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The President's News Conference With President Vicente Fox of Mexico in Monterrey, Mexico

March 22, 2002

President Fox. Good afternoon. Thank you very much. Yes, in fact, it has been a very productive meeting, a meeting where we have touched upon three subjects, three chapters. One deals with what we have called the border alliance, intelligent borders, and the smart border initiative.

The purpose is, firstly, to introduce the safety factor and hold it as an important priority and, at the same time, with the same emphasis, to seek for efficient borders, customs that are efficient as well, for an expeditious flow both of people, merchandise, products. And in this sense, what we seek is for those using these crossings, which are hundreds of thousands of people every day, to do so with that efficiency we are talking about. Likewise, within this same sense, we talked about a program to modernize, technologically speaking, our borders. And this would promote that efficiency.

Among other points within this same category, we have also spoken about opening in airports that have high traffic, both in the United States and Mexico, a line to take care of the Mexicans and Canadians coming into Mexico and, in the case of Mexico, taking care of U.S. citizens and Canadian citizens.

The second topic is what we have called the Partnership for Prosperity, where there are plenty of topics but the specific purpose is to generate opportunities for advancement, opportunities for income, and mainly in communities with high migratory rates in Mexico. For this purpose, we have spoken of joining efforts to facilitate resources for micro-, small-, and medium-sized companies, who are the ones generating the highest number of jobs.

We have spoken of also working to bring down the cost of migrators' remittances to their families in Mexico, and this way facilitating those resources becoming productive projects toward important generation of employment and opportunities.

We talked about important program of scholarships where, on the U.S. side, there will be investments up to $50 million, precisely to promote these scholarships and promote to the state level the creation of scholarships for universities. This is important in the purpose of creating, forming human resources.

And on the other hand, we have also spoken of generating and facilitating resources for infrastructure, especially at the border, infrastructure for an efficient use of water, for water treatment plants, infrastructure for ecological or environmental purposes at the border, and some other investments in infrastructure along the same lines, the border.

On the other hand, I believe it is very significant, and we have talked about it again, to have this great drive that has been announced by President Bush at the Financing for Development Conference. And it's the purpose to try to increase important resources for countries that are not as developed, for poorer countries. We have heard from many leaders present, many heads of state, who truly expressed this was welcome information, a welcome announcement. And of course, same goes for us. We are not a country to receive the help, but we clearly understand that there are countries who require this help to combat poverty very close to us, such as the case of Central America.

So we hope that these additional funds, I repeat, have been very welcome, well-received by the community of smaller countries present here. This time these same resources also, part of them, to be used in these countries of Latin America or Central America.

This effort of what has seemed to be called the participation in the millennium, the challenge of the millennium, is important for us.

And we have verified this importance it has for the community of countries.

Thank you. Now Mr. Bush will speak.

President Bush. Thank you for your hospitality, and thank you for hosting the important conference on reducing global poverty. It was a success, thanks to your leadership and your vision.

I'm so glad that the world could see Monterrey, Mexico. It is a really dynamic city. It's important for the world also to realize that as a result of President Fox's vision, this country is reforming. It's a vibrant place. It's an exciting place for people to live. People are finding jobs in Mexico.

And Mr. President, I am grateful to call you friend. Thank you for your leadership as well.

I try to remind people in my country, as many times as I can, a vibrant, prosperous Mexico is in the best interests of the United States of America. We were at the White House on September the 5th, and here's what I said then: "The United States has no more important relationship in the world than the one we have with Mexico." I believed it on September the 5th; I believe it today. And since September the 11th, those words have been tested and proven. I deeply appreciate President Fox's early support and his continuing advice. And on behalf of the American people, I thank the people of Mexico for their support and sympathy.

The relationship between the United States and Mexico is very strong, is very important, and it's growing stronger every day. America respects Mexico's culture and Mexico's achievements. By embracing markets and fiscal discipline, Mexico has created one of the most resilient economies in the region. And through NAFTA, our nations have forged one of the world's most dynamic trading relationships. Every day we exchange more than $650 million worth of commerce, creating wealth and opportunity for consumers and workers and families on both sides of the border.

President Fox and I are determined to extend the benefits of free markets to all our citizens. As part of our Partnership for Prosperity, we'll help focus private investment on less developed parts of Mexico, creating more jobs and more opportunities for more people.

President Fox and I are determined to make our shared border modern, efficient, and secure. The smart border declaration our countries have just signed will move us toward this important goal. Our common border must be closed to drugs and terrorists and open to trade and legitimate travel. America is grateful for Mexico's fight against the drug cartels, and I salute your many breakthroughs this year, Mr. President.

President Fox and I talked about migration. Last year, we established a process to address this issue. We're making good and steady progress. Migrants make a valuable contribution to America. It's also important for our Nation to recognize, as we discuss immigration, Mexico has got a unique place in this issue. Mexico is different from other countries not only because of our proximity but because of our special relationship.

We made some progress this year on an issue called 245(i). It's an important piece of legislation. It allowed families to stay together. It passed the House of Representatives. Unfortunately, it got stalled in the United States Senate. And my hope, Mr. President, is we're able to get it out of the United States Senate and to my desk so I can sign it.

