

*Canada, Mexico, and the U.S.*

Q. Mr. President, there is an impression that you might prefer Mexico over Canada. Do you have a preference for either country?

*President Bush.* I've got a preference for friends. And the Canadians are long-standing friends of the United States. Mexico is an important country, as well, and I look forward to a meeting with President Fox in a couple of weeks. My preference is for friendly relations in our hemisphere.

I want the people of my country to understand that a foreign policy priority of my administration will be this hemisphere. And it's so important for the United States not to neglect the hemisphere. My first meeting is with the Prime Minister. Shortly thereafter, I'll be meeting with the President of Mexico. And we have great opportunities in this hemisphere to spread prosperity throughout. And it's going to be to our nations' mutual benefit when that happens.

*2000 Presidential Election*

Q. Mr. President, what did you think of the Prime Minister's comments and those by the former Ambassador here last year that left the impression Canada might have felt it would have been easier to work with Al Gore than with you?

*President Bush.* I didn't pay attention to it, if he said that. I'm going to prove him wrong. But as for our discussions today, I didn't have any impression whatsoever that the Prime Minister came with any preconceived notion except one thing, that I will promote friendly relations with Canada.

*Canada-U.S. Relations*

Q. Mr. Prime Minister, considering your good relations that you had with President Clinton plus what you said in 1993 about relations with President Bush—first President Bush and then Prime Minister Mulroney, how do you expect your relations with President George W. Bush to be?

*Prime Minister Chretien.* Our relations will be very good. President Bush is the President of the United States; I'm the Prime Minister of Canada. We have common interests; we'll have different interests. And as we said before, it's very good to have these relations, and it's very good that Canada be seen as an independent country.

*President Bush.* Hold on. I've got a very important answer to give. The question was fishing. [*Laughter*] We talked about fishing, and I would hope someday to be able to go catch small-mouthed bass on the Prime Minister's—as he called it, the equivalent of Camp David. I could use a few techniques when it comes to fishing for small-mouthed bass. And one day, if all works out well, he can come down and catch large-mouthed bass on my ranch. [*Laughter*]

Q. Golf? Any plans to play golf together?

*President Bush.* If he gives me enough strokes. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:15 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to President Vicente Fox of Mexico. A reporter referred to former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada. After the Prime Minister's opening remarks, he spoke in French, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.