

Statement on the Death of Lee Atwater

March 29, 1991

Barbara and I lost a great friend in Lee Atwater. I valued Lee's counsel and abilities. The Republican Party will miss his energy, vision, and leadership. Barbara and I give our deepest condolences to Sally, the kids, and Lee's parents. We share in

their grief. Lee will always be in our memories.

Note: H. Lee Atwater was former chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Exchange With Reporters on the Death of Lee Atwater

March 29, 1991

The President. Happy Easter, everybody.

Q. Good morning.

The President. Good morning. Happy holidays.

Q. Mr. President, can you share your thoughts about Lee Atwater?

The President. Well, I will make a comment on that because I'm very saddened. Barbara and I are heartsick about it. Our whole family is. Lee was a very close friend to my sons and daughter as well as to Barbara and me. He suffered a lot. But I guess what I'd like to say is that we extend our love and best wishes to his family and, on the professional side, say that I was very proud to have him at my side as I campaigned for the Presidency and, after I became President, to have him as head of the Republican National Committee. He was doing a superb job until he was stricken by this brain tumor.

But I think now it's sadness and respect and giving the man credit for the job he did. He practiced the art of politics with zeal and vigor. And I was very proud of him, proud to serve with him.

Q. What did you make of his Life magazine apology to Michael Dukakis?

The President. Well, I found that very interesting and very enlarging. And I think, as he took stock of his life, he wanted to make things right, heal some wounds; and that was a very noble thing. And I salute him in death as I did in life.

This is about a friend of ours who died

today, who was head of our party.

Q. —in Moscow, Mr. President?

The President. You want to turn this into a full-scale press conference? I've got to hear—I've got to learn something from our guest here.

See how it works out. That's an internal affair.

Q. What does "seven" mean?

The President. What?

Q. Your answer, "seven"?

The President. [Laughter] That's one more than six. [Laughter]

Q. Is this from your CIA days?

The President. That means I don't want to answer. What was the question—then I'll tell you what the answer means. [Laughter]

Note: The exchange began at 10:38 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House, prior to a meeting with President Arnold Ruutel of Estonia. H. Lee Atwater was former chairman of the Republican National Committee, and Michael Dukakis was the 1988 Democratic Presidential candidate. Earlier that morning, President Bush had responded to a reporter's question on the situation in Iraq by saying, "Seven." A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.