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Interview With Foreign Print Journalists

March 27, 2006

The President. Thanks for coming. I'm looking forward to going down to Cancun. I'm very grateful for President Fox's hospitality. I've never been to Cancun, but I've had a lot of friends who have been to Cancun, and they tell me if I stay too long, I won't return. This is a relatively quick trip. I'm looking forward to going to the Mayan ruins, which will be really exciting. And I'm looking forward to both bilateral and our trilateral discussions.

With Mexico, obviously, there's big issues, particularly immigration right now. But I'll remind people that our relationship is more than just the migration issue. Mexico is our second-largest trading partner. The relationship with Mexico is a strong and vital relationship. Obviously, not only do we have important trade equities, but we've also got common values, and we've got millions of Mexican Americans who take great pride in their heritage. And so Mexico has been and will be a vital issue for future Presidents. And it's very important for us to work on a relationship that has a foundation of mutual benefit, as well as openness and candor when it comes to dealing with difficult issues.

And I really value my friendship with President Fox. Obviously, we have been through a lot during my Presidency and his. We've agreed on things, and we haven't agreed, but we've always remained friends, and that's a sign of a vital relationship. I'm obviously aware that there is a political season coming up, but until someone is sworn in office, my relationship will be with Vicente Fox as the leader of our important friend to the south. And I'm sure there's going to be all kinds of speculation about whether or not the United States will be involved in the election, and we won't be, pure and simple.

The relationship with Canada is also a vital relationship. Canada is our largest trading partner. This will be my first meeting with the Prime Minister as—with him as the Prime Minister. Obviously, I met him in the past. I'm looking forward to it. This will be the third Prime Minister with which I've dealt as the President. I've had good relations with the previous Prime Ministers, and I'm looking forward to good relations with Stephen Harper.

I'm fully aware of the relationship—the nature of the relationship between Canada and the United States. One, it's a vital relationship, but it's also one in which there is a certain skepticism about the United States, and therefore, I will do my very best to find common ground and to convince—through my relationship with the Prime Minister, convince the people of Canada we genuinely care about our friends and neighbors to the north and will work to resolve different issues in an aboveboard way that is mutually beneficial.

So it's an important meeting, and it's a way for us to confirm the—and then, eventually, the three of us will get into a room to meet. And it's a very strong signal that the three of us working together are better than each of us working apart, and that whether it be border security or commerce or hearing the values that are important in our neighborhood, we can do a lot together. And I find these meetings to be very useful and very important.

All right, we'll go around a couple of times. Pepe.

Mexico-U.S. Relations

Q. Sir, you mentioned the ties that bind both countries, the U.S. and Mexico. But those ties are also—those issues are extremely politically charged in both countries—trade, immigration, et cetera. So my question would be, where do you expect to lead the U.S.-Mexico relation in the next 3 years?

The President. Appreciate that. First, I think it's very important for both President Fox and myself to explain to both our countries the benefits of $300 million [billion] * two-way trade—well, nearly $300 million [billion] * in the year 2005 of two-way trade. In other words, it's one thing to talk trade, and I fully understand that unless those benefits are translated to more and more people, people begin to wonder whether or not trade is worthwhile.

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* White House correction.

You'll find that here in America we're having a debate as well, over trade. I said in my State of the Union that we've got to reject protectionism because I believe that trade, when it's done right, free and fair, is beneficial to the parties. And I strongly believe that the trade between the United States and Mexico has been beneficial for Mexico, as it has for the United States. But as a leader, I've got to continue to explain to people why.

I have a different perspective than many because of the relationship between—because of my time as Governor of Texas, and I remember full well what life was like on the border before NAFTA. And if you go down to the border now, you see vitality on the border, you see that—and vitality on both sides of the border.

There's been—commerce has helped people get jobs, and commerce has helped people realize a better life. And it's important for us to make sure we continue to explain that because if not, there will be protectionist tendencies that will tend to emerge, not only in our two countries but around the world. And in my judgment, leadership has got to fight off protectionist tendencies. I think that would tend to isolate each other and make it more difficult for us to realize the benefits of our relationship.

