weapons Ban; Law enforcement and crime : Gun control; Law enforcement and crime : Illegal arms trade, reduction efforts; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Mexico : Crime and narco trafficking; Mexico : Economic growth and development; Mexico : Energy :: Greenhouse gas emissions, reduction; Mexico : Illegal drugs, interdiction efforts; Mexico : Merida Initiative ; Mexico : President; Mexico : President Obama's visit; Mexico : Relations with U.S.; Mexico : Trade with U.S.; Western Hemisphere : Americas, Summit of the; Western Hemisphere : Inter-American Convention Against Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms (CIFTA).

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