

May 8 / Administration of George Bush, 1991

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on Foreign Access to United States Ports

May 8, 1991

The President today announced a major revision in U.S. port access policy which will provide access for commercial cargo, passenger, fishing, and fishing support vessels of the countries of Eastern Europe to all U.S. ports on the basis of 24 hours' notice of entry into the port. This includes the 12 U.S. ports previously closed for national security reasons to vessels from the region. These ports are:

Charleston, SC
Hampton Roads, VA
Honolulu, HI
Kings Bay, GA
New London and Groton, CT
Panama City, FL
Pensacola, FL
Port Canaveral, FL
Port Hueneme, CA
Port St. Joe, FL
Portsmouth, NH
San Diego, CA

This revision is the result of a comprehensive interagency review, and is designed to stimulate commercial trade between the U.S. and the region. It was taken in recognition of the progress these countries have made toward democracy and the rule of law.

This policy change is designed to facilitate the development of trade between the U.S. and the countries of Eastern Europe by opening some of the largest U.S. bulk and

container ports to their fleets. Previously, access for Bulgarian, Czechoslovakian, Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian vessels required up to 14 days' advance request prior to entering a U.S. port, and vessels of Albania were denied access to all U.S. ports and the U.S. territorial waters.

It represents another step by the U.S. in discarding cold war restrictions and in welcoming the countries of Eastern Europe into the international community of democratic nations. It is taken in recognition of the progress these six countries have made toward democracy and freedom. This change also significantly reduces the administrative burden on the U.S. Coast Guard and on the private sector for port calls associated with commercial vessels of Eastern European countries.

Under this new policy, vessels of Cambodia, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Syria, and Vietnam will continue to be ineligible to enter U.S. ports for national security reasons.

There has been no change in access for vessels of the U.S.S.R. to the 12 U.S. ports closed for national security reasons, and this new policy fully protects the national security interest of the United States. Access to other U.S. ports for vessels of the Soviet Union will remain as provided for in the U.S./U.S.S.R. Maritime Agreement which was concluded in June 1990.

Remarks Announcing the Resignation of William H. Webster as Director of the Central Intelligence Agency and a News Conference

May 8, 1991

The President. Well, it is with a great sense of pride, genuine pride in his accomplishments and long years of dedicated service to his country, that I announce that Bill Webster has informed me of his intention to retire as the Director of Central

Intelligence. Bill will be leaving Federal service after 26 years on the Federal Bench, as Director of the FBI, and as Director of the CIA. And as a former DCI, I know the complex organizations and interrelationships that comprise our intelligence

community. Bill has brought an integrity and effectiveness and a insight to the many intelligence-gathering operations of this nation. He has done a superb job.

A strong nation requires a strong intelligence organization. And Bill Webster has directed our efforts according to the guidelines that I set down at the beginning of this administration, that the CIA would have the single mission of providing intelligence to the policymakers of this government. And he's performed admirably. And that is a very important point—intelligence, not trying to shape policy. There are those who think CIA should have a different role, but I believe Bill Webster has demonstrated the value of an intelligence organization that is professionally directed and purposely committed. It is invaluable in defending the security of America. I noticed what one of our coalition partners said—the dependence on United States intelligence in the recent war.

In so many ways, he has performed with great distinction and the best—the best in the sense of service to his country. And I hate to see him go. This was his choice, but I offer him my thanks and I offer him the thanks of a very grateful nation as he finishes this distinguished career in government and considers other avenues.

And he can say a few words now, and then I'll be glad to take just a few questions.

Director, we're going to miss you, pal. But you're not leaving right now. We're not going to let him go.

The Director. Thank you, Mr. President. I have many mixed feelings about this morning. There's never an easy time to go, especially when you are working for an organization that you believe in and for people that you believe in. It's been an extraordinary experience to have worked with you, Mr. President. I have worked with you and for you for the last 10 years, and I want to say before I comment further that I know a good thyroid when I see one. [Laughter]

The President. Swallow gently.

The Director. I think I'm leaving you—I know I'm leaving you a healthy organization, one that has had during the last 4 years, I think, a good track record for its accountability.

The President. Absolutely.

The Director. So far as it's possible to be accountable. We have positioned ourselves for the challenges of the nineties, which are different than the challenges of the eighties. And I'm very proud of the performance that the entire community rendered during the Persian Gulf.

