

Administration of Barack Obama, 2012

The President's News Conference With President Felipe de Jesus Calderon Hinojosa of Mexico and Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada

April 2, 2012

President Obama. Please have a seat. Good afternoon, everybody. It is my pleasure to welcome two great friends and partners, President Calderon of Mexico and Prime Minister Harper of Canada.

Now, I've worked with Stephen and Felipe on many occasions. We've joined our international partners from APEC to the G-20. From our last summit in Guadalajara, we remember Felipe's hospitality and that of the Mexican people, including some very good mariachi and—

President Calderon. Mexican food.

President Obama. —some tequila, if I'm not mistaken. [*Laughter*] I can't reciprocate the music, but Felipe, Stephen and I are proud to welcome you here today.

President Calderon. Thank you.

President Obama. Between us, we represent nearly half-a-billion citizens, from Nunavut in the Canadian north to Chiapas in southern Mexico. In between, the diversity of our peoples and cultures is extraordinary. But wherever they live, they wake up every day with similar hopes: to provide for their families, to be safe in their communities, to give their children a better life. And in each of our countries, the daily lives of our citizens are shaped profoundly by what happens in the other two. And that's why we're here.

Today we focused on our highest priority: creating jobs and opportunity for our people. In the United States, our businesses have created nearly 4 million new jobs, confidence is up, and the economy is getting stronger. But with lots of folks still struggling to find work and pay the bills, we are doing everything we can to speed up the recovery. And that includes boosting trade with our two largest economic partners.

As President, I've made it a priority to increase our exports, and I'm pleased that our exports to Canada and Mexico are growing faster than our exports to the rest of the world. In fact, last year trade in goods with our two neighbors surpassed \$1 trillion for the first time ever. This trade supports some 2.5 million American jobs, and I want more trade supporting even more jobs in the future.

So today Prime Minister Harper led us in a very good discussion about how our three countries can improve our competitiveness. We agreed to continue making our borders more efficient and more secure so it's faster and cheaper to travel and trade. We're expanding cooperation to create clean energy jobs and combat climate change, an area in which President Calderon and Mexico have been a real leader.

I'm pleased to announce that our three nations are launching a new effort to get rid of outdated regulations that stifle job creation. Here in the United States, our efforts to cut redtape and ensure smart regulations will help achieve savings and benefits to businesses, consumers, and our country of more than \$100 billion. And we're already working to streamline and coordinate regulations with Canada and Mexico on a bilateral basis. So now our

three nations are going to sit down together, go through the books and simplify and eliminate more regulations that will make our joint economies stronger.

This is especially important, by the way, for our small and medium-sized businesses, which, when they start exporting, often start with Mexico and Canada. So this is going to help create jobs, and it's going to keep us on track to meet my goal of doubling U.S. exports.

More broadly, I reiterated my commitment to comprehensive immigration reform, which would be good for workers and good for business. I'm pleased that Canada and Mexico have also expressed an interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Consultations with our TPP partners are now underway on how new members can meet the high standards of this trade agreement, which could be a real model for the world. And I very much appreciated President Calderon updating us on preparations for the next G-20 summit, which he will be hosting in June.

Our other major focus today was the security that our citizens deserve. Criminal gangs and narcotraffickers pose a threat to each of our nations, and each of our nations has a responsibility to meet that threat. In Mexico, President Calderon has shown great courage in standing up to the traffickers and cartels, and we've sped up the delivery of equipment and assistance to support those efforts.

Here in the United States, we've increased cooperation on our southern border and dedicated new resources to reducing the southbound flow of money and guns and to reduce the demand for drugs in the United States, which helps fuel—helped to fuel this crisis. And today each of us reaffirmed our commitment to meeting this challenge together, because that's the only way that we're going to succeed.

Beyond our borders, these cartels and traffickers pose an extraordinary threat to our Central American neighbors. So we're teaming up. Defense ministers from our three countries met last week as a group for the first time ever. And we're going to be coordinating our efforts more closely than ever, especially when it comes to supporting Central America's new strategy on citizen security, which will be discussed at the Summit of the Americas in Colombia next week.