There's also going to be an important call for our countries to work together to emphasize the institutions, the democratic institutions that are vital for a functioning and stable society: anticorruption measures; free press; free religion; institutions that sometimes can be challenged in the course of politically—development within our neighborhood and around the world, for that matter.

So the common value theme is a very important theme for me to continue to work with Vicente Fox and whoever were to replace him—obviously, we've got a lot of human issues to deal with. The migration of people across our border is a vital issue that must be done in the same way to protect and honor people's lives. Americans are—I am disgusted by a system in which people are snuck across the border in the bottom of an 18-wheeler. This is inhumane. There's a more humane way to deal with our neighborhood.

There's a lot of big issues that confront us. But in order to make the relationship vital, we've got to explain to people exactly why—you know, the consequences of, for example, not having commerce flow as frequently as we do.

Tell me your papers now. Pepe.

Q. It's El Universal.

Q. La Opinion.

The President. *Si.* Thank you. Welcome.

Immigration Reform

Q. Over a million people across the country have marched in support of legalization and against H.R. 4437, the Sensenbrenner bill.

The President. In support of what? Legalization, you said?

Q. Legalization, yes. Since you're opposing amnesty, sir, would you agree on a language that puts the undocumented on a path to earn legalization——

The President. Let me tell you what I am for. First of all, there is a—the legislative process is one that, obviously, it goes through the House and then the Senate, and if there are differences, it has got to be resolved. And what people are now doing is reacting to a legislative process. I believe that any immigration bill ought to make sure that we're, one, able to secure the borders. That's what Americans want; that's what any country should want. Your borders ought to be secure.

And I also recognize that part of securing the borders requires a guest-worker program. In other words, the two go hand in hand. I don't believe people who have been here illegally should be granted citizenship status right off the bat. That's amnesty.

Let me finish.

I just, as a matter of fact, gave a speech to a group of citizens that have become U.S. citizens today, in my presence. They had stood in line. And I do not think a country that relies upon law ought to say to somebody who was here illegally, you get to be ahead of the line.

In other words—so therefore, I think that part of a rational worker program is—say you're here on a temporary basis, and if you choose to be a citizen or want to be a citizen, you get in line. But like I said today, I've

called upon Congress to increase the number of green cards. To me, that's the most rational way of dealing with the citizenship issue. It's essential that we not have automatic amnesty or legality. First of all, it would send a signal that said all you've got to do is get here illegally and eventually you get in the head of the line. And that's—I don't think it will work.

Q. But what if they get in line behind those who are waiting for their green cards now?

The President. That's why I said I think one way to deal with this is to increase the number of green cards. And right now part of the problem is that the green cards are limited. And that's why I have spoken before and again reiterated my position that there ought to be a temporary-worker program; people who want to be here should not get—be a citizen should not get ahead of the line but ought to be waiting in line. And if the Congress so desires, they ought to increase the number of green cards in order to take the pressure off the system.

Q. But——

The President. It's a plan that—again, I know people are saying, "Well, the House bill didn't have a temporary-worker program in there," and I think any bill should be a comprehensive bill including a temporary-worker program. I've spoken out on it ever since I've been the President, and I think it is the best way to go because I realize that, one, it is important to enforcing the border—that being a temporary-worker program; secondly, that it's a humane way to deal with people who are making a contribution to our economy.

In other words, if something is illegal, then people will figure out ways to get around the system. That's what creates the *coyotes*; that's what creates the smugglers; that's what creates the document forgers; that's what creates these places where people are dumped for a period of time and then smuggled across and then told to walk; that's what creates the dangerous predicament for people coming across the desert. And so there's a—and that's why people—that's what causes people to hide in the shadows of our cities.

And there's a much more rational way and much more humane way to deal with people who are doing jobs that Americans won't do. Anyway, that's why I think the work component is a vital part of an immigration policy, and I believe border—I know border security and a guest-worker program go hand in hand. In other words, one supports the other.

U.S. Border/Homeland Security

Q. I guess I wanted to ask you about an issue on the northern border that's of some concern. Your administration has proposed a Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative, which would require passports or passport-like documents for Canadians and Americans coming and going. And there's been some concern in Canada that this will, in effect, do more to harm economic trade and tourism and do little to actually improve security. And I'm wondering, when you're moving towards, sort of, a more integrated approach to security on things like NORAD, why move ahead with something that really amounts to a bit more of a restriction?