I realized a couple of months ago that I had finished 20 years of consecutive service and that I was approaching the end of a 4-year term—not term but 4-year period. My commission says to serve at the pleasure of the President for the time being. And this has been a 4-year “time being” that I've been very proud of and privileged to have served, not only with the President but with his national security advisers. But it seemed to me that this was a good window. You hate to leave, but something tells you that it's a good time to leave. I still have my roots in the law, and this gives me an opportunity to pursue other avenues in the private sector.

So, there you are.

The President. When is the 4 years up?

The Director. May 26th.

The President. May 26th, but we've got to be flexible on all of that. Now, either the Director or I will be glad to take questions.

Central Intelligence Agency

Q. Did this come as a surprise? Do you have a successor in mind?

The President. We haven't talked successor. Haven't gotten anyone in mind. But it did come as a surprise when Bill brought this up to me. He told me this several days ago, and it was his decision. I told him that—what I've said, essentially said here publicly. And he called in yesterday evening and said he thought we ought to go with announcement.

Q. Bob Gates had been nominated once before; would he be a candidate?

The President. Well, as I said, I haven't considered successors yet, but a worthy man, Gates. We all have great respect for him.

Q. Mr. President, speaking of—early on during the war with Iran, the CIA came under some criticism for not being as informative, not being as informed, perhaps, as it should have been. Was that a factor in

this at all?

The President. We all came under criticism early on, and all I say is, look at the results. And in my view, the intelligence was superb. I would call your attention to what the French commander—who was it yesterday—commenting on the intelligence that they had to depend on. So, we all got criticism. CIA got a little; Defense Department got a little; we took on some water over here. But the result was superb, and the intelligence was outstanding, and the community performed fantastically. I had a chance to mention that out at NSA, which is a part of the intelligence community. I hope I'll have a chance to go out to CIA again and say this. But I have no complaints whatsoever about the quality of our intelligence.

President's Health

Q. Mr. President, you were described yesterday as elated when you got the news that it was your thyroid, not your heart, that was out of kilter. Do you have any plans to adjust your schedule—which we all know is rather grueling for anyone, let alone a 66-year-old?

The President. Almost 67. [Laughter] No. They've said that with the thyroid thing that I might not get into as active an athletic regime as I'd like to. And they told me that this morning when I did this test. But they're elated that they know what caused this fibrillation and that's it's curable and will be cured very soon. But they've asked me just for the next few days to check it a little bit in terms of athletics, not in terms of my schedule here.

Q. But beyond the next few days, will you be scaling back?

The President. No, I don't think so. That's the good news, is that once the thyroid is corrected, that means there's no problem on the heart—thyroid connected to the heart bone, you know. And I think it's going to be all right, and they've assured me that it can be okay, yes.

Handgun Legislation

Q. Mr. President, the House will begin voting today on the Brady bill or the Staggers bill. Is there any scenario under which you would find yourself being able to sup-

port the Brady bill if in fact it is attached to your comprehensive crime legislation?

The President. What we've said is we will consider it if it is attached to the comprehensive crime bill. The important legislation, the priority legislation, should be the comprehensive crime bill. And I'm a little discouraged that it has not moved faster. And so, I will just stay with that position that we're opposed to them alone, we'll consider them as part of the comprehensive crime bill.

Q. What is wrong with waiting 7 days, Mr. President?

The President. Our position on this is so well-known I don't want to take up your time going into any more.

Baltic States

Q. Mr. President, you've got the Baltic leaders coming in later this morning. What are you going to tell them about your leanings on providing aid to the Soviet Union?

The President. I'm going to tell them that we haven't made a decision on that. I'm going to tell them I must comply with the law as it's written, but I will also tell them that we have a strong and, I think, good relationship with President Gorbachev. And I will tell them that I will be interested in hearing what their problems are. I will tell them that we have never and will never recognize the incorporation of the Baltics into the Soviet Union. But I will encourage peaceful resolution of these very difficult questions.

Soviet-U.S. Relations

Q. Your comment about Gorbachev today and a similar one yesterday seemed to indicate that you'd like to help him out, that you might want to work around the edges of that creditworthiness provision in the law to provide some kind of assistance.

The President. Look, when you look at the accomplishments of Mikhail Gorbachev, they are enormous. And yes, the Soviet Union is fighting difficult economic times. But I am not about to forget history; and what he did in terms of Eastern Europe, what he's done in terms of *perestroika* and *glasnost* has my respect. So, we will deal with the facts as they come to us. But I

don't want to see a breach in a relationship that is very strong, that's served us extraordinarily well in recent times during the war itself where, for the first time, the Soviet Union and the United States worked in sync on those matters. And I gave President Gorbachev great credit for that because he was under some pressures at home.