So again, I want to thank Stephen and Felipe for being here. When I came to office, I pledged to seek new partnerships with our friends in the Americas, a relationship of equality and shared responsibility built on mutual interest and mutual respect. That's what we've done. And it wouldn't have been possible without the leadership and sense of purpose that these two outstanding leaders have brought to all our efforts, including our efforts today. As a result, I believe our nations and our citizens will be more secure, more prosperous, and in a better position to give their children the lives that they deserve.

So with that, let me turn it over to President Calderon.

President Calderon. Thank you, President Obama. Your Excellency, Mr. Barack Obama, President of the United States of America, Right Honorable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister of Canada, ladies and gentlemen of the press, Mr. Ambassadors, legislators, friends: First of all, I would like to thank President Barack Obama for his extraordinary hospitality and that of his Government in hosting this summit of the leaders of North America.

And briefly, I would also like to express on behalf of the Government of Mexico, the people of Mexico, my family, and my own behalf, my most sincere sympathies to the family and

relatives of former President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado for his lamentable death yesterday. Tomorrow we will be rendering homage to him in Mexico.

The reasons that—for which we are here today at this summit of the North American leaders with President Barack Obama and the Prime Minister of Canada, we've come through a work day that has been very fruitful and fluid with an exchange of opinions and progress to the benefit of our respective citizens.

I'm also very thankful to my two colleagues for the openness with which we have broached some very complex items on our working agenda. I recognize and value their enormous commitment to our common region.

The leaders of North America share a vision of a strong, solidary, safe, competitive region that is able to successfully face head on the challenges of today. We agree that our common challenges can only be faced together. And therein lays the importance of having dialogue, strong dialogue, amongst our three countries.

The data that President Obama has just given us is very important, that our trade has exceeded \$1 trillion for the first time. And I think that that is not separate from a reality that has to be underscored. In this very complex world full of economic problems and severe crises, Canada, the United States, and Mexico are three countries that are growing right now and generating jobs today.

And that growth and those millions of jobs, many of them have to do precisely with the greatest trade exchanges that we have ever seen amongst these great nations. I would say that the potential of North America tied to these three countries is such that within our own nations we have a great deal to do to make the most of these opportunities for greater exchanges amongst our peoples.

As we've mentioned today, we have progressed on various fronts. For instance, we've advanced on the deregulation in our countries—in our own countries, as well as amongst our countries. We have progressed as well in harmonization of certain standards that facilitate trade. We've also progressed, in our case, on the bilateral relationship in border infrastructure. And all of this has led, of course, to the benefit of Canadian, Mexican, and American families.

In another line of ideas, I would also say that the three nations have renewed their decision to strengthen cooperation at the international level, particularly in issues as sensitive as the security of our citizens. We have reiterated the values upon which our societies were founded: democracy, liberty, justice, the respect for human rights. And today the political dialogue amongst us is perhaps stronger than ever.

We have renewed certain principles of our existence and of our challenges: the principle of shared responsibility, the exchange of information, and especially the strengthening of our institutions that has to be the guide of our cooperation.

Clearly, I expressed to President Obama and to Prime Minister Harper that the fight that Mexico is experiencing for a safer North America also requires a strengthening of national actions, amongst other things, to stop the traffic of weapons, to combat with greater strength money laundering, and of course, to reduce the demand for drugs that strengthens criminal organizations. I also expressed to President Obama and to Prime Minister Harper that Mexico recognizes that the commitment that they have undertaken to progress along those lines, it's also necessary to strengthen the regional security focus, and in order to do this, we need to include our neighbors and Central American partners, who are also facing serious problems

and who need our solidarity. The three countries have agreed to establish a joint dialogue mechanism with the Central American Integration System—SICA—in support of the efforts undertaken by Central American nations to fight organized crime and in favor of regional security that benefits us all.