The President. Well, I think—first of all, we have the same issue to the south, by the way. How do you come up with a policy where there are thousands of border crossings a day, without—and trying to have a rational approach to determining who's coming in and who's going out of the country, without endangering workforce, tourism, trade? Our goal is to, obviously, consult with our partners to develop, you know, passport and/or passport-like document, you said, and I think that may be the operative word as a plan develops.

There is a desire for a lot of our citizenry, and it's reflected in the Congress, to know, as I said, who's coming in and who's going out, and why. And I think that—I'm pretty confident that if we work closely, we can develop such a plan that enables a scanning device or a card that can be dealt with on a scanning device to not stop the flow of traffic of people who make a daily routine of it, and also make sure that we know who's coming in the country.

The purpose is not to impede trade and/or cross-border relations. The purpose is to expedite them in a way that gives both countries, or all three countries, comfort in knowing who's coming across. In Texas, for example, like in El Paso, on a daily basis, there's thousands of people that it's just a part of

their daily routine. And the idea would be to develop a document that could be scanned as they just walk across the bridge. It's the same concept for Canada as well.

Q. You couldn't just do it through a driver's license? I mean, that's the——

The President. Well, that's what they're working on. First of all, we have found in our own country that drivers' license aren't necessarily a secure document. I mentioned to you that this is a—the document forgery is a significant problem for our country, primarily for people coming in from the south. And you've got a person looking for somebody to help build an apartment building, and people show up, and they flash a document, and the employer is not equipped to be a document checker. It's not what they do.

And so they say, "Sure, come on and work." And the truth of the matter is, there is a whole industry out there to provide fake documents for people doing work that Americans won't do, because the system needs—the system says—just hasn't been rational, let me just put it to you that way. And therefore, there's a skepticism about certain documents which can be forged. And that's why you're seeing the notion of trying to develop one that is tamper-proof, for not only border crossings but also for working.

And it seems to me to make sense without—again, I understand the sensitivity. I'm very aware, and I'm sure Stephen and Vicente will bring this up. I've already talked to Vicente about the issue in regards to Mexico.

Look, again, this is an issue I'm very familiar with because of my time as the Governor of Texas—immigration issues and border issues are—it's been a part of our State's history for a long period of time.

Yes, Pepe. You're not going back to migration, are you?

Immigration Reform

Q. Unless you want to go there.

The President. No, but Maribel will. [*Laughter*] I can see it's on the tip of her tongue. No, that's all right. It's a big issue. It's a huge issue. Look—and you should.

Q. The question would be, though—if you excuse me, a few months ago, or a year ago, you said that you would invest political capital in the issue of—the immigration issue.

The President. Yes. You did come back to it. That's good.

Q. Yet in the last couple of weeks, there have been a lot of people in this town talking that your political capital is wasted. So——

The President. Don't underestimate me, Pepe.

Q. No, I don't. But——

The President. Okay. [*Laughter*]

Q. Is this Congress underestimating you? Because——

The President. We'll see. But I will keep speaking out on it. One thing is I'm—I believe it's very important to get this issue—to reform the immigration system. I have spoken out on it before, and I will continue speaking out on it. It's now coming to a head. And I will continue to call Congress to have a comprehensive package that is more than just border security but also enforcement—interior enforcement, as well as a guest-worker program. And I'm going to say it again, that—particularly for the American audience—the two go hand in hand. A temporary-worker program that enables people to cross our border legally to do work Americans won't do takes pressure off of Border Patrol agents who are trying to stop illegal activities, which makes it easier to secure the border.

Government of Mexico/Mexican National Economy

Q. If I may, sir, then what would you expect—or what would you propose or expect or hope that the Mexican Government would do in this case?

The President. No, I appreciate that. I think it's very important for the Mexican Government to continue doing what they have recently done, which is to make it clear to the American people that we have responsibilities on both sides of the border. And I thank President Fox for putting out those statements.

