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I want to introduce a person who embodies much of the good that's going on to help parents through having the village do its part, in the First Lady's words, to raise our children. Ben Casey is the president of the YMCA of Metropolitan Dallas. He has degrees in psychology and counseling from UCLA and Chapman College. He currently oversees programs—listen to this—145 program centers that serve a quarter of all the families in the greater Dallas region. We've asked him to speak to us today about his extensive experience with teens, the wise new poll which also has some important findings about the way teens and parents view their communication and time together.

And let me just finally say, Mr. Casey, as I bring you up, every minute I have ever spent with young people, as President and before, but especially as President, has reaffirmed to me how special they are, what enormous potential they have. Even the ones that can't make it really want to and wish they could. And what a profound responsibility we have. And I want to honor you, sir, because you spend every day trying to make sure we don't lose a single one.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to children's advocate David A. Hamburg, president emeritus, Carnegie Corp. of New York. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete. The Executive order of May 2 concerning equal employment opportunity in Federal Government is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks at the Council of the Americas 30th Washington Conference

May 2, 2000

Thank you very much. Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. And thank you, Buddy MacKay, for that fine introduction. That introduction was a classic example of Clinton's third law of politics: Whenever possible, be introduced by someone you have appointed to high office. [*Laughter*] They will always make you look good in good times and bad, whether you deserve it or not.

I want to thank the Ambassadors of Argentina, Colombia, Venezuela, and Brazil, who are here, for their interest and their presence; and all the people in the State Department who work on the Americas. David Rockefeller, I want to thank you for taking the lead 35 years ago now in establishing the Council of the Americas. And I want to thank the Council for its support of our efforts, beginning with NAFTA, alleviating the financial crisis in Latin America, the free trade area of the Americas, and the Caribbean Basin Initiative, as well as our efforts with Colombia.

I want to thank Buddy MacKay for his work as my Special Envoy and especially for the work he's doing now on Capitol Hill as our point person for the Caribbean Basin Initiative. I'd also like to thank my former Chief of Staff and the first Special Envoy to Latin America, Mack McLarty, for the work he has done. And let me say, the two of them together, I hope, will convince the next President and all future Presidents, without regard to party, that we have made a change in the configuration of the White House which ought to continue. I think that for decades to come, every President should have a Special Envoy to the Americas, because we have a special relationship with the Americas. And I hope those of you in this room of both parties who agree with that will do what you can to see that it happens after next January. I think it's a very, very important thing to do.

Let me say to all of you, especially to you, David, and to all of you who have been involved in this endeavor for a long time, you had the vision to see that North and South, in this increasingly small globe of ours, could come together, and that free trade could be a force for peace as well as prosperity, the basis of our partnership across the whole range of other areas in this hemisphere. You saw that in the middle of the cold war when most people only saw the world divided by East and West here

in the United States. Developments have proved that you were visionary, and we are grateful.

We are also grateful today in the United States for the extraordinary success that our economy has enjoyed and for the ability it has given us to play a positive role in the world for peace and freedom and prosperity, for democracy and open markets.

I think it is very important today that we ask ourselves what we propose to do with this prosperity and whether we really understand the role that our engagement in the world and our trade with other nations clearly has played in our prosperity and what responsibilities that imposes upon us in terms of our future.

We have benefited immensely from trade. There is no question that we have the longest economic expansion in history because we got rid of the deficits, and we've run 3 years of surpluses in a row and paying off $335 billion of our debt, and we've got low interest rates. There is no question that our investment in science and technology, our reform of our telecommunications system, and our continued commitment to education is important. But everyone should understand that our commitment to expanding trade, including not just NAFTA and joining the WTO but 270 other agreements, has helped us not only to find new markets for our products and services but, by keeping our own markets open, has kept inflation down as our economy has grown.

The two most significant things that have allowed the longest economic expansion in history for America to be long has been the enormous increase in productivity because of technology and the fact that we have permitted ourselves to have inflation-free growth because we've kept open markets with a responsible financial policy.