Of course, in this meeting, we have broached the topic of the regional economy. The leaders of North America agree that the United States, Canada, and Mexico must continue to delve deeper into our successful economic relationship so as to generate more jobs and greater well-being in all three countries.

Our governments recognize that it is absolutely necessary to continue to fully comply with the NAFTA, as well as to explore new means of strengthening regional competitiveness. And I am convinced that if we work together, we will become much more competitive than many areas of the world that we are competing with today.

Mexico's position is that the solution to the complex economic situation experienced by the world today is not a return to protectionist practices that only isolate countries, reduce competitiveness of economies, and send investment scurrying, but that part of the problem and the part of the investment that we need to see in the world economy is to see a delving deeper into our economies and making the most of our advantages that show our economic complementarity in terms of investment, labor, technologies, natural resources. And only then will we be able to have success in a world that competes ferociously by regions.

The three countries have renewed our commitment to broaden the productive—the supply chains of the region that will be even more interconnected, supporting especially the small and medium-scale companies.

Mexican exports to the world represent 37 percent of—or have, rather, 37 percent of American content. In other words, so American exports are American exports, and they generate millions of jobs for the region. And in that lays the need to work even more in this region on a clear trilateral deregulation, for instance, in nanomaterials and emissions standards for some vehicles.

Today we also agreed to work in a coordinated fashion on actions that we will be adopting to modernize infrastructure and for border management. After 10 years—the last 2 years, we've seen three new border crossing areas between Mexico and the United States, after 10 years of not having seen one new route. And we continue to work in a coordinated fashion to make our border more dynamic so that it's a border of opportunities for progress on both sides of that border.

Tomorrow, here in Washington, our ministers of economy and of trade will be meeting within the framework of the Free Trade Commission of the NAFTA so as to continue to work towards achieving these objectives.

Today, we've seen that prosperity in the region depends on greater integration with full respect of our sovereignties in all fields. And in this context, I'd like to reiterate the interest of my country to join forces as soon as possible to the TPP, or the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and its negotiations. Because we know that Mexicans can contribute to a quick and successful conclusion of this project. If we join forces in this region where we see the greatest growth in the world, we will be generating benefits for our families, our workers, and also substantially improving the competitiveness of the three countries in this context.

We are convinced that the experience and participation of Mexico will enrich this free trade project of the latest generation that encompasses countries in Asia, Oceania, and America. Our country has a clear commitment to economic freedom. We even have the support of the private sector so as to enter into the TPP. We are a nation that believes in free trade as a true tool to foster growth and development, and we have acted as a result of this.

I would also like to thank the United States and Canada for renewing their support to Mexico and its presidency of G-20. As you know, in June of this year, Mexico will host the summit of the leaders of the G-20 in Los Cabos. We are convinced, over and above the topics that we will be dealing with there, that the complex international environment needs to be an opportunity so that the world can redefine its development models with a firm commitment to the well-being of peoples and the care for the environment.

Ladies and gentlemen, in this summit, the representatives of the United States, Canada, and Mexico have undertaken an open, constructive dialogue, just as corresponds to countries that share values. We've talked about the enormous challenges facing us so as to work together in a globalized world. And as a result, we will be working on building a new era that consolidates the right conditions for development in North America on the basis of a successful partnership, as we have seen so far today.

My dear President Obama, thank you for your hospitality.

President Obama. Prime Minister Harper.

Prime Minister Harper. Well, first of all, I'd like to begin by thanking you, Barack, for so graciously and so warmly—literally—hosting us here today. And I'd also like to begin by offering my sincere condolences to you, Felipe, and through you, to the people of Mexico on the passing of former President Miguel de la Madrid, who I gather had much to do with the NAFTA partnership that we enjoy today.

Canada places the highest value on the friendship and partnership among our three countries. We form one of the world's largest free trade zones, which has been of great benefit to all of our nations. We're also effective collaborators in the G-20 in responding to the challenges of the global recession and instability of these past few years.

