



THE WHITE HOUSE  
PRESIDENT  
GEORGE W. BUSH

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## **President Bush Meets with U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Discusses Trade**

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THE PRESIDENT: Gracias. Thank you. Si ntese. Gracias mi amigo, David. Thank you for having me back yet again to speak. This is an opportunity de practicar mi Espa ol -- (laughter) -- of course, a lot of people say I ought to be spending more time practicing my English. (Laughter.) But I'm thrilled to be with you. (Applause.)

I really love the entrepreneurial spirit in all communities. And it's evident in the Latino community. As you know, I'm blessed to be a Texan and I got to see firsthand, as governor, the unbelievable initiative and drive of Hispanics who lived in my state. And it's the same thing all across the country. And so part of the purpose for me to come is to thank you for your helping others realize the blessings of owning a small business; thanks for creating jobs; thanks for setting good examples; and thanks for being my friend.

David, as you know, I've been to the Hispanic Chamber, I think this is my third time -- but I know a lot of you personally. And this may be my farewell address to the Hispanic Chamber as President, but it's certainly not going to be my farewell to you as a friend. (Applause.)

I thank not only David, but Augie Martinez. I thank the directors of the Hispanic Chamber. I thank my old buddy, Hector Barreto, who is here with us. (Applause.) Michael Barrera, thank you both -- appreciate you, Miguel. (Applause.)

And then there are members of my Cabinet have come because today I'm going to discuss with you a very serious issue, an issue that matters a lot to your future and the future of this country. And so I welcome Secretary of Defense Bob Gates. (Applause.) Secretary of the Treasury Hank Paulson. (Applause.) Secretary of Agriculture Ed Schafer. (Applause.) Secretary of Commerce Carlos Gutierrez. (Applause.) Elaine Chao, Secretary of Labor, is with us. (Applause.) Susan Schwab, of the USTR, Trade Representative is with us. (Applause.) This is not a Cabinet meeting. (Laughter.)

These are people who are here to put an exclamation point on the subject I'm going to discuss with you today. So I thank you all for coming. I appreciate your time.

I also want to welcome Carolina Barco, who is the Ambassador from Colombia. (Applause.) And other members of the Diplomatic Corps that have joined us.

A lot has changed since I first spoke to this group. I had to face some very difficult spending decisions and I've had to conduct sensitive diplomacy. That's called planning for a wedding. (Laughter.) La boda -- (laughter) -- de mi ni ita. (Laughter.)

I really appreciate the fact that we work together. I just want to review a couple of issues that have made a difference. First of all, we worked together to launch a period of sustained economic growth. I remember meeting with some right after the attacks and we were wondering whether or not our economy could withstand a terrorist attack -- after all, a recession was in place just as I came into office, then the terrorists attacked, then we had corporate scandals.

And a lot of folks were wondering whether or not this economy would be resilient enough to withstand those pressures. And it turns out it was. And I want to thank you very much for supporting the tax cuts plans that had good effect on small businesses all across the United States during that period of time. I think when people take a look back at this moment in our economic history, they'll recognize tax cuts work. They have made a difference.

And this is what we're doing again. We've entered another period of difficult times. I am confident in the long term for the United States' economy. I know we're resilient. I know we're entrepreneurial. I know we'll withstand these times. I want to thank you for supporting the economic stimulus package that we passed, which provides strong incentives for small businesses to expand and will put money into the pockets of the people who earned it.

Secretary Paulson has assured me -- he's a "can-do" guy -- that the checks will be coming into the mail in the second week of May. The other thing I do want to assure you of is that if Congress tries to raise taxes, I'm going to veto it. We don't need tax increases. (Applause.)

I appreciate your strong support on No Child Left Behind. We agreed that a system that just simply moves children through without measuring is inexcusable. You recognized early that many Latino kids were denied, you know, the great promise of America because they didn't get the good education that we expect. And so we confronted this business about giving up on kids early. We demand accountability. We spent more money, but in return for the increased money, we expect schools to measure and we expect schools to correct problems early, before it's too late.

No Child Left Behind is working. We've measured 4th grade -- Hispanic 4th graders have set new records when it comes to reading and math. So rather than weakening No Child Left Behind, the United States Congress needs to strengthen No Child Left Behind for the sake of all our children. And I want to thank you for your support. (Applause.)

A federal contracting process is open to more small and minority-owned businesses, thanks to our SBA guys who have been running the show, Steve and Hector. And we'll continue that practice of making sure that there's fairness when it comes to federal contracting.

I appreciate your support on immigration law. (Applause.) I'm sorry that -- you know, I'm disappointed that Congress missed a good opportunity to uphold our values and uphold our laws at the same time. And I'm confident that the day will come when a President signs an immigration bill that secures our borders, respect our laws, and treats people with dignity. (Applause.)