I hear—so many times people talk about trade only in terms of exports, because that sounds good politically, and when you say you're importing a lot, that doesn't sound good politically. But our imports have helped us a lot. They've kept inflation down, and they've made our people's dollars go further. And they've enabled us to keep growing without inflation. And along the way, they've helped our trading partners to lift their own well-being. Our two top trading partners today are our neighbors to the north and to the south. And during most of the last decade, our trade with Latin America grew faster than any other region of the world.

So we have been very fortunate. During the period since NAFTA entered into force, our exports to Canada and Mexico have gone up almost 80 percent. Our employment has skyrocketed. Canadian employment has jumped by more than one million overall, and Mexico's employment has climbed by one million. NAFTA played a major role in this.

It has set the stage for much of what has followed. During the Mexican financial crisis in 1995, we offered a loan package that wasn't too popular at the time. I always laugh about it. When Bob Rubin came to see me about it with Larry Summers, as I remember there was a poll in the paper that day that said by 81 to 15, the American people thought it was a bad idea for us to give financial assistance to Mexico. And I thought to myself, this is what's wrong with polls. If we don't help Mexico, and Mexico and Brazil and Argentina and the rest of Latin America and half the other developing economies of the world go in the tank, and our economy nose-dives, it will be 100 to nothing, people think it's a bad idea that we let the world economy go to pieces. And I am very glad that what we did worked. I think the Mexican Government and the Mexican people deserve a lot of credit for a painful recovery, in which they paid back their loans with interest and ahead of schedule.

Then 3 years later, our hemisphere was hurt by a crisis half a world away in Asia, but I'm glad that we worked to keep our markets open. And I still believe our choice for more trade, not less, contributed to minimizing the impact of the Asian financial crisis and enabling those countries to pull out of that crisis more quickly.

That doesn't mean that the size of our trade deficit is not a source of concern to me; it is. But I'm convinced the only way it will get smaller is when our partners, both to the south and around the world, grow wealthier and stronger, so that they can consume more of their own production and buy more of ours. I think the decision we made for open markets has plainly been the right decision, not simply for the United States economy but for the rest of the world. And I am absolutely confident it's the right decision going forward.

Right now I think we're making very good progress in moving the Caribbean Basin initiative through Congress. It is tied, as all of you know, to the Africa trade bill, which is also, I believe, very, very important to us in terms

of our long-term security interests and very important in terms of our fulfilling our responsibility to Africa. I think there is every likelihood now that that bill will be on my desk for signature by the end of the month. And I think it is high time.

I know I don't need to plug that legislation here, but the nations of the Caribbean have suffered quite a lot economically and have come under enormous pressure to become way-stations for narcotrafficking. And we need to do more for them. I believe this bill is a good bill, much better than it was about to be a few weeks ago. I hope you will all support it, and if you can help me pass it quickly, I'd be grateful.

I also want to affirm that we are still determined to meet the goal we set at the Miami Summit of the Americas in December of 1994, to achieve a free trade agreement by 2005 that will embrace the entire Americas—the world's largest trade zone, 800 million people investing in each other's future, enriching each other's lives, advancing each other's interests.

Negotiators are on schedule to complete and present a draft agreement to the trade ministers next April in Argentina. It will also be presented then to the heads of state at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec. We must stay on track to do this by 2005. The date should not slip, and I am confident we will do so.

I think a lot of people over-read the meaning of the failure of Congress to renew fast-track authority. The truth is, there was a fight largely along partisan lines over the content of that authority and whether the President should be given explicit authority to negotiate trade agreements that included environmental and labor conditions. I thought that fast-track authority was a lousy vehicle on which to wage that fight, even though I was sympathetic with the substance of the argument. I still believe that.

But you should not believe that because the legislation didn't pass over philosophical and partisan differences on that issue, that the United States is any less committed to finishing the free trade area of the Americas, or that because it didn't pass, any agreement we make in the context of the free trade area of the Americas is less likely to pass Congress. That is not true.

And you know that we're having an election this year. You may have noticed that. And there will be a lot of differences between the nominees and the parties over a lot of issues, but I am very gratified that there is no difference on this. You are going to have an American President committed to a free trade area of the Americas by 2005. And if it doesn't happen, it will not be the fault of the executive branch of the Government of the United States of America. We know this is the right thing to do.