As affirmed in our budget last week, our Government is focused on creating jobs, growth, and long-term prosperity for all Canadians.

I'm especially pleased that the United States has welcomed Canada's and Mexico's interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership. We also had useful discussions on continued cooperation in managing our borders, streamlining regulation, securing global supply chains, and advancing clean energy.

In addition, we've announced a broadened plan for North American pandemic preparedness and a new North America-Central America dialogue on security to fight transnational organized crime.

Finally, we discussed the agenda for the upcoming Summit of the Americas in Colombia. Canada looks forward to continue to working with the United States and Mexico to promote democratic principles, regional stability, and market-based economic growth with our partners in the Western Hemisphere.

And once again, Barack and Felipe, I look forward to continuing our useful discussions in Cartagena.

President Obama. Outstanding.

All right, I think that we're going to take a question from each press delegation. So I'll start with Julianna [Julianna Goldman, Bloomberg News].

U.S. Influence Abroad/Health Care Reform

Q Thank you, Mr. President. After last week's arguments at the Supreme Court, many experts believe that there could be a majority, a five-member majority, to strike down the individual mandate. And if that were to happen, if it were to be ruled unconstitutional, how would you still guarantee health care to the uninsured and those Americans who've become insured as a result of the law?

And then a question for President Calderon and Prime Minister Harper: Over the weekend, Governor Mitt Romney said that the U.S. used to promote free enterprise around the world, and he said, "Our President doesn't have the same feelings about American exceptionalism that we do, and I think over the last 3 or 4 years, some people around the world have begun to question that." So my question to the both of you is whether you think that American influence has declined over the last 3 to 4 years.

And, President Obama, if you'd like to respond to that too.

President Obama. Well, on the second part of your question, it's still primary season for the Republican Party. They're going to make a decision about who their candidate will be.

It's worth noting that I first arrived on the national stage with a speech at the Democratic Convention that was entirely about American exceptionalism and that my entire career has been a testimony to American exceptionalism. But I will cut folks some slack for now because they're still trying to get their nomination.

With respect to health care, I'm actually—continue to be confident that the Supreme Court will uphold the law. And the reason is because, in accordance with precedent out there, it's constitutional. That's not just my opinion, by the way; that's the opinion of legal experts across the ideological spectrum, including two very conservative appellate court justices that said this wasn't even a close case.

I think it's important—because I watched some of the commentary last week—to remind people that this is not an abstract argument. People's lives are affected by the lack of availability of health care, the inaffordability of health care, their inability to get health care because of preexisting conditions.

The law that's already in place has already given 2.5 million young people health care that wouldn't otherwise have it. There are tens of thousands of adults with preexisting conditions who have health care right now because of this law. Parents don't have to worry about their children not being able to get health care because they can't be prevented from getting health care as a consequence of a preexisting condition. That's part of this law.

Millions of seniors are paying less for prescription drugs because of this law. Americans all across the country have greater rights and protections with respect to their insurance companies and are getting preventive care because of this law.

So that's just the part that's already been implemented. That doesn't even speak to the 30 million people who stand to gain coverage once it's fully implemented in 2014.

And I think it's important, and I think the American people understand, and the—I think the Justices should understand that in the absence of an individual mandate, you cannot have a mechanism to ensure that people with preexisting conditions can actually get health care. So there's not only a economic element to this and a legal element to this, but there's a human element to this. And I hope that's not forgotten in this political debate.

Ultimately, I'm confident that the Supreme Court will not take what would be an unprecedented, extraordinary step of overturning a law that was passed by a strong majority of a democratically elected Congress. And I'd just remind conservative commentators that for years what we've heard is, the biggest problem on the bench was judicial activism or a lack of judicial restraint, that an unelected group of people would somehow overturn a duly constituted and passed law. Well, this is a good example. And I'm pretty confident that this Court will recognize that and not take that step.