President Fox and I agreed on measures to reform the North American Development Bank, known as NADBank. We will increase the Bank's ability to make low interest loans to address urgent environmental priorities along the border. We also agreed to expand the Bank's range, so more people can benefit.

Mexico and America are proud nations united by timeless values, by democracy, by faith, and by freedom. We have a modern relationship sustained by a mutual respect and trust. We've entered a new era of trade and cooperation and prosperity. And the United States and Mexico are building an historic partnership, one which will benefit both our peoples and provide a good example for the rest of the world.

Abortion Funding/Situation in the Middle East

Q. President Bush, have you or General Zinni heard anything from Chairman Arafat

that indicates that a meeting between him and Vice President Cheney could help catalyze an Israeli-Palestinian truce? And honoring President Fox's request that we focus on poverty over this summit, could I also ask you to explain why your administration is withholding the $34 million that Congress appropriated to the United Nations Population Fund, why it's—[*inaudible*]—this year's budget?

And President Fox, do you have any thoughts about the administration's decision on the United Nations Population Fund?

President Bush. Let me start with the latter. That violated the one-question rule, but—I said we're not going to use taxpayers' money to fund abortion. And we're going to make sure, before we spend taxpayers' money, that we're not funding abortion.

And as to your first question, as I have said all along, General Zinni will assess the situation in the Middle East. And a meeting could happen if and when Chairman Arafat performs, does what he's supposed to do. Those conditions have been laid out by Vice President Cheney. And now General Zinni is trying to determine whether or not he is going to do what he said he would do.

President Fox. The second question, what is the question to me?

Q. Your reaction to President Bush's decision to with hold $34 million from the United Nations Population Fund and their family planning work around the world.

President Fox. None. No comment. His decision is totally independent. No comment from my side.

President Fidel Castro of Cuba

Q. My question concerns both Mexico and the United States, in a way. President Bush, the Cuban Government claims that President Fidel Castro's early departure from the summit is a result of pressures from your Government. And Mr. President, I want to know if you really would have felt uncomfortable to encounter Fidel Castro here in Monterrey?

And for President Fox, Mr. President, what is the relationship between Mexico and Cuba now, after Ricardo Alarcon made the Government of Mexico responsible for President Castro's early departure?

President Bush. First of all, I know of no pressure placed on anybody. I mean, Fidel Castro can do what he wants to do. And what I'm uncomfortable about is the way he treats his people. There's only one country that's not a democracy in our hemisphere, and that's Cuba. And it makes me uncomfortable to realize that there is still one country that doesn't have free press, freedom to speak, freedom to realize your dreams. And I feel strongly about that, and I'm going to continue to speak out on the fact that this island is a place of repression, a place where the people don't have hope.

Q. Did you pressure anybody?

President Bush. I don't know what you're talking about, about pressuring anybody. I just said that.

President Fox. There has been no modification in our relationships. We said goodbye to Mr. Fidel Castro. His visit ended. And there is no modification or alteration.

U.S. Assistance to Peru

Q. Mr. President, President Bush, are you prepared to offer Peru new military assistance to help crack down on terrorism in the wake of the bombing in Lima? And is it time to resume drug surveillance——

President Bush. On the drug surveillance issue, we have yet—not made up our mind yet. We're analyzing not only what took place in the past but the most effective way to help Peru fight narcotics.

The first part of the question? I'm sorry, Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Q. Helping Peru with terrorism with new military assistance.

President Bush. We're going to analyze all options available to help Peru. But the first place we need to help Peru is to get the Andean Trade Preference Act out of the U.S. Congress. One of the messages I'm taking to not only Peru but the other Andean nations is, ATPA is important. It's important to my administration, it's important to their future, and I'd like to see it renewed as quickly as possible.

President Fidel Castro of Cuba

Q. Thank you. Good afternoon. The Cuban Government says that the Mexican Government was pressured. The Mexican

Government said they had no pressure. Who is lying, Mr. President Fox? Who is lying, Mr. President Bush, the Cubans or the Mexicans? Thank you.

President Bush. I thought I just answered that question. [*Laughter*] Maybe I missed it—or you did. [*Laughter*]

President Fox. There is no such thing. Mr. Fidel Castro visited Mexico, visited the conference, the U.N. conference. He was here; he participated in the conference; and he returned to Cuba—nothing more.

President Saddam Hussein of Iraq

Q. President Bush, good evening. During his recent trip to the Middle East, the Vice President made it very clear that at each stop, he told our Arab allies that no military action against Iraq was imminent. Isn't it also true that this administration is telling our allies, Arab allies and others around the world, that this government is, however, committed—as committed to removing Saddam Hussein from power as the administration was for removing the Taliban?

President Bush. Let me put it to you this way, David [David Gregory, NBC News]: What we're telling our friends is that Saddam Hussein is a man who is willing to gas his own people, willing to use weapons of mass destruction against Iraq's citizens. Evidently, there's a new article in New York magazine or New Yorker magazine—some east coast magazine—and it details about his barbaric behavior toward his own people. And not only did he do it to his own people; he did it to people in his neighborhood. And this is a man who refuses to allow us to determine whether or not he still has weapons of mass destruction, which leads me to believe he does. He is a dangerous man who possesses the world's most dangerous weapons. And it is incumbent upon freedom-loving nations to hold him accountable, which is precisely what the United States of America will do.