Q. Well, that sounds like you're not going to turn down his request for help.

The President. Well, as I said the other day, we have to be sure that we abide by the rules as established—I think the Agricultural Department has to make certain representations. But look, I've always felt that when people are hungry or need support as it relates to food and nourishment, that we ought to try to help.

Administration Travel Policy

Q. Mr. President, could you give us an update on your review of the White House travel policy, and are you still absolutely, firmly convinced that Governor Sununu did not abuse it in any way?

The President. Yes, I am convinced of that, and I'm going to have some changes, and I'll announce some soon, perhaps the next 48 hours.

Q. Were the travels that were made that he took—be permitted under the revisions?

The President. Well, why don't you wait and see because I don't want to preview it. We pulled one off here with Bill Webster, and it's so much more exciting when you get it when the time is right. So, we'll approach it in that open manner.

Vice President

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to the pundits who have suggested that as a result of your health scare over the weekend you might reconsider keeping Dan Quayle on the ticket next year?

The President. You want that by hand, or do you want it by word? *[Laughter]*

Q. Hand.

Q. Hand.

The President. No, no. I'm no Nelson Rockefeller. *[Laughter]* No, I've expressed my support for Dan Quayle. I think he's getting a bum rap in the press—pounding on him when he's doing a first-class job. And I don't know how many times I have

to say it, but I'm not about to change my mind when I see his performance and know what he does. I think it's probably been quite hurtful to him, but he's a man—strong one and—in fact, we talked about it a little bit yesterday and I said, look, keep your head up; you're talking to a guy who went through something like this for about 8 years—maybe not quite as intense, but that goes with the territory. And it's unfair, and it is piling on, and it is beneath the critics to do that at this time, I think. But anyway, it's a question I can't lay to rest.

Q. Some Republicans—

The President. Sure, the critics, any critics. But I'm just telling you how I feel.

Hostage Agreement Reports

Q. Mr. President, lately we've been hearing a resurgence of questions and increasing credence to these allegations that the Reagan-Bush campaign in 1980 was involved in a political deal to hold off on hostage releases until after the election. And even President Carter, who hadn't said this before, thinks that there should be at least some investigation. Don't you think that with all of these allegations coming from so many different continents and so many questions being raised that at least an investigation would be warranted to lay some of these issues to rest?

The President. I think the Congress—some Democratic Members are looking at it right now, and that's fine. I can only say categorically that the allegations about me are grossly untrue, factually incorrect, bald-faced lies. And I have my schedule out there—I think it was in—put in the days in question was in detail in the paper. And those critics—those who continue to pass this little word-of-mouth ugly rumor ought to have the decency and the honor to say this takes care of this question. I'm talking about myself. And I can categorically deny any contact with the Iranians or anything having to do with it. And to assign—let me give you a little more lecture on this, Rita *[Rita Beamish, Associated Press]*—to assign a motive to a person that he'd want to keep an American in prison one day longer I think is vicious. And I really am turned off by this, and I am disappointed in this Mr.

Sick, whoever he is.

Q. But, Mr. President, you wouldn't object then to Congress to—if there wasn't—

The President. They can do whatever they want. It's been looked at exhaustively. But all I'm talking about—all I can speak for is my own participation or lack thereof. And I think the people that are making these insidious insinuations ought to have the honor to say this takes care of it. But that's not the way the rumor mill works.

Vice President

Q. Mr. President, I just wanted to follow up on the question about the Vice President. The confidence you've expressed in him is buttressed by those around the White House here who say that he's very much a player. There is strong evidence, apart from what the media may or may not write, that that confidence is not widely shared among people in the general public. And I wonder, sir, if you have contemplated altering his role, giving him more of a chance to be seen, or anything that might allow him to shake this image that he seems to have acquired.

The President. I'd love to be helpful to him in any way I could in that regard. In my view, he is doing his assignments very well: Competitive Council, Space Council. He's done a lot of very important foreign travel for me, particularly as it relates to South America. And so, I can think of a lot of things that maybe I could emphasize more because I want to help. I don't like to see somebody unfairly criticized. To me, it's a question of—again, a question of honor. I just don't—I don't like it. I see him in action; I know what he's doing. He's been extraordinarily helpful. And I can't ask any more of him. But, Brit [Brit Hume, ABC News], if there was something I could do to help, I'd want very much to do it, because I have great respect for him.