Q. You say it's not an abstract conversation. Do you have contingency plans?

President Obama. I'm sorry. As I said, we are confident that this will be over—that this will be upheld. I'm confident that this will be upheld because it should be upheld. And again, that's not just my opinion, that's the opinion of a whole lot of constitutional law professors and academics and judges and lawyers who have examined this law, even if they're not particularly sympathetic to this particular piece of legislation or my Presidency.

President Calderon. Your question was a little local for me, and so I'm glad that the President of the United States answered it. But I would take advantage of this moment to say that after increasing the budget line for the folk insurance six-fold and after having built more than 1,000 new clinics in the country, we're getting close to reaching universal coverage of health care—full, free health care coverage for all people up to 18 years of age, including cancer coverage. Of the 120—112 million Mexicans, 106 million will have efficient, effective universal health care coverage.

So I would say that I would hope that one of the greatest economies in the world, such as the United States, could follow our example in achieving this, because it was a great thing.

Prime Minister Harper. Well, I don't think you really expect me to intervene in the U.S. Presidential election. Let me just say this. For Canada—and this is something that I think transcends governments in Canada or administrations here in the United States—for Canada, the United States is and always will be our closest neighbor, our greatest ally, and our best friend. And I believe that American leadership is at all times great and indispensable for the world.

And I think over the past few years we've done great things together in terms of the response both through the G-20 and bilaterally on the recession and the recovery. We had, under your leadership, Barack, that successful intervention in Libya. Our trade relationship is the biggest in the world and growing. And so I think it's been a tremendous partnership.

President Obama. Somebody from the Mexican press corps.

Gun Trafficking/Mexico's Presidential Election/Canada's Visa Program

Q. Good afternoon. For President Calderon, you were saying—you were referring to weapons. We'd like to know what President Obama said in terms of what's going to be done to stop the traffic of weapons.

And, President Obama, I'd like to know what plans your Government has in the Presidential election process in Mexico. What was discussed in terms of the interviews with the candidates in Mexico City? And I'd also like to know, for the Government of the United States, there's a threat for the country in this sense on weapons, Mr. President. Weapons have come into the country. Are there military leaks of letting the arms come through? What's going to be done?

And for Prime Minister Harper, are—is the visa requirement going to be removed for Mexicans? Thank you.

President Obama. That's a lot of questions. [Laughter] Go ahead, go first.

President Calderon. My position on this subject is very clear, and I would repeat it here. Let me broach it from another angle. It's been shown that when there is an excessive, quick availability of weapons in any given society, there is an increase in violence and the murders that goes on many years afterwards.

This phenomenon took place in many places of Africa after their civil wars. We've seen it in El Salvador, Guatemala, in Eastern Europe, in Kosovo, in Bosnia. It's happened—it's taken place in many different areas of the world. And we sustain that the expiry of the assault weapons ban in the year 2004 coincided almost exactly with the beginning of the harshest period of violence we've ever seen.

During my Government, we have seized over 140,000 weapons in 4 years. And I think that the vast majority have been assault weapons: AK-57s, et cetera. And many, the vast majority of these weapons were sold in gun shops in the United States. Along the border of the U.S. and Mexico, there are approximately 8,000 weapons shops. If we do our accounts, that means that there are approximately nine weapons stores for each Wal-Mart that exists in the United States and Mexico.

So a good deal of our discussion did touch upon this. But I recognize, at the same time, the administrative effort that's been undertaken, particularly by President Obama and his administration, so that the agencies for control of illegal actions curb this export of guns and weapons to Mexico. We've seen a much more active effort in this sense than in any other time in the past.

I have a great deal of respect for the U.S. legislation, especially the Second Amendment. But I know that if we don't stop the traffic of weapons into Mexico, also if we don't have mechanisms to forbid the sale of weapons, such as we had in the nineties, or for registry of guns, at least for assault weapons, then we are never going to be able to stop the violence in Mexico or stop a future turning of those guns upon the U.S.

So if I am against the traffic of weapons in Mexico, I'm against the traffic of weapons anywhere, be that within any circumstance. The Government of Mexico will never be able to accept anything that has to do with opening this.