You're aware of, I'm sure, a series of advertisements in our newspapers that said, we have an important relationship with the United States. And it requires the understanding that we will work together on our border—as well as, by the way, working on

the southern border of Mexico, because many of the folks that are now coming into our country are coming up from Central America, for example. A lot of folks from Central America have been crossing into Mexico and across. And part of making sure that our borders are secure—all our border, when I say "our borders," I'm talking about Mexico and the United States' borders in this case, is that we work hand in glove in the north, and also help in the south.

And Vicente has told me he understands that there is an issue on the southern border of Mexico. It's a difficult border to enforce, but it's important.

The truth of the matter is, the long run for the issue is going to be for Mexico's economy to extend its promise beyond just certain regions. Look, I strongly believe most people want to be able to find decent wages at their home, where people are able to provide for their families. And I've told our people ever since I've been involved in this issue that—and the way I like to put it is, family values don't stop at the Rio Grande River. In other words, moms and dads in Mexico are anxious to put food on the table for their children. And therefore, many of them are willing to come great distances and lengths to be able to provide for their families. And I think most people would rather be providing for their families close to their homes.

And so part of a larger strategy has got to be to make sure that we work in concert to develop—to encourage economic growth so that there are meaningful jobs throughout the country. That's why I'm a believer in trade. I believe if we were ever to stop our trade, it would make it harder for prosperity to spread.

And I appreciate Vicente's understanding that education programs are vital. People have got to have a skill set in order to be able to make sure that jobs are—that jobs spread throughout the country. And for a period of time, many people used to come across the border from the border regions, but prosperity, as I mentioned to you, is visible. The life has changed on the border. But the prosperity on the border has caused people from other parts of the country who are looking for work to migrate north, come across the border, and try to find jobs in the United States.

And I believe that the immigrant worker has helped grow our economy. In other words, there's jobs Americans will not do, and it makes sense to have a legal policy that says, if there's a job Americans won't do and people are willing to do it for the sake of their families, we ought to encourage them to do so and make it a legal, temporary experience. And we'll negotiate what the definition of temporary is, and we'll negotiate the kind of documentation necessary to make sure that they're not—there's not a lot of fraud. And we will—and also the issue of citizenship. And again, my own judgment is, is the best way to deal with the citizenship is to not say—to say to somebody, "If you're here illegally, you don't get to take somebody else's place in line who is here legally." The reason we have lines is because of the green card issue. There's a shortage of green cards. And Congress has the right to increase the number of green cards.

Yes, Miss Maribel.

Naturalization/Amnesty

Q. Sir, do you believe there is a difference between amnesty and earned legalization——

The President. What does "earned legalization" mean? Why don't you give me your description, and I will answer your question.

Q. According to Chairman Specter is, they have to pay a fine—the undocumented, I'm talking about—pay a fine, get in line, prove they have a job, that they have paid taxes, that they don't have a criminal record.

The President. Right. But "get in line," you said?

Q. Yes.

The President. That's exactly what I just said. Somebody, in order to become a citizen, must get in line. And amnesty means you're automatically legal and you get ahead. In other words, there is no line, you're just it. You know, you've been here, undocumented; you're legal; boom, you don't have to wait in line.

Getting in line is exactly what I just said. You can call it by any way you want to call it. I would say that it's a system that does not—that rewards and understands people

here are doing jobs Americans won't do—take out "rewards"—understands that there are people doing jobs that Americans won't do, but you don't get to be an automatic citizen. You have to get in line.

Q. So you agree with Senator McCain, then.

The President. Look, I'm just telling you exactly what I am for. And what I am for is a program that is not amnesty. In other words, amnesty means you're automatically legal. And there are some that believe that ought to happen, that think that's a rational policy. I disagree. And the reason I disagree was, one, it undermines rule of law. In other words, there's a lot of people here trying to become a citizen that are waiting in line, and all of a sudden—and they're doing it legally, and all of a sudden, you know, by law, it means that those who have been here not legally get ahead of the line.

Secondly, I think it sends a wrong message. In other words, basically, "It's okay, fine, all you have to do is come, come in the country, be undocumented, and in a matter of time, we'll make you legal." And I think that will cause another group of people to come. So therefore, my view is, is that, yes, you can become a citizen, but you have to get in line. In other words, you can't get ahead of those who have been here playing by the rules.

