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Note: The President spoke at 9:16 a.m. in the Fuel Cell Hangar at the base. In his remarks, he referred to Gen. Charles G. Boyd, Air University Commander at Maxwell Air Force Base; Gen. Merrill A. McPeak, Air Force Chief of Staff; Senators Howell Heflin and Richard C. Shelby; Representative Bill Dickinson; Emory M. Folmar, mayor of Montgomery; Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney; Gen. Colin L. Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Brent Scowcroft, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; President Vaclav Havel of Czechoslovakia; and President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union.

Remarks at a White House Briefing for the Associated General Contractors of America

April 15, 1991

Thank you all very much. This rainy day, I'm delighted to have you all here at the White House. May I salute our Secretary of Transportation, Sam Skinner. And I want to say a word about a matter that's of great interest to him and to me and to the entire country. But first, to President Black and all the members of the AGC, we're delighted you're here. I appreciate the chance to just say a few words to a group whose support on so many issues has meant a great deal to me, and I think it's meant a great deal to our country.

I know that you were in strong support of Operation Desert Storm. I think your strong support was very helpful—Capitol Hill and elsewhere. I salute you, and I appreciate it very much. Thanks, also, for helping us promote free trade, especially during the negotiations for the United States-Canada Free-Trade Agreement, an agreement that we strongly support.

And today I wanted to ask for your support again, support which can certainly enhance our ability to compete in the global marketplace and our ability to negotiate with our trading partners. That's the main subject I wanted to talk to you about.

But inasmuch as Sam Skinner is here with us, I thought I'd make a comment on another situation that affects the entire country. The rail industry is absolutely critical, and it's critically important to the United States economy, moving more than a third of all goods shipped in the United States. Now, there's a strike looming. And that strike that looms for right after midnight tomorrow could severely disrupt the economy just as the economy, in our view, is trying to turn around and get out of this recession. A rail strike could potentially idle hundreds of thousands of workers and affect virtually all Americans one way or another. It is always better for labor and management to resolve their differences and produce an agreement.

A Presidential Emergency Board, after 8 months of hearings, issued a report making dozens of recommendations for settling the dispute. This report can and should serve as the basis for resolution of this difficulty. Because of the potential economy-wide disruption, it would be prudent that all efforts and actions be taken to avoid the strike. My administration is willing to work with the parties to help in any way possible.

Now, just for a word on this free trade. We need Fast Track authority in trade negotiations, and we've asked Congress to approve Fast Track authority. Fast Track's a way of assuring our trading counterparts that the agreements they reach with us at the bargaining table—the ones that they reach with the negotiation process—will be the same ones that Congress has a chance to vote on, up or down.

Some allege that Congress has no say. And that simply is not true. We must negotiate with our trading partners, and then we bring the negotiated pact to the Congress for an up or down vote. Fast Track doesn't affect Congress' power to accept or

reject trade agreements. But it does prevent eleventh-hour changes to agreements that have already been hammered out, changes that force everyone to start all over again.

We need this Fast Track authority to pursue vital trade objectives: the Uruguay round, the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative, and the North American free trade agreement that we're talking to both Canada and Mexico about. If we lose this Fast Track authority, we lose any hope of achieving these three vital agreements. We lose trade. We lose jobs. And we jeopardize economic growth. And we unleash horrifying new waves of protectionism.

Here's the key: A vote against Fast Track is a vote against all the things we hold dear—prosperity at home and growth in other lands. It ignores the dramatic and wonderful changes in the world economy. We want to play a leading role in this new, exciting, emerging world. And we don't want to hide from it. And we want to join in the thrilling business of innovation. And we do not want to chain people to outmoded technologies, outmoded ideas.

Right now, we have the chance to expand opportunity and economic growth from the Yukon to the Yucatan. Think of it. The North American free trade agreement would link us with our largest trading partner, Canada, and our third-largest partner, Mexico. It would create the largest, richest trade zone on Earth—360 million consumers in a market that generates $6 trillion in output in a single year.