President Obama has been very clear on the position of his Government. We understand the work being done by the agencies to stop the criminals. But this cannot be an obstacle to the cooperation that we have to have amongst Mexico and the United States to stop these criminal activities that underlie this issue, which is one of the greatest obstacles and problems for Mexico.

I understand the internal problems from a political point of view in the United States, and I mentioned this publicly in Congress in the United States, and I said things exactly the way I

believe them. I said them outright. There's a great deal of discrepancy between points of view. It's a very complex political issue. But it is very important to underscore it.

And I believe that's the only part of the question that I can answer, and I would say that what President Obama has already answered was very well done.

President Obama. Just very briefly, with respect to the Presidential elections in Mexico, Vice President Biden met with the candidates to express sentiments that are similar to the ones that Stephen just expressed here with respect to U.S. elections. And that is that the friendship between our three countries, the partnership between our three countries, extends beyond and is more fundamental than any particular party or any particular election. And that's the message we have to send with respect to Mexico.

I've had an excellent working relationship with Felipe. I expect to have an excellent working relationship with the next Mexican President, whoever that candidate may be, because the underlying common interests that we have economically, socially, culturally, the people-to-people relationship that we have is so important that it transcends partisan politics.

And with respect to the issue of guns, I've made very clear in every meeting that I've had with Felipe—and we've actually put into practice efforts to stop illegal gun trafficking north to south. It is a difficult task, but it's one that we have taken very seriously and taken some unprecedented steps. We will continue to coordinate closely with the Mexican Government because we recognize the toll that it's taken with respect to families and innocent individuals inside of Mexico.

And this is part of our broader comprehensive cooperation in weakening the grip of narco-trafficking within Mexico. And we recognize that we have a responsibility to reduce demand for drugs, that we have a responsibility to make sure that not only guns, but also bulk cash isn't flowing into Mexico. And I—obviously President Calderon takes very seriously his responsibilities to apply effective law enforcement within Mexico. And I think he's taken courageous steps to do that.

So we're going to keep on partnering together in order to continue to make progress on this very important issue.

Prime Minister Harper. You asked me about the visa requirement. The visa requirement is the really only effective means we have in Canada today to deal with large-scale bogus refugee claims under our refugee determination system.

Legislation that is being implemented—and in fact, there's legislation before Parliament to enhance those changes—that legislation will in the future, in years to come, will give us tools other than visa requirement to deal with that particular problem. But as of today that remains the only tool at our disposal.

President Obama. Okay. And finally from——

Prime Minister Harper. Yes. Mark Kennedy, Postmedia News.

Trans-Pacific Partnership/Narco-trafficking/Security Issues

Q. Hello, gentlemen. I have a couple of questions on two critical issues that you were discussing today, one on trade and one on crime. On trade, Prime Minister Harper, why is Canada's position at the negotiating table on the Trans-Pacific Partnership so important to Canada? And secondly, to get us there, to be a player, are you willing to give up as a precondition our supply management system?

And, President Obama, you said earlier that there needs to be high standards for a country to be there. I'm wondering whether you think, yet, Canada has met those high standards—whether you want us to drop our traditional supply management system.

And on crime, we in Canada read about the challenges that Mexico has on the drug cartels and the horrible violence that occurs down there. But perhaps it's possible that many Canadians, and perhaps even Americans, don't see it as affecting their lives, perhaps it doesn't affect their communities. So on that issue, why do you three gentlemen think that a three-country coordinated approach is necessary to protect our citizens?

And, Prime Minister, I think you being the only person that can speak both English and French, if you can do that, please.

Prime Minister Harper. Sure. First of all, in response to the question on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, this is—our desire to be part of that negotiation is part of Canada's ambitious trade agenda. As you know, we are currently in negotiations with over 50 countries around the world, including the European Union and Japan and India. So this was obviously a logical extension of our desire, the desire of our Government to dramatically broaden our free trade relationships around the world.