And I just want you to know that. And I will try to find other ways to manifest that before I leave office. And there are some, but the most important one, I think, would be the passage of the CBI-Africa trade bill. But I ask you to—you know, we're having the same argument now with China and the WTO, where there are people who have honest differences over the way the World Trade Organization operates. They think it's too closed, too undemocratic, too private, and I agree with them. But voting against this is a lousy way to litigate that issue.

So parliamentary processes are often uneven and awkward, and many times people in parliaments throughout the world find the only forum they can for the fight they think that needs to be waged. But I think it's very important that you understand that what that fast-track battle was about. It was about the philosophical differences in our country over whether trade agreements should include labor and environmental conditions and whether the President should be given explicit authority to negotiate on that basis. It didn't have anything to do with people not really wanting a free trade area of the Americas.

I don't agree with the fact that it wasn't extended, and I am sympathetic, as all of you know, to the idea that if the world becomes closer knitted, we don't live by bread alone. It's inconceivable to me that we will have a global economy without having more and more of a global society. That will happen in some way, in some form, at some pace. But it shouldn't turn us against trade.

Similarly, it's inconceivable to me that the WTO, as it becomes more important, won't have to become more open and more democratic. But that's not an excuse for sticking it to China after China has made good-faith efforts to open its economy and to give access to the other members of the world trading community.

So I think it's important to understand these debates are going on, but this does not mean

that the United States is not committed to a free trade area of the Americas. It is profoundly important. It is important economically. It is also important politically.

One of the things that I'm very concerned about in Latin America is that, with all the triumph of democracy—34 of 35 leaders democratically elected, people now expecting to choose their leaders and chart their future and shape their destinies—there are too many people and too many places who have still not benefited from the global economy in ways that they can touch and feel. The answer is not to turn back; the answer is to keep going forward to spread the benefits to more people. And we have to continue to push that.

I am afraid democracy itself could be made far more fragile if more and more people grow more and more frustrated about the circumstances of their own lives. And it would be a terrible mistake for the United States ever to send a signal that we have any policy other than full steam ahead, more engagement, more support, more commitment. I think that is very, very important.

We've worked hard to uphold the rule of law in this hemisphere. We upheld that principle in Haiti. Haiti is still desperately poor and wracked with problems and facing new elections. We will do everything we can to help them stay with their democracy. But eventually, real people are going to have to feel real benefit. The answer is not for the United States, with the strongest economy, to withdraw. The answer is to deepen our engagement.

We acted again on the principle of the rule of law and democracy when we stood with the people of Paraguay to preserve democracy there when it was threatened in 1996. We attempted to uphold that policy every time it was threatened: in Ecuador, earlier this year; last month through the Organization of American States, when the countries of the hemisphere, thankfully, voiced strong support for a fair and open electoral process in Peru.

But most important, I think, today we are called upon to stand for democracy under attack in Colombia. Drug trafficking, civil conflict, economic stagnation combine everywhere they exist—and explosively in Colombia—to feed violence, undercut honest enterprise in favor of corruption, and undermine public confidence in democracy. Colombia's drug traffickers directly threaten America's security, but first they threaten Colombia's future.

In the United States, 90 percent of the cocaine and two-thirds of the heroin seized on our streets comes from or through Colombia. Fifty-two thousand Americans die every year from drugs, about as many as died in the wars in Vietnam and Korea. It costs us more than $110 billion a year in crime, accidents, property damage, and lost productivity.

But the price to Colombia is even higher. Last year, drug trafficking and civil conflict led to more than 2,500 kidnappings; a murder rate 10 times ours, which is virtually the highest of any country in the advanced world; terrorist activity that is now probably the worst in the world. Thirty-five thousand people have been killed and one million more made homeless in the last decade alone. Drugs fund guerrillas on the left and paramilitaries on the right.

