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The President's News Conference With Prime Minister Jean Chretien of Canada

April 8, 1997

President Clinton. Good afternoon. Let me say again that it is a very great pleasure for me to welcome Prime Minister Chretien to the White House. It's an especially important day in his life, because this is the 34th anniversary of Jean Chretien's first election to the Canadian Parliament. In the years since, he has held virtually every high office in the Canadian Government. He has traveled to Washington on countless missions. But this is his first official visit as Prime Minister, and I'm delighted that he's here.

It's fair to say that there has never been a relationship between two nations like the one that exists today between the United States and Canada. We have the most comprehensive ties of any two nations on Earth. Every day, our Governments work together to improve the lives of our people in ways no one could have imagined just a few years ago. We trade goods and services on an unprecedented scale and share ties of friendship that are unique.

We've worked hard today and made progress on important issues. We discussed our common efforts to create an open and more competitive trading system throughout our hemisphere. The benefits of this effort will be tremendous. Since NAFTA took effect, trade between our nations has grown by more than 40 percent, a remarkable achievement for what was already the world's preeminent trade partnership. United States exports to Canada have grown over $133 million and now support more than 1½ million jobs in our Nation. As partners in the Summit of the Americas process, our efforts to expand trade in our hemisphere not only increase prosperity, they also reinforce democratic values, which have made such extraordinary progress in the Americas in our time.

Today we've made concrete progress on key issues involving our two nations. We've agreed on new measures to crack down on criminals who use cross-border fraudulent telemarketing schemes to prey on the elderly and others. We're stepping up our cooperation to stop those who would abduct children and transport them across our borders. We agreed to modernize our border crossing so that by the year 2000, 22 pairs of towns will be equipped with remote video systems and new technologies to give them 24-hour service, and residents won't have to drive hours out of their way to the next border crossing. We're streamlining import and export processing, cutting freight costs, reducing truck backups.

We're working together to protect, clean, and manage the natural heritage we share. Twenty-five years ago, our nations signed the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which has helped to revive the ecosystem of the Great Lakes Basin. Yesterday, Minister Marchi and EPA Administrator Browner signed an agreement to work for the virtual elimination of toxic pollutants in the Great Lakes. This unprecedented environmental effort will involve the public and private sectors at all levels. There are some other areas, like Pacific salmon fisheries, where further progress is needed. But we're working on it.

Beyond our borders, we discussed the preparations for the July NATO summit in Madrid, where the Atlantic alliance will take a major step toward creating security for the 21st century.

I also want to salute the Prime Minister for his government's determination to support peace in Bosnia and Central Africa and other troubled places of the globe and especially for his nation's steadfast engagement in Haiti. Canada's efforts to help democracy put down strong roots in Haiti will long be remembered as a hallmark of the commitment to principle of the Canadian people.

Our work together spans the globe. It reaches into the heavens. I'm pleased that the Prime Minister has brought with him today a model of the remarkable 11-foot Canada Hand that will be used to build the international space station. I have personally seen it in its full size, Mr. Prime Minister, and it is a dramatic and important contribution. This instrument will perform delicate assembly work essential for the space station's construction. And I thank you and your Cabinet for voting last month to fund this important project.

Soon, Canada and the United States will be joined at the elbow in space, and that is a perfect symbol of the cooperation between our nations. Here on Earth, this cooperation has been a beacon of hope for countries on every continent. Today we've made that light brighter by reaffirming the ties between our nations and carrying forward our work together.

Mr. Prime Minister, I thank you, your government, and all of Canada for your dedication to this extraordinary partnership.

Prime Minister Chretien. Thank you, Mr. President. As I said earlier, I'm delighted to be in Washington, and I'm very satisfied and pleased with the discussions we had this morning. They were very frank, friendly, and very productive.

We are neighbors who work together, and I think we're working quite well. The President and I discussed our partnership in the economy, the environment, fisheries, in managing our border, in space, and in promoting world peace.

As you all know, our economies are performing very well, and that means more jobs and growth. Our trading relationship is the largest in the world. It's a real success story. And it is an example to the world. As you said, our trade has increased since 1993 by more than 40 percent, and most of our trade is problem-free. And when we have problems, we sit down and we work them out. Yesterday we announced a series of environmental agreements. We want to ensure that our citizens breathe clean air and drink clean water. Today we are announcing new ways to improve our shared border, all that based on the agreement that we signed 2 years ago on open sky.