Canada's position on Trans-Pacific Partnership is the same as our position in any trade negotiation. We expect to negotiate and debate all manner of issues, and we seek ambitious outcomes to free trade agreements. In those negotiations, of course, Canada will attempt to promote and to defend Canada's interest not just across the economy, but in individual sectors as well.

On the question of security, look, the security problems are—the security challenge, particularly around the drug trade, is a serious regional problem throughout our hemisphere that has real impacts—not the kind of governance and security impacts we see maybe in Central America and the Caribbean and elsewhere—but has real, serious impacts on the health and safety of communities in our country as well. And as these criminal networks are transnational, it's important that our attempts to fight them be equally transnational. And that's why we work together on these initiatives.

President Obama. Well, with respect to the TPP, as is true of any process of arriving at a trade agreement, every country that's participating is going to have to make some modifications. That's inherent in the process, because each of our countries have their own idiosyncrasies, certain industries that have in the past been protected, certain practices that may be unique to that country, but end up creating disadvantages for businesses from other countries. And so it's a process of everybody making adjustments.

I don't think Canada would be unique in that. Are there areas where we'd like to see some changes in terms of Canadian practices? Of course. I assure you that Canada will have some complaints directed at us, and every member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership eventually would have to make some modifications in order to accommodate the larger interest of growing the overall economy and expanding trade and ultimately jobs. So I don't anticipate that there's something unique about Canada that wouldn't be true for any of the other aspirants to forming this Trans-Pacific Partnership.

With respect to the transnational drug trade, first and foremost, I think we should be concerned about what's happening in Mexico and Central America because when you have innocent families and women and children who are being gunned down on the streets, that should be everybody's problem, not just our problem, not just their problem.

There's a sense of neighborly regard and concern that has to be part of our calculus and our foreign policy. But more practically, the United States shares a border with Mexico. If you have this kind of violence and the power of the drug trade as a whole expanding in countries that are so closely affiliated with us—in Central American countries—if you start getting a larger and larger space in which they have control over serious chunks of the economy, if they're undermining institutions in these countries, that will impact our capacity to do business in these countries. It could have a spillover effect in terms of our nationals who are living in those countries, tourists that are visiting these countries. It could have a deteriorating effect overall on the nature of our relationship. And that's something that we have to pay attention to.

And, as I said, I think the Mexican Government has taken this very seriously at great cost to itself. We have an obligation to take it just as seriously, in part because we are the ultimate destination for a large chunk of this market.

And that—Stephen and I were trading notes—in places like the United States and Canada, this is not just an issue of—that traditionally was very urban. This is disseminated across our communities. And you go into rural communities and you've got methamphetamine sales that are devastating young and old alike, and some of that is originally sourced in Mexico. And so even in the remotest, most isolated parts of Canada or the United States, they're being impacted by this drug trade, and we've got to work cooperatively in order to deal with it.

President Calderon. And I'd like to look at it from another standpoint. The security of North America is absolutely tied to each of its member states. There cannot be full security in this country or in Canada or in Mexico if we do not have a system that actually enables the cooperation mechanisms to act in facing threats that have no borders, that are transnational by their very nature. And these are threats that are not just tied into drug trafficking, which is transnational of course.

And I'll give you two examples of success stories that I was mentioning this morning. One, the attempt to take to Mexico one of the children of Qadhafi—one of Qadhafi's children. This implied an international and very North American operation because it was headed up by a Canadian businesswoman who hired an American company, which hired, in turn, Mexican pilots and counterfeiters. And this multinational operation could have been—would not have been avoided without the international security mechanisms that we didn't have before, but that now we have.

Also, being able to avoid the assassination of the Saudi Ambassador here in Washington would not have been possible without the mechanisms and cooperation that we have today.

So thinking that what happens in Mexico doesn't have anything to do with the security of the citizens of this country or of any other citizen of North America is a mistake. We have to understand that we are all tied to one another.