And now I want to discuss trade with you. It's a sensitive subject in America, and it's an important subject. As business leaders, you understand that breaking down barriers to trade and investment creates opportunities for our workers, for American workers, and employees, and employers, and consumers. Trade adds to our prosperity, but as importantly, it adds to the prosperity our trading partners. We want people who are interested in our goods and services to do well economically. We believe that the world benefits when prosperity is abundant throughout the world.

Trade also serves a broader strategic purpose. When we enter into free trade agreements, we reinforce commitments to democracy, and transparency, and rule of law. By promoting a future of freedom and progress and hope, we create an alternative vision to those of the terrorists and extremists who prey on societies trapped in poverty and despair. In other words, trade helps democracies flourish; it helps enhance prosperity. And that helps us in our national security concerns.

My administration has made expanding trade a high priority. When I took office, America had free trade agreements in force with just three nations. Isn't that interesting? Just three countries. Today we have agreements in force with 14, and Congress recently approved another one with Peru. Three more agreements are on Congress' agenda this year: Colombia, Panama, and South Korea. All three are important, and the agreement with Colombia is especially urgent.

For more than a year, my administration has worked with both parties in Congress to seek a path to bring this agreement up for approval. We continue to stand ready to negotiate a bipartisan way forward. But time is running out, and we must not allow delay to turn into inaction. The Colombia agreement is pivotal to America's national security and economic interests right now, and it is too important to be held up by politics. There needs to be a vote on Colombia this year. (Applause.)

And that means that members of the Congress must be ready to move forward with the agreement when they return from the Easter recess. Members of both parties should work with this administration to bring legislation to implement the Colombia agreement to the floor for approval, and they need to get the job done, and get a bill to my desk.

And I'll tell you why -- because this agreement with Colombia will advance our national security and economic interests, in these ways: Colombia is one of our closest allies in the Western Hemisphere. Under the leadership of President Uribe, Colombia has been a strong and capable partner, a strong and effective partner in fighting drugs and crime and terror. Colombia has also strengthened its democracy, reformed its economy. It has spoken out against anti-Americanism. This government has made hard choices that deserves the admiration and the gratitude of the United States. (Applause.)

These actions have required courage, and they've come with costs. As we speak, Colombia is under assault from a terrorist network known as the FARC, which aims to overthrow Colombia's democracy and aims to impose a Marxist vision on the country. The FARC pursues this objective through bombing, hostage-taking and assassination, much of it funded by drug trafficking. Since 2003 -- since 2003 -- attacks by the FARC have killed or injured more than 1,500 civilians. Last summer the FARC executed 11 Colombian lawmakers after holding them captive for five years. And the FARC continues to use jungle camps to hold hundreds of kidnapped victims, including three U.S. citizens.

President Uribe has waged an aggressive campaign against FARC terrorists, who do not respect national sovereignty or borders. Earlier this month, Colombian forces killed one of FARC's most senior leaders -- a man believed to be responsible for trafficking cocaine and murdering hundreds of people.

And the response to all this action reveals the challenges that Colombia faces. The President of Venezuela praised the terrorist leader as a "good revolutionary," and ordered his troops to the Colombian border. This is the latest step in a disturbing pattern of provocative behavior by the regime in Caracas. It has also called for FARC terrorists to be recognized as a legitimate army, and senior regime officials have met with FARC leaders in Venezuela.

As it tries to expand its influence in Latin America, the regime claims to promote social justice. In truth, its agenda amounts to little more than empty promises and a thirst for power. It has

squandered its oil wealth in an effort to promote its hostile, anti-American vision. And it has left its own citizens to face food shortages while it threatens its neighbors.

The stakes are high in South America. As the recent standoff in the Andes shows, the region is facing an increasingly stark choice: to quietly accept the vision of the terrorists and the demagogues, or to actively support democratic leaders like President Uribe. I've made my choice. I'm standing with courageous leadership that believes in freedom and peace. (Applause.) And I believe when the American people hear the facts, they will make their choice and stand with a person who loves liberty and freedom.

And there is no clearer sign of our support than a free trade agreement. This agreement would help President Uribe show his people that democracy leads to tangible benefits. This agreement would help create new jobs in Colombia, which would make it harder to recruit people to violence and terrorism and drug trafficking. The agreement would signal to the region that America's commitment to free markets and free people is unshakable.

And now it calls on Congress to decide -- to decide whether this agreement will take effect. People across the hemisphere are watching. They are waiting to see what Congress will do. Some members of Congress have raised concerns over the situation in Colombia.

Again and again, President Uribe has responded decisively. He's responded to concerns about violence by demobilizing tens of thousands of paramilitary fighters. He's responded to concerns about attacks on trade unionists by stepping up funding for prosecutions, establishing an independent prosecutors unit, and creating a special program to protect labor activists. He's responded to concerns over labor and environmental standards by revising the free trade agreement to include some of the most rigorous protections of any agreement in history.