But what is very important is our cooperation on peace and security. [*Inaudible*]—with the partnership we have had in Haiti and in Bosnia. We are in agreement on NATO enlargement. We all agree on U.N. renewal, and it's very important that this problem be resolved.

Once again, our cooperation is extending beyond the globe itself with the new Canada Hand, the next generation of Canada Arm. This gave a new meaning, Mr. President, to the term "hands across the border," and it's a symbol of our relationship as we enter a new century. By lending a hand to the American space program, we will be creating new jobs and opportunities in Canada in the high-tech sector of the future.

Sometimes our approaches are different. Sometimes in foreign policy, it's a matter of different means of achieving common goals; sometimes it is because our national interests are different. But we approach these differences with the honesty and mutual respect that a relationship like ours deserves. But the areas that bring us together are much greater than those that divide us. Working together, we are creating jobs, opportunities, and prosperity for the people in both countries, and we are setting an example of international cooperation for the world.

[*At this point, Prime Minister Chretien repeated a portion of his remarks in French.*]

And I would like to say that the Canadian people are very proud to be your neighbor. We have been able to work together, and we will do that in the future because together we can achieve a lot. And for you, Mr. President, as I said earlier, it's extremely important to carry on the leadership that you have shown in the last years because the United States is now the biggest and almost the unique power, compared to the situation that existed a few years ago. And I salute your leadership. And I know that you face some difficult problems, but you'll always have Canada on your side because we are both for peace around the world and prosperity around the world.

And thank you very much for your kind reception. And it has been fantastic so far. And the weather is well-organized. In Canada, I say that it is a federal responsibility. I don't know if it is the case here, but you've done a good job on that, Mr. President. [*Laughter*]

President Clinton. Thank you.

Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]?

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, you seem to have struck out in getting the Mideast peace talks back on track at this moment. Does the U.S. lack any diplomatic leverage with Israel despite 50 years of assistance and support? And where do you go from here?

President Clinton. Well, first of all, I wouldn't assume that, based on the comments that have been made so far. Where I go from here is that we're waiting for the Palestinian delegation to come in. We're going to review the ground that we went over with Prime Minister

Netanyahu, and we're going to do our best to get this thing going again.

There are clearly two preconditions: One is zero tolerance for terror; the other is a genuine commitment to build confidence and to make progress and to do the things required by the Oslo agreement. And the parties are going to have to decide whether they're willing to let the peace process go forward.

We are prepared to do whatever we can, but I would not conclude from the fact that I'm giving very noncommittal answers that I think there's no chance that we'll get it going again. I think that there is a fairly decent chance that we can, but I think it's important now not to say things which will undermine whatever prospect we have of success later.

In the end, it still depends on what it always has depended on, and that is the parties taking responsibilities to take the risks for peace.

President's Relationship With Prime Minister Chretien

[*The following question was asked in French and translated. Prime Minister Chretien answered in French and then repeated his answer in English.*]

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, the nice words you had with President Clinton plus what you said last night at the White House, would they reassure us in thinking that your relationship with President Clinton is as good or even better than that of your predecessor—Brian Mulroney had with Presidents Reagan and Bush?

Prime Minister Chretien. Perhaps I should translate; there will be an interest in English, I guess. [*Laughter*]

Yes, we are good friends. The President and I, we are politicians since a few years. [*Laughter*] And we can share a lot of debate together and spent a good time together last night talking about the problems of the world and a bit about the political problems that we all face on a daily basis. He gave me advice. I gave him advice. And it's free, so no problem. [*Laughter*]

It's a good relation, but he knows that we will disagree. And I'm—and I know that he will disagree with me. But we have shown that it is possible to tackle a problem at a time. And today we realize that the number of the problems that exist between United States and Canada today are very small, very few. And we explain each other, but sometimes our national interests are not the same. But I have to tell you that he's a good guy, and I enjoy to be with him. [*Laughter*]

President Clinton. Let me say, the biggest threat to our friendship is this injury of mine because it has precluded our indulging our mutual passion for golf. I don't think that—I don't know if any two world leaders have played golf together more than we have, but we meant to break a record, and I've had to take a 6-month respite. But I'll be back in the arena before long.

Anybody else? Mr. Hunt [Terence Hunt, Associated Press].

Terrorist Attack in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia

Q. Mr. President, are you asking Canada to extradite the Saudi man who is being held in Ottawa and is suspected of being involved in the bombing of the U.S. barracks in Saudi Arabia? Is the Prime Minister agreeable to doing that?

