

May 27 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 1993

Chief of Protocol.

"Molly Raiser is an outstanding individual who has worked in a variety of ways to make our Nation's Capital a better place to live and to increase the participation of women in American politics," said the President. "Along with Fred DuVal, she will do an outstanding job of ensur-

ing that the diplomatic corps and the many foreign dignitaries who come to Washington each year are given a true American welcome."

NOTE: Biographies of the appointees were made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

Nomination for Ambassador to Canada

May 27, 1993

The President announced his intention today to nominate former Michigan Governor Jim Blanchard to be the U.S. Ambassador to Canada.

"Our relationship with Canada is absolutely vital," said the President. "They are our largest trading partner and one of our closest neighbors. That's why I am nominating an Ambassador in whom I place such a high degree of trust, my

good friend Jim Blanchard. With a voice that will be clearly heard in both Ottawa and Washington, he will ensure that this important relationship continues to be productive for both countries."

NOTE: A biography of the nominee was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary.

Teleconference Remarks With Veterans in VA Medical Centers

May 28, 1993

The President. Vincent Mauro, are you there?

Vincent Mauro. Yes. My name is Vincent Mauro from Philadelphia Nursing Home Care Unit.

The President. And is Eugene Young there?

Eugene Young. Yes, I'm here at Bronx VA Nursing Home Unit.

The President. It's good to hear all your voices. I'm here with Vice President Gore and with Hershel Gober who is the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. And as we move into Memorial Day weekend, we just wanted you to know and all veterans like you in hospitals all across America that we're thinking about you, pulling for you. We know you wish you could be home and able to participate in the Memorial Day services. But we're very, very excited about the fact that you have these phones in your rooms now thanks to the PT Phone Home Project.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to Frank Dosio who came up with this idea and to all the people who worked on it: Bell

Atlantic, C&P Telephone, NYNEX, and especially the workers, the Communication Workers of America and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. There have been a lot of people who worked on this project, and we wanted to highlight that by talking to you three this morning.

And we thought it was an especially good time to do it as we head into Memorial Day. And I have a few notes about you guys. I know more about you than you know about me now. *[Laughter]* I wanted to say a special word of thanks to all of you. And Mr. Young, I understand you have a couple of sons in the service.

Mr. Young. Yes, I do, sir.

The President. And you ought to be able to talk to them more frequently now. Where are they?

Mr. Young. One, Korea; the other one in Italy in the Army, sir.

The President. Good for you. And you have a third child in college?

Mr. Young. Yes, Queens College.

The President. So, you have one child handy.

Mr. Young. Yes.

The President. Pretty close.

Mr. Young. Yes.

The President. And Mr. Maurio and Mr. Patenaude, both of you are veterans of World War II, is that right?

Mr. Maurio. That's right.

Ken Patenaude. Yes, I am.

The President. Is it nice for you having those phones?

Mr. Young. Very nice.

Mr. Maurio. I think it's an enormous accomplishment, and I think it's going to be great for all of us. It's going to get us easy access to reach our families and friends at home, a greater sense of privacy, and I think it's going to instill in us yet a higher level of self-reliance, which of course in our conditions is very important.

So, I'm fascinated by the incredible technology and the genius that it takes to put this program together and this phone system together. And I've been witness to it all morning long, and it's been extremely fascinating.

The President. Why don't you describe it to us. We can't see it here.

Mr. Maurio. I have surrounding me a bunch of electronic wizards. I don't understand their language completely, but they're absolutely fascinating to listen to. And there's an awful lot of technical equipment here, a lot of apparatus, but I think mainly the most important thing is volunteer efforts of all the people involved. I think that's a little bit of America at work, and it shows what we can do when our minds are set down to it. And I would like to thank all who participated in this wonderful project on behalf of all the patients, the staff, and the administration at both VA Hospital and the Nursing Home Care Unit in Philadelphia. I think it was a marvelous effort on all their parts. They deserve a great deal of credit, and I'm sure you will have to agree with me.

The President. I do. I hope we can get them the credit they deserve by this conversation this morning.

Anyone else have something to say about this?

Mr. Patenaude. Mr. President, this is Ken Patenaude from Albany.

The President. Hi, Ken.

Mr. Patenaude. Never in my wildest dreams did I ever think that I'd be talking to the President. It's an honor.

And I can't believe that this is happening. It's beautiful, the way they have this set up and all the work that these men have put into it. I want to thank all the volunteers from the Communication Workers of America, the VFW, American Legion, and all the employees at the Stratton VA Medical Hospital. This is one of the greatest things that has ever happened in my life.