I haven't had a chance to explain this to our Mexican friends, but a nightmare scenario, of course, would be if a terrorist organization such as Al Qaida were to link up with a barbaric regime such as Iraq and thereby, in essence, possess weapons of mass destruction. We cannot allow that to happen.

And so, David, what I've told others, including President Fox, is we have no imminent plans to use military operations. We'll be deliberate; we'll consult with our friends and allies. But we'll deal with Saddam Hussein. And he knows that. And this is exactly what I've been saying ever since I've been the President.

Q. Does that mean you will remove him——

President Bush. As I said, yes, we'd like to see a regime change in Iraq. That's been the longstanding policy of the U.S. Government. Nothing is new there. That's precisely what has been said since I became President of the United States. But close consultations with our friends from all around the world—and they—I think people have got a pretty good sense of how I view him. And I hope that, of course, he allows inspectors to go into his country, like he promised he would do, not for the sake of letting inspectors in but to showing the world that he has no weapons of mass destruction.

Immigration

Q. Good evening, Mr. President. If truly your government has contemplated some date about the migratory agreement with Mexico? And also, here at the forum there was something from former President Carter for amnesty for 3 million Mexican workers in the U.S. Your government would consider legalizing them, or are you saying no?

President Bush. I think the best way to describe what is possible in the United States is that beyond 245(i), which is the family reunification, is, first of all, understanding the unique nature of the Mexican in our country, that the Mexican national is different by virtue of the fact of the proximity to the United States and that we do have a special relationship between our countries, not only defined by NAFTA but defined by cultural ties and historic ties. And so I think that ought to be a part of any discussions.

But here's my attitude. I think what our country ought to do is help match any willing employer with any willing employee, so that if somebody is looking for somebody who wants to work and somebody wants to work, we can facilitate that arrangement.

And we've got a lot of discussions and work to do. But what I've assured President Fox and his administration is that we will continue working on this issue. We've got technical groups working on it, and he and I will continue working on it.

President Fox. Thank you very much. Good evening.

NOTE: The news conference began at 6:57 p.m. at the Palacio de Gobierno. President Fox spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. In his remarks, President Bush referred to U.S. Special Envoy to the Middle East Gen. Anthony Zinni, USMC (Ret.); Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority; and President Fidel Castro of Cuba. A reporter referred to Cuban National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcon. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

"The Monterrey Commitments": Joint Statement by the Presidents of the United States and Mexico

March 22, 2002

Our meeting today was a valuable opportunity to celebrate the strength and vitality of the U.S.-Mexican bilateral partnership over the past year, and discuss our priorities for the year ahead.

Our two nations have developed a historic level of trust and mutual respect, strengthened by common values and purposes, that has facilitated an unprecedented degree of bilateral cooperation over the past year. It is a high national priority of both nations to continue building on that cooperation over the coming years and harnessing it for the achievement of the important goals of economic and social development, security, and rule of law that are essential to both countries' wellbeing.

In this context, we agreed that the international campaign to eradicate terrorism requires us to address pressing new priorities and shared goals central to defending our societies and ways of life. At the same time, we recognized that the events of September 11 underscore more than ever the importance of the U.S.-Mexican relationship, as partners and neighbors, in the attainment of those goals and in realizing the vision we have set forth for our countries' future. Hence, we reviewed what we are doing together to create a "smart border" for the 21st century. We will build a border that protects our societies against those who would do us harm, and that truly serves the human and economic needs of our dynamic relationship. We share a vision of a modern border that speeds the legitimate flow of people and commerce, and filters out all that threatens our safety and prosperity.

The "smart border" declaration and action plan we have just adopted sets out a series of specific steps we will take to move concretely toward that vision. The twenty-point action plan comprises measures that will enhance the secure flow of goods and people, and build a modern and efficient infrastructure that keeps pace with commerce. We intend to monitor this process closely to ensure the fastest possible implementation of these and other steps on which we may agree. Both governments will work expeditiously to prioritize infrastructure investment needs and cooperate to identify funding sources.

Slightly more than one year ago, in Guanajuato, we talked about migration as one of the major ties that join our societies. We launched then the frankest and most productive dialogue our countries have ever had on this important and challenging subject. Those talks have continued over the past year, and have yielded a clearer assessment of the scope and nature of this issue. This bond between our nations can render countless benefits to our respective economies and families. Over the past year, important progress has been made to enhance migrant safety and particularly in saving lives by discouraging and reducing illegal crossings in dangerous terrain.

On September 7, 2001, during President Fox's historic State Visit to Washington, we issued a joint statement instructing our cabinet-level working group to provide us with specific proposals to forge a new and realistic framework that will ensure a safe, legal, orderly, and dignified migration flow between our countries. We have today agreed that our Cabinet level migration group should continue the work we charged it with in Guanajuato and Washington.