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me the seriousness of the problem—I understand it—two, he expects there to be action, and I agree. And we've taken some steps along those lines.

Thank you very much.

Q. Mr. President, did you misjudge President Musharraf?

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:43 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to General David H. Petraeus, USA, commanding general, Multi-National Force—Iraq; and President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan. Prime Minister Erdogan spoke in Turkish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at the White House Forum on International Trade and Investment

November 6, 2007

Thank you all. Please be seated. Thanks for coming. Good morning. Thank you for coming by the White House. I'm proud to be with you. I'm impressed by the fact that the men and women in this room lead some of our finest companies and trade organizations. I appreciate your engagement and interest in public policy. I appreciate your creativity in making sure our Nation remains the leading economic force in the world.

And I want to share with you some thoughts about an important debate that we're engaged in here, and I believe the outcome of this debate will determine whether we embrace new opportunities for free and fair trade or whether or not we'll become protectionists. My position is clear: We will work with Congress to open up new markets for American goods and services and farm products to make sure this economy continues to grow and our people have a high standard of living.

I appreciate the members of my Cabinet and team who are here. Secretary of the Treasury Hank Paulson has joined us—strong believer in free trade and open markets. Mr. Secretary, thank you. Ambassador Sue Schwab, who is responsible for opening up markets for U.S. goods and services—appreciate you coming, Ambassador. I want to thank Acting Secretary of the Agriculture Chuck Conner. If you're an American farmer or an American rancher, you ought to be supporting administrations and people in Congress who understand that your livelihood depends upon your capacity to sell overseas. We want people eating product grown here in the United States of America. That's what we want. I want to thank other administrative officials, and thank you all.

As I understand it, you understand how trade benefits this Nation. Free and fair trade allows your companies to sell more goods and more services. You understand what I understand: Free and fair trade means higher paying jobs for American workers. If you're a worker in a company that's selling overseas, you're more likely to be paid more than a counterpart.

Free trade helps provide American consumers with better choices at better prices. That's what we want for an American consumer. We want people to go in the marketplace and have a variety of choices. We want people competing for their dollar, and when people compete for the dollar, it means somebody is going to get a better price.

Trade is also one of the driving forces behind the strength of our economy. Last week, we learned our economy created 166,000 new jobs in October—that's the 50th straight month of job growth. That's the longest period of uninterrupted job growth on record. Interestingly enough, we also learned that our economy grew at 3.9 percent in the third quarter. Much of the growth was the result of record exports. Our exports now account for a larger percentage of GDP than at any other time in our history. We need to keep the economy growing. We need to continue to open up markets.

When I took office, the United States had free trade agreements in force with just 3 countries, and now we have agreements in force with 14 countries. These agreements are expanding opportunities for businesses like yours. Take Caterpillar—since we implemented our free trade agreement with Chile in 2004, Cat's exports to that country have more than doubled. And that's good if you're a worker at a Caterpillar plant. If that plant is selling more product overseas, it means you're more likely to get a pay raise and have stability in your job. Consumers around the world have a choice. The products they often

choose say "Made in the United States of America."

Congress needs to open up new markets for trade and investment by improving free trade agreements with Peru, Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. The first three of these agreements are with vital trade partners in our own hemisphere, in our own neighborhood. Together Peru, Colombia, and Panama represent 75 million potential customers with a combined GDP of $245 billion. Over the last 5 years, American exports to these countries have nearly doubled, yet our products still face significant tariffs when they enter these markets. By passing free trade agreements, we can eliminate many of the tariffs, we can level the playing field for our products, we can provide new legal—new opportunities and legal protections for our investors, and we can strengthen our friendship with fellow democracies.

Over the last three decades, most of Latin America has embraced democracy. That's positive. Now these young democracies are trying to build a better life for their citizens. Leaders like President Uribe of Colombia have taken brave steps to fight terrorists and drug traffickers, to strengthen the rule of law, and to open up their economies.

These friends of America are waiting to see what Congress will do with the trade agreements we have concluded with our neighbors in the region. People are watching the actions of the U.S. Congress very carefully. Champions of false populism in the region are watching Congress. They will use any failure to approve these trade agreements as evidence that America will never treat democracies in the region as full partners.

The time has come for Congress to act. We've negotiated fair agreements, and now it's up to the Congress. It's time for the Congress to pass these trade agreements to help build a hemisphere that lives in liberty and trades in freedom and grows in prosperity. These trade bills are important economic measures, and they are important national security measures as well.