Honest citizens, the vast majority of the people of Colombia, are simply caught in the middle. Eight hundred to nine hundred passports are issued every day—every day—as engineers, architects, and doctors take their families, their wealth, their talent out of Colombia. And yet, thousands upon thousands of courageous Colombians choose to stay and fight, because they love their country, and they want to save their freedom.

President Pastrana came to office with a record of risking his own life to take on drug traffic. He was kidnapped by the Medellin cartel. As mayor of Bogota, he saw them kill three Presidential candidates. Then he became a Presidential candidate—he used to joke that maybe that meant he was certifiably mentally unstable enough to serve—a very brave decision.

Once in office, he worked with experts in Colombia and elsewhere to put together Plan Colombia. It's a comprehensive plan to seek peace, fight drugs, build the economy, and deepen democracy. The plan costs about $7½ billion. It includes contributions from the Government of Colombia, international financial institutions, and other donors. And I've asked our Congress to give it $1.6 billion over 2 years. That will be a tenfold increase in our U.S. assistance to promote good government, judicial reform, human rights protection, and economic development. It will also enable Colombia's counterdrug program to inflict serious damage

on the rapidly expanding drug production activity in areas now dominated by guerrillas or paramilitary groups.

We know this approach can succeed. Over the last 5 years working with the Governments of Peru and Bolivia, we have reduced coca cultivation by more than 50 percent in those countries, reduced overall cocaine production in the region by 18 percent. Drug traffickers, driven from their old havens, unfortunately now are consolidating operations in Colombia. But we have an historic opportunity and an historic responsibility to do serious and lasting damage to the international drug trade if Congress approves our package. I am convinced the rest of the world will follow suit. If we show that we are prepared to pay our fair share of this, the rest of the world will help.

We need to help train and equip Colombia's counterdrug battalion, enhance its interdiction efforts, provide intelligence and logistic supports to the counterdrug mission, including force protection. They need this support. We can provide it, and we ought to provide it. We must not stand by and allow a democracy elected by its people, defended with great courage by people who have given their lives, be undermined and overwhelmed by those who literally are willing to tear the country apart for their own agenda.

And make no mistake about it: If the oldest democracy in South America can be torn down, so can others. Every one of you here has a deep and abiding interest in helping to see that the fight for freedom, democracy, and good government in Colombia is successful. I urge Congress to pass this package now. The Colombians waging this campaign are fighting not just for themselves; they are fighting for all of us, all of us in this room and the hundreds of millions of people we represent, and for our children.

As we know, the globalization of our societies is presenting us a lot of new challenges. The issue in Colombia is just the beginning. You will see, more and more, drug cartels, organized criminals, gunrunners, terrorists working together. The Internet will make it easier for them to do so, just as it makes it easier for you to work together to pursue your legal endeavors. But we have every reason to be optimistic, if we meet our common challenges—our common security challenges, our common environmental challenges, our common educational and health care challenges.

The mission you have championed for 35 years in this Council is closer than ever before to being successful. We have a chance to completely rewrite the future for our children because of the revolution in information, because of the biomedical revolution, because of the material science revolution. All these things together enable us to grow an economy and improve the environment, to expand trade and deepen democracy.

But when we have an opportunity like a free trade area of the Americas, we have to take it. And when we have a challenge, like the challenge in Colombia, we have to meet it.

The United States wants to do its part. It's very much in our interest to do so. We have benefited more than any other country in the world from the last decade, and we need to stand up here and do our part to be good neighbors and to help other people benefit as well.

But we need all your help. We have to win in Colombia. We have to win the fight for the free trade area of the Americas. We have to prove that freedom and free markets go hand-in-hand. That's what you believe, and we're going to be given a chance to prove it.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:05 p.m. in the Loy Henderson Auditorium at the State Department. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant to the President and Special Envoy to the Americas Kenneth H. (Buddy) MacKay; David Rockefeller, founder, Council of the Americas; Ambassadors Guillermo Gonzalez of Argentina, Luis Alberto Moreno of Colombia, Alfredo Toro of Venezuela, and Rubens Antonio Barbosa of Brazil; former Secretary of the Treasury Robert E. Rubin; and President Andres Pastrana of Colombia.