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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

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THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT  
AT THE  
SIGNING CEREMONY FOR THE  
TRADE ACT OF 1974

THE EAST ROOM

2:04 P.M. EST

Mr. Vice President, distinguished members of the Cabinet, Members of the Congress, including the leadership, ladies and gentlemen:

The Trade Act of 1974, which I am signing into law today, will determine for many, many years American trade relations for the rest of the world. This is the most significant trade legislation passed by the Congress since the beginning of trade agreement programs some four decades ago.

It demonstrates our deep commitment to an open world economic order and interdependence as essential conditions of mutual economic health. The act will enable Americans to work with others, to achieve expansion of the international flow of goods and services, thereby increasing economic well-being throughout the world.

It will thus help reduce international tensions caused by trade disputes. It will mean more and better jobs for American workers, with additional purchasing power for the American consumer.

There are four very basic elements to this Trade Act -- authority to negotiate further reductions and elimination of trade barriers, a mandate to work with other nations to improve the world trading system and thereby avoid impediments to vital services as well as markets, reform of U.S. laws involving injurious and unfair competition, and improvement of our economic relations with nonmarket economies and developing countries.

Our broad negotiating objectives under this act are to obtain more open and equitable market access for traded goods and services, to assure fair access to essential supplies at reasonable prices, to provide our citizens with an increased opportunity to purchase goods produced abroad, and to seek modernization of the international trading system.

MORE

(OVER)

Under the act, the Administration will provide greater relief for American industry suffering from increased imports and more effective adjustment assistance for workers, firms and communities.

The legislation allows us to act quickly and to effectively counter foreign import actions which unfairly place American labor and industry at a disadvantage in the world market. It authorizes the Administration, under certain conditions, to extend nondiscriminatory tariff treatment to countries whose imports do not currently receive such treatment in the United States.

This is an important part of our commercial and overall relations with Communist countries. Many of the act's provisions, in this area are very complex and may well prove difficult to implement. I will, of course, abide by the terms of the act, but I must express my reservations about the wisdom of legislative language that can only be seen as objectionable and discriminatory by other sovereign nations.

The United States now joins all other major industrial countries, through this legislation, in a system of tariff preferences for imports from developing countries.

Although I regret the rigidity and the unfairness in these provisions, especially with respect to certain oil-producing countries, I am now undertaking the first steps to implement this preference system. By this summer, most developing countries are clearly eligible, and I hope that still broader participation can be possible by that time.

As I have indicated, this act contains certain provisions to which we have some objection and others which vary somewhat from the language we might have preferred.

In the spirit of cooperation, spirit of cooperation with the Congress, I will do my best to work out any necessary accommodations. The world economy will continue under severe strain in the months ahead.

This act enables the United States to constructively and to positively meet challenges in international trade. It affords us a basis for cooperation with all trading nations. Alone, the problems of each can only multiply. Together, no difficulties are insurmountable.

It must succeed! I believe we will.

MORE

Page 3

This is one of the most important measures to come out of the 93rd Congress. I wish to thank very, very generously and from the bottom of my heart the Members of Congress and members of this Administration, as well as the public, who contributed so much to this legislation's enactment.

At this point I will sign the bill.

END (AT 2:10 P.M. EST)