President Clinton. Well, let me say we have discussed this. It's being handled in accordance with Canadian law. But I believe the FBI put out a statement about it today, and we are fully satisfied with our cooperation with Canada at this point, and I think we have to let the Canadian legal process play itself out.

Canadian Unity

Q. Mr. President, you came out strongly in favor of Canadian unity during the last Quebec referendum campaign. Can the Prime Minister count on your support again, given the fact that in all likelihood there will be another Quebec referendum in your second term?

President Clinton. Well, the United States—it's not just my position; we have long felt that our relationship with a united Canada was a good thing and that people of different cultures and backgrounds live together in peace and harmony with still some decent respect for their differences in both our two countries. And I would be—I haven't changed my view about that, and I haven't changed my relationship with the Prime Minister, so I don't know what else to tell you. My feelings have not changed.

Mr. Bloom, [David Bloom, NBC] you're new here. Maybe we ought to let you get a question here. Welcome.

Affirmative Action

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, today a California Federal appeals court upheld Proposition 209. If the State proceeds with dismantling affirmative action programs, will that help or hinder efforts to ease racial tensions in America?

President Clinton. Well, I believe if States are precluded from trying to take appropriate steps that are not quotas and that do not give unqualified people a chance to participate in whatever it is—the economic or educational life—but do recognize the disadvantages people have experienced, I think that will be a mistake. And I think we'll all have to regroup and find new ways to achieve the same objective.

I think—as you know, my position on affirmative action is that a lot of the things that we had been doing should be changed. I've worked hard to do that at the national level. But my formulation of "mend it, don't end it" I still think is the best thing for America. And so—and that's what I said in California during the election that people disagreed with me. But I think that we will see that, for example, universities are better, more vital places if they are racially and ethnically diverse. I believe that. And I think that it ought to be a legitimate thing for any university to be able to seek an appropriate amount of diversity among people who are otherwise qualified to be there.

Cuba

Q. Mr. President, on the Helms-Burton issue, Canada has insisted that its policy of engaging Fidel Castro is more effective than your policy of isolating the dictator. Have you seen any evidence that Canada's policy is paying off when it comes to human rights and jailed prisoners?

President Clinton. No, but neither one of us has succeeded yet. I mean, the evidence doesn't—since there hasn't been appreciable change in the Cuban regime, neither of our policies can claim success. But this is an area where I think we have an honest political disagreement. The Prime Minister characterized it earlier: We have the same objectives; we differ about how to pursue it. And since neither one of us has succeeded, we really can't know.

Russia and NATO Expansion

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, a number of experts at Harvard and elsewhere in the world say that the risk is increasing every day of nuclear leakage or nuclear smuggling out of Russia, which conceivably could lead to a nuclear terrorist attack somewhere in North America. In view of that mounting risk, wouldn't it be better to postpone NATO enlargement for a couple of years, continue with the Partnership For Peace, and make sure that denuclearization has taken full root in Russia with START II and START III?

Prime Minister Chretien. I don't think that you can link the two. I think that the expansion of NATO is something that is on the table since a long time, because when those countries decided to become democracy- and market-oriented, we told them that we were to accept them in NATO. And we have to deliver on the word we gave to them, and I compliment the President for the work he has done on that. He has had—he approached Mr. Yeltsin in a very practical way, in a very firm way, but in an understanding way, and we're very hopeful that NATO will be expanded this summer.

President Clinton. I'd also like to comment on that, because I believe that Russia has a big interest in preserving the security of its nuclear stockpiles, and they have worked with us in good faith hard now for years to try to dismantle the nuclear arsenals. One of the important agreements we've made here to try to get the START III agreement in force was also to make sure that we were actually destroying the weapons as well as dismantling them, and we have been working since I've been here very hard in a mutual and cooperative way with the Russians to ensure the security of those nuclear materials.

Yes, as long as they're in existence, I suppose there is some risk that someone will try to pilfer them. We've had instances of that before in the last few years, but if we work at it and we work together with them, I think we're likely to succeed. But I do not believe that the Russians have any greater desire than we do to see any of this material stolen or put into the hands of the wrong people. I think they have a deep, vested interest in them.

Canadian Unity

Q. In meetings yesterday with President Clinton, have you called attention to the international situation, and have you talked about the national unity issue? Has Mr. Clinton asked questions about it, and what were your general observations on the topic?