Mr. Fitzwater. Final question.

Iraq

Q. The Iraqis this morning tried to shoot down an American plane. What will be the United States reaction?

The President. Well, we're looking into that. Fortunately it didn't hit anybody. And

I gathered from the Pentagon they're not particularly concerned. But we have to look into that.

Q. It seems that, more and more, the U.S. is going deeper in northern Iraq. Aren't you entering the quagmire that you tried so hard to avoid?

The President. Well, as you know, I expressed my concern early on that I did not want to get bogged down. But what we're doing is humanitarian. We're getting enormous credit, finally—not that we're in there for credit—for saving lives and helping innocent victims of Saddam Hussein's brutality. And so, you raise a very good question because I don't want to see us get into a quagmire or get further militarily involved with some permanent presence required. I will be talking to the Secretary-General of the U.N., I think it's tomorrow, and I would hope that the U.N. could do in the north that which they're doing in the south.

This is the last one, then I really do have to go.

Middle East

Q. Mr. President, can you tell us your feelings now toward the Middle East? You've got Secretary Baker heading back for yet another trip. The Soviet Foreign Minister, Bessmertnykh, is going to be there at the same time. Does this signal some sort of breakthrough in the offing? Is there something that gives you cause for optimism?

The President. I wouldn't say breakthrough; I wouldn't say breakthrough. But cause for optimism? I think there's reason to be optimistic. I won't go into the details right now because when you're dealing with a situation of this complexity and of this endurance, you have to use some quiet diplomacy, which Secretary Baker is very effectively using. But I saw after his last trip some very, quite negative reports. And I don't think it's negative. I think there's still a real opportunity here. And I don't say that just wishfully; I say it after talking to him and talking to some leaders around the world. So, I'd like to say optimism, but I don't want to go overboard on it because there's still a complex problem.

Q. But there are some who think that you

may be being misled, and they cite for proof of that that action such as the Israelis continuing to establish settlements—that people may be telling the Secretary one thing but either unable to deliver or actually not telling the truth about their intentions.

The President. As we know, these differences have gone on for a long, long time. And I don't think that's the case, that somebody's saying one thing and then going off and just doing something behind his back. But, no, it's complex. But I don't accept that criticism. There's plenty of room to critique this and to wish for more progress from one country or another. But there's a lot going on. And I want to stay involved myself. I want to be a part of this because I think we have an opportunity now. And I think countries that the United States have helped recognize that. And I think Israel understands that. I think the Saudis understand that. I think the Egyptians understand

that. And so, I want to use that good will to further peace in the Middle East. And so I'm—put it this way—moderately optimistic.

Thank you all very much.

Note: President Bush's 81st news conference began at 8:35 a.m. in the Briefing Room at the White House. In the news conference, the following persons were referred to: Robert M. Gates, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; President Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union; John H. Sununu, Chief of Staff to the President; former President Jimmy Carter; Gary Sick, former National Security Council official during the Carter administration; President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; United Nations Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar de la Guerra; Secretary of State James A. Baker III; and Soviet Foreign Minister Aleksandr Bessmertnykh.

Statement by Press Secretary Fitzwater on President Bush's Meeting With President Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania and Prime Ministers Ivars Godmanis of Latvia and Edgar Savisaar of Estonia May 8, 1991

The President met today with President Landsbergis of Lithuania, Prime Minister Godmanis of Latvia, and Prime Minister Savisaar of Estonia for about 40 minutes in the Cabinet Room. The three Baltic leaders, who are on a private visit to the United States, had requested the meeting, the President's sixth with Baltic officials during the past 12 months.

The President reiterated the longstanding U.S. policy of nonrecognition of the forcible incorporation of the Baltic States into the Soviet Union in 1940. The President noted the United States had transported emergency medical assistance to the Baltic States in February. The United States intends to

send additional shipments of medical supplies to the Baltic States and to continue its program of medical assistance in the Soviet Union itself.

The President said the United States was encouraged by the resumption of negotiations between the Soviet Government and the Baltic States. The United States believes that fair and constructive negotiations are the only way to resolve the complex problems between Moscow and the Baltic governments. He said the United States hoped that all parties to these negotiations could be flexible and pragmatic in order to reach a just and lasting resolution of the problem.