Now, security, understood in the regional sense—in order to understand that, we have to understand where the greatest threats to security actually lay. The United States has a clear idea of its threat, of its security priorities, its threats of terrorism, of international terrorism, terrible attacks on the U.S. people. Another threat clearly is in the power of transnational organized crime, which I insist is not crime or organizations that are strictly Mexican in nature. They don't have a nationality, and they don't operate in just one country. They're probably operating right here in this city.

In Washington, for instance, the number of homicides per 100,000 inhabitants is higher by 10—more than 10 or 20 than the largest number in any of the big cities in Mexico. These are

international organizations that have a growing destructive capacity, that act well beyond borders and threaten anyone, anywhere.

It is true, the efforts that we undertake clearly make it possible to contain that threat and to prevent it from acting in society—not just in the United States or Canada, but even in Mexico. And that explains why, for instance, despite the perception of my country, last year 23 million tourists came to our country by plane, plus another 7 million in cruise ships, plus another 50 million who crossed the border, the land borders.

So that's also why there are 2 million Mexicans living comfortably in Mexico, and many more living also here who came to visit us here and wanted to see us in the White House. And that's also why 1.6 million Canadians come to Mexico every year. So that's 5 percent of the Canadian population that travels to Mexico every year.

And that also explains why, despite the fact that a State such as Texas recommends that none of its young people should travel to anywhere in Mexico, that's why there are hundreds of thousands of young Texans who go to Mexico, enjoy it, and why we haven't seen one single incident with U.S. spring-breakers in Mexico this past spring, for instance.

Great concern, because these are multinational criminal organizations and the mechanisms, of course, to face them, to defeat them, have to be multinational. In addition to the solidarity—expressions of solidarity of President Obama, who says that he cannot stand aside from the expressions of threat that is facing a neighbor of his, that vulnerability from an institutional point of view in Mexico and Central America is an issue that also impacts and jeopardizes all of the citizens of North America.

President Obama. Thank you very much, everyone.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 1:54 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Judges Brett M. Kavanaugh and Laurence H. Silberman, District of Columbia Circuit, U.S. Court of Appeals. President Calderon referred to former President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado of Mexico, who died April 1; Saadi Qadhafi, son of Col. Muammar Abu Minyar al-Qadhafi, former leader of Libya; and Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to the U.S. Adil al-Ahmad al-Jubayr. A reporter referred to Republican Presidential candidate former Gov. W. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts. President Calderon spoke in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Mexico, President Calderon Hinojosa; Interviews With the News Media : Joint news conferences :: Canada, Prime Minister Harper.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Calderon Hinojosa, Felipe de Jesus; Harper, Stephen; Kavanaugh, Brett M.; Silberman, Laurence H.

Subjects: Canada : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Canada : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Canada : Counternarcotics and drug interdiction efforts; Canada : Prime Minister; Canada : Regulatory cooperation with U.S.; Canada : Relations with Mexico; Canada : Relations with U.S.; Canada : Trade with U.S.; Canada : Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), membership bid; Central America : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Central America : Crime and narcotrafficking; Commerce, international : Group of Twenty (G-20) nations; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Drug abuse and

trafficking : Foreign narcotics traffickers; Drug abuse and trafficking : Interdiction efforts; Economy, national : Improvement; Elections : 2012 Presidential and congressional elections; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies :: Promotion efforts; Government organization and employees : Federal regulations :: Review; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Immigration and naturalization : Reform; Law enforcement and crime : Illegal arms trade, reduction efforts; Mexico : Border with U.S., infrastructure and security; Mexico : Counternarcotics and drug interdiction efforts; Mexico : Counternarcotics efforts, cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Crime and narcotrafficking; Mexico : Energy, alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Mexico : President; Mexico : Presidential election; Mexico : Regulatory cooperation with U.S.; Mexico : Relations with Canada; Mexico : Relations with U.S.; Mexico : Trade with U.S.; Mexico : Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), membership bid; Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP); Western Hemisphere : Americas, Summit of the; White House Office : Vice President.

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