[*The Prime Minister answered the question in French, and a translation was not provided.*]

Q. Mr. President——

President Clinton. Gene [Gene Gibbons, Reuters].

Middle East Peace Process

Q. Mr. President, in his election campaign, Prime Minister Netanyahu was very critical of the Oslo accords. At one point, I believe he described them as a knife in the back of Israel. And since then, he has taken a number of preemptive actions that have created a series of crises in the peace process. How does that square with your statement that one of the requirements is a genuine commitment to build confidence in the peace process?

President Clinton. I have so far not disclosed anything that has passed between us, but I will say that both—because he said it publicly—the Prime Minister has said repeatedly publicly, and said again to me when he was here, that even though he did not agree with everything about Oslo, he felt that the Israeli Government was bound by it, and he thought that he ought to honor it. And that's been his public statement, and I believe it remains his position.

Free Trade in the Americas

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, in light of all of the discussion and talk about free trade and the possibility of expanding free trade, did you ever think you would be this comfortable as a free trader?

Prime Minister Chretien. Yes. [*Laughter*] Because one of my problems at the time, I was afraid that the free trade agreements with the United States were to be a series of bilateral agreements, one with Canada, a bilateral with Mexico, a bilateral with something else. And I thought that we had to have a system where it will engage at the same time many countries to have a kind of counterweight to the might of the United States. And if we were to be alone, it was to be difficult.

And at that time, I was afraid that they—they worked to be the hub and make deals with everybody. Now that we have the concept of NAFTA, and now that we're looking and I hope that the President will convince the Congress to proceed on the fast track for Chile because we want to have by the year 2005 all the Americas together. And it's urgent that we move, because some are getting impatient in South America.

For example, MERCOSUR is working very well, and they are lobbied very strongly by the Europeans. And I would rather have them in the Americas than to be oriented elsewhere. So it's why I believe—and I will mention that to the leaders in the Congress this afternoon and in the Senate—that it's urgent to have a fast track to carry on to the commitment that we made in December '94 in Miami.

President Clinton. Let me say, I think it's very important that the Prime Minister has said this here in the United States and intends to continue and follow through with it. I am very concerned that we have not passed fast-track authority in this country. I think we have to do it. It's clear that expanding trade will strengthen democracy in Latin America and will strengthen our hand in the second fastest growing area of the world.

Last year, the MERCOSUR countries in South America did more business with Europe than the United States for the first time, simply because we have not had as aggressive a posture as we need. We had better go on and complete the work of the Summit of the Americas and create a free trade agreement area of the Americas if we expect to succeed.

Wolf, [Wolf Blitzer, CNN] and then I'll answer Sarah's [Sarah McClendon, McClendon News Service] question.

Relax, Sarah, I'm going to call on you.

Alleged DNC Access to Intelligence Information

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. There's a report, as you probably noticed in the Washington Post today, not only suggesting that there's an allegation of improper, unethical behavior on the part of the White House and the Democratic Party but perhaps even a crime, a violation of national security, that sensitive intelligence information was perhaps illegally passed on to the Democratic National Committee in order to prevent a fundraiser from getting someone into a dinner with you in 1995. I wonder if you've looked into that allegation, if you could tell us if there's any merit to it?

President Clinton. Well, this morning the Counsel's office held a series of conversations, which to the present time do not reveal any basis for believing that any sensitive information was improperly transmitted to the DNC. But because it's nonetheless a serious allegation, I

met with my Counsel this morning, and I asked him to give me some advice about what next steps should be taken to look into it further. But based on the conversations so far, there's—we have no basis to believe that it was done.

Prime Minister Chretien. Yes, in the back there.

Arms Sales and Illegal Immigration

Q. Mr. Prime Minister—[*inaudible*]—about the United States trying to sell arms to Latin American countries like Chile? And I have a second question for President Clinton. What's your response to the—[*inaudible*]—of Mexico and other Latin American countries about the change in the immigration law in the United States?

Prime Minister Chretien. Is it to you or to me?

President Clinton. They want to know—I think he—you want to know if he objects to the sale of arms to Chile by the United States?

Q. Yes.

Prime Minister Chretien. I don't know what kind of arms you're talking about. This is a problem with—every government has an army, and they have to have equipment. We buy equipment for our army, too, so I don't know if there is some materials that should not be sold. No problems have been mentioned to me in that possibility of United States selling arms to Chile.

