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Remarks on the House of Representatives Action on NAFTA and an Exchange With Reporters

November 17, 1993

The President. Thank you very much. Just a few minutes ago the House of Representatives voted to approve the North American Free Trade Agreement. NAFTA will expand our exports, create new jobs, and help us reassert America's leadership in the global economy. This agreement is in the deep self-interest of the United States. It will help make working Americans, the world's most productive workers, winners in the world economy.

I want to thank the lawmakers of both parties who gave their support to NAFTA. Many of them, as everyone knows, showed real courage in voting their consciences and what they knew to be in the best interest for their Nation. I want to thank all the citizens who worked so hard for this, the business leaders, especially the small business leaders, the spokespersons for the NAFTA fight, including Lee Iacocca who's here with us tonight.

I want to say a special word of thanks to the members of the Cabinet who labored so hard and long, especially Mickey Kantor, our Trade Ambassador, for his tireless effort on the side agreements and to lobby this through, and the Secretary of the Treasury, who is a native of south Texas and who understands so clearly why this is in our interests. And I want to say a special word of thanks to Vice President Gore for bringing home the message to the American people in his superb debate performance.

Tonight's vote is a defining moment for our Nation. At a time when many of our people are hurting from the strains of this tough global economy, we chose to compete, not to retreat, to lead a new world economy, to lead as America has done so often in the past. The debate over NAFTA has been contentious. Men and women of good will raised strong arguments for and against this agreement. But every participant in this debate wanted the same things: more jobs, more security, more opportunity for every American. And so do I.

I thank those who worked with us. I thank especially the people who organized the grassroots effort in our behalf, Bill Daley and former Congressman Bill Frenzel. I also thank the passionate defenders of the working people who oppose NAFTA for exercising their right to speak out. And they were right to speak out against economic conditions which have produced too few jobs and stagnant incomes, as well as inadequate strategies for retraining our workers and investing in our people and our places that need them. They fought hard, and they have my respect.

But in an economy where competition is global and change is the only constant, we simply cannot advance the security of American workers by building walls of protection around our economy or by pretending that global competition isn't there. Our only choice is to take this new world head on, to compete, and to win. That's why it's so important that we pass NAFTA, and I hope the Senate will complete the process in the next few days.

By eliminating Mexico's tariffs and restrictive rules we'll be able to export more cars, more computers, and other products and keep more American workers on the job here at home. NAFTA will raise environmental and labor standards in Mexico. And I want to ask tonight labor and management to work together with our administration to ensure that the labor and environmental provisions of NAFTA are honored. We must make sure that this pact works to America's advantage.

NAFTA is a big step, but just the first step in our effort to expand trade and spark an economic revival here and around the world. One legitimate point that the opponents of NAFTA made is that we will do even better in the global economy if we have a training system and a retraining system and a job placement system for our workers worthy of the challenges they face. We simply must guarantee our workers the training and education they need to compete in the global marketplace. And I call on the coalition that passed NAFTA to help me early next year present to the Congress and pass a world-class reemployment system that will give our working people the security of knowing that they'll be able always to get the training they need as economic conditions change.

We must also provide our citizens with other things, with health care that can never

be taken away, with increased investment in people and places and jobs. And we must continue the fight to lower foreign trade barriers which slow economic growth here in the United States and around the world.

Tomorrow I go to Seattle to meet with the leaders of 15 Asian Pacific economies. I will ask them to work toward more open markets for our products. When I return, I'll reach out to the other market-oriented democracies of Latin America, to ask them to join in this great American pact that I believe offers so much hope to our future. And next month we will urge our European and Asian competitors to complete work on the worldwide trade agreement that can literally create hundreds of thousands of jobs here in the United States as we open markets all across the globe.

We've faced choices before like the one we faced tonight, whether to turn inward or turn outward. After World War I, the United States turned inward and built walls of protection around our economy. The result was a depression and ultimately another world war. After the Second World War, we made a very different choice. We turned outward. We built a system of expanded trade and collective security. We rebuilt the economies of our former foes and in the process created the great American middle class.

Tonight, with the cold war over, our Nation is facing that choice again. And tonight I am proud to say, we have not flinched. Tonight the leaders of both parties found common ground in supporting the common good. We voted for the future tonight. We once again showed our strength. We once again showed our self-confidence, even in this difficult time. Our people are winners. And I believe we showed tonight we are ready together to compete and win and to shape the world of the 21st century.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, how are you going to make up with the Democratic leaders who fought this trade agreement so vociferously?

The President. Well, I thought what they all said tonight was a very good signal. At the end of that debate I was deeply moved by the efforts that people on both sides of the issue made to reach out to each other and to say that we have to make this work now, we have to go forward now, we have to build our economy. And I think you will see that happening. I think you will see a greater sense of unity and commitment to have the kind of job training programs we need, to have the kind of investment strategies we need to keep forcing these trade barriers down abroad.

And I must say, too, I hope we'll see in the future some more of this bipartisan effort to build economic security for Americans, because a lot of our national security in the future is going to be involved with rebuilding our economic strength from the grassroots up. And that's a very hopeful part of this debate.

Q. What about the relationship with organized labor, sir?

The President. Well, one of the things I learned, again, in this fight is that they have an enormous amount of energy and ability to organize and ability to channel the passions and feelings of their workers. You know, when you think about it, we had the White House, the leaders of both parties, an enormous amount of support, and we had to come from a long way back to win this fight because of the work they did largely. And what I want to do is to ask them to join me now, as I said tonight, in making sure that the labor and environmental agreements are honored, in going on to the health care battle, in going on to other economic battles, and in making sure we give our working people the kind of education and training programs they need to compete in this different and very competitive global economy.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:03 p.m. in the Grand Foyer at the White House.

Executive Order 12880—National Drug Control Program

November 16, 1993

The Office of National Drug Control Policy has the lead responsibility within the Executive Office of the President to establish policies, priorities, and objectives for the Nation's drug control program, with the goal of