The President. Well, I think you've earned it. You've served your country well, and I'm just glad to be a small part of this.

Mr. Patenaude. And it's a pleasure to have you on our side.

The President. Thank you. Well, I am. We've got a very good Veterans Affairs Department here headed by two American veterans, Jesse Brown, who's worked for disabled veterans for many years, and my longtime friend Hershel Gober, the Deputy Secretary, who's a Vietnam veteran also. They are keeping me on the straight and narrow here when it comes to veterans policies. They've got our administration focused on these kinds of problems and a lot of other ones.

And I'm glad to hear you say that. You say you never in your wildest dreams believed you'd be talking to the President. You know there are millions of people who would probably like to give me an earful this morning, and you can do it. So, you've been doing a great job.

Mr. Vice President.

The Vice President. Gentlemen, this is Vice President Al Gore. I just wanted to say that the heads of the labor unions whose members did this on a volunteer basis are here in the Oval Office with us this morning and representatives of some of the companies that made it possible. And I think that what people did in pulling together to make this phone system possible for you really kind of symbolizes the way the entire country feels about your service and about all veterans and what our country owes to you.

The fact that members of organized labor and members of companies in corporate America pulled together with more than 5,000 volunteer hours and huge quantities of donated equipment, volunteers from the VFW and the staff of the VA all working together to make this possible. If the whole country could find ways to express what we feel toward veterans like this, you'd see more of this. Matter of fact, CWA members from other cities have taken up

this challenge as a result of what Frank Dosio started there, and now it's beginning to be implemented in other VA hospitals and in other cities.

So, we're really proud of you. We appreciate what you've done. We join you in appreciating what these volunteers have done for you.

The President. I also wanted to note that as we get off the phone here I know that at least in Albany and Philadelphia several hundred other bedside phone units are going to be activated. There must be a lot of folks in those hospitals that want me to get off the telephone so they can use theirs. They're not going to be activated until we finish.

I did want to say one other thing to you. Yesterday morning we had a nationally televised town meeting here in the Rose Garden at the White House with a couple of hundred folks who came from 35 States. One of the people there said, "You know, we're always asking you, Mr. President, what are you going to do and telling you what we think you should do. What do you think we can do for our country to help now?" And I would just kind of like to repeat something that came out of that conversation because I told the woman who asked the question that there are clearly limits to what Government can do as well as great possibilities there. And a lot of the problems that we have in this country have to be dealt with by citizens working together at the grassroots level. And this is a stunning example of that. I mean, just think how many people all across America are going to wind up having telephones in these hospitals because one man had a vision, and his company and his union were willing to support that vision. I mean, that's an example of the kind of things that can be done by American people all over this country working together. Really, he deserves all the credit. I'm just glad to be here with this inaugural telephone kickoff.

Mr. Young, are you going to call your children when we get off the phone?

Mr. Young. I probably will, Mr. President. I'll get the number from my wife, and I definitely will call. And they will be excited like I am. And I would like to say thanks for the opportunity. And like Albany said, I never dreamed that I would be talking to the Presi-

dent of the United States and the Vice President of the United States.

And the Bronx VA Medical Center has some of the best staff there is. And we appreciate their hard labor and the volunteer service. And they're doing a very good job.

The President. Well, we're trying to support your veterans hospital network. Even as tight as the budget is here and as much as we're cutting, we're going to invest some more money in these veterans hospitals next year to try to keep the quality of care up for people like you.

Mr. Young. That's true. Yes—[inaudible]—the quality of care for the veterans, allocate more funding, and it will bring better quality care for the veterans which, you know, they deserve. And the staff also.

The President. Well, I wish all of you well. Mr. Young, when you talk to your sons in Italy and Korea, you tell them that we're proud of them on this Memorial Day weekend.

Mr. Young. I sure will, Mr. President.

The President. And when you talk to your child in Queens College, make sure that there's a graduation there. We need all the kids we can get with good educations so they'll support you and I when we get older and have a strong economy.

Mr. Young. That's true, Mr. President. Thank you very much.

The President. Thank you. Vince and Ken, thank you very much.

Hershel, you want to say anything?

Deputy Secretary Hershel Gober. I would just like to say before Memorial Day here for my comrades, fellow veterans, Vince, Ken, Eugene, we're proud of you. And Secretary Brown and I, along with the President and the Vice President, want you to know that we'll provide the support that you need and that you have earned. You have entitlements; you don't receive benefits. And I want you to know that we're thinking about you, and God bless you.

Mr. Young. Thank you very much.

The President. Thank you. Have a good day.

NOTE: The teleconference began at 9 a.m. The President spoke from the Oval Office at the White House.