Last week, the House Ways and Means took a positive step by voting 39 to 0 in favor of our agreement with Peru. Now the full House and Senate needs to follow suit. I urge the Members to pass our agreement with Peru quickly, by a large bipartisan majority, and then bring our agreements with Colombia and Panama up for votes as soon as possible. It's not acceptable to pass one trade agreement and let the others languish. It's not fair to pick out one country and not support the trade agreement with the other two in our hemisphere.

As we expand trade in Latin America, we also need to pass a free trade agreement with a vital democratic ally in the Far East, and that's South Korea. South Korea is the seventh largest trading partner. Congress needs to approve this historic deal and make it easier for American companies to sell and invest in one of the world's most important markets. Opening up the markets in South Korea will be good for American workers. It will mean somebody is more likely to have a higher paying job.

As we work to complete these new free trade agreements, we will also work to liberalize policies around the world. We welcome foreign investment in our country, and we want to ensure fair treatment for American investments abroad. All we ask is to be treated fairly. So we are pursuing investment treaty discussions with key emerging markets to protect private property rights, to require transparent and nondiscriminatory government regulations, to ensure that disputes are settled under the protections of international law.

The best way to advance new opportunities for trade and investment is through the Doha round of trade talks. Doha gives us the opportunity to lower trade barriers across the world for America's goods and services. It also represents an historic opportunity to help millions of people climb out of poverty and despair. My administration will continue working to bring the Doha round of trade negotiations to a successful conclusion, and I appreciate the hard work of Ambassador Schwab. It's not an easy task to convince others to realize the benefits of free and fair trade, but we believe it's in the Nation's interests to conclude a positive agreement. And we will work tirelessly to do so. All we ask is that people treat us fairly.

In the long run, we know that more trade and investment expands opportunity. It raises

the standard of living, but for the worker who has to change careers, it can be a painful experience. We have a responsibility to help workers. When a job goes overseas, somebody—some family hurts in America, and I understand that. And we can help, and that's why I believe in trade adjustment assistance. I think it's in the Nation's interest that we help somebody gain the skills to be able to work on an existing job if they happen to lose a job because of trade. I'm going to work with the Congress to reauthorize and improve this important program. I want the program to focus on workers who have lost jobs as a result of trade.

I also will continue to work to improve Federal job training programs. I'm a big believer in community colleges. Community colleges are market-driven, economic opportunities. Community colleges enable a local community to design a curriculum to meet the needs of local businesses. And I know that when somebody gets additional education, their productivity goes up. When their productivity goes up, it means they're more likely to be able to find a good job at higher pay.

Some in our country are fearful about our capacities to compete in the global economy. I'm not. I believe that so long as the playing field is level, we can compete with anybody, anytime, anywhere. But we need to do a better job of educating our people about the benefits of free and fair trade, and your companies and associations can lead the way. For example, at General Electric, employees and plant managers receive information packets explaining how pending trade deals with other countries will expand business and job opportunities here at home. Efforts like this program help build support for free trade policies that help us remain prosperous and competitive. And I strongly urge you to take up the cause of free trade with your employees.

I also ask you to take on another important assignment: Help educate the Members of the United States Congress. Help them understand that free trade is a vital national interest. Help them make the right decisions when these votes come up.

Thanks for letting me come by to say hello and to share with you some thoughts about free trade. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:45 a.m. in Room 350 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

Remarks Following a Meeting With the Import Safety Working Group

November 6, 2007

Good afternoon. I just had an important briefing from Secretary Leavitt and other members of the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety. The United States is one of the most open markets in the world, and our consumers are better off because they have a wide variety of products from across the world to choose from. And while we have strong food and product safety standards, we need to do more to ensure that American families have confidence in what they find on our store shelves. They have the right to expect the food they eat or the medicines they take or the toys they buy for their children to be safe.

Last year, the United States imported nearly $2 trillion of goods through more than 825,000 importers, and the vast majority of these imports are safe. Unfortunately, in recent months, Americans have seen imports from toys to toothpaste to pet food recalled because of safety concerns. My administration takes this problem seriously. So in July, I issued an Executive order establishing the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety. I asked this group to review the problem and to make recommendations for actions that we can take to address it.

In September, this working group issued a report recommending that we change our strategy to ensure the safety of our imports. For many years, we have relied on a strategy based on identifying unsafe products at the border. The problem is that the growing volume of products coming into our country makes this approach increasingly unreliable. The working group recommended that we adopt a smarter and more effective approach that focuses on prevention, building safety into products from the very beginning of the supply chain. Under this approach, we will