

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Congressional Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

April 12, 1994

The President. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the press. This is our first bipartisan leadership meeting on the resumption of the Congress, and we have a lot of things to discuss today.

I want to begin with a discussion of the crime bill and the importance of proceeding deliberately and quickly to pass it, to reiterate my commitment yesterday that we will do whatever we can to get the first 20,000 police officers on the streets this year if the crime bill is passed in an expeditious fashion. Then we'll move on to some other issues where I hope we can have a good bipartisan discussion in support of domestic issues like the budget and health care, and also we'll talk a little about Bosnia today and some other foreign policy issues.

Bosnia

Q. Mr. President, do you have some concern—there's more shelling today. I mean, there's some suspicion that the Muslims may be trying to provoke the Serbs. Have we started something with air strikes that will make matters worse rather than better?

The President. We certainly haven't started anything. We have done exactly what we said we would do under the U.N. policy, that if the U.N. forces there were put at risk, as they were in the shelling of Gorazde, we would offer close air support if the General asked and the civilian authorities agreed. We went through all the procedural requirements, and we did exactly what I think we should have done.

Q. Well, the Serbian—

Q. What about—

The President. We have talked—let me answer Andrea's [Andrea Mitchell, NBC News] question. We have cautioned the Bosnian Government forces not to try to take advantage of this in violation of the understandings themselves. And General Rose has been very firm on that this morning.

Q. Are you considering expanding this to other safe havens if the Serbs persist and don't get the message?

The President. Well, I wouldn't rule anything out. We're working very closely with General

Rose, and he's got a very aggressive view of his role there, which I think is good.

Q. The Serbian leader has threatened against the U.N. forces. They've kidnaped some. They're holding some in house arrest. They've escalated the military action.

The President. Well, every time we have been firm, though, in the end it's been a winner for the peace process. And I think it will be here. And I'm very encouraged by the position taken by the Russians, that they want the Serbs to withdraw from the safe area in Gorazde, and they want to return to the negotiating table.

Before this last incident, I thought we were getting pretty close to—not just to a cease-fire but to an absolute cessation of hostilities and a real serious bargaining position so we could get back there in a hurry, and I wish the Russians well in working with the Serbs. I've assured President Yeltsin that we have no interest in using NATO's air power to affect the outcome of the war. But we do want to protect the U.N. mandate. And we do want a negotiation, and I think we're going to get one.

Q. Have you seen or heard anything from the Serbs that would indicate a response to the air strike, sir?

The President. I don't know how to answer that, Peter [Peter Maer, NBC Mutual Radio]. The Russians—Mr. Churkin is over there now, and we're working on trying to get this thing back on track, and I hope we can do it. But we have to be firm in our reaction to the plain violations of the United Nations resolutions and in what we set our policy to do.

The good thing that we've seen since the terrible incident in Sarajevo in the market is that both the U.N. and NATO have been able to follow what they said their policy would be all along, and I think that's what we have to do. We have to be firm in pursuing the policy that we say we have. It's our only chance of success.

Supreme Court Nomination

Q. Will it be more difficult to—[inaudible]—your domestic agenda with George Mitchell nominated to the—will it be harder, once he's nominated?

Q. Do you have the name of a Supreme Court Justice on your left?

The President. You think the next Supreme Court Justice should be to my left, Helen [Helen Thomas, United Press International]? [Laughter]

Q. I said, is he?

Q. Unless you're considering Mr. Foley.

The President. He'd be a good one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:45 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks at a Reception for Representatives of Nonprofit Organizations April 12, 1994

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, Secretary Shalala, Secretary Cisneros, and the many other people in our administration who are here who have long supported the nonprofit sector of this country and worked in it.

I suppose no one qualifies in that regard more than the First Lady. Since I first met her, I've seen Hillary serve on children's advocacy boards, legal services boards, hospital boards, foundation boards. I was counting outside; I haven't checked with her, but I know that she's helped to form three nonprofit organizations and been associated with at least a dozen others. I appreciate the fact that she found a little time for me over the years. [Laughter]

I say that because I have learned, not only as a Governor and a public official and now as President but also in my own family, the incredible importance of the work that all of you do and those whom you represent.

When I ran for President, I said as clearly as I could that I thought the National Government had a responsibility to do many things that we were not then doing but that there were many things we could not do and that in the absence of a partnership with people in community organizations all across this country, we would surely never become the Nation we ought to be.

I'd like to make a few remarks about that, but I think it is appropriate, since we're talking about citizenship in its best form, that I also make a couple of comments at the outset about a subject very much in the press today.

Since Justice Blackmun announced his retirement last week, I have been working to find an able replacement. Last night, Senator George Mitchell, who was my leading candidate for the Court, came to see me and asked me what

I wanted him to do. And I said, "Well, I want to talk to you about it. I'd like to appoint you to the Supreme Court if you think we can do our work here for the country this year in pursuing health care reform and the other things we have to do."

And he looked at me and said, "You know, I've always wanted to be on the Supreme Court, and no one can predict what it would be like if I were nominated and then confirmed, while sitting in the Senate and leading this fight, what the impact would be. I have thought of all the ways we could do it and all the various scenarios, and I'm only sure of one thing: I cannot imagine that the impact would be good in terms of our ability to pass health care, welfare reform, or any of the other things we want to do." But his special concern was with regard to health care reform. And so he said, "I believe I should stay in the Senate and serve my term out and try to lead this country to health care reform. That's, after all, the job I was given, and it's my job until next January, and I'm sorry that the timing is not good, but I think it's the right thing to do."

I said, "Well, why don't we sleep on it and see if we can think of a way to do it?" This morning early I called him on the phone, and he said, "I still see it the same way." And I said, "Well, I haven't had any thunderbolts of insight about how your analysis is wrong." So he said, "I still think I ought to do not what I want to do but what I should do." And he seemed as comfortable with that decision as any one that I've ever seen him make. I say that because this country needs more people who devote themselves not only to what they would like to do but what they think the country needs. He has dedicated himself to doing some-