And the bottleneck is the number of green cards the Government issues. And that can be changed, and that's why I called upon Congress to increase the number of green cards.

Now, was that your question? [*Laughter*] You can see, Sheldon, that the migration issue is a consuming issue. And it's an important issue. One of the things that's very important is that this issue be conducted in such a way as it brings dignity to our process, that immigration is emotional and the people who are speaking out on the issue must understand its emotional nature and must not pit neighbor against neighbor, must treat people with respect. After all, we are a nation of immigrants, and I believe has helped—it helps revitalize our soul. I think it's a very important part of our Nation's history, and America should be viewed as a welcoming society that supports its laws, and the two don't necessarily contradict each other.

Trade Relations With Canada

Q. If I could ask you about—a bit of a two-parter. I know you don't like two-parters, necessarily.

The President. It hasn't stopped these people. [*Laughter*] Did it stop you, Nedra [Nedra Pickler, Associated Press], the two-part question, or are you still giving them?

Q. Yes. [*Laughter*]

Q. You mentioned that there's skepticism in Canada about the U.S. And I'm wondering, over the last few years you've had some——

The President. Let me just make sure that—first of all, I believe most—I believe people on both sides of the border think it's a very important relationship, and there's great friendships. Having said that, the Canadians have, oftentimes, taken independent view of decisions the United States makes. And there is concern about some of the decisions I have made, yes. I just want to make sure that it's not, kind of, universal skepticism—kind of, define it to the proper source.

Q. There's been some personal invective hurled at you over the years by Canadian Parliamentarians. You were the star in one of the former Government's campaign ads.

The President. Did it work?

Q. It didn't work for them.

The President. Okay. [*Laughter*]

Q. I wonder whether that's tarnished your image of Canada at all, and whether—one of the issues that's caused a lot of skepticism——

The President. If it did tarnish my image of Canada, it would also tarnish my image of my own country, because part of being in the political scene is that people—it's the great thing about free societies, people speak their minds. That's what happens here in this country as well.

Q. Well, do you see the opportunity for better relations, and specifically on the issue of softwood lumber? That's an issue that's caused a lot of skepticism.

The President. It has.

Q. People are looking for a strong signal from the President of the United States.

The President. Right. No, I understand. First of all, the relationship is much deeper than softwood lumber. And there will be—I'll comment on softwood lumber in a minute. First of all, I'd like to get the issue solved. So the strong signal is, is that I've told our folks that, let's work hard to bring this issue to conclusion. And we were close to getting it done at one point. And so my strong signal is, yes, let's get this behind us.

I predict, however, that there will be other issues that arise because of our—when we trade as much as we trade, nearly half-a-billion [half-a-trillion]* two-way trade in '05, there's going to be issues that come up. I can remember the potato issue—I don't know if it had as much impact on thought that softwood lumber did, but it was an important issue. I guess it was mainly confined to the eastern part of the country.

But with as much trade as we've got going for us, there will be other issues that arise. Same with Mexico, by the way. We're dealing with, you know, tomatoes, on occasion, or corn syrup, I think it was—yes, corn syrup. And it's just very important to be in a position to have a relationship such that we can work through these problems. But, no—democracy is what it is. It's a chance for people to express themselves. Sure, there were some harsh words, but—at least from my perspective, the people tend to discount the polemics and the, you know, kind of, just how politics works, and they want to know whether or not there's a genuine commitment to friendship. And there is, between not only America and Canada but also between the United States and Mexico. It's been a long-term relationship.

The migration issue, obviously, as you can see, has created a great deal of, at least, questioning, because it's on people's minds.

Canada-U.S. Relations

Q. Would it help if there was a little more maturity in the relationship, in terms of how Canada deals with the U.S.? Because there's been a perception in Canada that we haven't always been—dealt with you square on issues like missile defense or—you know, there have been a few things.

The President. I don't view—I, frankly, view the relationship as a good and strong relationship. Look, people—face it, part of the problem that we had was because of my decision to go into Iraq. And the Government of both countries didn't agree, and I understand that. War is terrible. It's an awful thing. And yet we're still able to maintain good relations.