A unified North American market would let each of our countries build on our own strengths. It would create more and better jobs for the U.S. workers. Let me just say that one once more: It would create more jobs for U.S. workers, better jobs for U.S. workers. And it would stimulate price competition, lower consumer prices, and improve product quality. The agreement would promote productivity and produce a higher standard of living throughout our entire continent.

As we help Mexico, as we help them achieve prosperity, we'll help the environment as well. Only through economic growth will Mexico obtain the resources necessary to address its tremendous environmental needs. They need new water systems for their border cities; they need air pollution control equipment for Mexico City. These are just a handful of the things that would be enhanced.

Mexico is committed to environmentally sound industrial expansion. President Salinas has already closed down the largest polluting refinery, taken a lot of political heat in the process—a PEMEX refinery near Mexico City. He's promised his people that the economic growth coming out of the free trade agreement will be ''clean growth'' and that dirty industries are not welcome.

I don't know how many of you all have met President Carlos Salinas, but I can tell you, he's an outstanding individual. And he talks about the environment and the need to clean it up, and he gives this dramatic example of the young children in the schools—because of Mexico City's pollution—painting the sky gray. And he says: ''I don't want our children to paint the sky gray any more. I want them to see the Sun. I want them to see the bright stars at night.'' He is committed to cleaning up that environment. And new Mexican laws requiring environmental impact assessments for all investments in new industrial facilities will make this commitment a reality. So the attacks on him from some in the environmental community I don't think have merit.

As we increase trade with Mexico, we will also help Mexican workers. Mexican wages have risen, and have risen quickly in recent years, with no tangible impact on America's pay scales. And that being true, someone then should ask the opponents of Fast Track why they oppose prosperity in Mexico.

We have much to gain from extending Fast Track—a new era of open, free, and fair trade. A vote on Fast Track is really a vote on what kind of America we want to build. A ''no'' vote will show that we fear the future and that we don't welcome it. A ''yes'' vote will express confidence in American know-how and ingenuity. I think we have confidence in ourselves. I say we do believe in ourselves.

And so, I'm going to be fighting my heart

out to assure the congressional approval of Fast Track. I ask for your support for America's heart. And I thank you for the past support on so many critical and key issues. Thank you all very, very much for coming to the White House. And God bless you.

Note: The President spoke at 10:07 a.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of Transportation Samuel K. Skinner; Marvin M. Black, president of the Associated General Contractors of America; and President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the President's Meeting With Senator Lloyd Bentsen of Texas

April 15, 1991

President Bush had lunch today with Senator Lloyd Bentsen in the West Wing of the White House. The President and the Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee discussed Fast Track legislation and related trade issues. ''Senator Bentsen has been a strong and steadfast leader in the Senate on the Fast Track legislation,'' President Bush said. ''He is one of our most knowledgeable leaders on trade matters, and his support is crucial as we pursue the Fast Track legislation.''

As the world's largest trader, the United States has an enormous stake in the future of the global trading system. Exports have become a vital source of strength to the U.S. economy. In 1990, the nearly 8.5-percent growth in U.S. exports accounted for 88 percent of U.S. economic growth.

In order to sustain the expansion of exports and consequent growth, we must continue our efforts to open world markets. We must maintain our active leadership role. Without an extension of Fast Track, those efforts are futile.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on the President's Federal Income Tax Return

April 15, 1991

The President and Mrs. Bush's 1990 tax return shows that they have paid $99,241 in Federal income tax on an adjusted gross income of $452,732, of which $200,000 was the President's salary. The Bushes also reported $245,911 in income, from their blind trust, $1,245 in interest income, and $8,647 from other sources. The blind trust is managed by Bessemer Trust Co., N.A., New York City.

The President and Mrs. Bush claimed $97,118 in itemized deductions, which included $38,667 in contributions to 50 charities and $330 to charities through the blind trust. A list of the 50 charities is attached. The net royalties received in 1990 of $7,042 from the President's book, ''Looking Forward,'' were given to charitable organizations included in this list.

The President and Mrs. Bush's tax return has been reviewed by the Office of Government Ethics and will be filed in the Philadelphia regional office of the Internal Revenue Service.