As one Democratic House member put it, it's impossible for someone to go to Colombia and not be impressed with the strides they have made. Ladies and gentlemen, if this isn't enough to earn America's support, then what is? If Congress were to reject the agreement with Colombia, we would validate antagonists in Latin America, who would say that the America cannot be trusted to stand by its friends. We would cripple our influence in the region, and make other nations less likely to cooperate with us in the future. We would betray one of our closest friends in our own backyard.

In the words of Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada, "If the U.S. turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin America dictator could hope to achieve." Congress needs to listen to those wise words as they consider this important bill. Members of both parties should come together, members of both parties should demonstrate their support for freedom in our hemisphere, and members of both parties should prove the -- approve the Colombian free trade agreement. (Applause.)

These strategic benefits are not the only reason for Congress to approve our trade agreement with Colombia. The agreement will also bring economic gains for both countries. Today virtually all exports from Colombia enter into the United States duty-free, but U.S. exports to Colombia face tariffs up to 35 percent. Now think about that: Goods coming from Colombia to us enter our country virtually duty-free, and yet goods going from the United States to Colombia are taxed.

Now, doesn't it make sense to pass an agreement that says the Colombians will treat us the way we treat them? If you're a farmer or interested in exporting construction equipment or aircraft and auto parts, or medical and scientific equipment, your goods will now go into Colombia duty-free, which means you're more likely to be able to sell your goods into Colombia. And if you're working for one of those companies, it means you're more likely to be able to keep your job.

I can't understand a mentality that doesn't recognize that causing America to be treated equally is not [sic] in our interests. It is in our interests. Every day that Congress goes without approving this agreement is a day that our businesses, large and small, become less competitive. It's missed opportunity.

This agreement is especially important during a difficult period for our economy. Listen, last year exports accounted for more than 40 percent of growth. Doesn't it make sense to open up markets, to continue to grow our economy with good exports? I think it does, and this is an opportunity for the United States Congress to send a clear message that they are concerned, like I'm concerned, about the state of our economy. They, like me, want to provide opportunities for our producers and our workers to be able to find new markets and expanded markets for U.S. goods and services.

This agreement will also benefit Colombia. It will give Colombian exporters the certainty that comes with permanent access. This will help stimulate investment and economic growth and higher standards of living for families in Colombia. And it will make it clear to the Colombian people we're partners in prosperity and we're partners in peace. (Applause.)

The time is coming when members will get their vote, yes or no. My administration is committed to working this agreement hard on the floor of the Congress. I firmly believe it is in our interests that this be passed. It's not in our political interests -- we ought to just put politics aside and focus on what's best for the United States of America. And what is best for our country is to get this agreement approved soon. (Applause.)

Congress also ought to approve the other two trade agreements on their agenda after they approve this one. Congress needs to approve the trade agreement with Panama, which will open up U.S. access to one of the fastest-growing economies in Central America and support a key democratic partner. Congress also needs to approve the free trade agreement with South Korea, which has the potential to boost U.S. exports by more than \$10 billion while strengthening a key ally.

As Congress moves forward these agreements, we will continue to press for an ambitious, successful Doha Round at the WTO. We're prepared to lead to ensure Doha reaches a successful conclusion. We understand the role of the United States. We're not going to shirk our duty to lead. But we're not going to make unilateral concessions either. We want negotiations to come from -- as a result of meaningful contributions by all folks. That's how you reach a successful round.

And so we challenged our trading partners to help forge a deal that opens up global trade flows and creates new opportunities for developed and developing nations alike. Our view is, the time for debating Doha is over. Now is the time for leaders to make tough choices that will allow these negotiations to advance.

Look, I know a lot of folks are worried about trade. There's neighbors worrying about neighbors losing jobs. People say, well, trade causes us to lose jobs. And I fully understand that. Sometimes trade causes people to lose jobs; sometimes the fact that technology hasn't advanced as rapidly or the productivity of workers isn't as good as it should be has caused people to lose jobs.

But nevertheless, there is that concern. And so my question to the American people is, what's the best way to respond? One option is to stop trade, erect barriers, try to wall ourselves off from the world. The costs of isolationist policies and protectionist policies would far exceed any possible benefit. Closing off our markets would drive up prices for American families, making it harder for people to sell goods in our country; would deny families choices that they've been used to. We want our consumers to have choices when they walk into markets. The more choices available,

the better it is for a consumer. The more competition it is for a product, the less likely it is the price will rise.

The other nations would retaliate, by the way, if they saw the United States throwing up barriers. And that would push jobs overseas faster. It could hurt millions of Americans who go to work each morning, who work for companies that rely upon exports, or companies that rely upon foreign capital as their base of operations.