When people are dealing with the subject of war, there is a lot of emotion. And I fully understand that. So I view the relationships both as not only important and vital, but I do view them as mature. As I said, this is the third Prime Minister with whom I will have dealt, and I—there is a certain camaraderie that takes place by virtue of our close ties and close history. And I bear no ill will whatsoever, and I understand the strategic importance of being close to our friends, and to have a capacity to talk among ourselves.

As I say, there's a lot we can get done by working together. The great competition for our respective economies, in the long run, will be coming from the Far East. And therefore, the more close our relationships and the more we're able to deal with cross-border issues on trade and other issues, the more we'll be able to work in concert to keep our standard of living high. And Vicente is—you've heard him talk a lot about his worries about China's trade into the hemisphere, and his concerns about job losses as a result of competition. And I believe that rather than, kind of, walling ourselves off, I believe that cooperation, like we have done through the NAFTA process, dealing with disputes in an openhanded way, will enable us to be able to leave in place something beyond our respective times in office, so that future leaders can compete confidently.

And obviously, that's part of a policy. I would like to extend this kind of cooperative spirit beyond just the three of us. That's why the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas—which 28 of 32 members, if I'm not mistaken, supported the Free Trade Agreement of the Americans—that's the concept behind this notion of having a hemisphere that trades freely in order to be competitive—help us be competitive, which will help maintain standards of living. That's, after all, one of the key goals of any government.

* White House correction.

Good, we'll see you all down there. Thank you, looking forward to it.

NOTE: The interview was taped at 11:09 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to President Vicente Fox of Mexico; and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 28. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this interview.

Remarks Announcing the Resignation of Andrew H. Card, Jr., as White House Chief of Staff and the Appointment of Joshua B. Bolten as White House Chief of Staff

March 28, 2006

Earlier this month, Andy Card came to me and raised the possibility of stepping down as Chief of Staff. After 5½ years, he thought it might be time to return to private life, and this past weekend, I accepted Andy's resignation.

Andy Card has served me and our country in historic times: on a terrible day when America was attacked; during economic recession and recovery; through storms of unprecedented destructive power; in peace and in war. Andy has overseen legislative achievements on issues from education to Medicare. He helped confirm two Justices to the Supreme Court, including a new Chief Justice.

In all these challenges and accomplishments, I have relied on Andy's wise counsel, his calm in crisis, his absolute integrity, and his tireless commitment to public service. Andy is respected by his colleagues for his humility, his decency, and his thoughtfulness. They have looked to him as a leader and a role model, and they, like me, will miss him.

On most days, Andy is the first one to arrive in the West Wing and among the last to leave. And during those long days over many years, I've come to know Andy as more than my Chief of Staff. He is leaving the White House, but he will always be my friend. Laura and I have known Andy and his wife, Kathi, for more than 20 years, and our close friendship will continue.

With me today is Joshua Bolten, who will be the new White House Chief of Staff. Josh is a man with broad experience, having worked on Capitol Hill and Wall Street and the White House staff and for nearly 3 years as a Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Josh is a creative policy thinker. He's an expert on the budget and our economy. He's respected by Members of Congress from both parties. He's a strong advocate for effective accountable management in the Federal Government.

He's a man of candor and humor and directness, who's comfortable with responsibility and knows how to lead. No person is better prepared for this important position, and I'm honored that Josh has agreed to serve.

The next 3 years will demand much of those who serve our country. We have a global war to fight and win. We have great opportunities to expand the prosperity and compassion of America. We've come far as a nation, yet there's a lot on the road ahead. I'm honored to have served with Andrew Card. I've got great confidence in my next Chief of Staff.

Congratulations, Josh.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:31 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Chief of Staff Card and Chief of Staff-designate Bolten.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting

March 28, 2006

Good morning. We've just finished our third Cabinet meeting of this year. I want to thank my Cabinet members for joining us. We talked about the war on terror. We talked about a war on terror that requires all of us involved in Government to respond and to protect America and help spread freedom.

My Cabinet officials obviously have got many responsibilities in their agencies, but we talked about their need to assume additional responsibilities to make sure that we're using every element of national power to win the war on terror and to secure the peace.

This morning we had briefings from General Abizaid, Ambassador Khalilzad, and