

Exchange With Reporters Prior to a Meeting With Democratic Congressional Leaders

March 2, 1993

Spending Cuts

Q. Mr. President, we hear you're not going to ask for any more spending cuts. Is that right?

The President. Where did you hear that?

Q. Well, there's a little piece in the paper that says somebody on your staff admitted that, well, they didn't really think you'd be able to find any more spending cuts.

The President. Well, I expect there will be a lot more as we go along. I just don't think we should shut the Congress down while we all look for them. Keep in mind that we've got more than they've had in a long time, and we need to go forward with this program. But I think you'll see a continuous stream of them coming out as we go along.

Q. From you?

The President. From me and from others.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, are you satisfied with the airdrops in Bosnia, the success of the airdrops?

The President. Well, the last report I got this morning was pretty good, based on the last information I had. And I haven't talked directly to General Powell today, but he thinks they've gone pretty well, and I have to rely partly on—largely on his judgment.

Q. How long do you think they need to go on there?

The President. I don't have an answer to that now.

NOTE: The exchange began at 10:19 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Exchange With Reporters Prior to Discussions With Secretary General Manfred Woerner of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

March 2, 1993

Branch Davidian Religious Sect Standoff

Q. Mr. President, the incident in Waco appears to be ending. Do you have any misgivings at all about how that was executed?

The President. I don't think now is the time to discuss that. I'm pleased that it's ending. I think it's ending in a way that's very consistent with a similar incident that occurred in my State, very similar, when I was Governor there many years ago.

Q. Are you satisfied that the appropriate action was taken in the first place?

The President. I don't think this is the time for me to comment on that. It's not appropriate at this time for me to comment on it.

Haiti

Q. Are you having any second thoughts about your criticism of George Bush's Haiti policy during the campaign, given that today you went to court to essentially support his position?

The President. But our position is different. Our position now is that there's a difference

if there are extreme circumstances, and I think there are. You know, maybe I was too harsh in my criticism of him, but I still think there's a big difference between what we're doing in Haiti and what they were doing in Haiti. And there's a big difference between the kinds of problems that are created by the Haitian circumstance. I mean, something that was never brought up before but is now painfully apparent is that if we did what the plaintiffs in the court case want, we would be consigning a very large number of Haitians, in all probability, to some sort of death warrant. I mean, if you look at how many people have been lost at sea, look at the number of people who died not even trying to come to the United States in a much shorter trip recently, given the means they had to get here, the kinds of boats they have and all of that.

We have now cut from 2 months down to 1 week the amount of time it takes to process

people who want to be considered to be refugees in Haiti. When we bring people back, we meet them there now. We don't just let them get dispersed into the country. We're going out into the country and doing the refugee handling. So it's a very different set of circumstances than it was.

NOTE: The exchange began at 4:25 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

Statement by the Director of Communications on the Situation in Haiti *March 2, 1993*

Today the Supreme Court heard arguments concerning the current repatriation policy regarding Haitian asylum-seekers. At that time, the Justice Department supported the President's legal authority to carry out the practice of direct return. The President believes it is essential that he retain the ability to implement such measures when exceptional circumstances demand.

The current practice of direct returns is based on the President's conviction that it is necessary to avert a humanitarian tragedy that could result from a large boat exodus. Hundreds, if not thousands, could lose their lives in overloaded, unseaworthy vessels if the United States reversed the practice of direct return precipitously.

At the same time, the President regards the current practice of direct return as a policy for exceptional circumstances. It is continually under review and will be adjusted when conditions permit.

In addition, the President is taking a series of initiatives to promote human rights and democratization in Haiti and to enhance the safety and well-being of those who have reason to fear persecution.

First, the Clinton administration strongly has supported the negotiating process undertaken by the United Nations and the Organization of American States (U.N./OAS) and has urged other nations, both within and outside the hemisphere, to provide diplomatic and financial support to the U.N./OAS effort. A U.N./OAS civilian monitoring team now is being deployed in Haiti. We hope and expect that their presence will create an atmosphere conducive to respect for human rights and political dialog, including progress on a settlement to this crisis.

The President will continue efforts to move the negotiating process forward as expeditiously as possible, leading to the restoration of con-

stitutional government and the return of President Aristide. President Clinton will meet with President Aristide on March 16 to review the progress that has been achieved and the challenges that lie ahead.

Second, the President is committed to enhancing the safety and well-being of those in Haiti who have reason to fear reprisal for their political activities and affiliations, and has taken a number of actions to improve in-country processing of Haitian refugees, the procedures by which Haitians may apply in Haiti for refugee status and resettlement in the United States.

Shortly after January 20, the President directed that U.S. officials double our capacity for the interviewing of refugee applicants in Haiti by officials of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The President also directed the State Department to send a technical mission to Haiti to develop detailed proposals for:

- more rapid refugee processing;
- making it easier for Haitians outside of Port-au-Prince to apply for refugee status and U.S. resettlement; and
- enhancing the safety of the repatriation process for returnees.

Since return of the technical team, we have streamlined procedures and added staff in Port-au-Prince and have reduced considerably the processing time for refugee applications in Haiti. We have already developed the capacity to reduce processing time for high priority cases from 2 months or more to about 7 working days.

The technical team, which also included congressional staff and representatives from the INS, made a series of additional recommendations for improvements in procedures, including the addition of personnel at the U.S. Refugee Processing Center in Haiti to serve as liaison