You know, some have called for a "timeout" from trade. I guess that's probably popular with the focus group. You know, they toss out the word "timeout" from trade -- it's got this kind of catchy little title to it. In the 21st century, a timeout from trade would be a timeout from growth, a timeout from jobs, and a timeout from good results. And retreating from the opportunities of the global economy would be a reckless mistake that our country cannot afford.

And there's a better answer -- and one of them shows faith in the American workers. Instead of trying to stand against the growth of global trade, instead of granting other people access to markets that we ourselves could have, instead of squandering an opportunity, why don't we help educate people? Why don't we provide educational opportunities so workers will have the skills necessary to fill the high-paying jobs of the 21st century? (Applause.)

One reason I mentioned No Child Left Behind, this program has got to start early, and it is. We're setting high standards and measuring, and correcting problems early, before it's too late. But there's more we can do. We provided more than a billion dollars for new initiatives to educate and prepare workers for the jobs of the 21st century. Yesterday Secretary Chao announced more than \$100 million in new community-based job training grants. In other words, we're focusing money to help people get the skills necessary to fill the jobs that are available in America. And when you get education, you're a more productive worker, which means you're going to get paid more money. That's what that means.

These grants support community college programs -- I'm a big supporter of community colleges -- that provide training for jobs in high-growth fields. And that's our strategy. Now, the word you'll hear attached to that is trade adjustment assistance. That's another program aimed at helping people get the skills necessary to find work. We support it. We support reforming and reauthorizing the vital program as a key component of trade policy. And I look forward to working with Congress to sign a good bill that I can sign into law.

These agreements that I've talked about deserve support from both sides of the aisle. Today I want to make a direct appeal to the members of the Democratic Party. From Franklin Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy to Bill Clinton, Democrats have a long history of supporting trade. Opening markets has been a history and a cornerstone of Democratic policy. President Clinton said, when he signed legislation to implement NAFTA 14 years ago, "We're on the verge of a global economic expansion that is sparked by the fact that the United States at this critical moment decided we would compete and not retreat." I fully support those strong words, those confident words, those optimistic words about America's ability to compete in the world. Thanks in part to the market-opening set in motion by the President, trade between the United States, Mexico and Canada has more than tripled since 1993.

I know there's a lot of criticism of NAFTA, but I will tell you this: I grew up in Texas, I remember what the border was like. And I would ask people to go down to that border today and see the benefits, the mutual benefits, of what trade has meant for people who, on both sides of the border, for years grew up in abject poverty. We may have some south Texans here today, and if you're old enough, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

The transformation has been remarkable because both sides have benefited. Both sides have realized the blessings of trade, as has Canada. All three of our economies, by the way, since that agreement was signed, have grown by more than 50 percent. More than 25 million new jobs have been created in the United States. The unemployment rate is lower than in previous decades. Workers, farmers, entrepreneurs have seen real improvements in their daily lives, including many Hispanic-owned businesses on both sides of the border.

Listen, NAFTA has worked. People shouldn't back away from NAFTA. It's been a positive development for a lot of people. And if you're worried about people coming to our country to find jobs, there's no better way to help somebody stay home than for there to be prosperity in their neighborhood. I'm convinced most people don't want to try to sneak into America to work. I'm convinced most people would rather have a job close to their -- close to where they live. And trade helps increase prosperity. It's mutually beneficial for Canada, the United States and America -- I mean, Mexico.

Now, look, I understand supporting free trade agreements is not politically easy. There are a lot of special interest groups that are willing to spend a lot of money to make somebody's life miserable when it comes to supporting free trade agreements. But I believe leadership requires people rising above this empty, hollow political rhetoric. If you're committed to multilateral diplomacy, you cannot support unilateral withdrawal from trade agreements. (Applause.) If you're worried -- if you are worried about America's image in the world, it makes no sense to disappoint the nations that are counting on us most. If you care about lifting developing nations out of poverty, you cannot deny them access to the world's greatest engine of economic growth. If you're truly optimistic about our country's future, there's no reason to wall our nation off from the opportunities of the world.

I appreciate your efforts in these matters. I feel strongly that trade is in our national interests. I know it's in your personal interests if you're business people. Of course, as you prosper, people are more likely to find work. After all, 70 percent of the new jobs in America are created by small business owners, just like those present here.

I believe Congress will do the right thing. When it's all said and done, they'll take a hard look at the facts. They will take a look at the consequences of rejecting a trade agreement with our close ally. They'll take a good look at the consequences of sending the wrong message to the false populists of the region. They'll take a simple logical look at how this can benefit our farmers and small business owners and employers.

Thanks for helping us work the issue. Thanks for giving me a chance to come and speak to you. May God bless you, and may God bless our country. (Applause.)

END 11:14 A.M. EDT

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