President Clinton. Let me just respond to both those questions. First of all, the United States policy is to reduce tensions between our Latin American allies. We've worked very hard, for example, on the border dispute between Peru and Ecuador and even sent our soldiers there to help to resolve the matter in a way that was mutually agreeable to both parties.

And we have made no final decision about what to do with regard to arms sales to any country. But all the militaries there have to continue to modernize their forces. So the question is, you want to help the modernization process in a way that will not spark an arms race. That's how the line has to be drawn.

With regard to the immigration law, the immigration law—I think the fears of the most extreme consequences have been exaggerated. But the law is tougher on illegal immigration and tries to speed up the process by which people who come to this country illegally leave. We have very high immigration quotas. We take a lot of immigrants in every year. I have strongly supported that, and I have strongly opposed attempts to discriminate against legal immigrants. But for all the people who wait their turn and come into this country legally, I think that they, too, are entitled to an immigration system that has as much as integrity as possible, which means we should be fair and generous to our legal immigrants and treat them in a fair way, but we should not countenance illegal immigration, and we should reduce it however we can within the limits of our law and constitution.

John [John Donvan, ABC News]?

Q. Mr. President——

1996 Campaign Financing

Q. Mr. President, there's a perception that, as a result of all the questions and anguished debate about the campaign finance issue, that your administration is in some areas of—other areas of government becoming somewhat bogged down. For example, it is said to be a factor in the delay in appointing ambassadors. It is said to have made the administration less sure-footed in its dealings with China. How accurate is this perception?

President Clinton. Oh, I disagree with that. I can't comment on what others are concentrating on or doing, but what I'm working on is how to balance the budget, how to get my education program through and get the national standards movement going all the way to success, how to complete the business of welfare reform. And dealing specifically with the Vice President's trip to China, he did and said exactly what he should have done and said, and he would have done it anyway in exactly the way that he did. So I just disagree with that.

With regard to the appointments process, the appointments process generally is always more political when you have the President of one party and the Senate of another. I don't think there's any question about that. But we're working very hard. We spent—I spent a lot of time on the ambassadors in the last 10 days, on both the career and the noncareer ambassadorial posts. And with the Secretary of State, the National Security Adviser, the Vice President, we've signed off on a large number. And we're trying to finish the process so we can send a great big group to the Senate and they can all be considered at one time.

So the work of this White House is going right on and will continue to go right on.

Q. Mr. President——

Middle East Peace Process

[*The following question was asked in French and translated. Prime Minister Chretien answered in French, and then repeated his answer in English.*]

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, have you and President Clinton talked about the situation—the peace process in the Middle East? And did you discuss about your position, about the new settlements by Israel?

Prime Minister Chretien. We have discussed, yes, the Middle East problem with the President. I agree with the President that only cooperation between the Israelis and the Palestinians will permit a solution to the problem. We consider that building new settlements in places that were not contemplated by preexisting agreements cannot be supported, because there will be a difficulty to achieve peace.

President Clinton. Sarah, what were you going to ask?

Cross-Border Drug Trafficking

Q. Sir, this is a question for both of you. The records show that there are far more drugs coming over the border from Canada into the United States now than ever before. Can you look into that and maybe do something about it, both of you?

Prime Minister Chretien. It's more trade. [*Laughter*]

Q. More drugs coming in from Canada to the United States.

President Clinton. More drugs, she said.

Prime Minister Chretien. More drugs—I heard "trucks." [*Laughter*] I'm sorry.

President Clinton. I'm glad we clarified that, or otherwise he'd have to delay calling the election. [*Laughter*]

Prime Minister Chretien. But we discussed the problem, and we have a good collaboration between the two groups who enforce the laws in Canada and in the United States. And of course, we're preoccupied by the level of drug trafficking in North America, and we are working as close as possible with the administration to control this problem because, of course, it's very devastating socially in both our countries.

President Clinton. One of the important things we did as a part of this meeting was to take steps to deepen our law enforcement cooperation generally. This is a difficult problem, but the only answer is to more closely cooperate and do the best we can and make the best use we can of our officials and our technology.

Thank you all very much.

NOTE: The President's 140th news conference began at 1:31 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Minister of Environment Sergio Marchi of Canada. Prime Minister Chretien referred to President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the Report of the Department of Transportation

April 8, 1997

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 308 of Public Law 97–449 (49 U.S.C. 308(a)), I transmit herewith the Annual Report of the Department of Transportation, which covers fiscal year 1995.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,

April 8, 1997.